www.IndiaESG.org
info@IndiaESG.org
info.IndiaESG@gmail.com

## Restricting Global Warming

# Path to Paris Agreement

Paris Agreement was a result of more than 30 years of negotiations between several stakeholders. Arriving at a consensus took the world from Rio to Kyoto, Copenhagen and finally Paris. World leaders tried several ways from legally binding emission cuts to Nationally Determined Contributions which used peer pressure.

www.IndiaESG.org
info@IndiaESG.org
info.IndiaESG@gmail.com

# Paris Agreement Journey

International climate summits can arguably be traced to 1979, when the first World Climate Summit, organized by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), framed climate change as an issue to be addressed by global politics. In 1988, the WMO was also the co-creator of the IPCC, the scientific body that was to become ever more influential in subsequent years and decades. However, the history of concerted global political action on climate starts with United Nations involvement. The 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, introduced several new UN initiatives and bodies, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Subsequent summits of the UNFCCC were called “conferences of parties,” or COP for short, with the number of the meeting attached: the first follow-up meeting, COP1, took place in Berlin in 1995. COP3 in Kyoto in 1997 produced the first major international accord on emissions reductions. The Kyoto Protocol, which took the form of a legally binding treaty, required high-income “Annex 1” countries to attain 5% emissions reductions compared to 1990 levels by 2008–2012, with several mechanisms built in that attempted to promote flexibility and technology transfer between countries. The first of these, emissions-trading, was meant to allow Annex 1 countries that had made deeper emissions cuts to sell surplus emissions allowances to other Annex 1 countries. The second of these, “joint implementation,” was also meant to be between Annex 1 countries, where one country could undertake a project involving technology transfer in a fellow Annex 1 country. The third, the “clean development mechanism” (CDM), attempted to provide a way for emissions cuts to also be spread to developing economies. Under the CDM, an Annex 1 country could get credit for conducting an emissions reduction project in a non-Annex 1 country.

Immediately after its adoption, the Protocol was viewed as a resounding success and an optimistic sign for the future. However, in retrospect, the Kyoto Protocol is widely viewed as having been a failure, and it did not achieve even the modest emissions targets it had embedded within it. Some of its failings were technical, such as the fact that the planned emissions-trading scheme was never properly implemented. But many of its failings were deeper and more structural. The fact that, in light of the notion of “common but differentiated responsibilities,” developing countries were not subject to any kind of emissions reduction obligations (and indeed many had skyrocketing rates of emissions growth during this time) made even Annex 1 countries less committed. Indeed, the United States ended up never ratifying the Protocol for this reason. Fundamentally, the Protocol provided no good way to overcome

the collective action problem, whereby any given country would bear the short-term costs of emissions reduction, but only a fraction of the benefit.

Expectations were high that negotiations at COP15 in Copenhagen in 2009 would produce an improved, binding treaty for the post-Kyoto space, as Kyoto was set to expire in 2012. Inversely to the situation with Kyoto, the Copenhagen summit's acrimonious end, with no agreement on a new binding treaty, was widely seen by commentators and the media as an abject failure. Nonetheless, some of the ideas first introduced at Copenhagen ended up laying the groundwork for subsequent climate policy. For one example, the meeting in Copenhagen was the first COP to establish the aspirational goal that global warming be kept to below 2°C. Another example is that in the absence of a binding treaty, the Copenhagen accord invited countries of all kinds, high-income and low-income, to submit domestic mitigation strategies to the UNFCCC.

In 2015, COP21 in Paris built on some of these new ideas first tentatively floated in Copenhagen. The Paris Agreement is based not on legally binding emissions reductions targets but on a commonly agreed aspiration to keep global temperature rise "well below 2°C above preindustrial levels" and to "pursuing efforts" to limit the rise to 1.5°C, combined with national efforts by each individual party in this direction (UNFCCC, 2015). These national plans, now called Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), are to be submitted to the UNFCCC, and periodically re-evaluated. Specifically, the Paris Agreement establishes a "ratchet" mechanism, where countries are expected to tighten their NDCs every five years, and these are to be evaluated at COP meetings. The first round of NDCs from 2015 were not aligned with a 2°C limit, let alone 1.5°C of warming limit—agencies such as the International Energy Agency (IEA) estimated that these policies would lead to 3°C or more of warming. However, the first round of "ratcheting" seems to be working as intended, as many 2020 NDCs are much more ambitious, with many countries committing to a (domestic) goal of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050, which does align with 2°C limit globally.

In any case, it is already possible to say that the success Paris has brought so far is in its different structure, and approach, from Kyoto. Instead of relying on legal obligations (which are difficult to enforce for any international treaty in any case, unlike domestic contracts that can be enforced by judicial systems and appropriate penalties), the Paris Agreement makes use of the powerful tools of inclusion and peer pressure. Everyone has to submit an NDC, and countries can and do ramp up ambitions when others do.

In addition, the framework around the Paris Agreement explicitly recognized for the first time that many kinds of stakeholders, ranging from subnational

actors such as cities and regions to private-sector businesses and financial institutions, could help to contribute to climate goals.