

ANALYSIS ENVIRONMENT

New IPCC Report Lists Numerous Low-Cost Options to Tackle Climate Change



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The latest Synthesis Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, AR6, is the final document in the series, which summarises the available information on climate change.



Placard at a climate change protest in San Francisco. Photo: Unplash/Li-An Lim.

Kochi: From supporting public transport and walking and cycling in cities to implementing policies that incorporate weather and health insurance, there are numerous feasible, effective, and low-cost options available to spur climate action and address the issue of climate change, as per the latest climate report released by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on March 20.

The Synthesis Report of the IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) is the final document in the series, and summarises the available information on climate change, how it is affecting people and ecosystems, as well as how to adapt to and mitigate climate change and its impacts. The report has numerous messages that India could adopt, said several scientists who contributed to the report.

The Synthesis Report

With increasing global greenhouse gas emissions, human-caused climate change has already caused widespread changes in our natural ecosystems and is also affecting weather and causing climate extremes, per the report. The changes are also affecting people drastically.

“Vulnerable communities who have historically contributed the least to current climate change are disproportionately affected,” the report noted. Unfortunately, these impacts are only set to intensify, the report predicts.

Many climate-related risks (such as human deaths due to increased heat, for example) too are higher now than when the IPCC team assessed them in its previous report, the AR5. Projected long-term impacts too are multiple times higher than currently observed, the Synthesis Report read. As global warming increases, many of these changes will become “unavoidable” and “irreversible” too.

“Every increment of global warming will intensify multiple and concurrent hazards,” it read. Per the report, only “deep”, “rapid” and “sustained” reductions in greenhouse gas emissions can slow down global warming over the next two decades.

Measures to adapt to climate change (such as ensuring access to air conditioning as many regions of the world face extreme heat due as a result of global warming) – also known as adaptation – are being implemented but these are clearly not enough given the current rates of climate change, the Report stressed.



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The lack of global funds is also a challenge for implementing adaptation measures, especially in developing countries, per the Report. Adaptation measures that are possible today will become less feasible and effective as global warming continues, the Report warned.

Though mitigation measures – actions that help reduce climate change such as reducing the sources of carbon emissions – are also being implemented through changes in national policies, there are gaps here as well.

Effective, low-cost actionables

However, there are multiple ways to increase climate action; feasible and cost-effective adaptation and mitigation measures are now available, the Report underlined. These include minimising the use of fossil fuels, alternative energy options (such as wind and solar), switching to electric vehicles, supporting public transport and active mobility in cities (such as walking and cycling), conservation and restoration of forest and other ecosystems and adaptive social safety nets such as weather and health insurance, among others. Many of these actions can complement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as listed by the United Nations in 2015 for countries to work towards.

The Report also highlighted the importance of equity and inclusion in implementing these climate actions.

“The importance given to equity and climate justice in the synthesis report is significant,” said Bejoy K. Thomas, associate professor at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research Pune, who was part of the IPCC’s Working Group III and contributed to one of their reports last year.

“This acknowledges historical responsibility for climate change, and should reflect in setting targets, especially mitigation goals, differently between countries based on their development priorities,” he wrote in an email to The Wire. Finance, technology and international cooperation are also “critical enablers for accelerated climate action”, the Report noted.

“It [the Synthesis Report] is not a doom and gloom report, it’s a report about actionable things that the world and India can take,” said Dipak Dasgupta, Distinguished Fellow, The Energy Resource Institute, one of the scientists who contributed to the Report, in an online interaction with journalists organised by Climate Trends on March 20.



Representational image for greenhouse gases. Credit: Cam McGrath/IPS

The report provides robust science but also succinct messages which are actionables and shows why urgent action can be taken given the options available across different sectors in the economy, said Joyashree Roy (Energy Academic Programme, Asian Institute of Technology), also part of the core writing team of the Synthesis Report.

The report is very explicit about the aspect of equity, the disproportionate effects on vulnerable communities who have historically contributed the least to climate change, how global greenhouse gas emissions have continued to rise with unequal historic and ongoing contributions arising due to aspects including lifestyles and patterns of consumption and production, said Aditi Mukherji, director, Climate Change Impact platform, Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, during the same online interaction. Mukerji is also an author of the core writing team.

Many messages for India

There are a lot of messages that India can take home and implement in the Synthesis Report, the authors said.

For instance, the report talks about lifestyles, consumption and demands. This not only applies to the global north but it also applies to the rich and the wealthy in the global south, said Mukherji. Inequality in consumption is as much a global north-south problem as much as it is a within-the-global south problem. “We cannot skirt that issue,” she said.

India has been pushing the concept of LiFE – Lifestyle for Environment – which stresses on individuals and communities limiting unnecessary consumption and making sustainable use of resources – at national and international stages. LiFE is part of India’s Nationally Determined Contribution that it has submitted as part of the Paris Agreement to curb climate emissions.

The report clearly shows that current trends (of climate change and climate action) are incompatible with a sustainable, equitable world, commented Chandni Singh, one of the authors of the extended writing team of the Synthesis Report.

“In India, while there is an acknowledgment of the need to mitigate and adapt simultaneously, most action is incremental,” Singh, Senior Research Consultant at the Indian Institute for Human Settlements, Bengaluru, told The Wire. “Adaptation in particular is continuously focusing on short-term measures.”

She took the example of coastal areas, which are witnessing coastal erosion, salinisation, and flooding simultaneously, she said. However, infrastructure such as sea walls or geotubes alone will not be adequate, she said.

“The synthesis report draws on WGII [Working Group] and WG III to demonstrate that bundles of adaptation and mitigation actions are necessary, and more effective in the long run. This is what India needs to focus on and fund,” Singh added.

In the case of our adaptation programmes, part of the confusion also stems from the fact that these cannot be easily distinguished from general development interventions, commented Thomas.

“In a hypothetical situation without the current thrust on climate action, many projects on ‘water conservation’, ‘sustainable livelihoods’ or ‘resilient agriculture’ would have happened anyway since they are crucial to development and improvement of living conditions,” he told The Wire.

“So, probably one needs to look at the various development interventions, even those that are not explicitly stated to be speaking to climate action goals, as a whole in assessing funding allocations, priorities and interventions. So, I would argue that the government needs to strengthen activities including under [the] MGNREGA since they do not just enhance livelihoods, but directly or indirectly speak to climate action goals as well.”

The government, incidentally, has slashed fund allocation for the MGNREGA – the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, which aims to provide at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment every year to every rural household in which its members take up unskilled manual labor – in this year’s Union Budget. It allocated only Rs. 60,000 crore for 2023-24, lower than the budget estimates for 2022-23 (Rs. 73,000 crore), as The Wire reported.

Climate resilient development

The Synthesis Report also touched on the importance of climate-resilient development, wherein adaptation and mitigation measures to counter climate change also support sustainable development. As per the Report, the window of opportunity for enabling this is “rapidly narrowing”.

“Investing in development props societies towards resilience,” said Singh. “The report articulates this as climate-resilient development and Figure 7 shows how climate actions can contribute to different SDGs. So it is not a question of whether we should use development funds for climate change but rather how we can effectively use existing funds to meet these complementary goals.”

One of the important aspects that the report also focuses on is the interdependence of ecosystem and human health, Mukherji said. According to her, the dualistic model of development versus environment that we tend to apply needs to be rethought.

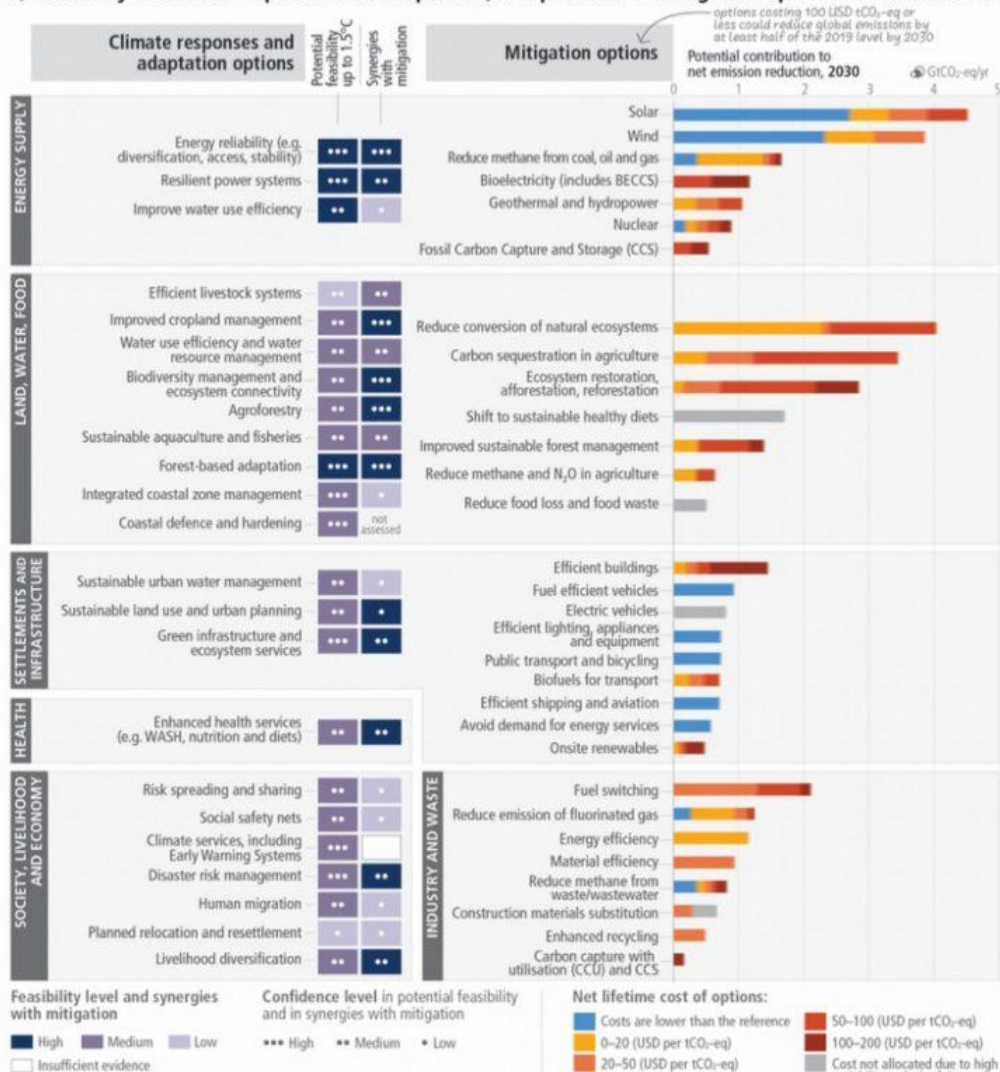
“What is happening in the Himalayas in the name of development is really not the direction,” she said.

“There are things that can be done differently, and that can make us more climate resilient overall,” Mukherji said.

“We have seen several crises unfolding in India recently...subsidence, Joshimath, drying up of springs...these [suggestions] need to become a strong basis for action.”

There are multiple opportunities for scaling up climate action

a) Feasibility of climate responses and adaptation, and potential of mitigation options in the near-term



b) Potential of demand-side mitigation options by 2050



Source: IPCC Report (<https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/>)

Source:

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