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Comparison of Greenhouse Gas Emissions by Different Countries

Monika Khurana[1] and Jia Sharma[2]
[1]Professor, Department of Applied Sciences, School of Engineering & Technology, Sushant University, Sector-55, Gurugram-122003-Haryana
[2]Student, School of Design, Sushant University, Sector-55, Gurugram-122003-Haryana
monikakhurana@sushantuniversity.edu.in

Abstract

Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions play a significant role to environmental health. Recently, the GHG emissions have been increasing gradually all over the world posing a great hazard to the environment and ecosystem at large. All the stakeholders and policymakers across different countries are finding a sustainable solution to mitigate this problem to save and protect the environment from these harmful gases. The GHG are emitted mainly from the burning of fossil fuels, transport, and industrial activities. This article reviews the emission of GHG by different countries across the globe, its impacts and mitigation strategies.

Keywords: Greenhouse Gas (GHG), emissions, global warming, climate change

Introduction

GHG emissions are a significant global environmental concern, contributing to climate change and its associated impacts. GHG emissions refer to the release of certain gases into the Earth's atmosphere that can trap heat and contribute to the greenhouse effect. The greenhouse effect is a natural process that keeps the Earth's surface warm enough to support life. However, human activities have significantly increased the concentrations of these greenhouse gases, leading to an enhanced greenhouse effect, and contributing to global warming and climate change.

GHG emissions are a critical component of the ongoing discourse surrounding global environmental sustainability and climate change. These emissions encompass a variety of gases that, when released into the Earth's atmosphere, contribute to the greenhouse effect, trapping heat and leading to the gradual warming of the planet. The repercussions of heightened GHG concentrations include rising global temperatures, shifts in weather patterns, sea-level rise, and ecological disruptions. Recognizing the urgency of addressing this issue, researchers, policymakers, and global organizations have intensified efforts to understand, monitor, and mitigate greenhouse gas emissions.

Different countries vary widely in their levels of greenhouse gas emissions, influenced by factors such as industrial activities, energy production, transportation, and land use. In this review article, introduction to greenhouse gas emissions by different countries will be discussed.

Major Greenhouse Gases

Carbon Dioxide (CO_2): As the most prevalent greenhouse gas, carbon dioxide is primarily produced through human activities such as the combustion of fossil fuels (coal, oil, and natural gas) for energy, deforestation, and industrial processes (IPCC, 2018).

Methane (CH_4): Emitted during the production and transport of fossil fuels, livestock farming, and decomposition of organic waste in landfills, methane is a potent greenhouse gas with a higher warming potential than CO_2 over a shorter timeframe (EPA, 2021).

Nitrous Oxide (N_2O): Nitrous oxide is released from agricultural and industrial practices, including the use of synthetic fertilizers and certain industrial processes (IPCC, 2014).

Fluorinated Gases: This category comprises hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), perfluorocarbons (PFCs), sulfur hexafluoride (SF_6), and nitrogen trifluoride (NF_3). Often used in industrial applications and electronic manufacturing, these synthetic gases have high global warming potentials and contribute significantly to climate change (EPA, 2022).

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Impacts of Greenhouse Gas Emissions

The consequences of elevated greenhouse gas concentrations are multifaceted, impacting ecosystems, weather patterns, and human societies. Melting ice caps, more frequent and severe weather events, and disruptions to agricultural systems are among the observable effects. Addressing these impacts necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the sources and dynamics of GHG emissions.

Mitigation Strategies

Efforts to curb greenhouse gas emissions involve a combination of policy measures, technological innovations, and behavioral changes. Transitioning to renewable energy sources, enhancing energy efficiency, adopting sustainable agricultural practices, and promoting afforestation and reforestation are crucial strategies in the global pursuit of emissions reduction targets (IPCC, 2018).

International Agreements

International collaboration is pivotal in addressing the global nature of greenhouse gas emissions. The Paris Agreement, adopted in 2015, represents a landmark effort by the international community to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. The agreement emphasizes the importance of nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and ongoing efforts to progressively strengthen them to achieve the overall climate goal (UNFCCC, 2015).

In January 2022, the list of major contributors to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions may have shifted due to changing economic and policy landscapes. However, as of that time, the following countries were among the largest contributors to global GHG emissions:

Major contributors of GHG emissions

1. China: China has consistently been the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases, primarily due to its heavy reliance on coal for energy and rapid industrialization. However, China has also made substantial investments in renewable energy and has committed to reducing its emissions in the coming years.
2. United States: The United States has historically been a significant emitter, with a large share of emissions coming from the burning of fossil fuels for energy, transportation, and industrial activities. In recent years, there has been a shift towards cleaner energy sources, with increased use of natural gas and a growing renewable energy sector. Policy changes and international agreements also influence the trajectory of U.S. emissions.
3. European Union: The European Union, as a bloc, has been a substantial contributor to global emissions, although individual member countries may vary in their emissions levels. The European Union has been proactive in addressing climate change, implementing policies and regulations to reduce emissions. Member countries have made significant progress in transitioning to renewable energy, with a focus on wind and solar power. The EU aims to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.
4. India: India's growing economy and population have led to increased energy demand, primarily met through fossil fuels. The country is a major emitter, particularly in the energy and industrial sectors. As a developing country, India faces the challenge of balancing economic development with environmental sustainability. Efforts are being made to enhance energy efficiency and incorporate more renewable energy sources.
5. Russia: Russia's emissions are largely associated with its fossil fuel production and export activities, including oil and natural gas. The country has made commitments to reduce emissions but faces challenges in diversifying its economy away from fossil fuels.
6. Japan: Japan, with a highly industrialized economy, has historically been a major emitter. The country has set ambitious targets for emissions reduction and is investing in renewable energy, energy efficiency, and technological innovations.

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7. Canada: Canada's greenhouse gas emissions are influenced by its energy-intensive industries, including oil sands extraction. The country is working to balance its resource-based economy with emission reduction goals, investing in clean technology and renewable energy.
8. Australia: Australia's emissions are influenced by its reliance on coal for electricity generation and its status as a major coal exporter. The country is working on transitioning to cleaner energy sources and addressing challenges related to its energy mix.

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions is crucial for mitigating the impacts of climate change. Efforts to address this issue include transitioning to renewable energy sources, improving energy efficiency, adopting sustainable agricultural practices, and promoting afforestation and reforestation. International agreements, such as the Paris Agreement, aim to bring countries together to collectively address and limit global warming by reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Conclusion

Greenhouse gas emissions pose a significant threat to the health of our planet, necessitating urgent and concerted efforts to mitigate their impact. A nuanced understanding of the sources, consequences, and mitigation strategies is essential for guiding global initiatives toward a more sustainable and resilient future. Through continued research, policy development, and international cooperation, the world can strive to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and work towards a climate-friendly and sustainable future.

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