



Call for Reforming the UNFCCC

For Prelims: [UNFCCC](#), [Convention on Biological Diversity](#), [Green Climate Fund](#), [Kyoto Protocol](#), [Adaptation and Mitigation](#)

For Mains: Role of UNFCCC in Global Climate Governance, Structural Reform Proposals for International Climate Institutions

[Source: IE](#)

Why in News?

A renewed push to reform the [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change \(UNFCCC\)](#) process has gained traction ahead of **30th Conference of the Parties (COP) in Brazil (2025)**, amid concerns over its weak implementation, insufficient finance, and procedural inefficiencies.

- Though proposals were discussed at the [2025 Bonn Conference](#), no consensus was reached.

What is the Need for Reform in the UNFCCC Process?

- **Lack of Effectiveness:** Despite decades of negotiations, global emissions continue to rise, and the process has not delivered the scale of action needed to limit warming **to 1.5°C**.
- **Voluntary Commitments:** The Paris Agreement relies on [nationally determined contributions \(NDCs\)](#), which are not legally binding and often fall short of scientific recommendations.
 - As of May 2025, only 21 countries (around 11%) have submitted their 2035 NDCs, raising concerns ahead of COP30 in Brazil.
 - Even among those submitted, many lacked credible implementation plans (meaning they were ambitious on paper but vague or underfunded in practice).
- **Consensus-Based Decision-Making:** Every decision under the UNFCCC must be agreed upon by all parties, giving **each country effective veto power**.
 - This often leads to watered-down agreements to achieve consensus.
 - Civil society groups have called for **majority-based decision-making** when consensus is elusive, but this remains controversial.
- **Inequity and Climate Justice Concerns:** [Small island states and least developed countries](#) often feel sidelined, with their calls for climate justice and adaptation finance inadequately addressed.
 - The failure of developed countries to meet their climate finance commitments and emission reduction targets has deepened mistrust.
 - Small Island Developing States (SIDS), despite contributing less than 1% of global emissions, face severe climate impacts.
 - Under a 2°C warming scenario, annual losses from extreme weather could reach **USD 75 billion by 2050**.
- **Credibility and Political Will:** The **US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement** has

undermined the credibility of the UNFCCC..

- **Implementation Gaps:** The Kyoto Protocol faced major shortcomings as it exempted developing countries like China and India, weakening global emission reduction efforts. It led to a significant rise in global emissions, **44% increase by 2012 from 1997 levels**.
 - The Paris Agreement, though more inclusive, suffers from absence of enforceable timelines.
 - The [Loss and Damage Fund](#), meant to support vulnerable countries, remains underfunded, with developed nations showing reluctance to accept liability.
 - [COP28 \(Dubai\)](#) lacked a clear timeline, binding mandates, and enforceable commitments to bridge the climate finance gap.
- **Fossil Fuel Influence:** COP28 marked the first agreement acknowledging the need to [transition away from fossil fuels](#). However, hosting COP meetings in countries heavily dependent on fossil fuels such as Dubai and Baku has raised concerns over **conflicts of interest and greenwashing**.
- **Insufficient Enforcement Mechanisms:** Countries face no real consequences for failing to meet their commitments, which weakens accountability and undermines trust in the system.

What is the UNFCCC?

- **About:** The UNFCCC was adopted at the **1992 Rio Earth Summit** and entered into force on 21st March 1994.
 - As of now, the Convention has 198 Parties, making it nearly universal in membership.
 - UNFCCC is one of the three Rio Conventions along with [Convention on Biological Diversity \(CBD\)](#), and the [United Nations convention to combat Desertification \(UNCCD\)](#).
 - These conventions are interconnected and supported by the **Joint Liaison Group** to ensure synergies in addressing global environmental challenges.
- **Objective:** To stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous human interference with the climate system.
- **Core Principles:**
 - **Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR):** Developed countries, having contributed more historically to emissions, are expected to take the lead in reducing them and supporting developing nations.
 - **Equity:** Recognizes the different capabilities and responsibilities of individual countries.
- **Institutional Structure**
 - **COP:** Supreme decision-making body.
 - **Subsidiary Bodies:** Includes the **Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA)** and the **Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI)**.
 - **Secretariat:** Based in Bonn, Germany, it supports the implementation of the Convention and its protocols.
 - **Global Innovation Hub:** Launched in 2021, aims to promote transformative innovations for a low-emission and climate-resilient future.
- **Key Functions**
 - **Negotiation Platform:** Hosts annual [Conferences of the Parties \(COPs\)](#), where countries negotiate climate agreements and review progress.
 - **Monitoring and Reporting:** Requires countries to submit regular reports on their emissions and climate actions.
 - **Financial and Technical Support:** Facilitates funding and technology transfer to developing countries through mechanisms like the [Green Climate Fund](#).
- **Major Agreements Under the UNFCCC:**
 - The [Kyoto Protocol](#), adopted in 1997, is the only global treaty with legally binding targets for developed countries to cut greenhouse gas emissions. It aimed to reduce emissions by **5% below 1990 levels by 2012**.
 - India ratified it in 2002. It follows the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities”.
 - [Paris Agreement \(2015\)](#) countries agreed to submit voluntary climate action plans (NDCs) to limit global warming to well below 2°C, ideally 1.5°C.

UNFCCC COP 29

About UNFCCC COP

UNFCCC Conference of Parties (COP)

Meets Annually (unless the Parties decide otherwise)

First COP

COP 29 (2024)

Supreme decision-making body of UNFCCC

In Bonn, the Secretariat (unless a Party offers to host the session)

Held in Berlin, Germany (1995)

Baku, Azerbaijan

Major Outcomes of COP 29

Key Goals & Agreements

USD 300 billion annual climate finance goal by 2035 under the **New Collective Quantified Goal on Climate Finance (NCQG)**

Agreement on **govt-to-govt carbon markets** (under the Paris Agreement)

Extended **Lima Work Programme on Gender** (2014) for 10 years

Over 30 countries endorsed → **Reducing Methane from Organic Waste Declaration** (India is not a signatory)

New Initiatives & Programs

Global Matchmaking Platform for Industrial Decarbonisation

Baku Adaptation Roadmap for National Adaptation Plans

Baku Initiative for Climate Finance, Investment, and Trade (BIOFIT) Dialogue

Baku Harmoniya Climate Initiative for Farmers

Baku Initiative on Human Development for Climate Resilience

Climate and Health Continuity Coalition

Adopted → Baku Workplan & renewed the Facilitative Working Group (FWG)

Sector-Specific Declarations

Declaration on Green Digital Action

Declaration on Enhanced Action in Tourism

Baku Call on Climate Action for Peace, Relief and Recovery

Multisectoral Actions Pathways (MAP) Declaration for Resilient and Healthy Cities

Declaration on Water for Climate Action

| India's Initiatives |

- Advocated industrial decarbonisation & hydrogen solutions
- Endorsed disaster-resilient infrastructure through Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure
- Endorsed gender-inclusive climate action
- Supported solar energy adoption, targeting 20-fold increase by 2050
- India & Sweden co-chaired → 6th Annual Summit of the Leadership Group for Industry Transition (LeadIT)

COP 30 to be held in Belem, Brazil in November, 2025



What Reforms can be Adopted to Enhance the Effectiveness of the UNFCCC Process?

- **Proposal for Majority-Based Decision Making:** Permit **majority voting** when consensus fails after a defined negotiation period. This would prevent obstruction by a few states and enable more ambitious outcomes.
- **Mandate Independent Review of NDC Implementation:** Create an independent technical body under the **UNFCCC to assess NDC credibility**, track implementation, and publicly flag underperformance.
 - This would introduce **reputational accountability and technical rigor** into the process.
- **Tie Climate Finance Access to Transparency and Results:** Link disbursement of funds (e.g. from the Green Climate Fund) to transparent reporting and measurable progress on **adaptation and mitigation**.
 - These reforms address structural inefficiencies and political bottlenecks in the UNFCCC process and, if implemented, could greatly improve its credibility, equity, and effectiveness.
- **Reframe Negotiations Around Human Needs:** Encourage shifting climate negotiations to a human needs-based framework, focusing on low-carbon solutions for housing, food, health, and mobility.
 - Backed by the **UNFCCC's Global Innovation Hub**, this approach aligns climate action with development justice and helps engage more developing countries.
 - Negotiations are hindered by bloated agendas and lengthy statements. Streamlining agenda items, capping delegation sizes, and limiting speaking times can enhance efficiency in the UNFCCC process.

Conclusion

The proposals for UNFCCC reform reflect growing frustration among developing countries and civil society groups. The need for greater efficiency, accountability, and adequate climate financing is evident, making COP30 a crucial platform to address these concerns. Strengthening the UNFCCC process through these reforms would enhance global cooperation and accountability essential for effectively tackling the climate crisis.

Drishti Mains Question:

Despite near-universal participation, the UNFCCC is increasingly criticized for its lack of effectiveness and equity. Examine the structural issues and suggest reforms to make it more responsive to the climate emergency.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions

Mains

Q. Describe the major outcomes of the 26th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). What are the commitments made by India in this conference? **(2021)**

