

THE SAARC DECLARATIONS ON CLIMATE CHANGE

a . Overview of the SAARC Declarations on Climate Change

The SAARC Environment Ministers' Dhaka Declaration on Climate Change (2008) and the Thimpu Statement on Climate Change (2010), based on the SAARC Plan of Action on Climate Change adopted in July 2008, has three broad thematic areas covering adaptation, mitigation, technology development and deployment, and joint mobilization of resources. The broad thematic areas are primarily spreading education and awareness in the region, joint research and capacity building, and joint programme implementation.

The following table (Table 5) lists the broad elements of the regional cooperation declarations.

Table 5. Broad Elements of the SAARC Declarations		
Thematic Areas <i>(based on SAARC Action Plan on CC)</i>	Dhaka Declaration: July 2008	Thimpu Statement: April 2010
Education and awareness	Promote advocacy programmes and mass awareness campaigns on climate change	Launch advocacy and awareness programmes on climate change, among others, to promote the use of green technology and best practices to promote low-carbon, sustainable, and inclusive development of the region Incorporate science-based materials in educational curricula to promote better understanding of science and the adverse effects of climate change
Regional capacity building inclusive of CDM development and joint research and investigation	Cooperate in capacity building, including the development of CDM projects and Designated National Authorities, and on incentives for removal of GHG by sinks	Establish an Inter-governmental Expert Group on Climate Change to develop clear policy direction and guidance for regional cooperation as envisaged in the SAARC Plan of Action on Climate Change

<p>Regional joint research and development, sharing of knowledge and information, and south–south cooperation for technology development and deployment</p>	<p>Exchange information on best practices, share results of research and development for mitigating the effects of climate change, and undertake adaptation measures</p>	<p>Set up a Low-carbon Research and Development Institute in South Asian University</p> <p>Establish institutional linkages among national institutions in the region to, among others, facilitate sharing of knowledge, information, and capacity-building programmes in climate change-related areas</p> <p>Commission a SAARC Inter-governmental Marine Initiative to strengthen the understanding of shared oceans and water bodies in the region, and of the critical roles they play in sustainable living, to be supported by the SAARC Coastal Zone Management Centre</p> <p>Commission a SAARC Inter-governmental Mountain Initiative on mountain ecosystems, particularly glaciers and their contribution to sustainable development and livelihoods, to be supported by the SAARC Forestry Centre</p> <p>Commission a SAARC Inter-governmental Monsoon Initiative on the evolving pattern of the monsoons to assess vulnerability due to climate change, to be supported by the SAARC Meteorological Research Centre</p> <p>Commission a SAARC Inter-governmental Climate-related Disasters Initiative on the integration of Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) with Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), to be supported by the SAARC Disaster Management Centre</p> <p>Commission a study for presentation to the Seventeenth SAARC Summit on Climate Risks in the Region: Ways to comprehensively address related social, economic, and environmental challenges</p>
<p>Regional cooperation on raising of financial resources for programmes on adaptation and mitigation</p>		<p>Commission a study to explore the feasibility of establishing a SAARC mechanism that would provide capital for projects that promote low-carbon technology and renewable energy</p>
<p>Joint implementation of projects</p>	<p>Initiate and implement programmes and measures as per SAARC practice for adaptation for dealing with the onslaught of climate change to protect the lives and livelihood of the people</p>	<p>Plant ten million trees over the next five years (2010–2015) as part of a regional afforestation and reforestation campaign, in accordance with national priorities and programmes of member states</p> <p>Evolve national plans and, where appropriate, regional projects on protecting and safeguarding the archeological and historical infrastructure of South Asia from the adverse effects of climate change</p>

Many of the elements of the SAARC declarations resonate well with some of the actions required in the region as whole, although these could definitely be more ambitious. However, what is noteworthy here is that the two declarations have not necessarily taken into account some of the recommendations made in the past, including the “Vision document”, which was put together by the Group of Eminent Persons in 2000.

The current mandates for action under the two declarations are largely skewed in the direction of developing a research database, which is one of the key recommendations for bridging the knowledge gap on various issues in the region.

Table 6. Various Events And Programmes Undertaken Through SAARC Declarations

Thematic Areas	Nature of Event/Programme
Capacity building and bridging of knowledge gap	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An experience-sharing workshop was organized to bridge information gaps related to <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Coastal fisheries resources – monitoring and conservation b) Oceanographic observations • A study tour was organized in Sri Lanka and in the Sunderbans area by India • A workshop on coastal zones and environmental issues was organized in 2010 • A meeting of experts was organized to discuss the impacts of climate change on coastal resources in 2010 • A training workshop on rainwater harvesting was organized in Maldives in 2010 • A training workshop on energy audits was organized in Sri Lanka in 2011 • A symposium on wind power development in South Asia was organized in 2011 • A training programme on institutional capacity development for regional energy efficiency was organized in 2011 • A training programme on understanding issues related to cross-border electricity interconnection was organized in Bangladesh in 2011 • A training programme on rural electrification through renewable energy was organized by Bangladesh in 2011
Creation of joint tools and projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vertical properties of convective systems in and around Bangladesh derived from TRMM perception radar data were studied • SAARC STORM pilot field experiment in 2009 • Structure and movement of tropical cyclones over the North Indian Ocean simulated by the WRF-ARW model were studied • Seasonal weather forecasting in Bangladesh using the Climate Predictability Tool (CPT) was begun • A tool to simulate the climatology of thunderstorms over the SAARC region was created
Joint projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A conference on the Action Plan on Energy Conservation for the region was organized – with the intention of embarking on a joint programme • An exercise on the selection of regional hydropower plants – criteria and geographic areas – was organized, particularly aimed at identifying sites in Bhutan and Nepal • An Integrated Energy Potential Vision 2020 for South Asia was prepared • Legal frameworks required for regional electricity trade were prepared • A report on “smart grids” for South Asia was prepared
Joint research establishments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SAARC Metrological Research Centre (SMRC), Dhaka • SAARC University, Delhi, commenced operations in 2010 (the low-carbon research centre to be housed in this university has yet to be established) • SAARC Forestry Centre, Bhutan, 2008 • SAARC Energy Centre, Islamabad, 2006 • operation srstity commneced tsying sites in Bhutan and Nepalriteria as organised ised ty inter-connection was organisaed in Bangla • SARRC Disaster Management Centre, Delhi, 2006
Funds and fund management	<p>The SAARC Secretariat receives the following funds in addition to the country contributions. The funds are primarily:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South Asian Development Fund (SADF): It has a corpus of USD 300 million of which India has earmarked USD 100 million for this. • SAARC Japan Special Fund • SAARC Fund for Regional Projects (SFRP) • SAARC Regional Fund (SRF) <p>The country contributions are on a pro rata basis, with the Indian government currently contributing on an average Rs 100 million per year.</p>

Some of the other initiatives taken were:

- A meeting of SAARC Transport Ministers was organized in August 2007 in Delhi, which helped in creating a draft Motor Vehicles and Railways Agreement for movement amongst SAARC countries. If this draft is finalized and implemented, it could possibly result in the reduction of a lot of GHG emissions resulting from air travel. For instance, because of restrictions on travel between India and Pakistan, one has to go via Dubai or a Gulf port, and if this agreement were to come through, it could possibly reduce not only GHG emissions but also travel time.
- A tele-education project linking the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IG-NOU) to other open universities in the region has commenced. This is a good opportunity for building awareness and imparting education on a number of climate-related issues.
- A tele-medicine project connecting super-specialty hospitals in the SAARC member states has commenced.

b. Analysis of the SAARC Declarations on Climate Change

While on paper a number of initiatives agreed on both in the Dhaka Declaration and the Thimpu Statement and in earlier declarations as well, particularly those related to “capacity building”, “training”, and “addressing the knowledge gap”, have been carried out, it is not known whether these exercises have actually addressed the objectives of capacity building and of implementing projects on the basis of these learnings.

Currently, there is no monitoring or evaluation of the projects. There is no clarity as to whether the people who underwent trainings are practising their learnings from these projects and whether these trainings have led to actual policy changes.

For instance, while an “Energy Vision 2020” has been prepared for the region, there are no signs of it being implemented as a regional initiative. While a number of initiatives have been taken at the country level, there are no signs of joint energy-efficiency programmes being taken at the regional level.

Hence, it seems that right now the SAARC Secretariat is functioning more in the capacity of an organizer of events and workshops, with very little joint programme implementation in place.

Some key areas where joint projects are required are:

- Adoption of special measure for the LDCs
- Energy cooperation
- Strengthening transportation and promoting sustainable transport in the member countries

However, there are no special projects aimed at addressing any of the above issues, apart from issuing joint reports.

Further, on the financial front, it was agreed to set up a South Asian Development Fund of at least USD 10–15 billion. However, what we now have in place is a small fund of just around USD 100–300 million, which is nowhere near sufficient for joint project implementation or for joint collaborative research, development, and deployment.

Further, it is necessary to build the resilience of vulnerable communities to climate change, to encourage climate-smart development, and to come up with a set of goals for South Asia to address the issues of development and poverty alleviation, along the lines of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These goals have yet to be achieved.

In the field of agriculture, too, there needs to be a lot more cooperation between the countries, as many of these nations face similar problems, such as fall in agricultural yield and saline intrusion into agricultural fields. While there are efforts to develop climate-and saline-resilient crops in the respective countries, there have been no attempts to follow a collaborative approach in dealing with the situation.

Other areas that need to be implemented on a war footing, and as agreed to in the declarations, are:

- Establish an Inter-governmental Expert Group on Climate Change to develop clear policy direction and guidance for regional cooperation as envisaged in the SAARC Plan of Action on Climate Change. This will also facilitate an integrated response to related social, economic, and environmental challenges.
- Commission a study to explore the feasibility of establishing a SAARC mechanism that would provide capital for projects that promote low-carbon technology and renewable energy, and of setting up a Low-carbon Research and Development Institute in South Asian University.
- Establish institutional linkages among national institutions in the region for facilitating the sharing of knowledge, information, and capacity-building programmes in climate change-related areas.
- Set up a mechanism of coordination between sector agencies in the respective governments on managing regional common resources, identifying and implementing thematic programmes, sharing knowledge and experience, and, most importantly, ensuring that the objectives of the training programmes are achieved.

In short, as of now, it seems that SAARC is not functioning as optimally as it ideally should and is nowhere near the objective of being either a customs union by 2015 or an economic union by 2020, as was envisioned by the Group of Eminent People from the region.