



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.