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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Climate Deaths 10x Higher in Poor Countries — The Cruellest Inequality of Our Time

 **DOWN TO EARTH**

25 March 2026

SUBJECTS COVERED**ENVIRONMENT** **IR****GS PAPERS****GS1** **GS3** **ESSAY****CURATED & WRITTEN BY****Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator & Content Creator •

[linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)

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 Down to Earth

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GS1

GS3

ESSAY

DTE

Down to Earth

MAINS RELEVANCE:

GS Paper 1

GS Paper 3

Essay Paper



INTERVIEW ANGLE

"A new report shows 90% of heat-related deaths by 2050 will occur in countries that contributed least to climate change. How should India frame its position on climate justice at COP31?"

WHY IN NEWS

A Climate Impact Lab report reveals that climate change is projected to cause ten times more deaths per year in poor countries than in rich ones by 2050, with 90% of temperature-related mortality concentrated in low- and middle-income countries.

The Editorial Argument

Down to Earth argues that the report lays bare the “cruellest irony” of climate change: the countries that will suffer the most are those that contributed the least to global emissions. The editorial calls for a fundamental reframing of climate negotiations from “mitigation targets” to “mortality accountability.”

The Data

REGION	PROJECTED NET INCREASE IN DEATHS PER 100,000/YEAR BY 2050
Pakistan	51
Algeria	High (among top 25 worst-affected)
Niger	High (among top 25 worst-affected)
Northern Africa	Greatest increase
Middle East	Greatest increase
Southwest Asia	Greatest increase

Key findings:

- **90% of temperature-related deaths** will occur in LMICs by 2050
- **10x more deaths per year** in poor countries vs rich countries
- The 25 worst-affected countries are almost entirely in the Global South
- Rich countries will see **net reductions** in cold-related deaths (due to warming winters)

The Emissions-Mortality Paradox

COUNTRY GROUP	SHARE OF HISTORICAL CO ₂ EMISSIONS	SHARE OF PROJECTED HEAT DEATHS (2050)
G7 countries	~50%	~10%
Least Developed Countries	~1%	~30%
India	~4% (cumulative)	Among most vulnerable

The editorial argues this asymmetry makes the **Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR)** principle not just a negotiating position but a moral imperative.

Why Poor Countries Are More Vulnerable

- 1 **Outdoor labour:** 60-80% of workforce in agriculture and construction (heat-exposed)
- 2 **Inadequate housing:** No insulation, limited access to air conditioning
- 3 **Weak health systems:** Fewer ICU beds, emergency response capacity, heat action plans
- 4 **Urban heat islands:** Rapid, unplanned urbanisation without green cover
- 5 **Food insecurity:** Heat reduces crop yields, compounding malnutrition and mortality

India's Specific Vulnerability

India is among the most vulnerable major economies:

- **Heat waves are intensifying:** 2024 saw temperatures above 50°C in parts of Rajasthan
- **Agricultural workforce:** ~42% of India's labour force works in agriculture (outdoors)
- **Urban heat:** Delhi, Nagpur, Ahmedabad routinely breach 45°C
- **National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC):** 8 missions, but heat-specific action limited
- **India's Heat Action Plan:** Ahmedabad pioneered (2013), now adopted by 130+ cities

Climate Justice Framework

The editorial calls for three reforms at COP31:

- ❶ **Loss and Damage Fund:** Operationalise the fund agreed at COP27 (Sharm el-Sheikh) with **minimum \$100 billion/year** for LMICs
- ❷ **Climate mortality accounting:** Include projected heat deaths in National Determined Contributions (NDCs) — make mortality a metric, not just emissions
- ❸ **Adaptation finance:** Currently only 21% of climate finance goes to adaptation; this must reach 50%

India's Climate Position

India has committed to:

- **Net zero by 2070** (announced at COP26, Glasgow, 2021)
- **500 GW non-fossil electricity capacity by 2030**
- **50% energy from renewables by 2030**
- **1 billion tonnes CO₂ emission reduction by 2030**
- **Carbon intensity reduction of 45% by 2030** (from 2005 levels)

UPSC RELEVANCE

CBDR, UNFCCC, COP27/28/31, Loss and Damage Fund, NAPCC 8 missions, NDC, Paris Agreement

Impact of climate change on vulnerable populations; regional geography of heat vulnerability

Climate change mitigation and adaptation; environmental justice

“Climate change is not an equal-opportunity crisis — the moral case for differentiated responsibility”

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

CLIMATE IMPACT LAB REPORT:

90% of heat deaths by 2050 in LMICs

10x more deaths in poor vs rich countries

Pakistan: 51 additional deaths per 100,000/year by 2050

Worst-affected regions: Northern Africa, Middle East, Southwest Asia

INDIA'S CLIMATE COMMITMENTS:

Net zero: 2070

Non-fossil capacity: 500 GW by 2030

Renewable share: 50% by 2030

CO₂ reduction: 1 billion tonnes by 2030

Carbon intensity: -45% by 2030 (from 2005)

CLIMATE FINANCE:

Loss and Damage Fund: agreed at COP27 (2022)

Adaptation finance: only 21% of total climate finance

\$100 billion/year target (developed to developing) — not met

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

CBDR: Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (UNFCCC principle)

Paris Agreement (2015): limit warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial

NAPCC: 8 missions (solar, energy efficiency, water, Himalayan ecosystem, green India, sustainable agriculture, sustainable habitat, strategic knowledge)

India's cumulative CO₂ emissions: ~4% of global total

G7 cumulative emissions: ~50% of global total

Sources: [Down to Earth](#), [Time](#)

CURATED & WRITTEN BY

Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

 [linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)

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