

Climate Profiles : Climate Profile India

India Climate Change Profile Part 1: Growth vs. Climate Protection?

Only economic growth will allow India to lift more than 300 million of its citizens out of extreme poverty. But rapid Indian development also increases pressure on the global climate and unique ecosystems. How will India face this dilemma?



Monsoon in India

A rickshaw puller transports a commuter along a flooded road in Kolkata in July 2007. Monsoon rains have become more erratic in recent years (Photo: Reuters)

India is home to one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, and currently the sixth-largest emitter of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. With nearly a quarter of its population living below the poverty line, the government is pursuing an ambitious development agenda.

Soaring Energy Consumption

Growth in India is expected to cause energy consumption to quadruple from 2005 levels by the year 2030. If current trends continue, most of this energy will be produced from coal-fired power plants, making India one of the top-three greenhouse-gas-emitting countries by 2025.

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Against this backdrop India's government is resisting international pressure to curb its greenhouse emissions. As a developing country India is exempt from mandatory caps on emissions. Developed countries, however, are demanding binding commitments from India. But with per capita emissions only six percent that of the average U.S. American, India argues that industrialized nations are solely responsible.

Global Warming Impacts

Nevertheless, Indian authorities may adjust their "development-versus-

climate protection" view. Recent international reports on climate change, such as the 2007 UN climate change report, presented grim environmental and economic scenarios for India if climate change continues unabated.

Some impacts of global warming have already become visible in India. Monsoon rains have become harder and less predictable, glaciers are melting, more floods and droughts occur, and mangrove forests are disappearing at an alarming rate. Public health, biodiversity, agricultural production, access to drinking water, and even national security will be affected. Indian policymakers are reacting to these threats by launching climate-friendly policies, especially when they serve the country's development agenda. For example, the government will try to meet 20-25 percent of national energy demands from renewable sources in the coming decades.

Climate Change Mitigation

Meanwhile big domestic players in the renewable energy sector, such as Suzlon Energy and Tata-BP Solar, are ahead of politicians, making big investments in large-scale products throughout the country. Answering energy and development needs in a sustainable way will be a big challenge for India this century. But the country could benefit from "leapfrogging" – to develop in the way that makes use of the best and cleanest technologies, policies and resources available without the decades of learning needed to get there.

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