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International Initiatives on Climate Change: Contributions of United Nations Organisations on Protecting the Nature

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Abstract

Nature is an incredible gift to the living beings, especially for the human beings of the planet. The changes created in the nature by human attitudes are more dangerous. Unbridled human desire, coupled with unsustainable development over centuries disturbed the rhythm of the nature. Climate change creates new challenges on different dimensions like health security, water security, human displacement, disaster management, human and climate trafficking and similar areas. United Nations Organisation took a leading role on uniting the countries for protecting the biosphere from degradation. Stockholm Declaration of 1972 was the first global conference on environmental protection, organised by United Nations. The principal objective of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that allows ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change so that food production is not threatened. The slogan ‘Common but Differentiated Responsibility’ portrays the need of cooperation among the nations and the common folk as well as the responsibility of each and every one on protecting the universe for the future generations.

Keywords: Climate Change, Greenhouse Gas, Nature, United Nations.

Climate change means a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods. Nature is an incredible gift to the living beings, especially for the human beings of the planet. From the evolution of the species, nature altered itself for its survival. Historically, the changes in nature have created huge impacts on both animals and human beings. Unbridled human desire, coupled with unsustainable development over centuries disturbed the rhythm of the nature. The development of human attitudes, urbanisation, industrialisation and the material world made the life of living beings harmful at several aspects. Natural events too cause changes in the climate and atmosphere. But the changes created in the nature by human attitudes are more dangerous. Recent studies reveal the bitter fact that human activities change the climatic conditions of the globe. According to a study that the world temperature has increased by 0.85 degree Celsius from 1880 to 2012. Similarly the increase of Carbon di oxide (CO₂) by 40%, Methane (CH₄) by 120% and Nitrous Oxide (N₂O) by 20% is also alarming. The estimates

of the scientists are that the temperature of the planet shall increase by 4.8 degree Celsius by the next 100 years. Climate change is considered as the biggest global health – threat of 21st century. It became a global challenge. Climate change creates new challenges on different dimensions like health security, water security, human displacement, disaster management, human and climate trafficking and similar areas.

The latter half of the 20th century alarmed the nations including the United Nations Organisation about the global threat of climate change. Numerous studies were undertaken to prepare themselves to face the threat for the existence of mankind. The initiatives of the nations revealed that the global challenge can be settled only through the collective coordination of the humankind. Climate change poses the most urgent existential challenge of our lifetime, not only for humanity's survival but also protection of the planet's biodiversity. Scientifically it was observed that the factors behind the climate change was the human activity including the use of fossil fuels that emits large quantity of carbon di oxide and similar activities that creates greenhouse gases in the air. Greenhouse gases mean those gaseous constituents of the atmosphere, both natural and anthropogenic, that absorbs and re-emitsinfra-red radiation. The prominent gases in greenhouse are carbon di oxide, methane, ozone gas, chlorofluorocarbon and nitrous oxide. These gases increases the heat within the atmosphere, creates adverse effects on ecosystems, in turn results in rising sea levels, severe weather events, and droughts that render landscapes more susceptible to wildfires. Climate change occurs by greenhouse effect (The Earth's climate is affected by the interaction of radiation from the sun and the Earth's atmosphere. The greenhouse gases have the important function of trapping this radiation in the lower layers of the Earth's atmosphere. This process is called the 'greenhouse effect' without which the earth would be as cold as the moon). The greenhouse gases remains in the atmosphere for a long time. It attributes that the greenhouse gases that was accumulated in the atmosphere already, shall remain for centuries. In this context, the nations realised their unification for the protection of the planet by enacting common legislations with the consent of humankind.

United Nations Organisation took a leading role on uniting the countries for protecting the biosphere from degradation. In 1961, the General Assembly of United Nations passed a resolution (1721 (XVI)), that paved the way for the creation of World Metrological Organisation. Gradually the world nations were compelled to undertake studies regarding the remedial measures to be undertaken at the earliest to reduce the greenhouse emission to protect the nature and control the climate change.

Stockholm Declaration, 1972

The creation of World Metrological Organisation was followed by the most important initiative of United Nations ie.,Stockholm Declaration of 1972. This was the first global conference on environmental protection, organised by United Nations on the topic UN Conference on Human Environment at Stockholm in Sweden in 1972. This declaration came up with 26 major principles to protect man and the environment. It urged every nation to create regulations regarding the protection of wild life and to preserve their environment. It recognised climate change as a global issue that should be addressed urgently. The major principles of this declaration are right to protect environment, use of science and technology, evolution of policies by the nations to protect the environment, management of natural resources, management of renewable resources, pollution control, prevention of pollution in oceans and protection of wild life. The following three categories of action plan of this declaration also gained importance.

1. Global Environmental Assessment Programme
2. Environmental Management Activities
3. International measures to support assessment and support activities

First World Climate Conference, 1979

Stockholm Declaration was followed by the first World Climate Conference in 1979 at Geneva in Switzerland. The conference organized four working groups to look into climate data, the identification of climate topics, integrated impact studies, and research on climate variability and change. It laid the foundation for the establishment of World Climate Programme and the World Climate Research Programme under the joint supervision and responsibility of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU) in the subsequent years. One of the important area that was highlighted in this conference was application of knowledge of climate in planning, development and management. It urged to evolve programmes to assist metrological and hydrological services to create awareness among the users by providing information regarding significant climate applications.

Subsequently, number of conferences and meetings were organised in this regard and an awareness was created among the world nations and the public regarding the need of protection of the stability of the nature and the use of reduction of greenhouse effect. Simultaneously working programmes were evolved by nations and began to implement gradually. At the same time, even though legislations were enacted by the nations, many nations were unable to execute the same due to lack of awareness and little cooperation of the public. The prominent programmes organised during the subsequent period were, the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer in March 1985, the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer in August 1987, Villach Conference in October 1985, the Toronto Conference in June 1988, the Ottawa Conference in February 1989, the Tata Conference in February 1989, the Hague Conference and Declaration in March 1989, the Noordwijk Ministerial Conference in November 1989, the Cairo Compact in December 1989, and the Bergen Conference in May 1990. Similarly, the Convention on Long-Range Trans boundary Air Pollution was adopted and opened for signature in 1979, and it was considered as the first international legally binding instrument on climate. Subsequently, three years later in December 1982, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea was also opened for signature. The instruments opened for signature made the world nations to look deep into the issue.

Second World Climate Conference, 1990

Second World Climate Conference is another important imitative of United Nations Organisation on protecting the environment. It was organised in 1990. The primary objective of this conference is to formulate recommendations for the continuing World Climate Programme. It was a step towards Global Climate Treaty and was attended by 747 scientists and technological experts from several nations of the world. The deliberate discussions resulted on specific recommendations on the significance of reduction of greenhouse gases for climate change, the use of climate information in assisting sustainable social and economic development, priorities for enhanced research and observational systems, the impact of climate change on water resources, forests, agriculture and food, oceans, fisheries, and coastal zones, necessary changes in energy production and consumption patterns, the impact of climate change on land use, urban planning, and human health, and the implications of climate change for sustainable development. The contribution of the heads of the governments and ministers of 137 governments made to pass certain resolutions. The major resolutions of the conference were as follows.

1. To stress the need for further scientific research on the causes and effects of climate change and recommend that this be done mainly through support of the World Climate Programme (WCP).
2. The state should adopt response measures without delay, despite remaining scientific uncertainties.

3. To urge the developed states which are responsible for 75% of the world's emissions of greenhouse gases, to establish targets or feasible national programmes or strategies which will have a significant effect on limiting emissions of greenhouse gases.
4. To recognize that the emissions from developing countries must still grow to accommodate their development needs, nevertheless, these states should, with support from the developed nations and international organizations, take action.
5. To make a call for elaboration of a framework treaty on climate change and the necessary protocols, containing real commitments and innovative solutions within the time for adoption by the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in June 1992.

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 1992

One of the most important initiatives of United Nations to protect the environment and save the humankind was the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change was adopted at the Rio Conference in 1992. The UN Conference on Environment and Development (also known as the Earth Summit or the Rio Summit) was held in Brazil, in June 1992. Representatives of 178 governments attended the Earth Summit and adopted three major non-binding instruments and two legally binding conventions. It acknowledged that change in the earth's climate and its adverse effects are a common concern of humankind. Concerned that human activities have been substantially increasing the atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases, that these increases enhance the natural greenhouse effect, and that this will result on average in an additional warming of the earth's surface and atmosphere and may adversely affect natural ecosystems and humankind. It resolved to serve as the primary framework for international cooperation to combat climate change. Comprehensive plan on action for sustainable development, Declaration on environment and development with 27 principles and the Statement of forest principles were the three major non – binding instruments. The United Nations framework convention on climate change and Convention on biological diversity were the two legally binding conventions. Among these the UN framework convention on climate change occupies utmost importance. The positive attitude from almost 197 signatories reflects the awareness of the nations and their concern towards the future generations. It was a great achievement on the part of the United Nations.

The principal objective of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that allows ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change so that food production is not threatened. It urged the signatories to have commitment towards

The establishment of national inventories of greenhouse gas emissions and sinks,

The formulation and implementation of policies and measures to mitigate and adapt to climate change,

The sustainable management of forests, oceans and ecosystem and

The integration of climate change considerations in national social, economic and environmental policies.

The UNFCCC instituted a process for countries to generate and share data about domestic greenhouse gas emissions. The data collected through the UNFCCC have proved important on developing scientific understanding of the climate problem. From its inception in 1992, the UNFCCC has led to the adoption of a number of subsequent agreements, that yielded fruitful results.

Kyoto Protocol

One of the much needed declarations to protect the nature was the Kyoto Protocol. It was an international agreement concluded by the UNFCCC, aimed on compelling its Parties by setting internationally binding emission reduction targets. It was adopted in Kyoto, Japan, on 11 December 1997. But the complex ratification process delayed the execution process and finally it came to force on 16 February 2005. This agreement helped to boost the effectiveness of the 1992 UNFCCC. It compelled the industrialised countries to enact necessary legislations to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases within the targeted period. Its main target was the reduction of such gases mainly on European countries which were highly industrialised. Nearly 37 countries were targeted in the first commitment period. It was also stated that Asian countries has less share on the emission of greenhouse gases. The slogan ‘Common but Differentiated Responsibility’ portrays the need of cooperation among the nations and the common folk as well as the responsibility of each and every one on protecting the universe for the future generations.

The subsequent initiatives include the Doha Amendment of Kyoto Protocol, the Paris Agreement, the Glasgow Climate Pact and a few other agreements. All those agreements aimed on turning the decade as a decade of climate action and support. The timely initiative of United Nations Organisation is a milestone on protecting the nature for the peaceful existence of living beings. As human attitudes plays a major role on the changes in the environment, individual awareness and responsibility shall be the only remedial measure for protecting the planet. The rush towards making money should be shown in social responsibility, that would lead to the creation of responsible society with peaceful co –existence. Besides, the responsibility of respecting international laws and policies, either created by the United Nations or the countries for the sake of protecting the biosphere should be given utmost importance. The response of federal and state natural resource management agencies to integrate climate-change science into resource management plans and adaptation actions should be appreciated and strengthened.

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