



An Opportunity for Collaboration in South Asia

This editorial is based on “South Asian Nations must Collaborate on Climate” which was published in Hindustan Times on 16/05/2022. It talks about the scope of collaboration among the South Asian nations vis-a-vis climate change.

For Prelims: SAARC, IPCC’s AR6 Report, Global Climate Risk Index, SDGs, Renewable Energy.

For Mains: SAARC - opportunities and challenges, Climate Change; an area of cooperation among south Asian countries.

Regional cooperation in South Asia has been an exercise in hope but suboptimal in its outcome. The ongoing climate crisis can serve well as an opportunity to bring a paradigm shift.

South Asia faces several climate challenges, however, the similarity of the challenges and the **complementary strengths of the nations**, along with their shared geography, socioeconomic characteristics, and cultures, present **opportunities for collaboration among the South Asian countries**.

The region needs to double down on pursuing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). India could assist by leveraging its development assistance to other South Asian countries by **joining hands with international development agencies** to jointly **design, fund, and implement climate resilience programmes**.

South Asia and Climate Change

How much does South Asia Emit?

- Home to about one-fourth of the global population, the region is responsible for **4% of historical global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions**.
- The annual per capita GHG emissions were **2.6 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent in 2019**, the **lowest of any region globally**, while the GDP per capita (purchasing power parity) was \$5,814 in 2020, the second lowest globally, just ahead of Africa.

How much does South Asia Suffer?

- South Asia countries are **among the most vulnerable globally** to the impacts of climate change.
 - Extreme climate-related events **affect more than half of the region's population** every year and continue to **burden South Asian countries' economies**.
 - The region is also home to the **lowest lying country in the world: Maldives**, which

could be submerged in the not-too-distant future.

- The [IPCC's AR6 report presents a troubling forecast for South Asia](#), predicting the **region will see hotter weather, longer monsoon seasons, and increased droughts** as total global warming increases by around 1.5°C in the next two decades.
 - [Heatwaves](#) and [humid heat stress will be more intense](#) and frequent during the 21st century over South Asia.
- According to the World Bank, almost 700 million people (nearly half of South Asia's population) have been affected by at least one climate-related disaster in the last decade.
- **India and Pakistan** ranked among the **20 countries most affected by climate change** in the 21st century in the think tank Germanwatch's 2020 [Global Climate Risk Index](#).
- Another [McKinsey Global Institute report](#) found climate impacts could **rob South Asian countries of up to 13% of their GDP by 2050**.

What are the Associated Challenges regarding Regional Cooperation?

- **Lack of Unanimity over Environmental Issues:** Consensus building continues to be a challenge on major decisions related to the environment. **Crucial shared resources**, such as the air, underground water aquifers and biodiversity, **remain largely ungoverned**.
 - **Constantly changing plans for a regional electricity trading mechanism**, potentially crucial in the age of renewables, have been sites of **diplomatic bitterness**.
 - Moments for optimism, such as a [SAARC Action Plan on Climate Change](#) and a joint declaration by **South Asian Environment Ministers** in Dhaka in 2008 were also **quickly forgotten**.
- **Challenges of Geopolitics:** The very idea of South Asia has been eroded by the tides of recent geopolitics. **China's economic dominance** and new alliances in the region have **exacerbated tensions between neighbouring India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal**.
 - Institutions such as the **SAARC seem to be at the point of no return**.
- **Territorial Issues:** The **arbitrary nature of national borders** makes climate change hard to manage. They are determined by politics and often completely neglect ecological boundaries and planetary systems.
 - The rigid borders of South Asia, so hastily **defined in the middle of the 20th century, are unsuited to the problems of the 21st**.

What can be Done?

- **Utilising Unutilised Energy Resources:** The Himalayan countries of Afghanistan, Bhutan, India, Nepal, and Pakistan have large, **unutilised hydropower resources**.
 - **Collaboration on technologies and finances**, and the development of a **common South Asian power market** can lead to increased energy security while reducing power costs and GHG emissions.
 - [India's lead on solar power](#) can help other countries develop this renewable resource as a cheap and principal energy source.
- **Regional Cooperation in Potential Areas:** Based on the climate crisis challenges and current initiatives, five key areas emerge for regional cooperation:
 - **Sustainable Urbanisation** - inclusive sustainable **municipal services, green transport, pollution abatement** and prevention.
 - **Climate-smart Agriculture** - water and **resource efficiency, minimising food wastage**, transport logistics and cold chains, and food processing.
 - **Disaster Resilience** - joint and **coordinated early warning systems** for hydro-meteorological events, **shared response mechanisms to disasters** including chemical and oil spills in coastal areas, and forest fires.
 - **Renewable and Clean Energy** - **solar** and **wind** energy, **power storage technologies**, joint development of hydropower projects, **regional energy market**, and increasing energy efficiency across industries, farms, institutions, offices and homes.
 - **Downscaled Climate Modelling** - to predict short- to long-term impacts and implement **people-oriented adaptation plans**.
- **Private Sector Participation:** The private sector will have a substantial role in climate adaptation and mitigation.
 - Thus, **relaxation of foreign direct investment rules** will help, especially for green

technologies, digital firms, [technologies of Industry 4.0](#), waste management and treatment, disaster resilience enhancing processes, and **technologies including in infrastructure sectors** such as climate-resilient roads and water transport.

- **SAARC Climate Fund:** Countries could also establish a SAARC Climate Fund, which could **pay for adaptation and mitigation initiatives** with a strong focus on innovations, **joint R&D, technology transfer, knowledge exchange**, and capacity building.
 - The fund could also **raise money from private foundations and individuals**, [Corporate Social Responsibility \(CSR\)](#) initiatives, and bilateral and multilateral agencies.
- **Climate Education:** Climate education will help communities **understand and address the impact of global warming**, encourage **behaviour changes**, and help them **adapt to climate change**.
 - Including **climate education in national curricula** will empower children and young people of the south Asian nations with the required knowledge and skills, to build a green, sustainable and climate-resilient future.

Drishti Mains Question

Discuss how climate change can be one of the opportunities for collaboration among the South Asian nations.

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