Paris Agreement @10th Year

Introduction - Paris Agreement

The Paris Agreement, adopted in 2015 at COP21, is the most important global climate treaty in modern history. It aims to limit global temperature rise to well below 2°C and ideally below 1.5°C. Unlike earlier climate regimes, Paris is based on universal participation, where every country—developed or developing—submits a climate action plan called a Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC). These commitments must be updated every five years with increasing ambition, making it a dynamic, evolving pact rather than a static treaty. Ten years later, the world is taking stock of how much the Paris Agreement has achieved — and how far we still need to go.

Why the Paris Agreement is Historically Significant

1. Universal Climate Action - Paris moved the world away from the Kyoto model, which placed obligations only on developed countries. This was the first time all countries agreed to act, making global climate governance more inclusive.

2. No Backsliding Principle - The Agreement created a rule that every updated NDC must be more ambitious than the previous one. This prevented countries from weakening their commitments.

3. The Global Stock Take System - A five-year review mechanism was introduced to assess global progress. It ensures transparency, accountability, and course correction.

4. Recognition of Equity and CBDR - Paris embedded the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) while recognizing national capacities. Developed countries would lead in deep decarbonization and provide finance, technology, and support to developing nations.

5. Flexibility Through Article 6 - Countries were allowed to use -

1. carbon markets
2. cooperative approaches
3. non-market mechanisms

This expanded options for achieving emission reduction targets.

Ten Years On - Appraisal of the Paris Agreement

Successes

A. The world avoided a catastrophic warming path

1. Before Paris, the world was heading toward 4–5°C warming by 2100.

2. Today, with NDCs, projected warming has reduced to 2.1–2.8°C.
3. This is not enough, but it shows the curve has bent.

B. Long-term strategies and net-zero commitments - More than 140 countries have now adopted net-zero goals, providing -

1. policy stability
2. investment certainty
3. technology direction

This is a major structural shift.

C. Climate institutions strengthened - The Paris Agreement directly or indirectly enabled -

1. establishment of the Loss and Damage Fund
2. negotiations for a New Collective Quantified Goal for Climate Finance
3. rise of global alliances of cities, industries, and civil society

D. Resilience of the Agreement - Even when the US withdrew under Donald Trump, the Agreement held firm. This demonstrated that Paris was built to survive political shocks.

Role of Developed and Developing Countries

1. Role of Developed Countries - Paris expected developed countries to -

1. reduce emissions quickly
2. reach net-zero earlier
3. provide $100 billion per year in climate finance (missed)
4. support technology transfer

However, the results have been mixed.

Many advanced economies have -

1. expanded fossil fuel production
2. delayed climate finance
3. resisted deeper carbon cuts

Developed countries must reach net zero by around 2040 to keep 1.5°C alive. Current pledges fall far short.

2. Role of Developing Countries - Developing nations argue that -

1. they contributed the least to historical emissions
2. development needs cannot be sacrificed
3. they need finance and technology support

Yet several emerging economies have shown leadership through -

1. renewable energy expansion
2. climate-resilient development
3. regional alliances

India is a major example of such leadership.

India's Role in the Paris Agreement Framework

1. Active Leadership in Global Climate Governance - In the last decade, India has led or co-led global initiatives such as -

1. International Solar Alliance (ISA)
2. Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)
3. Global Biofuels Alliance

A study shows India mobilises 47 countries on average in each initiative — comparable to COP presidencies.

2. Exceeding Commitments - India is on track to surpass its NDC target of reducing emission intensity of GDP by 45% by 2030, likely reaching 48–57%.

3. Expanding Renewable Energy - India is among the fastest-growing renewable energy markets, with large-scale solar, wind, and green hydrogen programmes.

4. Climate Goals Integrated with Development - Schemes such as -

1. UJALA

2. Faster Adoption of Electric Vehicles (FAME)
3. Smart Cities Mission
4. PM-KUSUM

show India's emphasis on jobs + growth + sustainability.

Concerns and Gaps

1. Inadequate Global Ambition - Developed countries are not decarbonising fast enough, pushing the world toward exceeding 1.5°C.

2. Climate Finance Crisis - The promised $100 billion was delayed and insufficient.
The new requirement is $1.3 trillion annually — a massive gap.

3. Technology Transfer Still Weak - High costs, patents, and geopolitics slow down clean tech diffusion.

4. Growing Adaptation and Loss & Damage Challenges - Developing nations face rising climate risks without adequate support.

5. Political Instability and Energy Security Pressures - Conflicts and changing global priorities have weakened momentum.

Suggestions for the Way Forward

1. Developed countries must lead by example

1. Faster fossil fuel phase-out
2. Earlier net-zero targets
3. Massive scaling up of climate finance

2. Reform of climate finance architecture - Climate funds need -

1. easier access
2. faster disbursement
3. lower interest rates

3. Global Technology Partnerships - India can help lead South–South climate technology collaboration.

4. Strengthening transparency and accountability - Countries must meet their commitments without creative accounting.

5. Moving from incrementalism to transformation - Climate change demands systemic, not marginal action -

1. green grids
2. urban redesign
3. sustainable agriculture
4. circular economy

Conclusion

Ten years after its adoption, the Paris Agreement remains humanity's most important climate framework — flexible, resilient, and universal. It has reduced warming projections, mobilised global cooperation, and created long-term climate pathways. But ambition, equity, and finance remain the biggest obstacles. Whether Paris becomes a turning point or a missed opportunity will depend on how seriously the world — especially the developed world — acts in the next decade. For developing nations like India, it is both a responsibility and an opportunity to shape a sustainable, equitable global future.

Main Practice Question

1. "Ten years after its adoption, the Paris Agreement remains central to global climate governance, yet significant gaps persist in ambition, equity, and climate finance. Critically analyse the achievements and shortcomings of the Paris Agreement at its 10-year mark, with special reference to India's role and concerns." (~30 words)

Answer Guidelines

1. Introduction (2–3 lines) - Briefly introduce the Paris Agreement (2015). State its objective - limit warming to well below 2°C, preferably 1.5°C. Mention its importance after 10 years.

2. Body

1. Achievements of the Paris Agreement

Universal participation through NDCs — first global climate pact involving all nations.
No-backsliding rule ensuring each updated NDC must be more ambitious.
Global Stocktake mechanism institutionalized periodic review.
Bending the emissions curve - projected warming reduced from 4–5°C to 2.1–2.8°C.
Triggered net-zero commitments and long-term strategies by 140+ countries.
Strengthened global climate institutions such as the Loss & Damage Fund.
Resilience - survived US withdrawal under Trump.

2. Shortcomings / Concerns

Gap in ambition - Developed countries slow in phasing out fossil fuels.
Climate finance crisis - $100 billion goal delayed; $1.3 trillion now needed.
Weak technology transfer due to patents and geopolitics.
1.5°C target slipping away due to insufficient global cuts.
Political instability and energy security pressures weakening commitments.

3. India's Role

1. Achieved and exceeded NDC targets on emission intensity.
2. Leading global alliances - ISA, CDRI, Global Biofuels Alliance.
3. Among fastest-growing renewable energy markets.
4. Advocates equity, climate justice, and CBDR.
5. Still faces adaptation burdens and finance gaps.

4. Way Forward / Suggestions

1. Developed countries must reach net zero earlier (≈2040).
2. Reform global climate finance architecture for accessibility and scale.
3. Strengthen technology sharing and South–South cooperation.
4. Move from incremental to transformational climate action.
5. Enhance transparency, accountability, and real-time emissions tracking.

3. Conclusion - Paris Agreement is a framework that works, but global leadership and equity must improve. The next decade will decide whether Paris becomes a turning point or a missed opportunity.