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PROTECT OUR PLANET



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Knowledge and Climate Change Waning Presence, Yet Strong Influence?

Message from **R. K. Pachauri**

In the world of today we are experiencing a massive overload of information all around us. At the same time, in a case such as knowledge and information which trigger action to deal with climate change we also see an overwhelming sense of urgency, by which such knowledge needs special attention and specialised intellectual resources. The latter requirement has largely been met by the assessments carried out by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) ever since this body was established in 1988, endorsed formally by the United Nations General Assembly. The result of actions over this period of more than thirty years has certainly created large scale awareness on the scientific reality of climate change, even though there are powerful lobbies and vested interests who remain in a state of climate denial and vigorously sow doubts in the minds of the public. Fortunately, there are groups in civil society and individuals who realise the grave threats that climate change poses to human society and all species on earth. The public at large is also convinced by what they observe today as the occurrence of extreme events and climate-related disasters, thus, validating the projections on climate change impacts brought out by the IPCC. Essentially, much of the knowledge on climate change which has spread across the globe is the result of a multiplicity of organisations and individuals exercising their initiative and moral responsibility.



The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Article 6 of the Convention has included actions to “Promote and facilitate at the national and, as appropriate, subregional and regional levels, and in accordance with national laws and regulations, and within their respective capacities: (i) The development and implementation of educational and public awareness programmes on climate change and its effects. (ii) Public access to information on climate change and its effects; (iii) Public participation in addressing climate change and its effects and developing adequate responses; and (iv) Training of scientific, technical and managerial personnel”. It also contains the provision for action at the international level, using existing institutions, where appropriate, to carry out exchange of educational and public awareness material and the implementation of training programmes. But in actual fact, the effort put in by the UN and its agencies as been far less than optimal, even though focused and well-designed efforts at dissemination of knowledge would be extremely cost effective. It is for this reason that the world must allow a thousand flowers to bloom, such that we use every means by which awareness based on knowledge can be created in every section of society. This effort must be spread through social media to reach out to the billions that are part of exchanging information through these media sources.

The POP (Protect Our Planet) Movement launched on Earth Day, 2016 mobilises youth across the globe as a collective effort motivating them as "youth inspired by knowledge". Perhaps, the large numbers who are now following Greta Thunberg worldwide in staying away from classes in school as a form of protest should join hands with the POP Movement to lock arms together and multiply our collective efforts towards meeting a common goal.

Knowledge and Climate Change

Waning Presence, Yet Strong Influence?

Heena Makhija and Shailly Kedia

Key messages >>>

- While there is high scientific consensus on anthropogenic climate change, there remains a substantial difference between scientific consensus and public opinion on climate action.
- Mandated by a United Nations General Assembly resolution, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change aptly represents science-policy nexus through its scientific assessments and its impact on policy circles at all levels.
- While many major countries like the United States grapple with climate denialism, developing countries like China and India and regional organizations like the European Union are taking a lead on climate action by implementing low carbon development measures.
- Continuous mobilization and knowledge building is the only way to keep the policy makers on their toes about the urgent need to counter climate change through international and national actions.

Epistemic role of multilateral

Over the last few decades, the discussion on climate change has seen addition of concrete qualitative and quantitative evidence in the form of assessment reports and data, creating a strong conglomeration of climate change believers. This knowledge base acted as a stepping stone and further encouraged policy deliberations and action on climate change at a global level involving different stakeholders. An '[epistemic community](#)' entails a broad coalition of actors including scientists, government, and politicians, who share a common interpretation of the science behind climate change. International organizations have played a crucial role in the climate change regime by providing a platform for knowledge aggregation, consensus building, engaging multiple stakeholders for sustained action. According to various studies, there is a high scientific consensus around that global warming is anthropogenic in nature. A [study on peer-reviewed scientific literature](#) which examined around twelve thousand climate abstracts, found that 97 per cent of the literature endorsed the consensus position. According to a [2019 Pew Research Center survey](#), 44 per cent surveyed adults in the United States wanted dealing with global climate change to be a top priority for the president and Congress. However, there remains a substantial difference between scientific consensus and public opinion on government priority, although the public opinion over the years in favor of scientific consensus has increased with two-thirds of [surveyed Americans](#) opining that most climate scientists think the Earth is warming due to human activity.

Role of intergovernmental organizations

The United Nations (UN) along with its various specialized agencies have played a major role in centralizing the discussion around climate change and paving way for international frameworks to counter its effects. The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was formed following a mandate of [UN General Assembly Resolution 43/53](#) of 6th December 1988 and was created by the United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). IPCC aptly represents the science-policy nexus in the UN through its scientific research and its impact on policy circles through scientific assessment reports. The [sixth assessment report](#) due in 2022 involving 721 experts representing various countries, businesses, scientists, and organizations will be a comprehensive assessment of the science behind climate change and will inform international climate negotiators around the world. IPCC'S report on climate change in October 2018 highlighted that humans have [at most 12 years](#) to fix their dependence on fossil fuels and drastically reduce total carbon emissions to achieve the 'Paris Agreement' goal of maintaining average global temperatures below 1.5° C.

UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) has been successfully [catalyzing MEAs](#) at the regional and global level and has been instrumental in development of international environmental law. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development or the Earth Summit (1992) was the first major conference of that size and scope witnessing the participation of [172 states](#)

[and almost 1800 NGO's](#) addressing issues ranging from alternative energy sources to reliance on public transportation systems and industrial emissions that brought the issue of climate change in the mainstream. It resulted in the setting of United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The United Nations has been instrumental in this regard as it keeps the momentum going by continuous engagement with stakeholders on reevaluating the existing norms, encouraging implementation of current agreements, and pushing for innovative policy research. For instance, the marine environmental protection committee of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) recently concluded its 74th meeting in London. Along with regulating shipping across the globe, IMO is also responsible for accessing and reducing the environmental impact of shipping. The UN 2019 Climate Summit scheduled for September this year seeks to mobilize and challenge states, companies, and citizens to step up action in areas of [energy transitions, climate finance, carbon pricing, cities, local action, and resilience](#).

Growing role of regional organizations

Regional conglomerations have also played a substantial role in furthering the implementation of international climate agreements and developing innovative climate measures. European Union (EU) launched the European Climate Change Programme (ECCP) in 2000 for overseeing the implementation of Kyoto Protocol. It devised the innovative [European Union Emission Trading Scheme](#) in 2005 to fight global climate change and guides EU's energy policy till date. EU has also been persistent in knowledge building on climate change with the [latest European Climate Change Adaptation conference \(ECCA 2019\)](#), a biennial conference convened by EU-funded projects on behalf of the European Commission was held from 28th to 31st May this year. It seeks to address issues such as data, methods and approaches in climate change adaptation, co-production of knowledge, global climate challenges, and climate risk management. Acknowledging the role played by organizations in cross sectoral and multi-partner coordination in addressing climate change issues, the first Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Climate Change Partnership Conference was held in 2018 calling out for a 'climate sensitive' business model, with the next conference scheduled for September 2019.

Role of non-governmental organizations

International environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOs) have been instrumental in building an [epistemological convergence on various aspects of climate change](#) by being constantly involved in researching, protesting, and lobbying in international climate negotiations. ENGOs as the South Centre, Third World Network, World Resources Institute, The Energy and Resources Institute, Global Commons Institute (GCI), Greenpeace International, and the Climate Action Network, formulate a strong lobby that influences the international negotiations and builds a knowledge base through their grassroots involvement. In the Global South, several organizations work on environmental development through research and advocacy often aimed at alternative energy along with mitigation policies. They blend the local concerns with the international norms by involving in policy as well as outreach. Organizations such as 350.org actively engage people through social media awareness campaigns and mobilize public opinion towards climate change.

Waning presence, yet strong influence?

While joint missions by various space agencies including the [National Aeronautics and Space Administration and Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency](#) will continue to improve availability of data for science. And while international organizations will continue to generate noise to bring together policy makers especially ahead of UNFCCC processes, the rise of climate sceptics supported by far-right political lobbies who question the 'science behind climate change' have made their work tougher. Multilateral agencies often do not succeed in holding the industrialized nations responsible for the global carbon emissions creating compliance issues. However, these multilateral bodies, especially the UN agencies and ENGO's through their assessment and engagement have been successful in highlighting the importance of climate action. Developing countries like China and India and regional organizations like the EU are taking a lead on climate action by implementing low carbon development measures. Continuous mobilization and knowledge building is the only way to keep the policy makers on their toes about the urgent need to counter climate change through international and national actions.

Photo credits (in order of appearance):

March for Science, Washington D.C. April 2017, Molly Adams via [Flickr](#)

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Analytical Brief on Climate Ambition and Sustainability Action

The analytical brief series, brought out jointly by the World Sustainable Development Forum and the Protect our Planet Movement, seeks to highlight a topical issue relevant to the realization of the sustainable development goals and ambitious climate actions.

About WSDF

The World Sustainable Development Forum (WSDF) is a not-for-profit organization incorporated separately in Europe, Norway and the U.S. Its North American arm WSDF-NA, headquartered in Washington, DC carries 501c3 tax exempt status. WSDF is a global initiative to promote and mobilize global action for effective implementation of both the Paris agreement on climate change and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the UN General Assembly. WSDF's relevance and role lies in acting as a facilitator for helping with implementation of actions required under these two sets of agreements.



About POP Movement

Protect our Planet (POP) Movement believes that the impacts of climate change will not affect a single country but the planet, in its entirety. POP believes that the power of the youth of the world will unite and to address this challenge. POP believes that the time to act is now and that knowledge is the true currency of changing the future.



www.thepopmovement.org