

**CLIMATE FRAMEWORKS:  
IMPLICATIONS, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS  
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*What makes a “good framework”?*

*Critical Reflections on the ‘Equity/ Southern Perspective’*

**SPEAKING NOTES**

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My thanks to the Royal Society for this opportunity to share some views, and my apologies for not being able to join you in person today.

In this brief overview, I will provide an introduction to some mainstream ‘equity/Southern’ perspectives on climate change and then offer some personal views from our own work on climate change in India, and with Indian diaspora communities across the world, on what is needed.

**1. The Traditional View**

The traditional views associated with developing countries of the key elements required for a long term, universal regime that meets criteria of fairness, efficacy and practicability for all countries, are well known in climate circles and have been well-articulated for the best part of the last 20 years.

Central to these views is the concern that as non-historical emitters with large poor populations, and negligible per-capita emissions, developing countries should not be expected to shoulder the burden of emissions reductions. Development pathways cannot be compromised as a result of climate change and developing countries need legitimate ‘room to develop’.

The most extreme – though minority - expression of this view sees climate change as some kind of neo-colonial plot out to undermine the growth and emergence of developing countries.

Both views, however, form part of the conventional – and largely accepted - wisdom on how climate change is viewed from and in ‘the South’.

It is also largely agreed – and legally reflected in the UNFCCC regime - that equity demands that historical emitters – who are far better placed with economic, technological and institutional resources – should shoulder the climate change burden and make deep and substantial cuts in their GHG emissions.

## **2. More Recent Articulations**

These traditional views have been further refined in recent years with a growing emphasis on the need for **adaptation** efforts to be included in more meaningful ways as part of future international climate change regimes.

An important articulation of some the most recent ‘views from the South’ is reflected in the Sao Paulo proposal (August 2006).

This proposal derives from efforts of the BASIC Project to distil a set of key elements that could form the basis of an agreement on future international climate policy. It includes the work and insights of 40+ individuals from 25 research and policy institutions from Brazil, China, India, South Africa and a range of experts from other countries.

Its Executive Summary reads as follows:

The Sao Paulo proposal reflects the principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. Climate change is framed in the context of sustainable development. The proposal deals with targets and mechanisms to reduce the level of GHG emissions seen by the atmosphere. Processes and actions to measure progress against the long term climate goal of avoiding dangerous climate change are also set out.

The proposal establishes a stable regime to encourage the required long-term structural shifts while retaining flexibility to accommodate changing circumstances. Elements relating to **adaptation, technology development and transfer**, and **sustainable development** are included because a broader package allows more trade-offs, which can generate support among more countries. Procedurally, the new elements could be implemented through a combination of actions under the

UNFCCC and revisions to the Kyoto Protocol. Alternatively, they could also take the form of a new protocol to the UNFCCC or amendments to Kyoto.

### **3. A Critique of 'the Southern view'**

In my view, the 'Southern perspective' presented above is a caricature of reality. Outside of the handy worldview of political blocs such as the G-77/China, the reality of the world is much more complex and not captured by easy labels such as 'South' or 'developing' - which continue to be bandied about without too much self-reflection in international fora.

In reality, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the 'South' or 'developing world' is infinitely more diverse and defies the easy categorisation that political traditions and ideological expediency ascribe to it.

For example, the inconvenient truth is that countries at immediate risk of climate change such as Small Island States, banded together in AOSIS, are given short shrift by more powerful middle-income nations such as India and China, who are more effectively able to set agendas on behalf of the 'developing world'.

A 'southern perspective' set by countries such as Tuvalu or Vanuatu would look considerably different compared to that set by India or Egypt.

Perpetuating the mythology that the interests of a space and nuclear power such as China are the same as Chad or Columbia does not do a service to anyone. Least of all to the poor in these countries for whom an aggressive, pro-active agenda on climate change is the only guarantee of future prosperity and stability.

### **4. What is Needed?**

Current global climate politics are abysmally 'unfit for purpose'. The carving up of the world into 'developed' and 'developing' countries is not only archaic, it has created a group-think and self-justifying logic among these blocs that has hidden diversity, masked interests and obstructed the emergence of truly co-operative global solutions.

Finding a politics more suited to the precarious climate-constrained age we are living in, will require a return to first principles, brave new thinking and new mindsets.

The first principles are to recognise a common human interest in a pro-active response to climate change. With every passing day, and every

new scientific discovery, climate science becomes ever more incontrovertible on the need for urgent action now.

Secondly, we need to recognise that equity and justice are global principles - not just the preserve of one set of countries. Equity, fair play and justice are just as relevant in the highly unequal United States as they are in the highly unequal India. They should be the driving principles on climate change in all countries to ensure socially just outcomes – not only in some countries.

Thirdly, if our bloc politics are a constraint on action, we need to change them. Thinking 'out of the box' may be difficult for bureaucrats and others with a vested interest in the institutional status quo, but change is possible.

Progressive politicians, business leaders, civil society organisations and opinion formers have a key role to play in articulating a new **global politics of the possible** and drive change in a new forward-looking direction.

Climate change must be seized as a new agenda of hope and opportunity to galvanise a new generation of leaders for whom action counts, not rhetoric, and who are committed to making positive change happen.

Our ***Climate Challenge India*** campaign – which is inspired by this thinking – has shown that it is possible to change mindsets and galvanise people with a positive agenda of the necessary and the achievable.

Our goal is to change the way India thinks, talks and acts on climate change – in our own interest as a nation. There is no reason why this should not be possible. We just have to make it so.

In conclusion, the current global politics on climate change are unfit for purpose. If we are to craft truly useful and effective Climate Frameworks we will have to go beyond what is currently on offer. Humanity, imagination and a will to succeed are what we need.

Thank you for your attention.

About the Speaker:

**Malini Mehra** is founder & chief executive of CSM, an India and UK-based non-profit. CSM has pioneered work on corporate responsibility, sustainability and climate change since its inception in 2000. CSM's '[Climate Challenge India](#)' campaign - the first of its kind in India – has just been voted one of the world's top five climate campaigns by COM+/ CGIAR. Named an *Asia 21 Young Leader* by the Asia Society in 2007, Malini is a political scientist and gender specialist trained at Smith College and the Institute of Development Studies (Univ of Sussex). She brings more than two decades of experience from the voluntary sector, government, business, academia and inter-governmental organizations including the UN. She was present at Kyoto in 1997 where she led the input of Friends of the Earth International. More recently, Malini was the architect of the UK's innovative 'Sustainable Development Dialogues' with emerging markets; served as a member of Kofi Annan's 'High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on UN-Civil Society Relations'; and advises companies including UNILEVER, BHP Billiton and Fortis. An Indian citizen, Malini speaks six languages and splits her time between India and the UK.

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