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## The evolution of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR): From principle to practice

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### Abstract

International climate governance depends on the principle of CBDR that protects both developed and developing nations during emissions reduction and sustainable development efforts. The UNFCCC introduced CBDR in 1992 with later updates in the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement. Climate talks now work with a more adaptable system for splitting developed and developing countries even though they began as strict categories.

This study explores how CBDR developed into its present form after Kyoto and addresses its existing problems plus predicted options. The relationship between rich countries and emerging markets now depends on how much they produced in the past and what resources they have compared to their financial support requirements. The report reviews the importance of global organizations when sharing climate funds and technology. Through its advocacy work, India takes the lead in shaping how the framework of CBDR will develop in the future.

The study shows that changes in climate governance require us to fix the existing principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibility by making it work better across different situations. Climate governance requires new rules that blend measurements of personal emissions with country prosperity levels and different usage of each sector to bring fairness to global climate action.

**Keywords:** Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR), climate governance, equity in climate action, climate finance and technology transfer, India's role in climate diplomacy

### Introduction

All nations share ecological responsibilities for climate response but they have differing levels of duty based on Common but Differentiated Responsibility (CBDR) principles. Through the 1992 UNFCCC introduction, CBDR established all states should work to protect nature but more emissions and economic strength will require developed nations to take bigger steps (Shapovalova 2020) <sup>[14]</sup>.



Source: (Arvoreagua, 2023) <sup>[1]</sup>

Fig 1: Definition of CBDR

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### Origins in International Environmental Law

The basic principles of justice and fairness underpin CBDR according to Principle 7 of the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (Punj, 2021) <sup>[10]</sup>. Industrialized nations lead environmental action at present because they produce the most greenhouse gases in history (Kolmaš, 2022) <sup>[7]</sup>. Various reports indicate nations with better economic status have not fulfilled their heightened responsibility in supporting developing countries with technological and monetary resources (Qiao-Franco, 2020) <sup>[11]</sup>.

### Historical Emissions and Economic Disparities

Developed nations that were central to changing the climate through heavy industrial production for 200 years must now share emission reduction responsibilities most severely with developing countries that they did not impact in their development (Chen, 2021) <sup>[5]</sup>. The equality concept of climate justice creates a conflict about who will bear accountability (Batista-Pritchard, 2024) <sup>[3]</sup>.

### Research Significance

The research must examine how CBDR developed into this new system because countries now make voluntary climate change commitments under the Paris Agreement instead of strict rules from the old Kyoto system (Schneider, 2024) <sup>[13]</sup>. This study examines how CBDR has changed as an approach while looking at the obstacles to using it today and its necessary role in maintaining climate fairness.

### Historical Foundations of CBDR

#### Emergence in International Environmental Law

In the last decades, international environmental law created

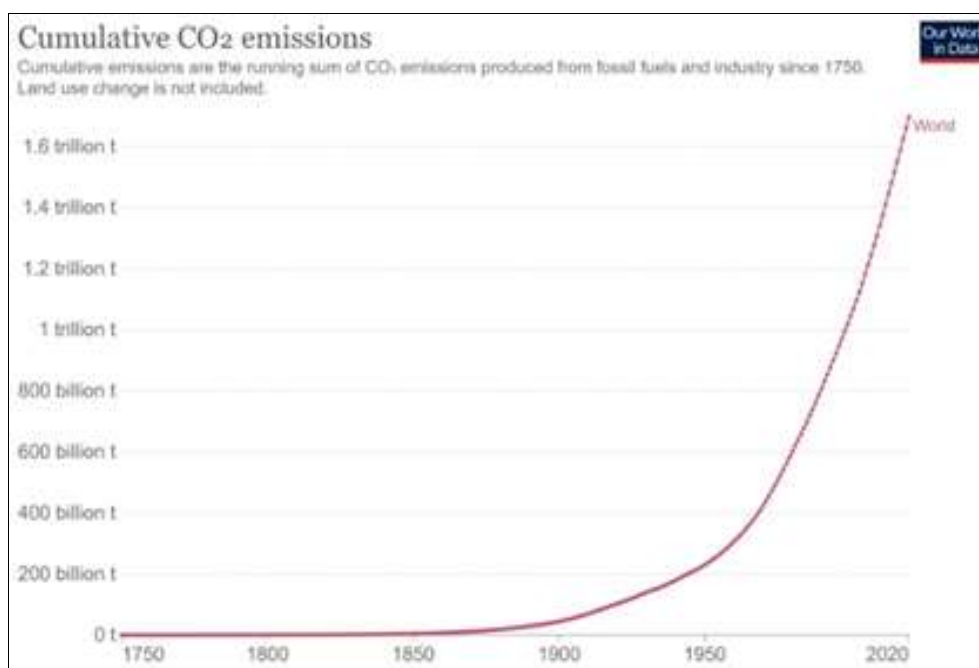
the concept of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) to fix unfairness between nations in their environmental responsibilities. Developing nations created this principle because industrialized countries do more to harm the environment, especially in global warming issues according to Shapovalova (2020) <sup>[14]</sup>.

The 1972 Stockholm Conference on Human Environment marked its first recognition of environmental responsibility since it assigned more accountability to developed nations because they polluted the world before developing nations did (Bilqis & Afriansyah, 2020) <sup>[19]</sup>. Following this, the Brundtland Report of 1987 established the principles of sustainable development while highlighting intergenerational equity. Worldwide environmental protection comes first but countries with advanced systems need to lead by example under these early CBDR standards.

### Institutionalization in Climate Governance

In 1992 the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) became the initial worldwide platform that officially recognized CBDR as essential rules for climate management (Shapovalova, 2020) <sup>[14]</sup>. Under Article 3 of the UNFCCC countries that advanced before discovered technologies became responsible for global emissions and need to handle climate change more intensely than others (Punj 2021) <sup>[10]</sup>.

In 1997 under the Kyoto Protocol Only developed nations including Annex I countries needed to follow emissions reduction rules while Non-Annex I countries ran free from legal requirements (Rosencranz & Jamwal, 2021) <sup>[12]</sup>. The top-down strategy approved basic fairness by letting developing nations develop their economies without demanding them to diminish their climate impact.



Source: (Venditti, 2022) <sup>[16]</sup>

Fig 2: Change in CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions Since 1900

India stood forward to defend this concept which demanded that countries with more greenhouse gas emissions history should lead climate change solutions. According to Qiao-Franco (2020) <sup>[11]</sup>, India wanted developed nations to fund and assist developing nations with their energy transition

process.

Research shows that the ethical basis of CBDR receives criticism because it separates countries into two groups when national power structures today include advanced economies like China and India (Kolmaš, 2022) <sup>[7]</sup>.

Developed nations insist every nation must act now given that emissions continue to grow in major developing countries.

Experts object to developed nations' carbon offset projects in Southern countries since these programs let wealthy countries avoid necessary home emissions cuts (Chen, 2021) [5]. People believe CBDR may not work as planned because it creates equal opportunities yet fails to slow global emission rates.

The principle of CBDR formed the basis for climate governance when it became part of UNFCCC and Kyoto Protocol rules. People argue about improving CBDR today because its central idea of equal treatment needs protection in our shifting global circumstances. The next sections study how CBDR developed within the Paris Agreement times and discuss its impact on modern climate management systems.

**CBDR in the Post-Kyoto Era**  
**The Rise of Emerging Economies**

Major BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) increased emissions quickly after the Kyoto agreement ended due to their fast economic developments. From 2006 onward China replaced the United States as the top emitter of greenhouse gases while India experienced strong emissions growth according to Rosencranz & Jamwal (2021) [12]. The quick economic growth of growing nations required a review of CBDR rules because wealthy nations wanted new pollutants with growing economies to handle more climate-saving work (Kolmaš, 2022) [7].

Economic development challenges in BRICS and other developing countries require them to face less climate responsibility when compared to industrialized nations. They argued that countries responsible for the most emissions in history must pay for this environmental damage based on years of production (Barral 2020) [2]. The ethical disagreement about who should take responsibility for carbon emissions remains a leading problem in climate talks after the Kyoto agreement ended.

showed that developed and developing countries now face major differences in their views. Instead of implementing binding emission targets under Kyoto Protocol rules the Copenhagen Accord introduced voluntary country goals as its basis according to Kolmaš (2022) [7].

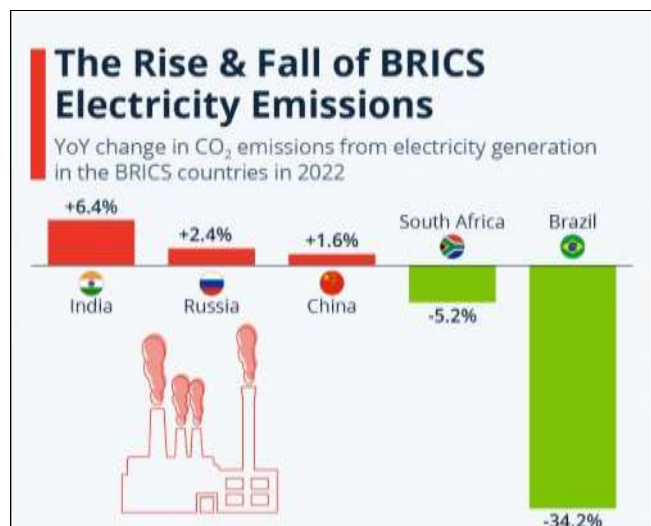
The negotiations between Copenhagen leaders collapsed because developed nations especially the US and EU wanted China and India to accept equal Gato roles before following their own agreed emission limits as outlined by Franco-Qiao (2020) [11]. The lack of agreement on emission reductions forced both parties to agree on voluntary national commitments which later formed the basis of the Paris Agreement.

To help developing nations fight climate change Copenhagen hosted an agreement that required developed nations to gather \$100 billion a year starting in 2020 (Barral 2020) [2].

These extinction targets failed to accomplish their goal and people blamed the CBDR system for weakening instead of strengthening its purpose.

**The Paris Agreement**

In the 2015 Paris Agreement CBDR saw its biggest transformation from top-down control to bottom-up self-differentiation planning (Schneider 2024) [13]. Rather than using strict standards the Paris Agreement allowed each country to create goals that matched their practical possibilities through Nationally Determined Contributions. Nations welcomed this plan but it weakened CBDR because developed countries no longer had mandatory responsibilities (Rosencranz & Jamwal, 2021) [12]. The self-differentiation strategy lets rich countries wiggle out of major climate promises with results pushed onto developing nations according to Shapovalova (2020) [14].

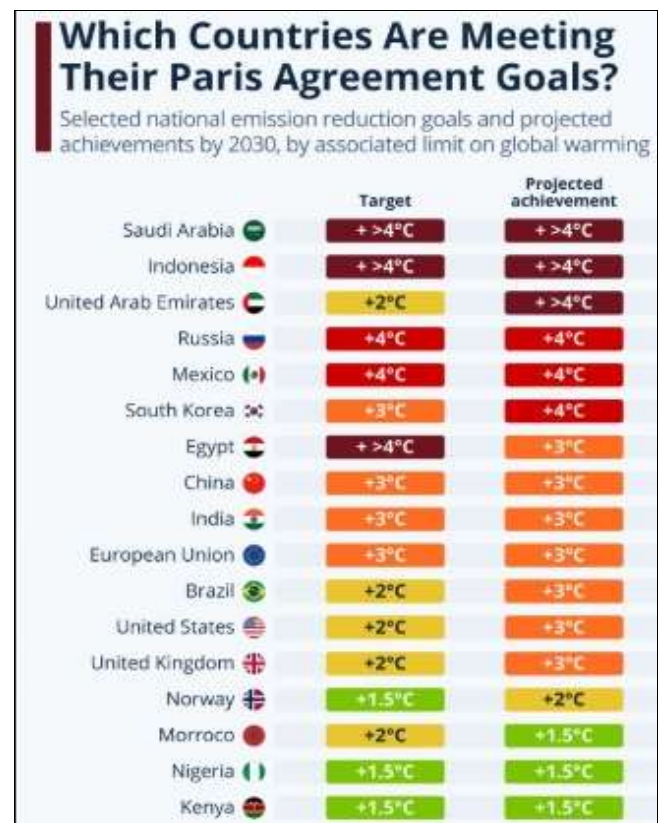


Source: (The Rise & Fall of BRICS Electricity Emissions, 2023)

Fig 3: The Rise & Fall of BRICS Electricity Emissions

**The Copenhagen Accord**

The 2009 Copenhagen Climate Summit (COP15) shifted how people and nations discussed the CBDR principle. The inability to create an official agreement at the summit



Source: (Buchholz, 2021) [14]

Fig 4: Countries Meeting Their Paris Agreement Goals

Paris Agreement finds support from nations because it makes everyone responsible for fighting climate change. Countries under this plan must update and strengthen their NDCs every five years according to Will and Manger-Nestler (2021) <sup>[17]</sup>.

Following Kyoto's end nations have moved from strict bound laws to more voluntary climate action where new economic powers take a greater part. The Paris Agreement now defines CBDR as a practical idea that can be adapted as needed. Different parties continue different discussions about how to split climate finance costs fairly while dealing with past emissions and fairness issues in worldwide climate rulemaking.

**Contemporary Challenges to CBDR  
Developed vs. Developing Countries**

The rule of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) in climate governance has become its biggest point of disagreement. Rich countries believe China and India must do more emissions control now since their economies keep growing according to Kolmaš (2022) <sup>[7]</sup>. According to the United States and EU nations developing countries with higher economic resources should devote greater climate action efforts instead of receiving financial and technological aid from industrialized countries (Schneider 2024) <sup>[13]</sup>.

Developing countries point to their past responsibility as the main factor to link during climate talks. Throughout the Industrial Revolution Western nations created most global greenhouse gas emissions which created their greater ethical and financial duty to stop climate change (Barral 2020) <sup>[2]</sup>.

The G77 + China group urges fellow nations to prioritize economic development, especially in South Asia and Africa until industrialized countries deliver promised climate finance as demanded by underdeveloped nations (Qiao-Franco, 2020) <sup>[11]</sup>.

Climate talks remain strongly dissected because parties can't decide how Cayton Brookstone Development concepts should work today.

**Challenges in Climate Finance and Technology Transfer**

The biggest obstacle to applying CBDR is the fact that developed nations failed to deliver the promised \$100 billion in yearly donations through the Green Climate Fund according to Will and Manger-Nestler (2021) <sup>[17]</sup>. The Paris Agreement shows commitment to fund developing nations but they receive less actual financial support. Developing nations ask for climate damage compensation because they want wealthy nations to pay for climate-related disasters (Shapovalova, 2020) <sup>[14]</sup>.

The main struggle lies with transferring advanced technology systems. For their climate targets developing nations must obtain low-carbon technologies like solar energy systems and techniques to seize and deal with carbon plus farm practices that resist weather changes. Businesses in developed nations hold patents and block the worldwide distribution of these technologies through their exclusive ownership rights according to Rosencranz and Jamwal (2021) <sup>[12]</sup>. The high expense of clean technologies makes them unattainable for the Global South and slows their path toward clean energy.



Source: (Naran et al., 2022) <sup>[9]</sup>

Fig 5: Global Landscape of Climate Finance Data and Methodology Improvements

Developing countries push for balanced technology sharing that involves free climate patents plus help for eco-innovation and public climate tech sharing (Liu et al., 2022) <sup>[8]</sup>. When climate finance and technology sharing remain weak the CBDR principle moves from being a practical solution to an empty framework for global climate justice.

**The Role of Multilateral and Regional Groupings**

International climate talks gain direction through the work of both global and regional associations when implementing CBDR. The G77 + China group supports justice by fighting for fair standards in climate funding and emission targets as

their bloc represents 130 developing nations (Qiao-Franco 2020) <sup>[11]</sup>. They demand top climate action responsibility from wealthy nations who must support developing nations financially and technologically.

Modern EU and US economies now support greater climate responsibility for China and India while reacting against CBDR principles according to Kolmaš (2022) <sup>[7]</sup>. The European Union set up carbon border taxes to restrain trade from countries that emit heavily which developing nations see as illegal trade barriers (Schneider, 2024) <sup>[13]</sup>.

BRICS nations act between these views by accepting climate steps yet expecting wealthy countries to provide

technology and finances first (Barral 2020) <sup>[2]</sup>.

Multilateral diplomacy plays a key role in reaching an agreement between industrialized and developing countries as their interests continue to evolve. Both economic capacity and past accountability need equal treatment to guide international climate policy decisions.

Today CBDR faces three key problems including different national economic priorities, unpaid financial duties, and unequal shared technology benefits. Global political changes and developing-developed country disagreements make current climate talks harder than ever. The task requires developing stronger financial support combined with better tech exchanges and multilateral participation that benefits all countries.

### **Future of CBDR in Global Climate Governance Is CBDR Still Relevant?**

Today's climate governance assumes CBDR's meaning but works differently from its original purpose in the present day. The argument about who should bear what portion of climate change response responsibilities has become more detailed because of worsening climate conditions. CBDR has not achieved worldwide consensus according to experts because developed nations reject it while developing nations lack unified support (Kolmaš, 2022) <sup>[7]</sup>.

The carbon budget issue reveals that available emission slots should go to countries based on their historic emissions according to Shapovalova (2020) <sup>[14]</sup>. Industrialized nations resist this position because they prefer emissions cuts linked to current national abilities instead of acknowledged emissions output (Rosencranz & Jamwal, 2021) <sup>[12]</sup>.

Despite criticisms, CBDR still influences climate diplomacy. In 2015 when the Paris Agreement came into being it included self-differentiation rules enabling each country to set their individual goals and targets. Despite legal weakening, CBDR maintains its essence as the basis for current climate policy discussions (Schneider 2024) <sup>[13]</sup>.

### **Reforming CBDR for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Modern climate governance needs countries divided into flexible groups instead of fixed developed-developing pairings. The current criteria in place fail to align with present economic changes among nations as well as protect small island states (Will & Manger-Nestler, 2021) <sup>[17]</sup>.

The new proposal bases differentiation on both population emissions and economic power instead of fixed nation categories. High-emission developing countries should adopt more responsibility when they receive technology and finance from industrialized nations (Fan, 2024) <sup>[6]</sup>.

Different countries share responsibilities in emission reduction depending on their sectoral contribution levels. Oil-exporting states might focus their reduction efforts on their energy industries whereas industrialized nations would aim to share clean technology advances (Yong & Xin, 2024) <sup>[18]</sup>.

United Nations and multilateral bodies need to validate that developed countries deliver their promised climate funding. Governed nations fell short of delivering the \$100 billion Green Climate Fund plans which harmed the CBDR principle according to Liu *et al.* (2022) <sup>[8]</sup>.

Our climate program seeks both fair adjustments to CBDR standards and economic compatibility to achieve equal national contributions toward solving climate problems.

### **India's Role in Shaping the Future of CBDR**

India holds a central position in future CBDR discussions because it needs to maintain both its financial success and follow international climate agreements. As a leading climate equity player India demands that rich countries reduce emissions first since India produces the third-most carbon emissions worldwide (Qiao-Franco 2020) <sup>[11]</sup>.

India demanded international fairness in climate protection at COP26 and COP27 because rich countries must pay past debts before asking developing nations to cut more emissions (Fan, 2024) <sup>[6]</sup>. The nation supports South-South partnerships especially through the International Solar Alliance (ISA) to help developing nations transition to renewable energy.

India needs to find ways to progress its economy while making progress toward environmental protection. Due to rising energy requirements India needs time to gradually shift away from coal and petroleum despite continuing to deliver cheap power to its people according to Schneider (2024) <sup>[13]</sup>.

India must steer global climate diplomacy and South-South cooperation at the forefront to develop CBDR's next phase as a fair system for managing the climate.

To make CBDR a useful tool in future climate policy need to modify and update the system according to today's global economic norms. Despite the weakening impact of self-differentiation under the Paris Agreement on climate action, CBDR still provides fundamental protection against unfair practices. India needs to guide reforming climate disparity models while providing funding for CBDR to keep it effective in fighting climate change.

### **Conclusion**

From 1992 onwards Common but Differentiated Responsibilities led to important changes in how nations handle climate change during UNFCCC talks. After the Paris Agreement, people began questioning its old method of separating developed and developing nations so the approach opened up to more flexibility.

CBDR has less influence in climate talks because developing nations do not agree and developed nations reject this principle (Kolmaš, 2022) <sup>[7]</sup>. Barral (2020) <sup>[2]</sup> shows the loss of CBDR's power due to the lack of required financial and technical obligations.

CBDR needs changes to avoid fading thus CBDR must adapt to a framework that works across different settings based on how well countries perform economically and their share of national emissions plus what they do in specific industries (Yong & Xin, 2024). A redesigned CBDR needs to adjust between historical duties and modern economic facts for us to tackle climate change through fair worldwide efforts.

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