

Oxfam report on 'Net Zero' Carbon Targets

August 5, 2021

In news

Oxfam has said that 'net zero' carbon targets that many countries have announced may be a "dangerous distraction" from the priority of cutting carbon emissions.

Key findings of the report

Oxfam has mentioned the following findings in its new report titled "Tightening the Net" that has been released just a few months ahead of the UN climate talks in Glasgow:

- As per the report, **Land-hungry 'net zero' schemes could force an 80 per cent rise in global food prices** and more hunger while allowing rich nations and corporates to continue "dirty business-as-usual."
- Using land alone to remove the world's carbon emissions to achieve 'net zero' by 2050 would **require at least 1.6 billion hectares of new forests**, equivalent to five times the size of India or more than all the farmland on the planet.
- The report says that **to limit global warming below 1.5°C and to prevent irreversible damage from climate change, the world needs to collectively be on track and should aim to cut emissions by 45 per cent by 2030 from 2010 levels**, "with the sharpest being made by the biggest emitters."
- Currently, countries' plans to cut emissions will only lead to a one per cent reduction by the year 2030.
- According to Oxfam, if only land-based methods to deal with climate change are used, **food rises are expected to rise even more**. It estimates that they could rise by 80 per cent by the year 2050.

- Oxfam's report shows that if the entire energy sector - whose emissions continue to soar- were to set similar **'net-zero' targets, it would require an area of land nearly the size of the Amazon rainforest,** equivalent to a third of all farmland worldwide.
- It emphasises that **reducing emissions cannot be considered a substitute for cutting emissions,** "and these should be counted separately.

Countries which announced Net Zero Targets

- **New Zealand:** In 2019, the government passed the Zero Carbon Act, which committed the country to zero carbon emissions by 2050 or sooner, as part of the country's attempts to meet its Paris climate accord commitments.
- **UK:** In the same year, its parliament passed legislation requiring the government to reduce the UK's net emissions of greenhouse gases by 100 per cent relative to 1990 levels by the year 2050.
- **The US:** Its president Joe Biden announced that the country will cut its greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030.
- USA also launched a bipartisan organisation called World War Zero in 2019 to bring together unlikely allies on climate change and with the goal of reaching net-zero carbon emissions in the country by 2050.
- **The European Union:** It also has a similar plan, called "Fit for 55", the European Commission has asked all of its 27 member countries to cut emissions by 55 per cent below 1990 levels by 2030.
- **China:** Last year it announced that it would become net-zero by the year 2060 and that it would not allow its emissions to peak beyond what they are in 2030.

About Oxfam

- Oxfam is a global movement of people, working together to end the injustice of poverty.
- It tackles the inequality that keeps people poor.
- It saves, protects and rebuild lives when disaster strikes.
- It helps people build better lives for themselves, and for others. we take on issues like land rights, climate change and discrimination against women.

India's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC)

- As India transitions into the 6th year since it pledged to generate an additional carbon sink of 2.5-3.0 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent by 2030 as part of Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) target under the 2015 Paris Agreement.
- The agreement has set three major goals—increase the share of non-fossil fuels to 40% of the total electricity generation capacity, to reduce the emission intensity of the economy by 33 to 35% by 2030

What is Net- Zero target ?

- Net-zero, which is also referred to as **carbon-neutrality**, does not mean that a country would bring down its emissions to zero.
- That would be gross-zero, which means reaching a state where there are no emissions at all, a scenario hard to comprehend.
- **Net-zero is a state in which a country's emissions are compensated by absorption and removal of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere.**

How net zero is achieved ?

- Absorption of the emissions can be increased by creating more carbon sinks such as forests, while removal of gases from the atmosphere requires futuristic technologies such as carbon capture and storage.

- It is possible for a country to have negative emissions, if the absorption and removal exceed the actual emissions.
- For example, **Bhutan has negative emissions**, because it absorbs more than it emits.
- In order to meet the 1.5°C global warming target in the Paris Agreement, global carbon emissions should reach net zero around mid-century.

Net-zero goal- 2050 and Paris agreement

- It is being argued that global carbon neutrality by 2050 is the only way to achieve the Paris Agreement target of keeping the planet's temperature from rising beyond 2°C compared to pre-industrial times.
- The net-zero goal does not figure in the 2015 Paris Agreement, the new global architecture to fight climate change.
- The Paris Agreement only requires every signatory to take the best climate action it can.
- Countries need to set five- or ten-year climate targets for themselves, and demonstrably show they have achieved them.