

International Solar Alliance: A Case for Indian Solar Diplomacy

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Abstract : International Solar Alliance is the foremost treaty-based global organization concerned with tapping the potential of sun-abundant nations between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn and enables co-operation among them. As a founding member of the International Solar Alliance, India exhibits its positioning as an upcoming leader in clean energy. India has set ambitious goals and targets to expand the share of solar in its energy mix and is playing a proactive role both at the regional and global levels. ISA aims to serve multiple goals- bring about scale commercialization of solar power, boost domestic manufacturing, and leverage solar diplomacy in African countries, amongst others. Against this backdrop, this paper attempts to examine the ways in which ISA as an intergovernmental organization under Indian leadership can leverage the cause of clean energy (solar) diplomacy and effectively shape partnerships and collaborations with other developing countries in terms of sharing solar technology, capacity building, risk mitigation, mobilizing financial investment and providing an aggregate market. A more specific focus of ISA is on the developing countries, which in the absence of a collective, are constrained by technology and capital scarcity, despite being naturally endowed with solar resources. Solar rich but finance-constrained economies face political risk, foreign exchange risk, and off-taker risk. Scholars argue that aligning India's climate change discourse and growth prospects in its engagements, collaborations, and partnerships at the bilateral, multilateral and regional level can help promote trade, attract investments, and promote resilient energy transition both in India and in partner countries. For developing countries, coming together in an action-oriented way on issues of climate and clean energy is particularly important since it is developing and underdeveloped countries that face multiple and coalescing challenges such as the adverse impact of climate change, uneven and low access to reliable energy, and pressing employment needs. Investing in green recovery is agreed to be an assured way to create resilient value chains, create sustainable livelihoods, and help mitigate climate threats. If India is able to 'green its growth' process, it holds the potential to emerge as a climate leader internationally. It can use its experience in the renewable sector to guide other developing countries in balancing multiple similar objectives of development, energy security, and sustainability. The challenges underlying solar expansion in India have lessons to offer other developing countries, giving India an opportunity to assume a leadership role in solar diplomacy and expand its geopolitical influence through inter-governmental organizations such as ISA. It is noted that India has limited capacity to directly provide financial funds and support and is not a leading manufacturer of cheap solar equipment, as does China; however, India can nonetheless leverage its large domestic market to scale up the commercialization of solar power and offer insights and learnings to similarly placed abundant solar countries. The paper examines the potential of and limits placed on India's solar diplomacy.

Keywords : climate diplomacy, energy security, solar diplomacy, renewable energy

Conference Title : ICGREP 2022 : International Conference on Green, Renewable Energy and Power

Conference Location : Bali, Indonesia

Conference Dates : January 14-15, 2022