

Intervention in GST Roundtable 4 on Integrated and Holistic Approaches

Thank you, co-facilitators, for this opportunity. Let me address your key messages.

Point no. 4

While nations continue to pursue efforts to limit the global temperature increase to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels, and overshoot increases risks to people and planet, we need to plan pragmatically for scenarios of temporary overshoot.

Let me dispose of this point at the outset. The term overshoot is a term that comes from the literature on scenarios that has deep flaws in terms of equitable energy access and supply, income growth and consumption levels across the world. In much of these scenarios, huge levels of negative emissions, especially from afforestation and diversion from other land uses, are assumed, particularly in the developing world, even to meet the target of 1.5 degrees C. The term overshoot implies a situation where having crossed the 1.5 degree target, it is hoped that there are technologies that will bring down the peak warming level, by huge absorption of CO₂ gases and/or reductions of non-CO₂ gases from the atmosphere. These are unproven at best, and where proven are traditional methods such as afforestation that call for deployment at huge scale. While all technological research for dealing with the climate challenge is necessary, it is not clear to us why we should include this as our considered GST outcome, especially given its highly contestable assumptions. The plain reality is simply the likelihood of breaching the 1.5 deg threshold sooner than later.

Point 1.

The Convention and the Paris Agreement are processes that set norms which drive policy outcomes to increase international cooperation on climate, within and beyond the processes themselves.

While the UNFCCC Climate Convention and the Paris Agreement have undoubtedly many processual aspects, it would be particularly ill-posed to emphasise solely these aspects. They are treaties. They are negotiated, signed and adopted and ratified by each Party. And as we well know provides for withdrawal from them as well.

The UNFCCC provides the foundations of the global climate regime, as the academic literature would call it, with the Paris Agreement being a specific agreement under this Convention, membership to the Agreement being contingent on membership to the Convention.

We also emphasize that all Parties have precise obligations and commitments under the Convention and its Paris Agreement, which are based on principles and values that are as clearly laid out. The scope for further detailing of these, including in terms of quantification, do not take anything away from the precision of these obligations and commitments.

Developing countries have long been critical of the developed countries in terms of fulfilment of these obligations and commitments across the arena of mitigation, adaptation and means of implementation. And meeting these will provide the best foundation for trust and confidence.

There are similar issues with the Paris Agreement in terms of implementing the equity and differentiation aspects of the Convention.

This is an issue that is of considerable significance to our consideration of the GST. And our understanding, I repeat, of where we are and how we get here. And this needs to be fleshed out in detail, much of which has already been set out in our other roundtables of mitigation, adaptation and the means of implementation. The question of historical responsibility, of pre-2020 gaps in commitments and implementation and the absence of the meeting the provision climate finance would not be positioned correctly in our outcomes without understanding them in terms of obligations and commitments.

Point 2.

Governments should implement integrated policy packages that mainstream climate resilience and low GHG development, and strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty.

This point has some serious issues, the entire thrust of which is focused on the developing countries. The term low GHG development is hardly a term that fits Annex-I Parties and eradicating poverty is not their context. So we ask, what is this peculiar emphasis that highlights what developing countries should do? The explanations below in the few paras do not lessen this confusion.

Indeed, going to the details below, precisely the opposite of what the Paris Agreement in Article 2.1(b) calls upon, is what is sought to be asked for of developing countries. The article states : Increasing the ability to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change and foster climate resilience and low greenhouse gas emissions development, in a manner that does not threaten food production. Unfortunately enough, we have found that the vast majority of scenarios of the IPCC that recommend stringent mitigation action, lead to serious consequences for food production and food security. It is these scenarios that are now being used to ask all of us to accept global targets.

The real issue is the relationship between development and climate action, that is still an area with huge knowledge gaps that need to be bridged urgently for climate action that does not endanger development.

The trouble with this formulation in point 2, when it is used as mere rhetoric, as the IPCC scenarios demonstrate, is the lack of emphasis of equity and differentiation. These are the two foundations of the international covenant that governs our global climate action efforts. Without equity, the words “eradicate poverty” ring hollow. Unfortunately, the constant

attempts to limit equity, as applicable only in the context of ambition, will only fuel this mistaken emphasis.

Point 3.

Systemic transformations open huge opportunities but are disruptive. A focus on inclusion and equity can increase ambition in climate action and support when it builds trust and solidarity into an upward spiral of ambition and climate action.

While these are hopeful words, these are hardly met in practice. Speculative ambition without feasibility will eventually entail cynicism, while practical, measured and deliberate steps will assist in pragmatic moves forward.

Yet again we meet concepts that ignore differentiation. Systemic transformations fit countries and economies that have reached settled levels of accumulation of wealth, of assets, of infrastructure, of human capabilities and the ability to potentially pursue this indefinitely. Systemic is a term that hardly fits developing countries, the vast majority of whom are indeed striving precisely to develop the systems that would provide them a virtuous cycle of growth and sustainable development, as much as costs and barriers as well as the lack of means of implementation would permit.

Further, the unsustainable production and consumption of the developed world that brings the entire planet to the threshold of the current climate and ecological crises, is hardly called into question in this generality. It is in keeping with this reality, and underlining our own commitment to walking the talk, that India has called for a global movement called LiFE, or Lifestyle for the Environment, a movement away from destructive and unsustainable consumption to mindful and deliberate utilization of natural resources.

Transformational adaptation is a particularly disturbing term, when adaptation is the forced reality for the more than 50 per cent of the world that contributes less than one-sixth of the annual emissions. The majority of these 50 per cent live on less than USD (PPP) 3 dollars per day, much less in terms of real dollars. The enormous assistance and support that this half of humanity requires to meet its needs of survival, adaptation and low-carbon development is truly enormous. And yet today our greatest challenge is the provision of the means of implementation, an area in which obligations and commitments have not been met or kept.

To call this challenge an opportunity seems less than accurate at best.

We urge that the key messages in these points be reformulated, highlighting also the gaps we have noted and providing a more balanced set of messages.

