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COP30, Climate Justice and the Future of Agriculture in India

Mains: *GS II – International Agreements| GS III – Environment*

Why in News?

Recently, The COP30 climate summit held in Belém, Brazil—at the heart of the Amazon—took place amid indigenous resistance, ecological fragility, and growing global inequality.

What are the contradictions of the COP30?

- **Demands of Developed countries** – Developing countries entered COP30 demanding *stronger commitments on climate finance* and adaptation, while scientific bodies reiterated the urgency of rapid decarbonisation.
- **Brazil's Reiteration** – The Brazilian presidency attempted to re-centre the discourse around justice, equity, and ecological integrity—terms that had gradually faded from climate diplomacy.
- **The Contradictions** – The final outcomes exposed persistent contradictions in multilateral climate governance:
    - Countries expressed intent to "transition away from fossil fuels" but *avoided firm commitments to an unequivocal phase-out.*
    - Adaptation finance received rhetorical support *without binding targets.*
    - A measurable global *goal on adaptation finance was deferred* despite strong lobbying from developing countries.
    - A new framework for agricultural emissions reporting was introduced as voluntary, yet implicitly signalled future obligations.
- These outcomes underscored the structural asymmetries that continue to shape global climate negotiations.

How agriculture emerging as a new climate battleground?

- **Agriculture** – Although agriculture was not a formal agenda item, it emerged as a highly contested issue at COP30.
- **Importance for India** – This is particularly significant for India, where agriculture employs nearly half of the workforce, dominated by small and marginal farmers.
- The sector is most exposed to climate risks but least protected by global finance.
- **Reasons for scrutiny on agriculture** – The scrutiny on agriculture intensified due to:
    - Methane emissions from livestock and paddy cultivation.

    - Nitrous oxide emissions from fertiliser use.
- **Issues with the Guidelines** – The Belém guidelines encouraged improved reporting of agricultural emissions and adoption of "best practices" for mitigation.
- While voluntary, *these guidelines indicate a political shift*—largely led by developed countries—towards integrating agriculture into mitigation frameworks.
- **Implications for India** – For India, the implications are profound:
    - Methane emissions are deeply embedded in mixed crop-livestock systems, and proposals to reduce cattle populations ignore their economic, social, and ecological role in smallholder livelihoods.
- Such technocratic approaches risk overburdening small farmers while leaving industrial agriculture largely unchecked.

How climate finance remain as the persistent fault line?

- **Climate finance** – It remained the most entrenched divide at COP30.
- **Demand from developing countries** – Developing countries demanded annual funding of USD 300–400 billion by 2030 to meet adaptation needs. The final agreement, however, merely "encouraged" donors to scale up efforts.
- **Key concerns**:
    - The Loss and Damage Fund received only symbolic reinforcement and remains severely underfunded.
    - Financing lacks predictability and grant-based support.
- **Affirmation of Developed countries** – They continued promoting private and blended finance as primary mechanisms.
- For Indian agriculture, this financing gap is critical.
- **Requirement of Sustainable finance** – Climate resilience requires sustained public investment in:
    - Micro-irrigation
    - Watershed restoration
    - Agro-ecological diversification
    - Soil regeneration
    - Rural extension services
    - Climate forecasting systems
- These are public goods that require public expenditure and long-term concessional international finance.
- COP30's failure to establish binding commitments leaves India facing a growing adaptation deficit.

What are the strategy if India at COP30?

- **3 priorities** – India entered COP30 with three strategic priorities:
    - Securing commitments on climate finance
    - Safeguarding policy space for development
    - Ensuring flexibility in agricultural emissions reporting
- **India's success** – India achieved partial success by:
    - Incorporating references to food security and rural livelihoods in the final document.

    - Resisting binding methane reduction targets in agriculture.
    - Ensuring voluntary reporting of agricultural emissions.
- **Drawbacks for India** – However, India failed to secure meaningful breakthroughs on climate finance or binding obligations from developed countries.
    - Domestic vulnerabilities also shaped India's negotiating position.
    - The country faces a deepening agrarian crisis marked by groundwater depletion, heat stress, crop losses, livelihood insecurity, and rising farmer debt.
    - Inadequate domestic adaptation investments and uneven institutional capacity across states weaken India's ability to project a transformative agricultural vision at global forums.

How the climate justice discourse revived at Belém?

- **Important proposers** – COP30 witnessed a revival of climate justice discourse, driven by Brazil's presidency, Indigenous leaders, and the G77+China bloc.
- **Concerns in Amazon** – The Amazon became a symbol of historical exploitation and ecological injustice, highlighting unequal climate impacts:
- **Issues raised by local leaders** – Indigenous leaders highlighted:
    - Land dispossession
    - Deforestation
    - Resource extraction
- **Prospects for India** – These concerns resonate strongly with India's tribal and forest-dependent communities.
- This justice-centred discourse challenged narrow technocratic approaches and re-emphasised the historical roots of the climate crisis.

What lies ahead?

- Climate Justice must be embedded in finance, technology transfer, and regulatory frameworks—areas where COP30 made limited progress.

- COP30 at Belém exposed the limits of international climate governance and the widening divide between those responsible for emissions and those suffering their consequences.
- In India, these inequities are most visible in agriculture, where erratic monsoons disrupt livelihoods, reduce incomes, and deepen rural distress.
- The summit underscores a critical reality: climate justice in India will be shaped not only by energy transitions or industrial policies, but by the future of small and marginal farmers.
- Without shared global responsibility and a genuinely transformative domestic agricultural vision, climate justice will remain an aspiration rather than a lived reality.

Reference

The Hindu| COP30 Contradictions and Solutions

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