

SDG-13 Review

Leveraging CC and SDG Interlinkages

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The inter-linkages between climate change and SD have been identified in both the Paris Agreement as well as Agenda 2030. These have been reinforced in the 2019 SDG report which has warned that decades of progress on various SDGs can be reversed as a result of climate change – poverty, hunger, water, inequality, oceans and forests, and urban development.

Literature abounds on the linkages between climate change and sustainable development as also the strength of these inter-linkages. However, there is also substantial evidence of a continued siloed approach to dealing with climate change and the SDGs at all levels. The rhetoric is not being matched by action on the ground. For example, the SDG report too, while being an extremely useful document, has yet not been able to define specific causal relationships that would inform countries and other actors on the attractiveness of synergistic action.

A preliminary analysis of the NDC documents, BURs and the VNRs on SDGs also reveals that in most countries the climate and SDG actions are identified separately with little apparent focus on synergistic optimisation of outcomes. Part of the problem here could also be linked to the reporting formats that have been provided to countries -- are we then getting the messaging right so that the value of an inter-linked approach flows down the length and breadth of implementing countries? That the trade-offs are explicitly identified and addressed?

Several governments have recognised the importance of taking a policy coherent approach to the SDGs and in some cases to climate change and the SDGs. Examples exist of special Ministers being appointed, high-level committees being formed, with some supported by working groups as well. However, an effective governance model ensuring both horizontal and vertical integration still seems to be elusive.

Key challenges to achieving the synergistic approach to climate change and the SDGs seems to be the availability of good quality data, the analytical capabilities at all levels, and the empowerment of functionaries to take cross-functional approaches and decisions.

In this short period of time, it is difficult to specifically say which climate actions would yield the greatest sustainability benefits but subjecting all policies – including fiscal, programmes, regulations and developmental activities in a country to a well-defined strategic impact assessment could be an effective way forward.

In response to the call for transformative actions a mission approach may be adopted. So, for example, if the focus is on sustainable urban mobility the push factors – creation of infrastructure, aligned policies and regulations; would have to combine with the pull factors – definition of incentives for inclusivity, institutional strengthening, education/awareness; clearly illustrating the co-benefits – clean air, jobs, spreading of profits; in a nimble manner recognising the fast paced technological and social developments to ensure the accelerated change which is the call of the hour!