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## Net Zero Carbon Targets and Climate Change: Oxfam Report

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### Why in News

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Recently, a report (**Tightening the Net**) published by **Oxfam International** has said that announcing **Net Zero Carbon Targets** may be a dangerous distraction from the priority of **cutting carbon emissions**.

- Many countries like New Zealand, UK, US, China and the European Union have set net-zero targets on greenhouse gas emissions to tackle climate change.
- The report emphasises that **reducing emissions cannot be considered a substitute for cutting emissions**.
- **Oxfam International** is a group of independent non-governmental organisations formed in 1995.

### Key Point

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- **Net-zero:**
  - Net-zero, also means carbon neutrality, is a state in which a **country's emissions are compensated by absorption and removal of greenhouse gases** from the atmosphere.

It 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.
  - One way by which carbon can be absorbed is **by creating carbon sinks**. This way, it is even possible for a country **to have negative emissions, if the absorption and removal exceed the actual emissions**.
    - Until recently, the **Amazon rainforests** in South America, which are the largest tropical forests in the world, were carbon sinks. But eastern parts of these forests have started emitting CO<sub>2</sub> instead of absorbing carbon emissions as a result of significant deforestation.
    - **Bhutan has negative emissions**, because it absorbs more than it emits.

- **Countries that have announced net-zero Targets (Some Examples):**
  - The **European Union** has a plan, called **“Fit for 55”**, to deliver the carbon neutrality goal.
  - **China** also 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.
  - The **International Energy Agency’s (IEA)** has released its **Net Zero Emissions (NZE) Roadmap - named ‘Net Zero by 2050’**.
- **Findings of the Report:**
  - **A very big area is needed to control energy sector emissions:**

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.
  - **More Forests required:**

If the challenge of change is tackled only by way of planting more trees, then about 1.6 billion hectares of new forests would be required to remove the world’s excess carbon emissions by the year 2050.
  - **Land- Based Methods can raise food crises:**
    - Currently, countries’ plans to cut emissions will only lead to a 1% reduction by the year 2030.
    - Significantly, if only land-based methods (Forestation) to deal with climate change are used, food crises are expected to rise even more. Oxfam estimates that they could rise by 80% by the year 2050.
  - **Need to cut emissions significantly:**

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% by 2030 from 2010 levels, “with the sharpest being made by the biggest emitters.”
- **Analysis (Net-Zero vs Climate Change):**
  - **‘Net-Zero’ Reduces the Responsibility of ‘Biggest Emitters’:**
    - Many governments and companies are adopting net zero climate targets as they recognize the urgency of the climate crisis.
    - Without clear definition, however, these targets risk being reliant on using vast swathes of land in low-income countries to capture carbon emissions, allowing the biggest emitters to avoid making significant cuts in their own emissions.
  - **May Increase the Demand for Land:**

It could also lead to an explosion in demand for land which, if not subject to careful safeguards, **might risk increasing hunger and fueling land inequality.**

## Way Forward

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Net zero should be a pathway to real and transformative climate action and not greenwash. Carbon emissions need to be reduced now, and land-based climate solutions must center 'food-first' approaches that help achieve both zero emissions and zero hunger.

**Source: IE**