Introduction

India has taken a remarkably consistent approach to global climate negotiations: a principled position on climate change founded on attention to equity dimensions of the problem. This stance, which is the setting on a metaphorical compass that has guided the last two decades of Indian climate policy, has strong implications for India’s arguments for the relative mitigation burdens of the industrialized and developing world and therefore for India’s approach to multilateralism applied to climate change. Rooted in ethical claims, this view has served Indian interests well in staving off pressures for premature mitigation commitments and placing the emphasis for mitigation action on industrialized countries. However, the geopolitical terrain has shifted considerably over the last two decades. A more definitive science of climate change, growing alarm among vulnerable nations, an ascendant Asia, and a struggling West all have implications for how India should strategize to achieve its goals in climate negotiations and climate policy more generally. This new context, this chapter suggests, calls for updated cartography, even as the compass setting remains valid. With an updated map, India’s climate journey may no longer traverse a straight line, even though the overall direction remains the same. In this chapter, I seek to explain the reasons for the persistence and continued validity of India’s climate compass setting, but also argue for rethinking our map of climate diplomacy.

The chapter begins with a discussion of exactly why climate multilateralism is such a challenging task. There is good reason why India, like many other countries, has struggled to deal with the complexities of global climate politics.
I then review in brief the trajectory of Indian climate policy, focusing on international positions but also tracing the growing significance of domestic climate policy. The third section seeks to interpret recent positions and strategies adopted by India, drawing on a growing literature. I conclude by expanding on the theme of an Indian climate position in a changed global context.

The Challenges of Climate Multilateralism

After two decades of effort at multilateral coordination on climate change, greenhouse gas emissions are relentlessly rising; it is hard to claim even moderate success on international cooperation to limit climate change. The roots of this failure lie in at least five underlying characteristics of the climate challenge: the scale and scope of adjustment, the challenges of complexity and communication, the need to trespass across policy silos, the porosity of international and national categories of action, and uncertainty about who will bear the costs of climate change. First, the scale and scope of the climate challenge are unprecedented. Addressing climate change requires nothing less than reversing the entrenched pattern of industrialization built around accessing and using fossil fuels. The United Nations Environment Programme estimates that, in order to keep global average temperature increase to below 2° Celsius (the minimum threshold considered safe by science), global greenhouse gas emissions would have to peak well before 2020, and carbon dioxide emissions from industry and energy would have to decline at the rate of about 3 percent a year until 2050. To put the latter figure in perspective, a 3 percent rate of decline in emissions translates to about a 6 percent rate of decarbonization—gross domestic product (GDP) per unit of carbon—with a GDP growth rate of 3 percent. All of this would have to be accomplished in a world where developing countries legitimately assert the right to develop and grow in the most cost-effective way, which currently is a pathway dependent on the use of fossil fuels. In short, addressing climate change requires completely reengineering industrial development and reconceptualizing industrial society.

Second, the complexity of climate science and the challenge of communicating about climate change exacerbate the problems of building domestic political consensus for action and impede the construction of a common narrative around which to negotiate global action. The challenge begins with the complexity of climate science, which operates on carefully calibrated statements of probability—the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) uses statements such as “high agreement, much evidence” to indicate the extent of evidence and agreement among experts on the causes of and mechanisms to
address climate change. But, in addition, as Hulme notes, different attitudes to risk and technology, different perspectives on what is “fair,” different interpretations of what constitutes development, and different visions of the future all place obstacles in the way of communicating about climate change.

Third, to achieve this scale of change requires revising policy across an enormous range of sectors and breaching traditional policy silos. Domestically, mitigating and adapting to climate change involve departments that deal with agriculture, forests, urbanization, health, rural development, energy, water, and coastal protection, to name just a subset. Moreover, linkages across departments will have to be made to address climate change; concerns of water are tied to those of forests and agriculture, for example.

Fourth, climate change requires policymakers to move back and forth across domestic and international policy arenas. Internationally, climate change intersects with the work of ministries of trade, as questions of sanctions related to the greenhouse gas content of trade increasingly come into play. Ministries of finance are also salient; India’s Finance Ministry has recently set up a climate cell. Constructing global climate negotiating positions requires diplomats to develop a close understanding of national policies across a broad range of sectors. Conversely, domestic policymakers need to be aware of the nuances of global climate debate, particularly as the international negotiation veers toward a regime based on “measurement, reporting, and verification” of domestic actions.

Finally, central to the challenge of garnering global agreement is a lack of agreement on the costs of addressing climate change and how those costs will be divided. A contentious principle at the heart of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) applies the idea of “common but differentiated responsibility and respective capabilities” (CBDRRC) as the basis for sharing burdens, but there is considerable contention on how to apply this principle and its continued salience. As discussed later, CBDRRC is a central plank in India’s negotiating approach. Coming out of this principle is a substantial literature on “burden sharing” in the climate context. Two decades of debate and thinking, however, has not led to agreement. Climate change continues to defy both domestic policymaking and global agreement.

India in Climate Negotiations: A Brief Historical Tour

From the early days of climate negotiations in 1990, India was instrumental in shaping the underlying principles to guide the emergent global regime. Indian research organizations played an important role in framing the climate
problem as one of allocating rights to the global commons. From this idea came the corollary that any allocation should be on the basis of equity. At the very outset of substantive negotiations in 1991, India’s delegation leader stated, “The problem . . . is caused not by emissions of greenhouse gases as such but by excessive levels of per capita emissions of those gases . . . . It follows, therefore, that developed countries with high per capita emission levels are responsible for incremental global warming . . . the principle of equity should be the touchstone for judging any proposal.”

By the conclusion of the framework convention, India had helped to formulate the position of the global South along these lines; India’s compass setting was largely the compass setting for the global South. Building on the ideas articulated above, India had modified the IPCC’s formulation of “common responsibilities” across countries to “common but differentiated responsibilities,” reflecting the importance India placed on appropriately allocating responsibility across countries for causing the problem. This formulation paved the way for introduction of this bedrock principle in the UNFCCC and reinforced its use as the compass setting for India’s climate position. In addition, India worked with other developing countries to ensure that the negotiation process was held under the authority of the UN General Assembly through a specially constituted negotiating committee, judging that the UN framework would provide the best opportunity to articulate and defend these views. India also played a leading role in calling for new and additional funding and for a separate institutional mechanism for climate funding.

These negotiations took place in the context of the early 1990s, when the global political map was dominated by an ascendant West. By contrast, developing countries had emerged from a decade of structural adjustment leading to perceptions and realities of political and economic disempowerment. Prior efforts in the 1970s and 1980s to build new forms of global cooperation to provide gains to the developing world had gone nowhere. In this context of limited faith in the ability of the international system to safeguard the interests of the South, the emergence of environmental concerns as a new agenda was viewed with deep suspicion. The potential for cooperation on global environmental problems demonstrated by the Montreal Protocol was built on differentiated commitments for North and South. This model of a “firewall” built around differentiation with corresponding financial obligations was seen as the most useful approach to defend Southern interests. Consequently, the climate regime that emerged from the UNFCCC was very much a product of its time, and India played a considerable role in crystalizing Southern concerns into legal architecture and form.
During the next significant moment in the buildup to the Kyoto Protocol, India played a significant role in defending the notion of differentiated responsibility. The context for these negotiations was growing pressure by vulnerable states for negotiation of a legally binding protocol and by industrialized countries for “advanced” developing countries to take on commitments. Faced with this situation, India convened a “Green Group” of seventy-two countries to support the idea of a legally binding protocol, but without any additional commitments for advanced developing countries.\(^{15}\) The combined negotiating strength of the group was adequate to persuade the European Union (EU) and other champions of a legally binding instrument that in order to win the support of the Green Group, they would have to proceed on the basis of differentiated commitments.

While India’s position in global climate negotiations has been defined largely within a foreign policy frame, the one significant exception is India’s position on the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) under the Kyoto Protocol. The CDM allows developing countries (non–Annex 1 countries, in the UNFCCC argot) to generate and then sell emission credits by undertaking projects to reduce greenhouse gases. India initially opposed this proposal, with the intent to keep exerting pressure for action on the industrialized world.\(^{16}\) However, Indian business interests, led by the Confederation of Indian Industry, saw opportunity in the CDM and advocated a shift in India’s position to embrace the mechanism, a position buttressed by research from Indian think tanks.\(^{17}\) This revised position was reconciled with India’s historical stance by locating it within the larger position that India would only take on mitigation actions when financially supported to do so.\(^{18}\) This episode is noteworthy because it is one of the few cases where domestic interests have had an effect on shaping foreign policy on climate change.

The period starting in 2007 marked a new phase of the global climate negotiations process, when negotiations addressed the future of the global climate regime after the conclusion of the first “commitment period” of the Kyoto Protocol (from 2009 to 2012, when progress against commitments was to be assessed). This period of negotiations had three important moments: Bali in 2007, when a framework for negotiations was put in place—the Bali Action Plan; Copenhagen in 2009, when an effort to pull together an encompassing way forward narrowly foundered; and Durban in 2011, when a negotiating approach, the Durban Platform, was agreed upon. Throughout this period, a central and ongoing theme was whether negotiations would proceed on the basis of a unitary framework or whether differentiated responsibility would drive the form and architecture of the legal agreement.\(^{19}\)
During this phase, large developing countries including India were placed under considerable pressure to articulate the conditions under which and the forms in which they would undertake climate mitigation commitments. For their part, India and other large developing countries pressed the industrialized countries to commit to renew and enhance their commitments under the Kyoto Protocol for a second commitment period and pressured the United States (which has not ratified the Kyoto Protocol) to take on comparable commitments under a suitably stringent legal construct. Moreover, diplomatic pressures outside the UNFCCC process were also ratcheted up. Climate change became a regular feature of G-8+5 and G-20 discussions and pronouncements, particularly in the buildup to the 2009 Copenhagen negotiations.

This period, with its heightened pressures, marked a turbulent phase of Indian climate politics and policy as, indeed, of climate policy in many countries. These are discussed under three categories: new statements and articulations of India’s international stance, new and shifting alliances, and new frameworks for domestic policymaking linked to climate change.

First, the Indian government began experimenting with new formulations of India’s climate policy, often in reaction to external stimuli, but occasionally in a proactive fashion. In response to pressure at the G-8+5, the prime minister announced that India’s per capita emissions would never exceed those of the developed world. This stance was consistent with India’s long-standing position that long-term agreements should be based on per capita emissions, but represented a shift in that it introduced the notion of limits, albeit framed in per capita terms. The practical implications of this offer, in particular whether it binds India substantively, depend considerably on the rate of reduction in emissions in the industrialized world.

Equally if not more significant were tonal changes in the articulation of India’s position. Many of these statements were associated with a new minister of environment and forests, Jairam Ramesh, whose broad approach involved positioning India as a forward-looking and positive player in climate negotiations. This stance is perhaps best summarized by a statement he made with regard to domestic environmental regulation, but that aptly summed up his approach to climate negotiations: he called for a shift to a “yes, but” approach instead of a “no” approach, indicating that the emphasis should be on the conditions for agreement. Substantively, Minister Ramesh argued for shifting from a per capita approach to a “per capita plus” approach. While this was never fully spelled out, the approach seemed to indicate sector-based plans and performance targets for action.
There was considerable domestic debate in the buildup to Copenhagen on whether this constituted a substantive shift in India’s position, notably in the form of parliamentary debates, but also in the reporting and opinion pages of newspapers. During those debates, Ramesh stated that India had three “red lines” going into the negotiations: no binding commitment to reduce emissions, no “peaking year” setting an upper bound on Indian emissions, and no scrutiny of domestic actions undertaken with domestic funds. All of these flow directly from India’s historical position emphasizing differentiated responsibilities consistent with the long-standing setting of India’s climate compass. However, following a slew of voluntary pledges by other developing countries, notably China, on the eve of Copenhagen, India did announce a voluntary reduction in “emissions intensity” from 2005 levels by 20–25 percent by 2020.

The intense pressure in the buildup to Copenhagen failed, however, to result in a formal agreement, achieving instead an “agreed outcome,” for reasons discussed elsewhere, but this had to do with last-minute resistance by a small group of countries. In the aftermath of Copenhagen, and notably at the Durban negotiating session in 2011, India continued to play a highly visible role, notably under a different minister of environment and forests, Jayanti Natarajan. The tonal quality changed, however, with India’s emphasis shifting to arguing against initiating a process to reach a legally binding outcome. While the concerns were legitimate—the failure of industrialized countries to meet their commitments, the uncertain future of the Kyoto Protocol, the failure to mobilize adequate funds, and perhaps most important the failure to precondition legal stringency on substantive equity in the outcome—the shift in tone was palpable and left India open to criticism from small island and other vulnerable countries of being insufficiently supportive of global climate mitigation efforts.

As these various statements and formulations suggest, the terrain for climate contestation has shifted considerably in recent years. Despite the lamentable failure of industrialized countries to meet their obligations, they have managed to ramp up pressure on large developing countries for action. While seeking to hold the line on differentiation, developing countries have been forced to articulate various ways in which they might contribute to mitigation efforts within their own countries. In the course of negotiating this terrain, India has continued to hew to the compass setting of common but differentiated responsibility, although some seasoned observers charged that Minister Ramesh was flirting with changing that course setting. Whichever the minister, however, Indian climate policy has appeared somewhat reactive;
the contours of a long-term strategic approach have not been particularly apparent.

A second implication of the changed context for climate politics was India’s active engagement with new allies to manage the shifting geopolitical map of climate change. Most apparent was the emergence of Brazil, India, China, and South Africa (BASIC) as a new negotiating bloc. The importance of BASIC came to the fore in Copenhagen, where the leaders of these four countries negotiated directly with the president of the United States, essentially sidestepping the European Union and other regional blocs. Notably, this new grouping also called into question the salience of the G-77 and China, which historically has sought to provide a unitary developing-country voice in climate negotiations. At Copenhagen and since, the BASIC countries have sought to defend a framework of differentiated responsibility, keep the process tightly tied to the UNFCCC, and make the case for equity a central element in forging a global climate agreement.

Representing four of the most populous and fastest growing countries, BASIC is a powerful new presence in climate negotiations. While providing a bulwark against pressure from the industrialized world, the emergence of BASIC has also led to some expressions of alarm from vulnerable nations. At Durban, there was a direct statement challenging whether a morality of development, as articulated by BASIC countries, trumped the existential threat faced by small and island nations vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Moreover, as some observers comment, there are considerable differences between the four as well, and it is unclear whether their interests will converge over the long term.

However, the battle lines drawn in climate negotiations do not necessarily extend to the world of diplomacy outside the UNFCCC. Concurrent with these negotiation-focused coalition-building efforts, India has also been engaged in pragmatic efforts at bilateral dialogue. India and the EU have a bilateral program of cooperation on energy, clean development, and climate change, and India and the United States have initiated creation of a joint clean energy research and development center. These measures indicate not only a strain of pragmatism, but also recognition that the arena for climate negotiation is not the only space in which climate issues will play out—many of the new developments will be in the broader arena of technology cooperation and energy policy.

Third, in response to pressure to demonstrate commitment to an effective global response, India, like other large emerging countries, has instituted a set of domestic policy processes on climate change. Even prior to the Copen-
Hagen emissions pledge, India established a “National Action Plan on Climate Change” developed by an advisory group to the prime minister, which then spawned eight “missions” ranging from mitigation themes such as solar energy promotion to energy efficiency to adaptation efforts focused on water and agriculture. Subsequently, India also set in place state-level processes to develop state action plans on climate change. Finally, the government established an Expert Group on “Low Carbon Strategies for Inclusive Growth” to recommend approaches and policies for India’s Twelfth Five-Year Plan.

All of these domestic measures signal a marked departure from the early days of Indian climate politics. They indicate a willingness to explore ways of internalizing climate change as one among multiple objectives, although very emphatically not the primary objective, of Indian development policy. Some of these efforts are open to criticism as dressing up existing policies in new garb, and some have undoubtedly received a stimulus due to their link with the climate agenda. This is particularly true of energy efficiency policies and renewable energy promotion measures, both of which are driven by energy security concerns as much as, if not more than, climate concerns, but which came to life as part of a climate action plan. While the process of internalizing climate change into Indian development policy is somewhat ad hoc and lacks a conceptual structure, clear processes have been put in place, and some concrete initiatives are apparent.

Interpreting Indian Climate Policy

These changes in Indian statements, alliances, and domestic policies have led to a rash of efforts to interpret India’s “new” climate policy and politics. While these reviews offer some insights into shifts in Indian climate politics and policies, they also tend to gloss over significant nuances in interpretation.

Several articles focus on a perceived shift in Indian foreign policy on climate change. Michaelowa and Michaelowa go so far as to pronounce India’s approach as a shift from the “porcupine” to the “tiger,” using a well-developed metaphor in the writing on Indian international relations, signaling a transition from a prickly and defensive stance in climate negotiations to a more dynamic and flexible one. Atteridge and his co-authors interpret this shift in terms of growing political control displacing bureaucratic control. Several scholars note that India’s growing great-power aspirations and its desire to be seen as a responsible global actor explain much of the tonal shift in India’s stance on climate negotiations. However, there is a tendency to overstate the extent of this shift. While several authors acknowledge that tonal shifts
have tended to be closely correlated with changes in the minister of environment and forest—with a flexible approach around Copenhagen associated with one minister giving way to a more traditionally Indian approach based on equity principles at Durban associated with another minister—the expectation of a long-lasting change in direction is more wistfully hoped for than rigorously argued.43

An important new direction in this emergent literature is an effort to link shifts in international climate policy to domestic changes and vice versa.44 Atteridge and his co-authors, in particular, seek to paint a picture of Indian climate governance as an interplay between forces—material and ideational—at national (and subnational) and international levels. However, as I discuss further below, the links between national changes in climate politics and India’s global positions are still tenuous, a point that Vihma also makes, drawing on earlier work by Dubash.45 Among these reviewers, Getz stands out as particularly dismissive of domestic policy changes, arguing that these are essentially justified by domestic policy objectives such as energy security and therefore not to be taken seriously as climate policy. However, this criticism misses the point that in India political consensus is congealing around climate policy understood as an approach founded on “co-benefits” or the simultaneous achievement of climate and development policies. The important test of significance is whether this approach results in policies that would otherwise not have been formulated (or enhanced stringency or implementation of existing policies) and the impact of policy formulation on domestic and international climate policy. On both counts, the story is more complex (and affirmative) than Getz implies.

Interpretations Revisited

As this brief review suggests, the interpretive literature of the recent past has led to some significant insights, but the interpretations tend to be partial and swing from one extreme to another: India as obdurate climate player to climate tiger. Below, some further refinements in interpretation are suggested, building particularly on the link between domestic and foreign policy on climate change and on India’s efforts to negotiate an ever more complex international policy and political debate.

First, while domestic policy on issues such as energy is now interwoven with processes and initiatives that are explicitly linked to climate action, these domestic policy initiatives insufficiently inform and shape international climate and energy policy in India. India’s international climate stance remains
focused rather single-mindedly on CBD R R C—the true north of India’s climate compass. In the early days of negotiations, it was appropriate for this principle to form a single-point agenda. And even today, this principle should indeed be a starting point for India’s international climate position, given long-standing and robust arguments about the historical responsibility of industrialized countries for the majority of greenhouse gas stocks in the atmosphere. In strategic terms, CBD R R C offers the best bulwark against any premature claims that India should offer absolute limits to greenhouse gas emissions.

However, in the current global context, it is increasingly incongruous as an exclusive guide for Indian climate policy. This context includes the emergence of a multipolar world within which India is claiming a louder voice, increasingly robust evidence of substantial impacts from climate change, and increasingly strident calls for action from small and vulnerable countries. In this context, calling only for differentiated responsibility leaves India open to criticism that it seeks a global climate agreement that puts off its own mitigation responsibilities indefinitely. Consequently, this stance fails to take diplomatic advantage of what is now the considerable cumulative weight of India’s domestic climate policy. A position built around both CBD R R C as the bulwark against premature calls for absolute emission cuts from India—which would indeed seriously compromise future development prospects—and mitigation actions consistent with India’s stated approach of co-benefits are likely to integrate domestic and foreign policy better and to serve India’s short- and long-term interests.

Second, there is a growing tension between India’s positions and its choice of allies, forcing constant adjustment. In forging a revised strategic vision, an updated map would need to take into account several new realities. As the least developed countries, small island nations, and other highly vulnerable countries have raised the pitch of their demands for an effective global climate deal, the coherence of the G-77 and China as a single voice of the developed world has come under pressure. As discussed earlier, the emergence of the BASIC grouping was, in part, an effort by rapidly developing large economies to articulate a shared position, one that was somewhat at odds with that of smaller developing countries. However, India is substantially different from its BASIC partners along several dimensions—considerably lower GDP per capita and social indicators, lower greenhouse gas emissions per capita by a factor of three to five, and greater vulnerability to climate change.

These differences in both capacity and responsibility suggest that the principle of CBD R R C is less defensible when applied to India’s BASIC partners than to India itself, which shares considerably more characteristics with
poorer and less developed economies. Consequently, there is a tension between partnering with BASIC and credibly defending and furthering the principle of CBDRRCC. Indeed, there are indications that Brazil and South Africa, the two countries with the highest emissions per capita and GDP per capita in the alliance, are less wedded to the principle than are China and India. By late 2012, this tension had come out in the open, with China and India forging a new alliance of “like-minded developing countries,” consisting of a curious collection of large Asian economies including China, India, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Thailand, oil producers such as Saudi Arabia and Venezuela, and several members of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas such as Bolivia and Ecuador. While the glue binding this alliance can only be inferred, its press release suggests that a common commitment to preserving and defending CBDRRCC is central to its purpose.

These shifting and overlapping alliances point to a larger challenge facing India in developing a foreign policy on climate change: India is simultaneously a country with large numbers of poor and vulnerable people and one that is rapidly growing and claiming an increasing share of globally available natural resources and carbon budget. From the former perspective, India's natural allies are the least developed countries; from the latter, they are the rapidly industrializing countries. This tension does not lend itself to easy solutions. In the absence of substantial progress on an effective global climate agreement, Indian decisionmakers appear to have swung toward placing higher priority on defending their access to the global carbon budget, calculating that a richer economy is also one that is better placed to adapt to climate change. Doing so, however, places India on a course of growing conflict with small and vulnerable nations.

Third, as a “premature power”—one where global reach has outstripped domestic indexes of development—India has limited means to exercise influence globally. One option is, of course, for India to leverage its power by working with allies, as was successfully accomplished in Copenhagen through the BASIC alliance. However, this approach is limited by the schizophrenic nature of India's interests, as discussed above. Moreover, broader foreign policy considerations and broader strategic alliances inevitably limit India's options. Despite these limits, India has been remarkably assertive about its position, most notably at the Durban Conference of Parties (the annual meetings to take forward climate negotiations) in December 2011. On that occasion, India alone faced off against the European Union on the question of whether future negotiations would result in a legally binding document or not. Eventually India won the concession of somewhat weaker language on
this point, but arguably lost ground on explicit articulation of the principle of CBDRRC in the final document.48

The Durban episode illustrated that India is failing to implement a strategy that brought considerable success in the early days of the negotiating process—framing issues in a manner that advances Indian interests and then building a coalition of support around that frame. Indeed, this approach enabled India to enshrine the CBDRRC principle at the heart of the UNFCCC process. More recently, India has provided little evidence of efforts to frame a forward-looking agenda that is strategically located within the current geopolitical context and then build support for it. Other nations similarly placed in the negotiations process have exercised great influence by developing concepts and building support for their ideas. The role of South Africa in floating the concept of “sustainable development policies and measures” that formed the basis for “nationally appropriate mitigation actions”—the accepted formulation for mitigation actions by developing countries—is a case in point. To link this point to the earlier discussion, the concept of co-benefits is ripe for such development, but India has invested very little by way of intellectual or political resources in promoting this concept as a legitimate basis for international action.

One potential reason for making relatively little effort to frame ideas and shape debate is the relatively low level of capacity devoted to climate change within government circles. During the first decade and more of negotiations, climate change was understood in India as a strictly foreign policy issue, which could be managed by a few skilled diplomats backed by a small number of specialists. In a context where climate change is closely interwoven with national energy strategy formulation, state-level development planning, and trade policy, the requirement is for climate policy that successfully draws on and integrates a range of additional policymaking arenas. Moreover, the climate regime is increasingly taking shape as a soft-law regime, where the role of international law is to nudge and induce rather than direct and enforce. Understanding and making use of this perspective requires skills and knowledge that go beyond traditional international law expertise.

All of these additional burdens require a broader range of skills and more coordination across different arms of the government. In addition, while nongovernmental think tanks played an important role in the early days of climate negotiations, as discussed earlier, and while the ecosystem of nongovernmental actors is far more dense, there is a degree of lock-in to existing positions. For a middle-level power like India to address the new landscape of climate politics will require refinements in substance (an integrative approach
across policymaking arenas and scales of governance) and in policymaking process (alliance building with governments and engagement with influential nongovernmental actors in India and elsewhere to better represent Indian positions). Collectively, these observations suggest that, while there is indeed a complex interplay between India’s domestic and foreign policy on energy and climate, there is much scope for more intentional and strategic interaction, with considerable upsides for the effectiveness of India’s foreign policy on climate change.

Recalibrating the Compass: Redrawing Maps

India’s climate-negotiating approach has been marked by several high points, notably in the early years of negotiations, when India, along with other developing countries, managed to frame the climate debate around India’s own compass setting to internalize considerations of equity. In Saran’s phrasing, these early negotiators managed to structure the climate deal around the principle of nonreciprocity—the principle that obligations by the North need not attract reciprocal obligations by the South. As Saran also notes, that world is long past; given the new geopolitical map, reciprocal commitments are now the order of the day, and concerns over economic competitiveness are foremost in the minds of Western democracies.

In this context, negotiating as if we lived in a nonreciprocal world is unlikely to be fruitful. This is not to say that the underlying principle of equity should be abandoned; it continues to have strong ethical resonance and enormous practical implications for India. But it may be productive to recalibrate India’s negotiating compass and to reformulate both Indian objectives and consequent strategies.

The first step is to define Indian objectives clearly. A primary objective is surely to avoid a situation where India is forced to commit to absolute emission caps, which would likely cripple efforts at growth and poverty reduction, given that the cheapest energy sources continue to be based on fossil fuels. But equally, it is in India’s interest, and that of India’s vulnerable populations, to have an effective global climate agreement. Finally, climate policy has to operate in the context of India’s larger concerns with energy security, given the country’s limited energy resources and poor energy infrastructure. The principle of CBDRRRC is a valuable instrument to ensure the first, but its updated articulation should be consistent with the latter two objectives. This more nuanced and multipart articulation could form the basis for a recalibrated climate compass.
Second, India’s climate objectives have to be realistically located within the country’s larger foreign policy objectives; climate policy does not operate in a vacuum. This redrawing and updating of the geopolitical map involves mapping not only global climate politics but also broader diplomatic objectives. It would serve India’s interests to pay at least as much attention to the emergent coalition of nations most vulnerable to climate change—least developed countries (including many African nations) and small island states—as to its BASIC allies. While India straddles both categories, the insistence on donning the mantle of a rapidly industrializing economy alone risks subjecting India to demands for onerous climate obligations that it is least able to bear among large emerging economies and fails to reflect the strong interests of the poorest Indians in robust global climate mitigation. India must manage and perhaps even use productively its simultaneous status as a rising power and a vulnerable nation. Factoring in broader diplomatic objectives is a more complex issue. Climate considerations undoubtedly have to be leavened by ongoing strategic alliances. In the future, the thorniest issue is likely to be managing the balance between a recently warming relationship with the United States and the imperative of engaging a rising China. While unpacking the implications of a rapidly changing global context requires far more space than is available here, there is little doubt that Indian climate policy has to be informed by an updated geopolitical map.

Third, there is certainly room for India to develop and propagate alternative and more nuanced frames for climate negotiations. The need is for a frame that sidesteps the fraught North-South politics of global climate negotiations, while preserving substantive attention to concerns of equity and differentiated responsibility. The key to doing so might lie in India’s “co-benefits”–based approach to domestic climate policy, which allows primacy of developmental objectives, even while making a substantive contribution to global mitigation. This approach would need to be defined more carefully and formalized and could then be used as an important element of an updated version of differentiated responsibility across countries.

For the reasons outlined at the beginning of this chapter, solving climate change through multilateral negotiations has always been a tall task. Over the last two decades, the task has, if anything, become harder due to blurred boundaries: between international negotiations and domestic politics, entrenched North-South politics, and tectonic geopolitical shifts leading to a multipolar world. To achieve its goals, India cannot continue to deploy only old tools and techniques. These must be upgraded to reflect climate diplomacy in this far more complex environment.
Notes


3. Ibid., p. 25.


7. See Ministry of Finance, Department of Economic Affairs, Climate Change Finance Unit (http://finmin.nic.in/the_ministry/dept_eco_affairs/economic_div/ccfu_index.asp).


16. Ibid., p. 106.
18. Sengupta, “International Climate Negotiations and India’s Role.”


35. Hallding et al., *Together Alone*.


43. Michaelowa and Michaelowa, “India as an Emerging Power.”


46. “Meeting of the Like Minded Developing Countries on Climate Change,” press release (Beijing, October 18–19, 2012).


50. See Dubash, “The Politics of Climate Change in India.”