

Exploring Sub-national State-led Responses to Climate Change: A Case Study of the Assam State Action Plan on Climate Change

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Abstract

Governing climate change is a mammoth task which involves complex interaction and cooperation among various actors and various forms of institutionalized authority within the state, business, and civil spheres. However, the state, owing to its coercive power, still remains the most dominant actor in controlling and mitigating the effects of climate change on both the environment and on people, as policies and regulatory norms, to a large extent, create the space and the framework within which climate change is tackled.

In November 2015, the Assam State Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC) was formally launched as a part of the Centre's initiative to tackle climate change through state-level action plans. Assam, according to several studies, "falls within areas of greatest climate sensitivity, maximum vulnerability, and lowest adaptive capacity". Adding to this very observable vulnerability of Assam is an often under-recognized factor – *demographic shifts and associated economic, social, political, and security-related pressures arising from climate change-induced internal migration within, and external migration into Assam*. Dealing with this problem requires a two pronged approach – first, there arises a need for universally defining terms like "environment refugees" and/or "climate migrants". Second, it not only requires the state to be active in rehabilitation efforts, it also requires conceptualization and creation of alternative livelihoods and sustainable infrastructures in climate change "hotspots" so that inhabitants have other alternatives to migration. Thus, while the adoption of the SAPCC marks a progressive step in the battle against climate change, is it broad enough in its scope? Does it only take into account the effects of climate change in relation to natural resource management and the environment, or does it adopt a more dynamic approach wherein it factors in other variables like the effects (good or bad) of climate change-induced migration?

The study will attempt to assess the situation from the government's point of view. For this, government reports, policy documents, and other relevant publications will be examined. The research is done through an exploratory approach and with qualitative methods. Keeping in mind the primacy of the state with regard to governing climate change, an attempt has been made to explore how the Assam State Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC) is looking to mitigate and control the effects of climate change in Assam in general, and (if at all it is cognizant of, and trying to) address the issue of climate change-induced migration in Assam in particular.

Key words- Assam, climate change, migration, policy

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