

Reforming UNFCCC process

In recent years, climate negotiations have failed to achieve sufficient progress in tackling climate change and its impact. Several ideas have been proposed to reform these talks but it's unlikely that they will be implemented



AMITABH SINHA

THE INTERNATIONAL climate negotiations, held under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), have been facing a credibility crisis in recent years.

Their outcomes have been largely underwhelming as they have not delivered the kind of action required to curb global warming. Developed countries that fail to meet their targets, or deliver on their commitments, have not been held to account. Developing countries, particularly the small and most vulnerable of them, have repeatedly complained that their concerns are often ignored, and that the negotiations have failed to deliver climate justice.

Also, the withdrawal of the United States from these negotiations, following the return of Donald Trump to the White House this year, has threatened to make the entire process irrelevant.

As a result, there has been an effort to re-infuse trust and confidence in the system in the lead-up to the COP30 meeting in Brazil which will take place in November. As the host of the COP30, Brazil has been actively engaged with other countries to explore the possible steps that can be taken in this direction.

The annual mid-year climate meeting in Bonn, Germany, which wrapped up last month, discussed the ideas and suggestions submitted by countries, climate groups, and non-government organisations, to reform the system and make it more effective.

Suggestions for reforming climate negotiations

The Bonn meeting, held in the second half of June, acknowledged that the "growing scale and complexity" of the climate negotiations presented challenges. It also emphasised the need to "improve the efficiency of the UNFCCC process in a transparent and inclusive manner".

However, the proposals that were included in the discussions were not radical.



The closing plenary of the Bonn summit on June 26. UN Climate Change

Amongst the things proposed was streamlining agenda items to eliminate overlapping or redundant issues, and asking countries and observer groups to restrict the length of their statements to allow for more time for negotiations. Notably, it was also proposed that countries limit the size of their negotiating teams. The discussions remained inconclusive, and would continue in the COP30 meeting.

Civil society organisations and climate advocacy groups, which have been at the forefront of the demands to reform the UNFCCC process, have been asking for more fundamental changes. At Bonn, a letter signed by more than 200 such groups, suggested five major reforms. One of them was a demand to allow majority-based decision-making when attempts to find a consensus remain elusive.

The UNFCCC works through consensus, which means no decision is accepted till every country accepts it. In a way, every country has a veto. Getting all of the more than 190 parties to agree to every part of a decision has always been a big challenge. This is often blamed for the lack of ambition in the outcomes of climate negotiations.

The civil society groups suggested that countries that do not have a good track

record of climate action be not allowed to hold the COP meetings. In the last few years, the choice of Dubai and Baku for holding COP meetings has come under criticism as their economies are sustained largely by the fossil fuel industry.

These groups also called for reducing the participation and involvement of representatives of fossil fuel companies and other polluting industries in COP meetings. There have been allegations that these companies influence the outcomes of COP meetings in their favour.

Any decision to reform the UNFCCC process will have to be approved through consensus by all the parties, and it is unlikely that any of the more radical suggestions would go through.

Brazil's bid to rebuild trust in the system

As the host of the COP30, Brazil has to take leadership in ensuring its success. The outcome of this meeting will be measured largely by the faith and confidence that countries, mainly developing and vulnerable ones, are able to put back into the process.

In a recent letter to all the parties, Brazil acknowledged the need for reforms, and asked them to "consider" the future of the

UNFCCC process.

Brazil said long-standing issues such as excessively long agenda items, overlapping themes, scheduling constraints, and barriers that prevent meaningful participation of smaller delegations, needed to be addressed.

The country has also talked about mainstreaming climate conversations in other multilateral forums, including different UN agencies and financial institutions.

It has floated the idea of creating additional multilateral mechanisms that can complement the UNFCCC process, and push the implementation of the decisions taken at climate meetings.

Brazil has also drawn up a list of 30 items on which it would work with other countries to accelerate climate actions.

Developing nations' demand to increase climate finance

For developing countries, the single biggest issue currently is the lack of adequate money to finance their climate actions, and the failure of developed countries to deliver on their obligations to provide climate finance.

To comply with the provisions of the 2015 Paris Agreement, the Baku meeting had to decide on a new finance mobilisation target for developed countries, which, as of now, are under obligation to, collectively, raise at least \$100 billion a year to help developing countries.

While the needs of developing countries were assessed to be at least \$1.3 trillion a year, developed countries agreed to mobilise a sum of just \$300 billion a year, and that too from 2035 onwards.

Developing countries have continued to put pressure on the developed world to take additional steps to increase the availability of finance. They stalled the discussions in the Bonn meeting last month, and managed to force a special meeting on the issue. However, it remained inconclusive. The matter is likely to dominate the discussions at the COP30.

BRICS, a group of nine large and influential developing economies, also weighed in on the subject at its recently concluded meeting in Brazil.

In a separate declaration on climate finance, the BRICS countries asked developed countries to fully deliver on their finance commitments under the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement, while increasing their contribution to adaptation finance.

