

Much ado about the State Action Plans on Climate Change; its business as usual for the governments

Ajay K Jha

India is highly vulnerable to climate change due to a variety of factors including high dependence on rain fed agriculture, huge coastline, and low adapting capacity due to poverty. According to the UNEP (2007) India is one of the 27 countries highly vulnerable to climate change. Around 42 per cent of India's population still does not have access to commercial energy. Over 75 percent of household energy consumption is for the basic human need of cooking. Traditional biomass is the primary cooking fuel for over 700 million Indians. Even by modest estimates 27.5 percent population is below poverty line. Lack of access to commercial energy leads to illiteracy, gender inequality/disempowerment, high IMR and MMR, Poor Health & and hence a low HDI. Over the next 25 years, India needs to lift the bottom 40 percent of her citizens to an acceptable level of economic & social well being – this will not happen without providing modern energy to these fellow Indians. Equity in access to energy is another major concern as according to an estimate by Greenpeace, the top 1 percent of our population in India has emissions which are 4.5 times that of the bottom 38 percent.

India's additional vulnerability to climate crisis emerges from the fact that more than 70% of the population is still dependent on climate change sensitive sectors like agriculture, fishing and forests. Huge coastline for approximately 7000 kilometers running through 13 states and a critical factor for subsistence of more than 300 million population, along with retreating Himalayan glaciers, which is lifeline of all north Indian river systems, requires serious efforts to understand and approach climate crisis. India's stand as a developing country is that GHG abatement in any form involves significant economic costs and will adversely impact GDP growth as it requires a shift from cheap fossil fuels to costlier non-carbon energy. India is being urged and also itching to show leadership in climate change. However, domestic efforts fall far short to cope up with the vulnerability that India is posed to.

India's National Action Plan on Climate Change

Prime Minister announced the NAPCC on 30th June 2008. It was declared in haste without any public consultation. The 8 missions (solar, enhanced energy efficiency, Himalayan eco system, sustainable agriculture, sustainable habitat, water, green India and strategic knowledge) drawn up initially did not have any targets, time limits or financial allocations. The government had announced that by the end of the year (2008), they will be ready with detailed mission plans and also move on state action Plan on climate change to support and implement NAPCC. However, even after three years, not all mission plans are ready. Civil society groups has serious reservations on both the process as well as the content of the mission plans. The most worrying factor is that if the government is serious on NAPCC missions, it could have opened the process to have views from experts and civil society, and affected communities rather than developing the plans in ivory towers, which many say is completely devoid of the ground realities.

Dilly dallying over state action plans

The development of State Action Plan on climate change also presents interesting approach to public policy planning and sufficient insight to governments' seriousness on climate action Plan. Delhi was the first state to declare its Climate Change action Plan in 2008 itself. Few more states took up leadership and responded to Union Ministry of Environment and forests by declaring their action plans. By June 2010 only six states (Delhi, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Karnataka, Chandigarh) had submitted their draft plans.¹ Ministry of Environment and Forests organized a Consultation workshop to expedite states Action plan on climate change on 19th August 2010, where representatives from 14 states participated and committed to submit their action plans

¹ Only six states submit action Plan on climate change, Panigrahi, June 12 2010, http://zeenews.india.com/news/nation/only-six-states-submit-action-plan-on-climate-change-panigrahi_633474.html

by 31st March 2011.² However, according to the latest information only 14 states have submitted their drafts by July 2011.³ The north eastern states of Manipur, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Sikkim, Tripura and Assam have been among the first to submit their plans.⁴ Union Ministry of Environment and forests had instructed the states to submit their plans by 30th September, 2011, which most of the states are yet to miss. Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Bihar, Tamilnadu and Kerala are some of the critical states yet to submit their plans. While Tamil Nadu and Kerala had to change their plans with the change in the government and will take more time to submit, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar have reportedly started and will take another three months. The case of Gujarat is the most interesting and curious one! Gujarat has not yet drafted its SAPCC but has already launched a R13,000-crore adaptation programme, Gujarat is also reportedly the first state to launch a dedicated climate change department.

There is also a lot of haggling over money for implementing these action plans. States have demanded from the MOEF a sum ranging between Rs. 30 lakhs (Bihar) to Rs. 5 crore (West Bengal). Union Ministry of Environment and Forests has initially agreed to provide only a Rs 10 lakh support to states for implementing these plans. Here we present snapshots from some of the State Action Plans which are available in the public domain.

Highly secretive and top down

Not all these plans are in the public domain. Only Delhi, Odisha, Rajasthan, and West Bengal plans are accessible on their government website. Few other states like MP, Karnataka, Assam, have provided initial drafts without much information about when and how they will be turned into draft plans. Besides, civil society groups have been able to access some information/draft in the states of Manipur and Uttarakhand. Power pint presentations by few states are available on the website of the Moef, however, they did not provide much insight other than generic information. Having a look at the papers available in the public domain reveals a lot on why the states do not want to share their drafts.

Without targets, timelines and financial allocation SAPCCs remain a wish list

Most of the initial documents and drafts does not have a target, timeline, financial implications and allocations and do not prescribe the period of operation. Karnataka's initial document only talks about actions taken and actions proposed by different departments.⁵ It is interesting to see that departments of energy, PWD, Housing, Urban development, Animal Husbandry are amongst the department not giving any feedback. Furthermore interesting is that, department of agriculture does not provide any input on mission on agriculture. MP scoping paper also does not have any targets, it is for the government to lay down targets, timelines and financial provisions. The draft of Rajasthan also provides an interesting reason for not having physical or financial targets, "since actions proposed will cover two planning periods (11th and 12th) specific physical and financial targets have not been proposed", and "some activities are new and long term and would need substantial investments into research, training and capacity building at the individual and institutional level before these can be implemented."⁶

Riding high on the crest of coal based power

² National Consultation workshop on State Action Plan on Climate Change, <http://moef.nic.in/modules/others/?f=sapcc-workshop>

³ Deadlines missed, state of inaction on climate change plan, Kritika Suneja, 23rd July 2011, <http://www.financialexpress.com/news/deadline-missed-state-of-inaction-on-climate-change-plan/821063/0>

⁴ ibid

⁵ STATE ACTION PLAN ON CLIMATE CHANGE, KARNATAKA RAPID ASSESSMENT OF SECTORAL ACTIONS INITIATED, REPORT PREPARED FOR DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT, GOVERNMENT OF KARNATAKA, DECEMBER 30, 2010, Environmental Management & Policy Research Institute, Bangalore

⁶ Rajasthan Environmental Policy including Rajasthan Environment Mission, and Climate Change Agenda for Rajasthan (2010-2014), Department of Environment, Government of Rajasthan, Jaipur

Most of the states plan to jack up their power production by 10 times to as much as 50 times mainly through fossil fuels. While Odisha which has a peak demand of not more than 4000 MW, plans to increase the production to 60,000 MW.⁷ The planned 15 fold increase in thermal power capacity will lead to at least thirteen times higher levels of emission of heat and pollution.⁸ Not to be undone, Madhya Pradesh also plans to increase the production from 5500 MW to 60000 MW.⁹ It is surprising than despite having relied mainly on hydel power till now (55% power generation comes from hydropower) and having more untapped potential of hydropower, MP decides to switch to reverse the ratio and depend mainly on power production from coal. GoMP has also signed 42 new MoUs and with a total capacity creation of about 55,000 MW. In the next 5 years, about 11,000 MW of power will be generated for the state. Assuming that about 70 per cent, i.e. 7,500 MW will be coal based, the total carbon emissions will be 37.50 million tons of carbon per year.¹⁰ This is a substantial contribution and, therefore, will be the focus in the context of climate change. Uttarakhand aspires to become an Energy state and increase power production to an astounding 80,000 MW with a current peak demand of 1600 MW! The state has reportedly signed more than 550 MOUs with various companies Indian and foreign to achieve this objective.

Water missions; can we let it flow

The most disastrous impact of climate change is to be taken by water. Most the states acknowledge it, however, what they propose is exactly the opposite what should they be doing in the light of this reality. Most of the states are still obsessed with the idea of riverlinking. In MP there are proposals for interstate link projects (Ken-Betwa, MOU signed) and the Parawit Kalsindh-Chambal links are under consideration with other states. In Bihar also govt has proposed riveling. It remains to be seen whether it appears in the SAPCC clearly or not. In Karnataka, water dept. is completely clueless on Mission on water and has taken no action. A number of smaller states like Manipur, are proposing exploration of ground water¹¹ despite the fact that more than 1/3rd development blocks in the country are "critical" in terms of availability of groundwater. Besides, there are enough suggestions towards increased privatization in regulation and management of water. The state of MP proposes "demand management and optimization of water use, investigate new regulatory structures with entitlements and prices to adopt water efficient and innovatory technologies....". There are similar proposals in the state of Manipur as well.

Lip service to agriculture and food security

While most of the states acknowledge importance of agriculture in terms of contribution to state's economy, food security, and livelihoods, lot of them propose actions which are actually responsible for bringing agriculture to a sorry state in the country. While Manipur Plan talks about "modern scientific agriculture," MP proposes a set of actions to improve agriculture including "modernization of agriculture: biotechnology, seed replacement increased use of fertilizers...." West Bengal and Rajasthan both also propose "zero tillage agriculture" and Rajasthan includes "exploring carbon sequestration potential of carbon deficient soil" and "increased use of biotechnology" suggesting clearly having gained the wisdom from Monsanto, with which the Govt. of Rajasthan has signed an MOU to improve agriculture and income of the farmers in the state.¹² for those interested, Monsanto has been lobbying with UNFCCC for more than two decades to declare zero tillage agriculture as CDM approved methodology, which will allow it to sell its roundup ready Soya to unsuspecting farmers encouraging them to earn carbon credits. Obviously, all know that who will benefit from it. Odisha has also given extensive treatment to agriculture in the plan however, it failed to allocate single Rupee to agriculture!

⁷ World Bank and DFID provided Technical Assistance to Govt. of Odisha for developing SAPCC

⁸ <http://orissaconcerns.net/2010/06/reject-orissa-draft-climate-change-action-plan/>

⁹ Madhya Pradesh is receiving support from UNDP, DFID, & World bank for climate change programme

¹⁰ Scoping study for Madhya Pradesh State Climate Change Action Plan, Merlyn Hedger and Vaideeswaran S, March 2010, A report for the Government of MP

¹¹ Manipur State Action Plan, Climate change sensitive sectors and thrust areas for action, provided by Manipur Department of ecology and Environment, Govt. of Manipur for circulation in State Consultation on SAPCC in July 2011

¹² Government of Rajasthan along with 6 state Universities has signed an MOU with Monsanto. Civil society groups have challenged this. A committee appointed by the State Government is looking into the legality and validity of the MOU.

Damn with the rights of forest dwellers: states want forests to ring their cash registers

Almost all the states are unanimous in their plans to earn carbon credits from the forests. Himachal Pradesh, which has declared itself the first Carbon neutral state, was the first to get early bird prize by setting up a CDM cell. State of Madhya Pradesh also set up a climate change cell in the department of forests to attract CDM projects. Other states like Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Manipur are also at "exploring mitigation potential of community forest projects to obtain carbon credits and forest conservation." This is a cause of concern, when seen with the fact that a number of states are high on afforestation and planting forests in non-government and community lands. The experience has been that afforestation generally takes place in common property resources and lands habited by forest dwelling and forest dependent communities, and its them who suffer when the states go full throttle on afforestation. These states perhaps are also not aware of the popular global resentment against REDD + programme, as they are generally seen ranging against the rights of forest dependent communities and favouring big TNC grab land for mass afforestation, destruction of natural forests and planting of monoculture instead. A number of states also plan to plant agro-fuels in afforestation. In Karnataka Plan, the Pollution Control Board actually proposes "planting 1.5 crore saplings including bio-diesel plants between 2010-2012." In Manipur also, huge tracts of jhoom fields were converted into agro fuel plantations, however, many farmers highly disappointed with the experience, have reverted back to their traditional farming. The question if also of approach to forestry missions. State plans talk about Joint Forest Management, in forest conservation and preservation, which has been by now rejected by communities as it seen concentrating power in the forest departments. Forest Rights Act, 2006 which was passed after a prolonged struggle in India, is believed to put the rights of the communities living in forest in preference over the control of the forests by Forest Department, which JFM tends to reverse.

No concern for equity, rights of people and gender

Most of the state plans do not talk at all about increasing access and equity in energy, water or natural resources. They also remain equally insensitive to gender concerns in climate change. Furthermore, the rights of the forest dwellers and forest dependent people do not exist for these plans. None of them actually are worried about or even paying lip service to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Population (UNDRIP). Detailed treatment to mission on forestry and biodiversity fail to mention how forest dwelling people have contributed to preservation and conservation of forests and ensuring their efforts and respecting their knowledge. Similarly, strategic knowledge missions have shown scant regard to the traditional knowledge and wisdom of people in understanding and caring for the environment and climate. Mission plans on energy do not pay any importance to bio-mass, which is actually the sole source of energy for more than 60% of the population. State plans smacks of little respect for people and riding on knowledge of patrons of neo-liberal economy, keep no stone unturned in apportionment of natural resources.

Conclusion

Most of these plans are being developed in complete isolation with views of experts, researchers, academics and civil society in the state. A number of them are seen to be completely disconnected with the geography, economy and social realities of the state; the templates could be equally relevant (rather irrelevant) for any state with the change in name and title. Many of the states are being helped by World Bank, UNDP, DFID, GIZ etc. and have enough suggestions on how these state plans are being influenced by international climate change politics, manifolds increase in power production being one of them. It is exactly from where strong proposals to earn carbon credits from forests and soil carbon sequestration are coming, without states knowing much about the prevalent debates and apprehensions on these aspects. Most of the states have actually developed these plans without any mapping, vulnerability assessment of regions or sectors and does not seem to go beyond the generally prevalent bureaucratic lethargy. States either do not have much vision in missions on energy efficiency, industries, health, livelihoods and urban planning. Some of them go to the extent of absurdity talking about going for "LEED Design buildings" (despite having an equally good GRIHA 4 Code) and "low carbon green highways." The efforts on developing renewable energy also remain highly undermined. Rajasthan goes on the list that the "solar energy potential in the state might be as much as 100,000 MW," but has no idea of how that can be tapped. Most importantly, any plan does not show least affinity with the people who are being affected due to climate change

impacts. None of the plan could think of any kind of support for adaptation and rehabilitation of millions of farmers who are being ruined due to failed crops, or rural folk unable to keep cattle due to lack of fodder, people in coastal states who cannot fish anymore due to salinization of sea water, or people dependent on minor forest produce losing their source of sustenance. The National Action Plan and State Action Plans remain high on politics and low on promises. It's business as usual.

Feedback and comments are welcome at k.ajay.j@gmail.com
