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COP 30: Diverging Optics and Reality

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Introduction

The optics and reality of climate action are taking sharply diverging routes. That gap is widening as the climate crisis becomes more severe. Multiple scientific assessments warn that global temperatures are on track to surpass the Paris Agreement's 1.5 degree Celsius threshold by 2030, a limit already breached temporarily due to the combined effects of El Nino and human-induced warming. The year 2024 was the hottest on record, with a global mean temperature 1.55 degree Celsius above pre-industrial level.

Yet, paradoxically, enthusiasm for climate action, particularly in developed nations, is fading. This was evident at COP 30, held recently in Belem, Brazil, where the fossil-fuel lobby, especially major producers, appeared to wield decisive influence over the summit's final outcomes. The logic of dependency seems to have prevailed once again.

Deep divisions surfaced on several core issues, including climate finance (including adaptation), pathways for phasing out fossil fuels, and the unilateral environmental measures adopted by some developed countries. Consequently, these subjects failed to secure concrete or unambiguous language in the final COP 30 outcome document.

Developing nations repeatedly emphasized that countries must retain autonomy in determining their own fossil-fuel phaseout pathways. Such decisions, they argued, should reflect national circumstances and capacities, and must be accompanied by clear,

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predictable, financial and technological support from developed countries.

Important outcomes:

As the COP 30 was termed the COP of Implementation, the developing countries wanted a substantial increase in the adaptation finance and flexibility in reporting indicators about the progress made in adaptation. The final draft called for the tripling of finance for adaptation by 2035, 5 years later than originally proposed target by 2030. It still left much more to be desired, as it does not match the real adaptation requirements that the developing countries and civil societies had been asking for. The year 2035 is too distant and the negative impact of climate change would further worsen, which will again widen the gap between what has been agreed and what will be required in reality.

One of many core priorities of COP 30 was agreeing on a set of indicators for the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA). However, the COP 30 failed to deliver a coherent outcome on indicators for GGA. The developing countries were concerned that too many indicators would be overloading their already overstretched reporting systems. The final text gives countries the flexibility to select and report on indicators that reflect their national circumstances.

There was also a discussion on climate finance to prepare the roadmap from $ 300 billion, agreed last year, to $ 1.3 trillion, which was the original plan for climate finance. The developing countries wanted to hold developed countries to their promises; however, the developed countries insisted that this discussion should take place within overall New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG). This stalemate was resolved with a decision to establish two year work program on climate finance, which include article 9.1 (on what rich countries must provide) in the overall context of article 9 (Ghosh, Nov. 2025).

The negotiations also took place on just transition agenda, which was to ascertain that transition to low carbon economy does not leave anybody behind. The aim was to clarify the scope of the Just Transition Work program. It was in the interest of developing countries to have autonomy to adopt multiple pathways to green transition. The most difficult part of the negotiation was agreeing on the 'roadmap of transitioning away from the fossil fuels'. Many oil producing and consumer countries were against prescriptive top-down roadmap. They wanted to have autonomy and flexibility in choosing their own paths. The impasse was broken with a launch of a Global Implementation Accelerator as a cooperative, facilitative and voluntary initiative to accelerate implementation to keep 1.5 degree Celsius in reach (Ghosh, Nov. 2025). Even reform of fossil fuel subsidy did not find mention in final draft (IISD, 22 Nov. 2025).

The unilateral environmental measures, having trans-border impact through trade, were also the part of negotiations. On this count, the final text reaffirmed that these measures do not make arbitrary discrimination. These measures, particularly Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) and forest related regulations, are hurting

the poor economies disproportionately, as they will be, as of now, applied indiscriminately. They are against the spirit of UNFCCC and Paris Agreement as they violate their basic premise of common but differentiated responsibility and respective capabilities. It also violates many WTO provisions.

Negotiations concluded in regard to one more important area from the point of equity is on Gender Action Plan (GAP). It includes the use of disaggregated data and gender analysis for decision making and collaboration among gender, climate change and other actors to advance gender-responsive climate actions. It will facilitate the integration of gender in national climate policies and plans. It will also help integrate it in reporting and communication under UNFCCC and set the accountability for implementing these issues in various streams of climate action (IISD, 22 Nov. 2025).

One bright spot was the proposal to establish a **Just Transition Mechanism**, a move widely welcomed by civil society groups, indigenous communities, and developing nations alike. If designed effectively, it could help ensure that the shift to a low-carbon future is equitable, socially inclusive, and sensitive to local livelihoods (Ghosh, Nov. 2025).

Issues of Urgent Discussion and Finalization:

To strengthen progress towards just green transition, the following issues need urgent discussion and finalization:

First, the remaining carbon budget is very limited. It is going to be the rarest of rare inputs in the near future. Each company will be facing carbon price in some forms in the near future. As per scientific estimates, including IPCC report, the carbon budget will exhaust in less than 5 years (as per current emission rate), given the target of temperature increase to 1.5 degree Celsius (Gupta, 2024). A scramble might be seen tacitly, on the part of developed countries, to grab the remaining carbon space. CBAM and other green regulations under green deal of the EU and the US starting digging new oil fields are testimony to this. Their carbon footprints have increased in the last two years after the Russian invasion on Ukraine. Even if these countries remain stick to their timelines for reaching net-zero emission by year 2050, very little carbon budget will be left for developing countries, which have not only been struggling to access technology and finance for green transition but have also been reeling under debt pressure. In such a scenario, it is of utmost importance to judiciously distribute the remaining carbon space among nations of the world. A progressive method favoring developing and poor countries is required.

Second, access to technology is critical for just transition. However, developing countries' access to green technology has remained an issue of concern. Despite lengthy discussion at multilateral forums, co-development and co-ownership of clean technologies has remained a piped dream. As per WIPO report, a handful of nations dominate green technology patents. Specifically, five G20 countries, namely China, Japan, the US, South Korea and

Germany, account for 85 percent of green technology patents. Given the prevailing IPR regime, control of few countries on green technologies is expected to hamper the energy transition of poor economies, undermining the climate mitigation's efforts at global level. There is a need to rewrite IPR rules to ease the transfer of green technologies. The green technologies should be regarded as public goods. They should be co-developed with public money. Even private sector can be involved on the cost-plus basis. Or, a share of profit or tax collection from businesses deploying new technologies may be promised to innovators. An open access patent pool can also be a viable option.

Third, climate finance is important component for green transition. However, the climate finance is becoming smaller and fragmented. Over the past three decades, more than 60 multilateral funds have emerged to raise climate finance for climate action in developing countries. Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF), an initiative led by Brazil, is the latest addition. Most of them are small and obscure. Only 19 sizable funds, including Green Climate Finance, Global Environmental Facility, Adaptation Fund and Climate Investment Fund - publicly report their activities. These funds' landscape has become so crowded that it creates confusion in minds of potential recipient countries. Each fund has its own approval process and compliance requirements. Moreover, they tend to draw from a fixed pool of public fund for sustainable development, which include different climate-related projects and other priority areas, such as health, education, etc. It is advisable to consolidate these funds and have one or two funds with substantial resources to be effective.

There has been discussion on unilateral trade-related environmental measures in COP 30; however, no concrete outcome has found place in the final draft, except future discussions at subsidiary bodies on enhancing international cooperation in this area. The result of those discussions will be reported at a high-level meeting in 2028. The text also stated that these measures must not result in arbitrary discrimination. Early resolution of these issues, and exempting least-developed countries and provisions of special and differential treatment for developing countries to accommodate their developmental aspirations would be critical (Kher and Gupta, 2024).

Actions on these points could be a game changer for both climate and development. It will also ensure the developing countries about the sincerity of developed countries.

Role of Major Emitters (Except the US)

As the US has withdrawn from the Paris Agreement and boycotted the COP 30 meeting, it is the responsibility of other major emission emitters, especially the EU, China and India, to shoulder major burden. Though the US being the largest economy of the world with GDP of about $ 28 trillion and the second largest emitter of green house gases (GHGs), after China, of around 5489 $MTCO_2e$ in year 2022, it will be difficult

to fill the void. It is not only in terms of cutting emission to compensate the US withdrawal from the Paris commitments but also in other ways. They include helping other developing and least-developed countries transition to low carbon economies with financial and technical supports and launching major scientific research program in climate and related technologies for mitigation and adaptation. The US has already cut down substantially all developmental and climate-related grants to poor countries. Its Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) undertook a formal review of its *endangerment findings, thus, even questioning its commitment to the scientific basis of Climate change. The EPA action has serious implications for the US government-supported research programs and will have adverse impact on development of corresponding action plans. The US investments in climate research have already been significantly reduced with implications for human resource allocation to climate-related research.*

The European Union (EU), a major contributor to global greenhouse gas emissions, is facing growing constraints in meeting its climate commitments following the return of the Trump administration in the United States. Although the EU has pledged to cut emissions by 55 percent by 2030 and reach net zero by 2050, rising security demands threaten these goals. The U.S. has pressed EU members to increase defence spending to 5 percent of GDP from about 1.9 percent in 2024, placing additional strain on already weak public finances.

Germany has relaxed its fiscal deficit limits to accommodate higher defence outlays, while countries such as Greece, Italy, and France, with debt-to-GDP ratios of 158 percent, 136 percent, and 113 percent respectively in 2024, face severe fiscal stress. Coupled with the EU's continued support for Ukraine and a reduced U.S. role as regional security guarantor, defence spending is likely to crowd out climate investment, making the EU's ambitious climate targets increasingly difficult to achieve. Moreover, under the new deal with the US, the EU has pledged to import substantial fossil fuel energy (worth US $ 750 billion) from the US.

China, the world's largest GHG emitter, has not made any absolute emissions-reduction commitment under the Paris Agreement. Its updated 2030 NDC focused on intensity and capacity targets, including a 65 percent reduction in CO_2 emissions per unit of GDP from 2005 level, a 25 percent share of non-fossil energy, over 1,200 GW of wind and solar capacity, and an increase in forest stock by 6 billion cubic meters. However, its updated pledge, covering the 2035 horizon, committed to reduce absolute economy-wide net emission by 7-10 percent from peak level by 2035. China has pledged to peak emissions around 2030 and achieve net zero by 2060. Although its leadership in green technologies, driven by industrial policy, has lowered global transition costs, China's economy is under internal stress and faces further risks from U.S. tariff pressures under Trump's trade policy. These factors may slow the global green transition, as major emitters confront financial and political constraints. With continued economic growth of 5–6 percent and rising energy demand, China may still rely on both fossil and

non-fossil fuels, allowing emissions to keep rising in the medium term.

India, being a distant third emitter, has been progressing well to meet its climate commitments. It is ranked 10th in climate change performance index in year 2025 (against China's 55th rank). India is well ahead of schedule in meeting all its commitments and progressing well in deploying renewable projects, both grid-based and off-grids. However, India remains heavily dependent on coal for electricity generation.

In this context, effective climate action will require the EU, China, and India to shoulder the greatest responsibility. Despite their domestic constraints, they must mobilize greater political will and resources to provide collective climate leadership. The EU should reassert its role by emphasizing equity, with accommodating the concerns of poorer countries, in its trade-related climate measures and scaling up financial and technical support. China can support the Global South by providing affordable access to green technologies, while India can contribute by developing green projects in these economies, alongside intensifying decarbonization efforts at home. Such leadership would also make diplomatic and commercial sense. Together, they should continue and strengthen evidence-based climate research, including on carbon capture, utilization, and storage (CCUS). They should also consistently encourage the U.S. to recalibrate its climate stance. Achieving this, however, will be politically and fiscally challenging.

Conclusions

The gap between promises and reality at ground is widening up. It is visible at the COP 30 outcomes. The final outcomes coming out of the COP30 summit are not commensurate with what was originally demanded or actual requirement at the ground, especially in the financial matters, be it for adaptation or mitigation. For adaptation, though the amount has been tripled, it is not proportionate with actual need, and the timeline has also been pushed ahead to 2035 from the original 2030. For mitigation also, no concrete result has come in regard to original demand of $ 1.3 trillion. Even how $ 300 billion will be contributed is not clear yet. Rather, a decision to establish two year work program on climate finance was made, which include article 9.1 (on what rich countries must provide) in the overall context of article 9. No decision was made for the roadmap of phasing out fossil fuels. Many fossil fuel producing and consumer countries were against prescriptive top-down roadmap. They wanted to have autonomy and flexibility in choosing their own paths. The impasse was broken with a launch of a Global Implementation Accelerator as a cooperative, facilitative and voluntary initiative to accelerate implementation to keep 1.5 degree Celsius in reach. Even reform of fossil fuel subsidy did not find mention in the final draft.

Some positive outcomes, especially for the poor economies, were clarifying in final draft that unilateral environmental measures should not make arbitrary discrimination, flexibility in choosing their pathways to transition to green

economy and phasing out fossil fuels, etc. A **Just Transition Mechanism was established,** which was welcomed by civil society groups, indigenous communities, and developing nations alike. It could help ensure that the shift to a low-carbon future is equitable, socially inclusive, and sensitive to local livelihoods, provided, it is designed effectively.

However, some more fundamental issues should be discussed and decided in the future negotiations for the just green transition. They include judiciously distributing the remaining limited carbon space, keeping in consideration the developmental aspirations of poor economies; devising some mechanism for green technologies' transfer to poor economies at affordable prices; and consolidating the fragmented landscape of climate finance to avoid difficult navigation of multiple approval process and compliance requirements by the potential applicant.

In this fluid situation, where the US has withdrawn from the Paris Agreement and remained absent from the COP 30, the EU, China and India will have to shoulder the major responsibility. It will not be only in terms of doubling down efforts to cut emissions domestically to compensate the share of the US, which is reversing policies of earlier administration in regard to clean energies and other green activities and going again for fossil fuels, but also in terms of helping poor economies financially and technically. These measures would also make good business and strategic sense in a time when each big country is realigning its alliances for economic and political reasons.

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RIS specialises in issues related to international economic development, trade, investment and technology. It is envisioned as a forum for fostering effective policy dialogue and capacity-building among developing countries on global and regional economic issues. The focus of the work programme of RIS is to promote South-South Cooperation and collaborate with developing countries in multilateral negotiations in various forums. Through its following centres/forums, RIS promotes policy dialogue and coherence on regional and international economic issues.

The word "DAKSHIN" (दक्षिण) is of Sanskrit origin, meaning "South." The Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, inaugurated DAKSHIN – Global South Centre of Excellence in November 2023. The initiative was inspired by the deliberations of Global South leaders during the Voice of the Global South Summits. DAKSHIN stands for Development and Knowledge Sharing Initiative. Hosted at the RIS, DAKSHIN has established linkages with leading think tanks and universities across the Global South and is building a dynamic network of scholars working on Global South issues.

AIC at RIS has been working to strengthen India's strategic partnership with ASEAN in its realisation of the ASEAN Community. AIC at RIS undertakes research, policy advocacy and regular networking activities with relevant organisations and think-tanks in India and ASEAN countries, with the aim of providing policy inputs, up-to-date information, data resources and sustained interaction, for strengthening ASEAN-India partnership.

CMEC has been established at RIS under the aegis of the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPS&W), Government of India. CMEC is a collaboration between RIS and Indian Ports Association (IPA). It has been mandated to act as an advisory/technological arm of MoPSW to provide the analytical support on policies and their implementation.

FITM is a joint initiative by the Ministry of Ayush and RIS. It has been established with the objective of undertaking policy research on economy, intellectual property rights (IPRs) trade, sustainability and international cooperation in traditional medicines. FITM provides analytical support to the Ministry of Ayush on policy and strategy responses on emerging national and global developments.

BEF aims to serve as a dedicated platform for fostering dialogue on promoting the concept in the Indian Ocean and other regions. The forum focuses on conducting studies on the potential, prospects and challenges of blue economy; providing regular inputs to practitioners in the government and the private sectors; and promoting advocacy for its smooth adoption in national economic policies.

FIDC, has been engaged in exploring nuances of India's development cooperation programme, keeping in view the wider perspective of South-South Cooperation in the backdrop of international development cooperation scenario. It is a tripartite initiative of the Development Partnership Administration (DPA) of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, academia and civil society organisations.

FISD aims to harness the full potential and synergy between science and technology, diplomacy, foreign policy and development cooperation in order to meet India's development and security needs. It is also engaged in strengthening India's engagement with the international system and on key global issues involving science and technology.

As part of its work programme, RIS has been deeply involved in strengthening economic integration in the South Asia region. In this context, the role of the South Asia Centre for Policy Studies (SACEPS) is very important. SACEPS is a network organisation engaged in addressing regional issues of common concerns in South Asia.

Knowledge generated endogenously among the Southern partners can help in consolidation of stronger common issues at different global policy fora. The purpose of NeST is to provide a global platform for Southern Think-Tanks for collaboratively generating, systematising, consolidating and sharing knowledge on South South Cooperation approaches for international development.

DST-Satellite Centre for Policy Research on STI Diplomacy at RIS aims to advance policy research at the intersection of science, technology, innovation (STI) and diplomacy, in alignment with India's developmental priorities and foreign policy objectives.

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