

## BRICS Environmental Cooperation

**Mains:** *GS II - International Relations*

### Why in News?

*India's chairship of BRICS and the hosting of the 12th BRICS Environment Ministers' Meeting in New Delhi on August 18 reflect its commitment to placing environmental sustainability at the heart of development cooperation.*

### What is the background?

- **Global environmental challenges** - The contemporary world faces a convergence of environmental challenges—*climate change, biodiversity loss, land degradation, forest fires, resource depletion and rising disaster risks.*
- These challenges are particularly significant for developing countries, where environmental vulnerability often intersects with poverty, livelihood insecurity and developmental needs.
- **Role of BRICS** - In this context, BRICS has emerged as an important platform for advancing a people-centric and inclusive approach to sustainable development.
- With BRICS countries accounting for nearly **half of the world's population, around 40 per cent of global GDP** and a substantial share of international trade, the grouping has considerable potential to shape global environmental governance.

### What is India's approach to Brics?

- **Humanity First** - India's approach to BRICS is rooted in the principle of "**Humanity First**".
- This reflects the understanding that environmental policies must not be viewed in isolation from livelihoods, economic development, social equity and the aspirations of developing societies.
- **Indian Initiatives** - India's schemes such as **Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment)** and **Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam** demonstrate how environmental protection can be linked with individual responsibility, community participation and ecological restoration.
- Such initiatives promote a shift from purely technology-driven environmentalism towards behavioural change and community ownership.
- **Relevance of India's approach** - This approach is particularly relevant for developing countries, where environmental policies must simultaneously address poverty alleviation, employment generation, energy security and ecological sustainability.

## What are the four pillars of BRICS environmental cooperation?

- **Promoting Sustainable Lifestyles** - Unsustainable consumption and production patterns are major drivers of environmental degradation.
- The **sustainable lifestyles** agenda seeks to encourage responsible consumption, behavioural change, environmental awareness and knowledge-sharing.
- Mission LiFE provides an important framework in this regard by encouraging individuals and communities to become active participants in climate action.
- Rather than placing the entire burden on governments, it promotes a collective responsibility involving citizens, businesses and institutions.
- **Afforestation, Forest Fire Management and Disaster Resilience** - Forests are critical for biodiversity conservation, carbon sequestration, water security and rural livelihoods.
- However, increasing forest fires, land degradation and climate-induced disasters are threatening ecosystems across the developing world.
- BRICS cooperation in **integrated landscape restoration, forest-fire preparedness, early-warning systems and disaster resilience** can help member countries strengthen their capacity to respond to such challenges.
- Modern technologies such as **remote sensing, satellite-based monitoring and artificial intelligence** can complement local and traditional knowledge.
- This combination can improve early detection of forest fires, ecosystem monitoring and disaster preparedness.
- **Circular Economy** - The traditional “**take-make-dispose**” model of economic growth places enormous pressure on natural resources.
- A circular economy seeks to reduce waste by promoting resource efficiency, reuse, repair, recycling and recovery.
- For BRICS countries, the circular economy has the potential to simultaneously advance environmental protection and economic development.
- Cooperation in research, innovation, technology transfer and capacity building can help create green industries, sustainable jobs and new economic opportunities.
- It can also reduce dependence on virgin resources and minimise pollution and waste generation.
- **Climate Adaptation and Resilience** - Climate change is no longer merely a mitigation challenge; **adaptation has become an urgent developmental necessity**.
- Developing countries often face disproportionate climate risks despite having contributed relatively less to historical greenhouse-gas emissions.
- The BRICS emphasis on **people-centric and community-based adaptation** is therefore significant.
- Traditional, indigenous and local knowledge can provide valuable insights into water management, agriculture, disaster preparedness and ecosystem conservation.
- Integrating such knowledge with modern science and technology can produce solutions that are locally appropriate, culturally sensitive and more effective on the ground.

A key principle underlying India's approach is **Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC)**.

- Environmental responsibility cannot be separated from historical emissions, developmental inequalities and differences in national capacities.
- Developing countries require adequate **finance, technology transfer and capacity building** to undertake ambitious climate and environmental action without compromising their legitimate developmental aspirations.
- Thus, an effective global environmental framework must balance environmental ambition with **equity, climate justice and energy security**.

### How is India's development-environment balance?

- **Emission reduction** - India has reduced the **emissions intensity of its economy by 37.38 per cent between 2005 and 2022**.
- While non-fossil sources accounted for **54.18 per cent of installed electricity capacity as of June 30, 2026**.
- These developments indicate the possibility of pursuing economic growth while progressively reducing the environmental intensity of development.
- India's **Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) for 2031-2035** further demonstrates its effort to integrate climate action with inclusive development and energy security.
- However, India's transition must remain sensitive to the realities of a large population, developmental inequalities, employment needs and the continuing importance of affordable and reliable energy.

*India's own experience demonstrates that economic development and environmental responsibility need not be contradictory.*

### What are the challenges ahead?

- **Dissimilarities** - Member countries differ significantly in their economic structures, energy mixes, environmental priorities and institutional capacities.
- Balancing rapid economic growth with ecological sustainability will therefore require sustained consensus-building.
- **Supporting constraints** - Furthermore, environmental commitments can succeed only when supported by adequate finance, technology and institutional capacity.
- There is also a need to ensure that the transition towards a green economy remains **just and inclusive**, particularly for workers and communities dependent on carbon-intensive sectors.

### What could be done?

- **Development of common platform** - BRICS can strengthen its environmental role by developing a **common knowledge and technology platform**, expanding cooperation in climate-resilient infrastructure and disaster management, facilitating green technology transfer and promoting sustainable finance.

- It should also deepen cooperation among cities, universities, research institutions, businesses and local communities.
- Greater emphasis on **nature-based solutions, circular economy models, ecosystem restoration and climate-resilient agriculture** can generate both ecological and socio-economic benefits.
- India can further leverage its experience in Mission LiFE, renewable energy expansion, digital public infrastructure and community-based environmental programmes to facilitate South-South cooperation.
- **From Declarations to Implementation** - The real significance of BRICS environmental cooperation lies not merely in the adoption of declarations but in their **implementation**.
- Under India's chairship, practical outcomes have included principles relating to sustainable lifestyles, integrated landscape management, forest-fire preparedness and community-based adaptation, alongside technical reports, dialogues, platforms and knowledge-sharing mechanisms.
- The next step should be to translate these commitments into measurable outcomes through:
  - Greater climate and environmental finance for developing countries.
  - Affordable access to green technologies.
  - Enhanced cooperation in disaster-risk reduction.
  - Cross-border knowledge-sharing and scientific research.
  - Greater participation of local communities and indigenous groups.
  - Stronger monitoring mechanisms and measurable environmental targets.
  - Promotion of green jobs and sustainable livelihoods.

## What lies ahead?

- BRICS represents an important opportunity to reshape the relationship between **development, environment and equity**.
- Its collective strength can help ensure that environmental governance is not limited to global declarations but translates into tangible improvements in ecosystems, livelihoods and community resilience.
- India's chairship has placed the principles of **people-centricity, sustainability, equity and "Humanity First"** at the centre of environmental cooperation.
- The ultimate measure of success will be whether these principles produce cleaner economies, healthier ecosystems, resilient communities and sustainable livelihoods.
- The path ahead should therefore not be a choice between development and environmental protection.
- Rather, BRICS must demonstrate that **inclusive development, climate action and ecological sustainability can reinforce one another**, creating a future in which both people and the planet can prosper.

## Reference

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