

## Sharing the Burden of Carbon Emissions

The Recent 2015 Paris Climate Conference (COP21) aims to achieve a legally binding and universal agreement on climate and keeping global warming below 2°C. It suggested that developed countries must lead the way in taking action by: adopting ambitious emission reduction targets of their own; promoting rapid technological progress, and honouring their aid commitments to the developing countries.

Industrialised countries owe their current prosperity to years of 'historical' emissions, since the start of the industrial revolution. Developing countries have only recently set out on the path of industrialisation and hence, their per capita emissions are still comparatively low. Equity is an essential ingredient of an effective global climate change policy, as reflected in the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) and respective capabilities", set forth in the UNFCCC.

### Carbon Emissions in High and Middle Income Countries

Countries	Carbon emissions metric tonnes per capita 1990	Carbon emissions metric tonnes per capita 2011	Percentage growth in emissions per capita 1990-2011
<b>High-Income Countries</b>			
Australia	15.5	16.5	6
Canada	15.7	14.1	-10
Chile	2.5	4.6	84
Denmark	9.8	7.2	-27
Russia	14	12.6	-10
Singapore	15.4	4.3	-72
South Korea	12.1	3	-75
United States	19.3	17	-12
<b>Middle-Income Countries</b>			
Bangladesh	0.1	0.4	300
Brazil	1.4	2.2	57
China	2.2	6.7	205
India	0.8	1.7	113
Indonesia	0.8	2.3	188
Pakistan	0.6	0.9	50
Sri Lanka	0.2	0.7	250
<b>Low-Income Country</b>			
Afghanistan	0.2	0.4	100

**Source:** World Bank Datasets

High-income countries were responsible for high carbon emissions from 1990 to 2011. While they have gradually reduced the carbon emissions, when compared with the developing nations the percentage growth in emissions per capita 1990-2011 has been slow. With this scenario, not only have today's high-income economies generated about 80 per cent of past fossil fuel-based emissions, but those same emissions have helped carry them to high levels of social and economic well-being. These countries carry the responsibility for the damage but they also have the capacity to repair it.

It is incredibly important for countries to not dismiss the past when assessing the future because these things are not mutually exclusive. Thus CBDR aims to protect countries from bearing an unequal amount of responsibility is much needed. However, the concept is not without its flaws. We cannot only take the past into account we should also look at the present and future. For this reason, responsibilities assigned to countries should be based on their historical role, equity-per capita emissions, and their capacity to implement change. This would ensure that rapidly developing countries are not let off the hook but are instead forced to take on their fair share in creating a sustainable living environment for tomorrow.