

WHY INDIA NEEDS TO RAMP UP ITS EFFORTS TO TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE

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If climate sceptics — there are many across the world, including US President Donald Trump — needed further evidence that climate change is indeed a reality, the last few weeks would have given them enough scientific evidence. From the [United Nations World Meteorological Organization's](#) annual Greenhouse Gas Bulletin to the [Lancet Countdown 2018 on Health and Climate Change](#), all reports have said that climate change is the world's biggest crisis, and India will be one of the worst-hit countries. According to the Lancet study, India experienced an additional 40 million heat wave exposure cases in 2016 compared to 2012.

In such a challenging scenario, one would expect India's policymakers to do whatever it takes to ensure that the existing problem is not aggravated either by delayed or misguided responses. But some decisions have been problematic. Take, for example, the National Clean Air Action Plan (NCAP), which the Union environment ministry is in the process of finalising. The main target under NCAP is reducing PM 10 (coarse pollution particles) and PM 2.5 (fine, respirable pollution particles) concentrations by 20% to 30% between 2019 to 2024. But, according to a report in Hindustan Times, air quality targets under [NCAP will not be legally binding on states](#).

Air pollution and climate change are closely related. The main sources of CO₂ emissions — the extraction and burning of fossil fuels — are not only key drivers of climate change, but also major sources of air pollutants. Furthermore, many air pollutants that are harmful to human health and ecosystems also contribute to climate change by affecting the amount of incoming sunlight that is reflected or absorbed by the atmosphere, with some pollutants warming and others cooling the earth. Activists have correctly pointed out that India needs a legal mandate for air pollution target reduction because it is going to decide the scale and stringency of action. China's pollution levels and life expectancy have improved since the stringent implementation of its national clean air action plan.

And why just air pollution? If the Indian government wants to soften the blow of climate change, it must ensure that all laws that govern, and safeguard, the country's natural resources — water, air, forests, oceans — are implemented in letter and spirit because each of these sectors have a role to play in tackling global warming.

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