

Can India meet its NDC target under Paris Climate Agreement by 2030

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As India transitions into the 6th year since it pledged to generate an additional carbon sink of 2.5-3.0 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent by 2030 as part of Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) target under the 2015 Paris Agreement, initial trends suggest that the targets may be met only halfway at best, according to experts.

Prof. NH Ravindranath of Centre for Sustainable Technologies – IISc, Bangalore, has laid down a 3-point roadmap which could help India achieve at least 50 per cent of its NDC target under the Paris Agreement. Firstly, admitting that it won't be easy to meet it the whole way, he goes on to advise that a separate cell be set up in the ministry with adequate funding solely for the purpose of tree planting. He also said that the states need to be given some targets with respect to reforestation.

Moreover, to achieve the NDC target India needs to produce an additional 25-30 million hectares of forest cover by 2030 which is an additional 1/3rd of the existing green cover.

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) fails to provide any clarity on how this land will be arranged. Prof Ravindranath suggests that remote sensing could come in handy here. "The National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC) Hyderabad has identified various patches of wastelands scattered across the country where reforestation can be undertaken," he said. He also said that NRSC has the capacity to generate high quality maps however he's concerned that the forest authorities fail to effectively use them. "We have the mapping technology to track lands for afforestation at high resolution but unfortunately the forest department and the district officials do not use these in any planning."

Green India Mission

Green India mission which is one of the 8 missions under the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) was launched in 2015 with objectives in line with meeting the Paris agreement. GIM aims to increase India's forest cover by 5 million hectares & enhance carbon sequestration over a span of 10 years. There is a lack of latest data pertaining to GIM but a performance report of NAPCC finds that in 2015, '16 and '17 GIM missed its targets by 34%. Instead of the targeted 67,956 hectares, only 44,749 hectares of land got green cover.

Lack of funding at both centre and state levels is what causes GIM to continually fall short of its annual targets, pushing the NDC target farther away. MOEF&CC termed the budget allocation for years 2015-18 as "grossly insufficient" to cover previous year liabilities let alone meet new targets in a written reply to Lok Sabha.

The GIM was allocated ₹311 Crores in Budget 2020 and ₹240 crores in 2019. Prof. Ravindranath however, terms this as 'completely inadequate' and only good enough for planning work and not for implementation

Budgets more often than not show the priority areas of any government, going by that logic, GIM is presently not the focus of domestic funds allocated in the budget, Kanchi Kohli, Senior Researcher at Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi told the *BusinessLine*. She doesn't fail to also point out that

history shows govt allocations for afforestation and plantation are embroiled in corruption and ineffective implementation.

Responsible Reforestation

When it comes to reforestation, Experts call for the need of a conscious shift away from monoculture plantations such as Eucalyptus/Acacia which drains ground water resources and causes harm to the surrounding environments. “Unfortunately, Forest departments prefer fast growing species with high survival rate, hence they go for plantations,” Ravindranath said. It is impossible to replace native forests and the growth rate of natural forests will be inevitably slow, he added. He also points out that responsible reforestation would involve consultation with villagers to determine which species best fit the region and planning reforestation activities accordingly.

Nevertheless, highlighting the need to preserve rather than restore, Rajesh Ravindran, an IFS Officer at Forest Department of Kerala says that, “If there is more cost for your business from not cutting down a specific tree I advise you to bear it because it’s not all about money..it’s also about the future of the planet.” He also said that the proposed current annual target for Kerala under GIM is 21888 hectares. He said that GIM scheme is well underway in the state with the implementation of half and half restoration such that half of the afforested area lies inside forests and the other half lies outside in convergence with non-forest schemes such as Haritha Keralam and Kerala agriculture mission.

Source: <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/can-india-meet-its-ndc-target-under-paris-climate-agreement-by-2030/article33640924.ece#>