

Kyoto protocol 1997



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The United Nations framework convention on climate change, devised the international agreement termed as Kyoto Protocol, in order to work towards preserving the environment. The protocol was aimed at diminishing the intensity of six major greenhouse gases namely carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, sulfur hexafluoride, hydro fluorocarbons, and perfluorocarbons. What is this International Agreement? Global warming intimidates the very existence of all life forms on earth.

The emanations of the aforementioned six gases contribute considerably to the thinning of the ozone layer, the consequences of which can be summed up in the rising of the sea levels, melting of snowcaps, floods and droughts. By 1990 the ratio of these emissions had risen by a considerable amount, as substantiated in the report published by the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change). The report called for urgent actions to curb the threat of climatic alteration. Thus, at the United Nations Conference of Environment and Development, the birth of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change took place.

The decisive objective of the meeting was: " Stabilizing greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system. " (UNFCCC, Article 2, 2008). Furthermore, the agreement also encouraged achieving the change in a limited time p, so as to avoid an economic standstill by allowing the ecosystem to align with the change in the atmosphere. The concurrence focused primarily on the industrialized nations, termed under Annex 1 as the major producers of the greenhouse gas emanations and thus the prime participators of the protocol.

It is mentioned in the protocol that the achievement of the reduction in emissions is to be performed principally through nationwide procedures. However, in order to counter the criticisms with regards to the economic melt down that might result through the adherence to this protocol, the agreement also mentions three market based methods: (a) Emissions trading; (b) Clean development mechanism; (c) Joint implementation. The protocol also asserts that the countries establish a monitoring body responsible to formulating reports regarding the greenhouse gas emanations and the trade carried out.

This is achieved through: (a) Registry system; (b) Compliance system; (c) Reporting system. Another objective of the protocol is to help countries adapt to the changing climatic conditions and its adverse effects. Therefore, an Adaptation Fund was also formulated under this protocol to sponsor adaptation schemes and programmes to the developing countries that are signatories to the protocol. The protocol encourages countries to align their policies to the targets of the Kyoto Protocol, in order to curb the looming threat. The IPCC has forecasted an overall increase in global temperature to 5. Degree Celsius (UNEP, 2001). Therefore, developing countries are required under this protocol to device measures for absorption of the greenhouse gases. The protocol has been approved by 183 parties, including Japan, China, Italy, Spain, Germany, France, the Netherlands and Russia, a country accounting for 17% of the greenhouse gas emanations (Kyoto Protocol: Status of Ratification, 2008) The fulfillment of the agreement is considered crucial, for the changing climatic conditions are causing more harm than good for the eco-system. Why this Agreement is Important:

Keeping in view the drastic change in the climatic condition and its consequences, it was vital for the global community to advance towards such a step intended at diminishing the greenhouse gas emanation. Inter governmental panel on climate change has forecasted an average increase of global temperature from 1.4 degree Celsius to 5.8 degree Celsius (UNEP, 2001). While this increase may appear trivial, yet it contributes greatly to the rising of sea levels, melting of snow caps and these drastic changes themselves affect the production of food and leads to droughts and famines as well as floods.

Under such circumstances it was vital to put forth an agreement that was legally binding on the countries that were the greatest benefactors of the greenhouse gasses. This global warming is a result of 150 years of rigorous industrial development. Smoldering of fossil fuels has penetrated the ozone layer, which was acting as a filter for the living creatures from the damaging consequences of sunlight.

The excessive access given to the ultra violent radiations is harming the ecosystem, which is not just confined to the melting of the ice caps in Atlanta but also the extinction of animal and plant species, due to the destruction of their habitat. While the melting of ice caps is causing floods, the extinction of animals is resulting in direly affecting the food cycle; the results of which are not just felt by the wild life but also the human beings. The extinction can also lead to the extinction of human beings, if the situation is not controlled.

Therefore, it was vital for the international community to join hands and take steps for the conservation of the atmosphere. In this regards, the Kyoto

protocol serves as a plausible tool. Industrial growth will be useless if people can not benefit from it; if people can not live enough to take its benefits. Increase in pollution etc has direly affected the living conditions of people. While the developed nations are enjoying the benefits of a strong economy, the developing countries are undergoing the effects which are resulting in deteriorating the state of those countries.

Third world countries already having been victimized by poverty, unemployment, civil disobedience also have to suffer the influence of the changing climatic conditions. Mostly third world countries have agro-based economies. The phenomenon of global warming has become an enemy to their crops, those crops that constitute their largest amount of export. As a result, third world countries have to import more than they can export leaving them under a heavy financial burden. Michael Grubb et al 1999) This shows that the affects of global warming, that took birth due to the extensive industrial growth of 150 years have aided greatly in crippling the already crippled economy of third world countries and in fact has produced more problems for them than they can handle. Even for the developed countries, the climatic changes have posed big problems. Thus, under such circumstances, it was pivotal for the United Nations to come up with a solution to curb these problems.

The Kyoto protocol is binding on all its members and such a legally binding agreement that fathomed the harmful affects of global warming marks one of the very important agreements produced. Through this agreement, countries, by law, are supposed to work on towards reducing their greenhouse gas emanations, working for the global good. Important parties

of the Agreement: Even though the protocol has a total of 183 parties to date, the most important ones include United Kingdom and European Union. Russia and U. S. A are the largest creators of greenhouse gas emissions.

Out of the 2, Russia has ratified the treaty while the U. S. A has not. Back when the protocol had to be approved around 55% of the votes were required (Kyoto Protocol: Article 25), out of which a vote of either U. S. A or Russia was crucial. Russia thus ratified the agreement and helped put it in to effect. The United States had ratified the agreement, yet U. S. A declined, refusing to adhere to the Annex 1 and Annex 2 countries, by putting forth the argument that India and China are also potential greenhouse gas producers. Furthermore, it is stated that the agreement poses a threat to their economy.

U. S. A has neither accepted nor rejected the agreement even though it is a signatory. However, on state level a program has been initiated entitled, “Regional greenhouse gas initiative” (Regional greenhouse gas initiative, 2006). The following states are participants Maine, New York, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Vermont, Connecticut, New Jersey, Delaware, and Maryland, representing around 46 million people. Around 80 cities from 50 states are working towards ratifying the Kyoto Protocol (Mayor’s Climate protection centre, 2008).

Attempts at convincing the government are also being carried out at student level, as students have initiated a movement as well termed as Kyoto Now. One of the major supporters of the protocol is the European Union. The EU produces around 22% of the worldwide greenhouse gas production and is

now committed to reducing the greenhouse gas production (Energy policy of the European Union, 2002). Denmark, for example, is alone working towards decreasing 21% of its greenhouse gas emanations.

In fact, the European commissions back in 2007 announced the formation of a European Union Energy Policy which incorporated a 20% cutback in greenhouse gas emissions. By 2020 The EU has also placed fine on countries failing to adhere to the reduction target. The European Union has been an ardent supporter of the Kyoto Protocol and is working towards negotiating with other hard-to-convince nations. (Michael Grubb et al 1999) The United Kingdom is also a strong supporter of the Kyoto Protocol. Its energy policy fully supports descend in carbon dioxide production.

While the United Kingdom has reduced a considerable amount of greenhouse gas reduction yet it needs to work on towards cutting back on the increase in the net carbon dioxide emanations. A draft by the name of Climate Change Bill was in print, which advocated the reduction of 60%, with a beginner's target of 26% to 32%, of the carbon dioxide levels (Department for environment, food and rural affairs, 2007). If this bill is approved, the United Kingdom will emerge as the first country to integrate such a strong target in to the energy policy, rather the law.

Result of the Agreement: The Kyoto protocol has earned both positive and negative comments. While its advocates consider the agreement to be a historical step towards curbing the threat of global warming caused due to human activities. Critics argue that the protocol would just result in a 5% decrease in global greenhouse gas production and that this is not a

considerable amount of reduction. As quoted by inter governmental panel on climate change, a decrease of 50-60% is required otherwise the world will face a global increase of 3 degree Celsius in its temperature.

Thus, critics argue that the targets set by the UNFCCC are inadequate.

(Michael Grubb et al 1999) Another argument put forth by the opposition of the agreement is that, not all countries are participating in this agreement. For example, U. S. A one of the worlds largest creator of greenhouse gas emanation, has not ratified the treaty. Furthermore, china is termed under Annex 2 of developing countries even though it is the second biggest producer of these emissions. India is also included in the same list while the production of the greenhouse gases exceeds even those of the industrialized nations.

Therefore, critics argue that with such a limited participation from countries, the Kyoto protocol can not be counted up on to achieve the reduction in greenhouse gases to curb the threats of global warming. While the protocol might be considered a first step towards addressing this problem, it does not according to the opposition present a clear cut and effective framework that can be counted up on to curb the problem. Economic constraints have also been addressed by both the proposition and the opposition of the agreement. Critics argue that the protocol would do more harm than good.

The argument put forth is that countries would have a negative impact on their economy for different companies would be required to come up with new, climate-friendly technologies and solutions and the cost of these technologies might force some companies to shut down. Another argument

brought in to the limelight is that due to the protocol the tax payers and customers would have to pay a higher amount of tax in order to aid the government in working towards the reduction of greenhouse gases for example the assertion of strict rules.

Furthermore, it is argued that the nationals of the developed countries might be forced to spend more and might be forced to practice a superior standard of living. However, it must be noticed that the protocol does provide cures for short-term economic problems. The instruments of Emissions trading, Joint implementation, and clean development advocate the cause of the protocol yet also allow countries not to experience a considerable amount of change in their economy abruptly.

Countries can take up their time revolutionizing their existing sector while working for the benefit of the global community by reducing emissions alongside. Furthermore, those markets that work with collaboration and work towards producing environment friendly products and services will adjust quickly to the new economic environment and in the long run would be a lot more successful. However, besides all these arguments no one can refute the important step taken back in 1997 in Brazil with regards to the imminent threat of global warming.

While the Kyoto protocol may not be right on path to assemble the targets of diminishing greenhouse gas emanation, it is still on track. The fulfillment of this protocol, specifically by the developed countries mentioned in Annex 1 would advocate other such steps to be taken under stricter conditions. Also, nations by proving themselves capable of having reduced their greenhouse

gas emissions can work towards conferring with developing countries to lend a helping hand in curbing this global threat.

By commencing the journey with achievable and small goals, the global community can work towards achieving larger targets. Even if the countries that have ratified the agreement staunchly follow the route to reducing the greenhouse gases, change can be achieved. Efforts at national level will act as a catalyst for change. Thus, it would be highly unfair to deny the significance of the Kyoto protocol, for it is a bold first step taken towards preserving the environment.

What can serve as another plausible technique for reducing those harmful emissions is by switching over to renewable resources and minimizing the usage of fossil fuels. The smoldering of fossil fuels produces harmful pollutants into the atmosphere. These by products can stay mortal in to the atmosphere and along with affecting the ozone also affect the respiratory organs of the human beings, resulting in causing fatal asthma attacks. From land mining to burning of coal in a coal mine to oil spills, the impact on the atmosphere have proved to be fatal in the past.

Thus, in order to combat climate change the first step countries should take is the substitution of fossil fuels with renewable sources of energy. Also, by increasing the green belts in the world, we can work towards saving the environment. Deforestation has a highly negative impact on the environment as well as the climate. The effects of deforestation include soil erosion, temperature extremes, increase in deserts; all contributing greatly to the

observable fact of global warming. Therefore it is crucial that deforestation be stopped. Of course ceasing deforestation is not the only solution.

Reforestation should be encouraged. This is an act that can be carried out at individual level as well thus governments should try and engrave the importance of a substantial green belt in helping limit the phenomenon of global warming and working towards a safe environment. “ We must no longer think of human progress as a matter of imposing ourselves on the natural environment. The world--the climate and all living things-- is a closed system; what we do has consequences that eventually will come back to affect us. ” (Woods Hole Research Center, 2008)