

UNFCCC REFORMS: ENVIRONMENT

NEWS: Why the UNFCCC process must be reformed

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

The UNFCCC, the global framework guiding climate negotiations, faces mounting criticism over stalled progress, consensus deadlock, and unmet finance promises, prompting calls for reform. India has emerged as a proactive climate leader, with updated NDCs, strong performance, and initiatives like Mission LiFE and LeadIT 2.0.

Introduction & Context

- As the global climate crisis intensifies, the **credibility and effectiveness of the UNFCCC process** has come under sharp scrutiny.
- Concerns include **rising emissions, unmet finance pledges, weak enforcement, and inefficiencies in negotiations.**

About the UNFCCC

- **Adopted:** 1992 at the Earth Summit, Rio de Janeiro
- **Objective:** To stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere and guide global climate action.
- It has laid the foundation for later agreements like the **Kyoto Protocol (1997)** and the **Paris Agreement (2015).**

Institutional Framework of the UNFCCC

- **Conference of the Parties (COP):**
 - Supreme decision-making body.
 - Meets annually to assess progress, adopt decisions, and negotiate new climate commitments.
- **Subsidiary Bodies:**
 - **SBSTA** (Scientific and Technological Advice): Advises on science and technology inputs for decision-making.
 - **SBI** (Implementation): Reviews national communications and promotes compliance.
- **UNFCCC Secretariat:**
 - Supports the COP and parties.
 - Maintains data transparency and facilitates implementation and coordination.

Major Milestones in the UNFCCC Process

- **1997 – Kyoto Protocol:**
 - Introduced **legally binding targets** for developed countries.
- **2005 – Kyoto enters into force.**
- **2012 – Doha Amendment:**
 - Extended Kyoto commitments post-2012.
- **2015 – Paris Agreement (COP21):**
 - Non-binding but universal.
 - Goal: Limit global warming to **well below 2°C**, ideally 1.5°C.
- **2023 – First Global Stocktake:**
 - First comprehensive review of global climate progress under the Paris Agreement.

India's Engagement with the UNFCCC

1. Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) – Updated in 2022

- Reduce **emissions intensity of GDP by 45% by 2030** (from 2005 levels).
- Achieve **50% cumulative electric power capacity from non-fossil sources** by 2030.
- Target of **Net-Zero emissions by 2070**.

2. Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment)

- Launched to **promote sustainable consumption and climate-conscious behavior** at the individual and community level.

3. Long-Term Low Emission Development Strategy (LT-LEDS)

- Submitted to UNFCCC in 2022.
- Focus areas:
 - Clean energy transitions
 - Low-carbon mobility and urban design
 - Carbon removal technologies
 - Forest-based climate resilience

4. India's Initiatives at COP Summits

- **COP26 (Glasgow):**

- Introduced *Panchamrit* commitments.
- Advocated for **climate justice** and equitable access to the global carbon budget.
- **COP28 (Dubai):**
 - Reported **33% reduction in emissions intensity** from 2005 to 2019.
 - **40% installed capacity from non-fossil fuels achieved** nine years ahead of target.
 - India launched:
 - **Green Credit Programme**
 - **LeadIT 2.0** (Leadership Group for Industry Transition, with Sweden)
 - **Global Biofuel Alliance**

5. Climate Progress Reporting

- **4th Biennial Update Report (BUR)** submitted in December 2024. Highlights include:
 - **7.93% drop** in GHG emissions (2020 vs 2019)
 - Forests and tree cover offset **22% of CO₂ emissions**
 - Achieved **36% reduction** in emission intensity since 2005

Why Reform of the UNFCCC Process is Urgent

1. Stalled Progress

- Despite three decades of negotiations, **global GHG emissions continue to rise**.
- Climate targets set under the Paris Agreement are not being met at the required pace.

2. Consensus Paralysis

- UNFCCC operates on **consensus-based decision-making**.
- This gives veto power to any one nation, resulting in **slow and diluted outcomes**.

3. Withdrawal of Key Players

- Temporary **exit of the US under President Trump** weakened momentum and eroded trust.

4. Climate Finance Bottleneck

- Target of **\$100 billion per year** by developed nations remains unmet.
- Estimated actual requirement: **\$1.3 trillion annually**.
- New pledge (from 2035): \$300 billion/year — still seen as insufficient and vague.

Proposed Reforms to the UNFCCC

Reforms at Bonn Climate Meeting (June 2025)

- **Simplify Agenda:** Remove overlapping issues to improve negotiation focus.
- **Team Size Cap:** Limit delegation sizes to make negotiations more manageable.
- **Restrict Speaking Time:** Allocate more time for actual bargaining instead of extended statements.

Reforms Suggested by Civil Society

- **Majority-Based Decision Making:** Replace full consensus with majority votes in certain cases.
- **COP Host Restrictions:** Ban countries with poor climate records from hosting future summits.
- **Restrict Fossil Fuel Lobbying:** Limit the influence of high-emission industry groups.
- **Transparent Processes:** Public access to negotiations and **independent audits** of pledges.
- **Accountability Mechanisms:** Penalize or name-shame countries failing to deliver on their climate promises.

Brazil's Leadership for COP30 (2025)

- Released a **letter calling for reform** of the UNFCCC to rebuild trust.
- Proposed **multilateral synergy**, suggesting integration of climate goals across UN and global financial institutions.
- **30-Point Agenda** unveiled to accelerate global climate action.

BRICS & Climate Justice Call (2025)

- At the BRICS Summit in Brazil, member nations issued a **joint declaration** demanding:
 - Full delivery of the **\$100 billion climate finance** commitment.
 - Greater **funding for adaptation** (currently far less than mitigation funding).
 - Emphasis on **equity and historical responsibility** in climate action.

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