

# FAIR ALLOCATION OF EMISSIONS TO END ENVIRONMENTAL COLONIALISM

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## Emissions and International Cooperation:

Human activity evidently has harmed the global environmental system. The role of different states also impacts global environmental policies. Environmental and climate change are among the serious threats we are currently facing. Like politics, there is a clear impact of colonization in the sphere of the global environment. Developed countries with smaller populations are benefitting at the cost of larger and poorer populated countries.

*"Environmental issues affect the welfare of all humankind, both directly and through their interaction with other aspects of international politics, including economic development, trade, humanitarian actions, social development, and even security."*<sup>i</sup>

One of the main threats undoubtedly is ozone layer depletion. Ozone depletion would be a catastrophe and its harm innumerable since the ozone layer helps shield the earth from harmful UV radiations. It was only in the 1970s that scientists discovered that human-made chlorofluorocarbon was harming the ozone layer. This discovery defined the ozone-depletion issue and set a stage for agenda settings in the late 70s and early 80s. This threat demanded international action, which finally began in 1982.

However, ozone protection is not possible without the involvement of both emission-producing and consuming states. There has been a divide on the implementation of the decisions taken to protect the ozone layer in

particular, and the environment in general, between the states. Developed countries - major producers of emissions - have been vetoing the implementations, while large developing countries have been delaying them for the sake of producing large quantities of emissions for their development.

Negotiations proposing binding restrictions on the production of hazardous chemicals, after vigorous discussions, resulted in the ozone regime's first agreement, the 1985 Vienna Convention. Unfortunately, although this convention affirmed the importance of the ozone layer, inclusion of monitoring, research and data exchanges, it did not place any obligations on the hazardous chemicals producers. Following reports about the hole in the Antarctic ozone layer, the negotiations started again and concluded with the Montreal Protocol. Subsequently, a way to deal with emissions was found in the form of two control schedules.

Two control schedules were an endorsement in which industrialized states have emitted almost all of the CFCs and developing countries still needed these chemicals for their economic development. A common agreement here was that addressing global environmental problems is the responsibility of all states but some states have specific responsibilities because of their contribution to the environmental problems and their availability of technological and financial resources to address these problems. To control emissions without major emitters could never be successful; and any regime without these emitters would have been a failure. The Montreal Protocol is widely considered a historic achievement in global environmental politics. This agreement paved the way for significant developments which took place in the future discourses on the global environmental agreements. It was the first treaty that addressed a threat to the global environment through cuts in the production and use of hazardous chemicals.

To address global environment and climate change, a consensus generation and cooperation

among countries are vital. One of the most important steps in this regard is the Paris Agreement, adopted in 2015 and entered into force in 2016. This agreement actually provides a framework for financial, technical, and capacity-building support to the countries that need it.

## International Cooperation

International cooperation on the global environment and climate change is the basis to tackle this issue. Many scholars have proposed different models to craft effective climate change responses. David G. Victor suggests a framework to respond to climate change by returning to three fundamentals of the issue.

*“Effective climate change response requires returning to fundamentals, and here I briefly address three: the demand for international cooperation; the number of countries participating and their interests; and the design of the institutions that aim to promote cooperation.”<sup>ii</sup>*

Global cooperation on climate change is manifested through the interests shared by the states. Any policy for cooperation on climate change can be conceived only after looking through the perspectives of different countries. Almost any country is willing to contribute to the effort to handle the dangers of climate change. Despite having different interests and objectives, there comes a point where all these countries can cooperate to avoid extreme dangers. The difficulty for collective action can never be ruled out given the varying interests between the parties supposed to cooperate.

Another important factor affecting the cooperation on climate change is the involvement of more and more states. The logic behind this argument is that such a global problem requires broad and global involvement. Victor criticizes this argument by putting the example of cooperation of a small number of states with aligned interests.

*“The World Trade Organization, notably, has emerged to be the most effective example of global cooperation by focusing, through the original GATT, on a limited number of countries whose interests were sufficiently aligned to allow cooperation.”<sup>iii</sup>*

Agreements based on core interests are more effective despite having a small number of countries with practical benefits. Involving countries with stakes of interest could prove more effective in cooperation on climate change.

Similarly, the role of international institutions is another factor which Victor discussed in global cooperation on climate change response. Victor criticizes the conventional wisdom based on the practice that the global environmental problems can be solved through global binding treaties.

*“Nonbinding institutions often perform much better. Nonbinding agreements are more flexible and less prone to raise concerns about noncompliance, and thus they allow governments to adopt ambitious targets and far-ranging commitments.”<sup>iv</sup>*

The institutions’ role is significant in reviewing the performance of states involved in such nonbinding agreements. Environmental cooperation is an issue where self-interest plays more than collaboration to implement the agreements. Participants and institutions have learned how to play a role in situations where the number of participants is considerably high. Victor suggests serious cooperation among the most concerned parties.

*“In the area of international cooperation, the solutions lie in efforts to create a club of a small number of important countries and craft the elements of serious cooperation.”<sup>v</sup>*

## Need and Want

International framework conventions on climate change have no importance unless they are not implemented with a true spirit. A just global environmental policy is the only way forward. Climate justice is not possible without a just climate change policy. The question of justice

in climate change and allocation of emissions needs to be answered.

In a situation where “The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change” would be played cleverly by the USA, while all other states want to implement the convention, justice becomes a dream. States and their leaders are bound to take action, whether just or not. What matters most is the choice to be made for a just decision and action.

According to Henry Shue, in order to decide how to tackle the threats to the global environment, there are four questions that are deeply involved in every choice of a plan for action. Shue believes that fair climate change responsibility is possible when we can address these questions:

Allocation of the costs of prevention

Allocating the costs of coping

The background allocation of resources and fair bargaining

Allocation of emissions

## Allocating the costs of prevention

The industrial revolution has resulted in the accumulation of CO<sub>2</sub>, more than what the earth can contain. Every day human activity adds more CO<sub>2</sub> to the earth’s atmosphere. The excessive CO<sub>2</sub> is beyond the capability of natural processes to handle this accumulation, resulting in an increase of surface temperature. Furthermore, some developed countries have been the major contributors of CO<sub>2</sub> and their emission level is also higher than other countries. Meanwhile, poor states need emissions for economic development. Shue suggests that the fair solution is to allocate the costs of prevention.

*“The bills for both must be paid: someone must pay to make the economic development of the poor as clean as possible, and someone must pay to reduce the emissions of the wealthy. These are the two components of the first issue of justice: allocating the costs of prevention.”<sup>vi</sup>*

## Allocating the costs of coping

The second most important question is allocating the costs of coping fairly. How should the costs of coping be allocated so that everyone gets their share in managing global warming?

One suggestion by Shue is “to each his own”, meaning every nation must suffer thus deal with the consequences on its own. But the problem with this approach is that most poor nations have no independent access to their resources. A major portion of their resources is under the control of multinational firms that are remotely operated. So this allocation of costs of coping must be shared fairly. It is necessary to separate between the costs of prevention and coping because the allocation of costs of prevention will directly affect the ability to cope.

## The background allocation of resources and fair bargaining

The bargaining and its outcome between two or more parties can be binding upon the parties only if the bargaining situation fulfills the minimum standards of fairness. No party should be allowed to exploit the position of a weak party while bargaining on the costs of prevention or coping.

## Allocating emissions

There must be a fair mechanism that could share the total emissions of greenhouse gases among nations and individuals. The danger of global warming can be avoided only by putting a stop upon the total net emissions. The total net emissions must be shared among nations up to individuals. A distinction should be made between essential and non-essential emissions. Similarly, this allocation must be able to differentiate between ‘need’ and ‘want’. Some emissions are essential for survival and some are simply luxury.

## Endnotes

- <sup>i</sup> Chasek, et al, 2014, Global Environmental Politics, Ch. 3. Ozone Depletion and Climate Change, p 15.
- <sup>ii</sup> David G. Victor, (2006), “Toward Effective International Cooperation on Climate Change: Numbers, Interests and Institutions”, Global Environmental Politics 6:3. p 92

- <sup>iii</sup> Ibid., p 95.
- <sup>iv</sup> Ibid., p 97.
- <sup>v</sup> Ibid., p 101.
- <sup>vi</sup> Henry S. (2014), “Climate Justice Vulnerability and Protection” Oxford University Press, pp 47-68.