

## Action For the Earth

### Climate Change & Negotiations – From Rio to Paris

# CARBON FOOTPRINT



The Earth has experienced periods of climate change in the past - changes that have occurred due to natural phenomena such as tectonic movements, solar radiation, volcanic eruptions, and inter-stellar collisions, to mention a few. A large amount of scientific evidence, besides temperature records, shows that Earth's climate is changing. All indications point to the fact that the change has been primarily caused by human behaviour over the past few centuries.

A look around will show that the atmosphere and oceans have warmed, sea levels have risen, there has been a strong decline in Arctic sea ice, and other climate-related changes. Environmental scientists realize that inaction on climate change could result in even more disastrous climatic changes in the days to come.

*Industrialization, modernization & urbanization have been identified as the primary factors responsible for our current crisis.*

Citizens and governments can choose to deter further climate change by changing their pattern of energy production and usage, so as to limit emissions of greenhouse gases. Or, they can wait for changes to occur and accept the losses, damage and resultant suffering; they can adapt to actual and expected changes as much as possible; or they can seek as yet unproven 'geoengineering' solutions to counteract some of the climate changes that would otherwise occur.

Each of these options has pros & cons & costs, and they have to be discussed on a global scale.

Taking cognizance of these global climate change realities, scientists, environmentalists, world leaders, governments, experts, NGOs, policymakers and heads of state from around the world meet to participate in a series of negotiations, agreements & action, under the supervision of the UN.

The most noteworthy among these are formation of IPCC, The Earth Summit at Rio de Janeiro in 1992 & The Kyoto Protocol in 1997, Bali 2007, Copenhagen 2009, Durban in 2011 & Paris, 2015.

Formal consultations to mitigate climate change started with the formation of **IPCC** (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) - a leading international body that came together for the assessment of climate change.

Established by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) in 1988, IPCC assesses the scientific, technical and socio-economic information relevant to understanding the scientific basis of risk of human-induced climate change, its potential impacts and options for adaptation and mitigation. IPCC is located at the WMO headquarters in Geneva.

In collaboration with the scientific community, authors & expert participants, IPCC has produced 5 comprehensive multi-volume assessment reports.

IPCC Assessment Report 1 was published in 1992. IPCC AR 5, the fifth & most recent report, *categorically states that the findings committee can confirm, with 95% certainty, that humans and not natural factors are the main contributors to climate change.*

The reports are based on the findings of thousands of scientists from all over the world who contribute to the work of IPCC voluntarily. IPCC is open to all member countries of the United Nations (UN) and WMO. Currently, 195 countries are Members of the IPCC.

In 2007 the IPCC was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

The IPCC findings prompted a series of global awareness & action campaigns. The first among these was **the Earth Summit – Rio de Janeiro (1992)**. Around 30,000 representatives from 178 nations, non-governmental agencies and other interested groups met in Rio de Janeiro to discuss global environmental issues that would become central to policy implementation.

The conference was a result of two and a half years of worldwide consultation and demonstrates the best intentions of the human race to live responsibly. More than 130 signatory nations agreed on an action plan for developing the planet sustainably through the twenty-first century. All the nations present, accepted without change, the Rio Declaration.

The key highlights of the agreement were

- New and additional financial resources to meet convention goals
- Promotion of transfer of technology to developing countries
- An institutional mechanism to enable the international community to manage the climate change problem over the long term, working with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Unfortunately, the Rio Convention lacked definite targets and timetables for stabilizing emissions of carbon dioxide that had been desired by most industrial nations. The United States, a leading contributor to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions pushed for a delay in setting actual dates or levels, arguing that the countries supporting the timetables did not have credible plans for stabilizing emissions. The U.S. also stated it had already committed itself to an action plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but felt it would be unwise to support environmental programs at the expense of the domestic economy. Saudi Arabia & other oil-producing nations strongly opposed the reduction of fossil fuel use. This indicated that they would fight hard to maintain oil's place as the world's primary source of energy as it was their economic lifeblood.

Though the Earth Summit awakened global consciousness to the imminent Climate Change crisis, it did not achieve its potential. The commitments made at the Rio Summit were not realized due to a lack of domestic legislation, a lack of credible and independent international scrutiny to monitor delivery, and the international community's failure to convert the original Rio agenda into financial commitment by governments.

To further strengthen the pledge taken at the Earth Summit, participants of the Earth Summit came together in Kyoto - Japan to formulate **The Kyoto Protocol**. Finalized in 1997, it went into force in 2005 & has been ratified by 191 nations. The USA was perhaps the only nation to abstain from ratifying it.

*The Kyoto Protocol was special, as it was the first legal agreement between nations to mandate country-by-country reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. It was based on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change framework which pledged to stabilize greenhouse-gas concentrations at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.*

At the Kyoto Summit, developed nations argued for a wide range of desired outcomes, negotiated positions, converged and agreed upon.

Rich industrialized countries committed to a 5.2% reduction below their 1990 levels by 2012 and an 80 % reduction by 2050. International Emissions Trading, Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) and Joint Implementation were identified as three vehicles for emission reduction.

It was agreed that developed countries would bear the major responsibility, based on historical cumulated emissions & CDM was identified as the technology that would enable the implementation of the commitment.

An adaptation fund was set up to minimize the impact on developing countries. Developing nations such as China and India, weren't expected to reduce emissions, they were not accountable for the then build-up of CO<sub>2</sub>.

The Kyoto Protocol took time to be established as an international law. While some countries such as the European Union, were on track to meet their Kyoto goals by 2011, other large nations fell short. As per IPCC, the Kyoto targets were not aligned with the 450 ppm peak target. The current planetary boundaries framework suggests 350 PPM may be a more realistic target.

Though the participants of Climate Change Negotiations met every year, to review implementation & develop plans of action, there hasn't been adequate commitment to arrest further deterioration of the earth's climate.

**The Bali Road Map**, a United Nations Climate Change Conference in 2007, hosted by the Government of Indonesia, was another landmark meeting of the parties to the Kyoto Protocol.

The Bali Action Plan launched a new, comprehensive process to enable the full, effective and sustained implementation of the Convention, through long-term cooperative action from 2007 up to and beyond 2012. Governments divided the plan into five main categories: shared vision, mitigation, adaptation, technology and financing.

A Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action was set up to conduct work under the Bali Action Plan and its central task was to decide the emission reduction commitments of industrialized countries after the Kyoto Protocol's first commitment period expired in 2012.

In 2009, at Copenhagen, a new political accord was inked by world leaders during the U.N. Climate Change Conference. The accord was an explicit emission pledge by all the major economies – including, China and other major developing countries.

**The Copenhagen Accord** was the culmination of intense negotiations launched after the 2007 Bali Action Plan. It drew a level of political attention well beyond that of any previous climate meeting. At the end of a highly volatile 11-day conference, a deal was brokered, wherein,

parallel decisions under the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Kyoto Protocol would take note of the political accord and open the way for governments to individually sign on.

Key elements of the Copenhagen Accord were:

- A goal of limiting global temperature increase to 2 degrees Celsius; a process for countries to enter their specific mitigation pledges by January 31, 2010
- Broad terms for the reporting and verification of countries' actions
- A collective commitment by developed countries for \$30 billion in "new and additional" resources in 2010-2012 to help developing countries reduce emissions, preserve forests, and adapt to climate change
- A goal of mobilizing \$10 billion a year in public and private finance by 2020 to address developing country needs.

The Copenhagen Accord is a political (as opposed to legal) agreement of a novel form. Formal decisions under the U.N. climate process are typically taken by consensus. As some parties opposed the accord, the decision entering it into the conference's proceedings is not technically an acceptance of its substantive content by the Conference of the Parties (or by the parallel Meeting of the Parties under Kyoto). Rather, the decisions by the two bodies only "take note" of the accord. The Copenhagen Accord declared itself operational immediately, although many of its provisions required further elaboration.

Despite the large participation, the Copenhagen Accord was not successful. The reasons ranged from the fact that key participants could not come to a consensus on a global agreement, to the lack of political will to understand, recognize and accept the scientific evidence, to the fact that the hosts put forward a draft political declaration to a select group of "important countries" - thereby annoying every country not on the list, to the European Union's endorsement of a weak accord and to perceived slights that resulted in almost routine suspension of sessions.

The failure of the Copenhagen Accord created the need for further negotiations that were more sensitive to all parties concerned.

With the Kyoto Protocol being the world's only existing treaty stipulating cuts in greenhouse gas emissions (cuts only apply to developed countries and the US did not join in.) & commitments this far being voluntary, there was a great need for a legally binding, more comprehensive agreement.

**The United Nations Climate Change Conference at Durban in 2011** witnessed a breakthrough in the international community's response to climate change. It was the second-largest meeting of its kind. For the first time, world governments committed themselves to write a comprehensive global agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, covering developed and

developing countries, to come into force in 2020. The participants agreed to adopt a universal legal agreement on climate change as soon as possible, and no later than 2015.

All governments committed to a comprehensive blueprint that would bring countries closer to delivering the ultimate objective of the Climate Change Convention - to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that will prevent dangerous interference with the climate system, and at the same time will preserve the right to sustainable development.

The four main areas that were agreed upon included

1. A second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol , which specifies cuts in greenhouse gas emissions by developed nations
2. Launch of a new platform of negotiations with definite timelines to implement a universal greenhouse gas reduction protocol, with legal force by 2015 for the period beyond 2020
3. Finalizing in 2012, the existing stream of negotiations to make existing emission limitation plans more transparent. It also launched a long-term implementation plan of a comprehensive global support network that shall deliver funding and technology to help developing countries build their own clean energy futures and construct societies and economies which are resilient to climate change.
4. To scope out & conduct a fresh global review of the emerging climate challenge based on the best available science & data.

The Durban Agreement also put forth the idea of a new \$ 100 million Green Climate Fund to help poorer countries reduce their emissions.

The Conference was hosted by the Government of South Africa and took place at the International Convention Centre (ICC) & Durban Exhibition Centre (DEC).

**COP 21** - The 21<sup>st</sup> Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is being held from 30 November – 11 December, 2015. 40,000 people from 190 nations across the world are participating in the two-week conference, to discuss, debate, take ownership, assess, assign, decide & implement a plan that will save further catastrophes arising from climate change.

The Conference aims to work out a way of limiting emissions of greenhouse gases, while allowing countries to continue to grow their economies, and providing assistance to the least developed and those most affected by rising temperatures.

COP 21 is perhaps more crucial than the earlier negotiations. Seen as critical we are faced with a global problem that has resulted from local behaviour. It has become imperative to take corrective action – find alternate energy resources, reduce the use of fossil fuel, and limit thoughtless consumption.