



## A Brief review of SAARC Declaration on Climate Change, Dhaka (2008) and Thimphu (2010) Built a climate resilient South Asia

# SAARC charter on Free Movement of Climate Migrants

### 1. Climate Change and vulnerability in South Asia

Flooding, food shortages, and being impoverished of our people gradually are common incidents of devastating impacts in South Asia, those have experienced due to advancing of climate change impact. The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report said that the effect of GHG emission growth will be felt worldwide, but that will be especially intense in South Asia; countries as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The report's assessment also said that the climate change effects we are already seeing but rank Asia as the biggest victim of natural disasters last years, accounting for nearly 30 percent of the global economic loss attributed to natural disasters.

Apart from the above, the following issues to be considered as factor to vulnerability for south Asians;

South Asia has the highest density of poverty in the world. With an estimated of 700 million South Asians have been subsisting on less than US\$1.25 a day (World Dev Report 2014). This has been making weaker gradually south Asian people's capacity to cope with natural disaster climatic impact. That's why an even small climate shocks can cause irreversible losses and dispense a large number of people into destitution.

South Asia is endowed with great rivers, which are the lifelines of the regional economy along with the ice mass covering the Himalayan-Hindu Kush mountain range is the source of the nine largest rivers of Asia, including the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Indus. Melting glaciers could affect near about 500 million people in South Asia, alongside rising sea level, changing rainfall patterns and scarcity of drinking water. Bangladesh and rural Nepalese are already living in poverty due to this effect, and production of crops has been failed due to the warmer climate. Indian wheat is also facing that problem.

This is also a projected by World Bank study that by 2050, about half the region's population will dwell in cities. Given current trends, South Asia will host five of the world's 11 mega cities i.e. Mumbai, Delhi, Dhaka, Karachi, and Kolkata. The cities of South Asia already face immense challenges, including poorly maintained infrastructure, unplanned growth, scant livelihood opportunities, and susceptibility of the poor populations to ill health.

Overall, South Asia countries suffer an extremely high number of natural disasters. There are 09 severe natural disaster recorded during the period of 1990 and 2009, where more than 750 million people which about 50 percent of the region's population were affected, leaving almost 1,53266 (SAARC Working paper 2010). These disasters have made loss about US\$45 billion in damages. As climate-related risks intensify, there will be a need to respond proactively to build resilience through prevention and preparedness rather than through relief and response (Rechard Damania, World Bank).

### 2. Role of regional cooperation addressing the climatic impacts

A common understanding and regional cooperation through the SAARC could be a powerful mechanism to face the climatic challenges especially in the area of adaptation and mitigation towards the development and enhance quality of life of the people in our respective countries.

Our leaders issued a Statement on Climate Change at their meeting in April 2010, at Thimphu. They recognize that the member states of SAARC as developing countries face the dual challenge of addressing the negative impacts of climate change and pursuing socio-economic development. The statement emphasizes the overriding importance of socioeconomic development and poverty eradication in our region, and that reducing dependence on the carbon in our economic growth and promoting climate resilience that will promote both development and poverty eradication in a sustainable manner.

### 3. We (the CSOs) expect meaningful implementation of SAARC commitments

Reiterated the principles of equity, and common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities as enshrined in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change would be the basis for a meaningful regional cooperation in facing the present and future climate change impact through SAARC. There are a lot of action pledges in the SAARC declaration those are yet to be implemented. It's also being observed to roam the SAARC actions within the meeting & workshop rather implementing need base action, those were pledged in the declaration. We are a part of CSO (Civil Society Organization) demanding to the SAARC leaders to undertake following actions in case of climate change issues;

## a. Institutional Framework

- i. 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.
- ii. Enhancing institutional coordination and strengthening mechanisms encouraging resource mobilization and expert exchange for regional cooperation on research with government institutions and CSOs.

## b. Adaptation

The main focus of adaptation will be in the field of agriculture, there needs to be a lot more cooperation among the countries. As many of SAARC member countries face similar problems, such as fall in agricultural yield and saline intrusion into agricultural fields. There have been no attempts to follow a collaborative approach in dealing with the situation. Considering the situation following actions should undertake;

- i. Holding joint hydrological exercises to measure water outflow and adopting regional water resources management, since there are many river-sharing issues among the member countries of the region.
- ii. Take effective measure to enhance knowledge sharing mechanism and information dissemination in practical basis as cropping patterns and crops cultivated in the region are almost similar.
- iii. Establish a Regional Knowledge-sharing Platform on Community-based Adaptation that will demonstrate the practical tools & techniques and experiences on adaptation. SAARC process should explore a possible mechanism also to engage the CSOs sharing knowledge and information dissemination in this regard.
- iv. Taking regional initiatives for establishing community-based seed banks to conserve the agro biodiversity of the region and placing these seed banks in the direct management of farmers.
- v. Ensuring knowledge exchange and seed sharing without any intellectual property rights (IPR) restrictions or barriers

## c. Mitigation

- i. Conduct joint research and development on alternative technologies in energy sector especially energy efficient technologies, renewable energy, etc.
- ii. Commission a study to explore the feasibility of establishing a SAARC mechanism which would provide capital for projects that promote low-carbon technology and renewable energy; and a Low-carbon Research and Development.
- iii. Take effective measure to develop SAARC common energy investment fund especially to produce and provide hydro power among the SAARC countries. There are huge potentiality of hydro power production in Bhutan & Nepal. This hydro power should produce through a common investment through SAARC initiative by which all member countries would be benefited.

## d. Finance & resource Mobilization

- i. To initiate necessary resource mobilization to climate change program and action we should not wait for international finance as there have a typical politics among the countries and tend to evade the responsibility for the developed nations in case of financing. In this situation SAARC climate change fund need to establish that would be a dependable source for implementing SAARC climate action plan and as well as act the counter part of global funds. This fund also should be used for financing for technology development for the adaptation and mitigation needs of the SAARC countries.
- ii. Set up a centre for technology development in South Asia to jointly develop and deploy clean technologies to meet the adaptation and mitigations needs of the region. This center and its activities would be supported by the SAARC climate change fund and also for demonstrating climate related projects in the region.

Apart from the above, we demand to SAARC leaders to revisit the SAARC Climate Change Action Plan to address the adaptation needs of the region through an effective implementation and institutional mechanisms. Develop strategies for people who can not adapt to climate change due to huge loss of livelihood and habitat. SAARC platform also need to formulate policies and strategies to facilitate those who are forced to relocate and become climate refugees.

