Climate Action Summit 2019 - Mitigation and Adaptation

What is the issue?

- The Climate Action Summit took place at New York recently.
- Given the historical emphasis on mitigation, it is time to reflect on the benefits of 'adaptation' to 'mitigation'.

What is Climate Action Summit?

- The UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, hosted the 2019 Climate Action Summit.
- The Summit was held to boost ambition and accelerate actions to implement the 2015 Paris Agreement on Climate Change.
- It took place amidst one of the largest environmental protests ever and a heart-wrenching speech from Greta Thunberg.

What is the point of concern?

- The summit seems to be based on the age-old assumption that adaptation to climate change has its limits, and mitigation deserves more emphasis.
- But, large parts of the underdeveloped and the developing world might not have the wherewithal for mitigation.
- Worryingly, there is scant acknowledgement of this fact by the UN.
- So given the reality, the true need is more focus on adaptation than mitigation.

How has the Green Climate Fund worked?

- Historically, mitigation projects have always been preferred for funding over adaptation projects.
- But, the Green Climate Fund (GCF) remained a rare exception.
- It offered funding for both mitigation and adaptation, while being guided by the UNFCCC principles and provisions.
- At present, the share of funds allocated by GCF to adaptation projects is 24% and mitigation 42%.
- The balance 34% is classified as "cross-cutting", but with a larger mitigation component.
- The low level of funding to adaptation can be attributed to two factors:

i. adaptation is a new endeavour without much “expertise” available
ii. adaptation primarily provides local benefits

What are the implications of this shortfall?

- It is felt that the GCF has failed to channel funding to the most vulnerable communities in the most vulnerable countries.
- [These include the communities in the least developed countries (LDCs) and small island developing states (SIDS).]
- This is largely due to GCF’s mandate to act as a “bank”, seeking returns on its investments.
- The GCF focusses on fund management capacities of both recipient country governments and implementing entities.
- This has made the access to large-scale funding difficult.
- In absence of revenue streams, adaptation projects have mostly remained micro and small, and thus incremental rather than transformative.
- The GCF also insists on genuine adaptation projects, not development proposals dressed up as adaptation.
- Due to this approach, adaptation projects from Bangladesh and Ethiopia have been rejected lately.

What is a possible solution?

- A solution for this may be found in the Generic Adaptation Decision Framework (GADF).
- The GADF was proposed in an article in the Journal of Indian Ocean Region.
- The GADF has been proposed to help rationalise between choices of -
    1. in-situ adaptation (adaptation in the vulnerable region)
    2. managed retreat (movement to safer regions)
- The GADF suggests that managed retreat should be thought of if three conditions are satisfied:
    1. the socio-economic well-being under the business-as-usual (or status quo) is diminishing
    2. the cost of in-situ adaptation is higher than the business-as-usual scenario
    3. net current value of ex-situ adaptation (or strategic and managed retreat) is highest of all the adaptation scenarios
- On managed retreat being the best option, development of the host location could be designed to generate a revenue stream for private investors as well as the GCF.
- Even the source location could generate revenue through forest regeneration and tourism concession.

How does Sundarbans delta offer an example?

- The Sundarbans delta has been encountering a relative-mean-sea-level rise of the Bay of Bengal at the rate of 8 mm/year over the last decade.
- It is also subject to regular instances of land-loss and disappearance of islands.
- The proportion of high intensity events (cyclones) appears to be increasing, possibly as a result of rising sea surface temperatures.
- Given these, the GADF has an application in the Sundarbans delta.
- A long-term strategy for adaptation and mitigation for the delta is proposed by the WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature) India Vision 2050.
- This comes in the form of a managed retreat of population by 2050, and regeneration of mangrove forests in the vacated vulnerable zone.
- The scenario of a "managed retreat" by 2050 will yield a net economic benefit of 12.8 times as that of the status quo or "business-as-usual".

What could be done?

- A refined GADF and its application could be part of a GCF grant programme.
- The GCF is also required to channelise up to $100 billion from 2020 annually to the developing countries for both mitigation and adaptation projects.
- So, a recourse to a refined GADF could serve all the stakeholders well.

Source: Business Line

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