



INDIA'S SOFT POWER IN CLIMATE CHANGE

by Arunabha Ghosh

Soft power, writes Joseph Nye, is “the ability to shape the preferences of others.” Among other resources of soft power are values, policies and institutions. In the past decade India has deployed these resources on climate matters. In seeking to carve its own niche on climate leadership, India has employed three narratives: the power of example; the power of resistance; and the power of institutional leadership.



POWER OF EXAMPLE

For long, India had urged developed countries to act more forcefully on climate change, while arguing that it needed technology and finance to adopt more climate-friendly pathways. While the demand remains valid, since 2008 it also leveraged policy and market size to drive change domestically.

Energy efficiency has been a significant driver. The Perform, Achieve and Trade scheme mandated energy efficiency targets - and trading of energy saving certificates -

for factories in large industrial sectors, building a quasi carbon market. Other schemes include the Super-Efficient Equipment

Programme for appliances, and a national cooling action plan to develop alternative technologies for air-conditioning and refrigeration. The use of advanced market commitments created a large market for LED light bulbs, drove costs down by 80% within three years, and resulted in over 300 million bulbs distributed. The approach is now being used for efficient fans, air-conditioners, and electric vehicles.

Another example was how fossil fuel subsidy reforms and improved subsidy targeting increased energy access. Since November 2014, the *Pahal* programme has directed subsidies for LPG cylinder into bank accounts of poor households. (Like LED, *Pahal* scaled up a pre-existing pilot scheme begun under the previous government.) By January 2016, it covered 90% of the user base, becoming the world's largest

cash transfer programme. The Give It Up campaign, a behavioural nudge, resulted in 10 million households surrendering their LPG subsidies within the first year. And the *Ujjwala* programme increased access to LPG from 56% of households in 2014 to over 80% by January 2018. Despite challenges, this sequential approach to subsidy reform at scale has burnished India's credentials.

The biggest push has been in renewable energy. When the National Solar Mission began in 2010 (targeting

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22,000 megawatts (MW) by 2022), total installed capacity was 17.8 MW. The renewables goal was revised in 2015 to 175,000 MW (capacity had crossed 69,000 MW by March 2018). Whereas many European countries pushed renewables through consumer subsidies, India adopted reverse auctions and competitive bidding for solar (and, more recently, wind), with tariffs now among the lowest in the world. By demonstrating that market-friendly and fiscally sound policies could be adopted, India upturned the notion that renewables were too costly or only within the reach of advanced economies.

POWER OF RESISTANCE

The second narrative for India’s soft power centres on resistance in climate negotiations. Underlying this has been an emphasis on equity and climate justice. Resistance against injustice has inherent value. India has employed these tactics in global environmental politics since the early 1970s.

After the failed Copenhagen climate summit in 2009, the distinction between the obligations of developed and developing countries progressively eroded. India had to decide whether it would be forced to the table or whether it would come forward with its own plans for combating climate change. When the Paris climate negotiations approached in 2015, India was willing to contribute to climate action through ambitious mitigation plans. But its power of resistance was deployed to enshrine a key principle of “climate justice” back into the Paris Agreement.

For the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol in 2016, to phase-down hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs),

India pushed hard to delay the year of freezing HFC consumption. It emphasised the need to differentiate between its and China’s projected emissions. Even in 2050, India’s unabated HFC emissions would have been 7% of the world total against China’s 31%. The final deal, under which China would freeze in 2024 and India in 2028, demonstrated India’s willingness to be part of a multilateral solution without compromising on differentiation.

In Paris and Kigali, India sought to balance three imperatives: being perceived as a dealmaker not a dealbreaker; retaining flexibility for its growth; and resisting dilution of the principles of equity, justice and differentiated responsibility. Pragmatism in negotiations increased the power of its principles. Resistance was central to India’s position but not an obstacle. This approach will now be tested as the Paris rulebook negotiations drag on through 2018.

POWER OF LEADERSHIP

India’s diplomatic tact and political leadership were best demonstrated when it joined hands with France to launch the International Solar Alliance (ISA). Announced on 30 November 2015, ISA has moved at a steady pace.

In November 2016, its Framework Agreement opened for signature. By November 2017 15 countries had already ratified the Agreement, which meant that on 6 December, ISA was born as the world’s newest treaty-based intergovernmental organisation. When its Founding Conference was held in New Delhi in March 2018, 61 countries had signed the Framework Agreement, and 32 had ratified it.

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India’s actions on climate change are currencies for its soft power. It has used shifts in domestic policies, pursued values of equity and justice to manoeuvre in international negotiations, and upended received wisdom on the ability of developing countries to conceptualise and lead international institutions. These are significant examples of soft power, in principle and in practice. But these are also works in progress, and face the perils of policy reversal or insipid execution. Soft power continues to rely on hard delivery.

Dr Arunabha Ghosh is CEO, Council on Energy, Environment and Water (<http://ceew.in>). Twitter: @GhoshArunabha

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