

# Why India Shouldn't Sign on to Net Zero

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## Doing so would be to accede to further over-appropriation of the global carbon budget by a few

Despite the net zero campaign by a number of countries and non-state actors, the timing of the world's carbon dioxide emissions reaching net zero is not the critical parameter for the safety of humanity. As the recent report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change made it clear, limiting the increase in the world's average temperature from pre-industrial levels to those agreed in the Paris Agreement requires global cumulative emissions of carbon dioxide to be capped at the global carbon budget. It is a truism that such a cap means that eventually emissions must go to zero, or more precisely, net zero. But reaching net zero by itself is irrelevant to forestalling dangerous warming. This is no more rocket science than saying that the promise of when you will turn off the tap does not guarantee that you will draw only a specified quantity of water.

### What Promises of Net Zero do

What do we know about projected cumulative emissions? The top three emitters of the world — China, the U.S. and the European Union — even after taking account of their net zero commitments and their enhanced emission reduction commitments for 2030, will emit more than 500 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide before net zero. These three alone will exceed the limit of about 500 billion tonnes from 2020 onwards, for even odds of keeping global temperature increase below 1.5°C. With these committed emissions, there is no hope of “keeping 1.5°C alive.” The target is dead-on-arrival. For two-to-one odds for the same target, the limit is 400 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide, a limit that is even more certain to be breached.

Neither the Paris Agreement nor climate science requires that net zero be reached individually by countries by 2050, the former requiring only global achievement of this goal “in the second half of the century”. Claims that the world “must” reach specific goals by 2030 or 2050 are the product of specific economic models for climate action. These are designed to achieve the Paris goals by the “lowest cost” methods, foregoing equity and climate justice. They front-load emission reduction requirements on developing countries, despite their already low emissions, to allow the developed world to backload its own, buying time for its own transition.

These stringent limits on future cumulative emissions post 2020, amounting to less than a fifth of the total global carbon budget, is the result of its considerable over-appropriation in the past by the global North. Less than a fifth of the world has been responsible for three-fifths of all past cumulative emissions, the U.S. and the EU alone having contributed a whopping 45%. Promises of net zero in their current form perpetuate this hugely disproportionate appropriation of a global commons, while continuing to place humanity in harm's way.

## **What India must do**

India's emissions story cannot be bracketed with the top three. India is responsible for no more than 4.37% cumulative emissions of carbon dioxide since the pre-industrial era, even though it is home to more than a sixth of humanity. India's per capita emissions are less than half the world average, less than one-eighth of the U.S.'s, and have shown no dramatic increase like China's post 2000.

For India to declare net zero now is to accede to the further over-appropriation of the global carbon budget by a few. India's contribution to global emissions, in both stock and flow, is so disproportionately low that any sacrifice on its part can do nothing to save the world. Nor can it proceed with the expectation that the developed world and China would limit their emissions further in the future. If such expectations were belied, it would endanger the future of its own population, subjecting it to unprecedented hardship. The failure of the developed world to meet its pre-2020 obligations along with its refusal to acknowledge this provides little confidence for the future.

The allocation of property rights, without grandfathering, is essential to ensure equitable access to any global commons. The global carbon budget has been subject to no such restriction allowing the developed countries to exploit it fully, in the past and the present. Only China, from among the rest, has managed to surmount this barrier to access. India, in enlightened self-interest, must now stake its claim to a fair share of the global carbon budget. Technology transfer and financial support, together with "negative emissions", if the latter succeeds, can compensate for the loss of the past. In the absence of such a claim, India's considerable current efforts at mitigation are a wasted effort, only easing the way for the continued over-exploitation of the global commons by a few.

Such a claim by India provides it greater, and much-needed long-term options. It enables the responsible use of coal, its major fossil fuel resource, and oil and gas, to bootstrap itself out of lower middle-income economy status and eradicate poverty, hunger and malnutrition for good. India's resource-strapped small industries sector, which provides employment and livelihoods to the majority of the population outside agriculture, needs expansion and modernisation. The agriculture sector, the second largest source of greenhouse gas emissions for India after energy, needs to double its productivity and farmers' incomes and build resilience. Infrastructure for climate resilience in general is critical to future adaptation to climate change. All of these will require at least the limited fossil fuel resources made available through a fair share of the carbon budget.

Developed countries and China, on the other hand, if they are serious about the Paris Agreement targets, must reach net zero well before 2050. For a target of 2°C, there is more room for the rest of the world, since the cumulative emission limit for it, with the same even odds, is 1,350 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide. However, without restriction of their future cumulative emissions by the big emitters, to their fair share of the global carbon budget, and the corresponding temperature target that they correspond to made clear, India cannot sign on to net zero.

Even if India were to enhance its short-term Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement in some fashion, unnecessary as of now, it should do so while staking a claim to its share of the global commons. This will ensure that its efforts will not further enable the free-riding of the developed world and protect its access to this strategic resource, vital to India's industrial and developmental future.

### Expected Question (Prelims Exams)

- Q. In the concept of Net Zero, by which year the maximum carbon emissions have to be brought to zero?**
- (a) 2020
  - (b) 2030
  - (c) 2040
  - (d) 2050

### Expected Question (Mains Exams)

- Q. What is the concept of Net Zero? Is this concept suited to the interests of developed countries and imposed on developing countries? make a comment.**

**(250 Words)**

**Note: - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC main examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.**