

OVERVIEW OF THE SAARC COUNTRY POSITIONS ON INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE NEGOTIATIONS

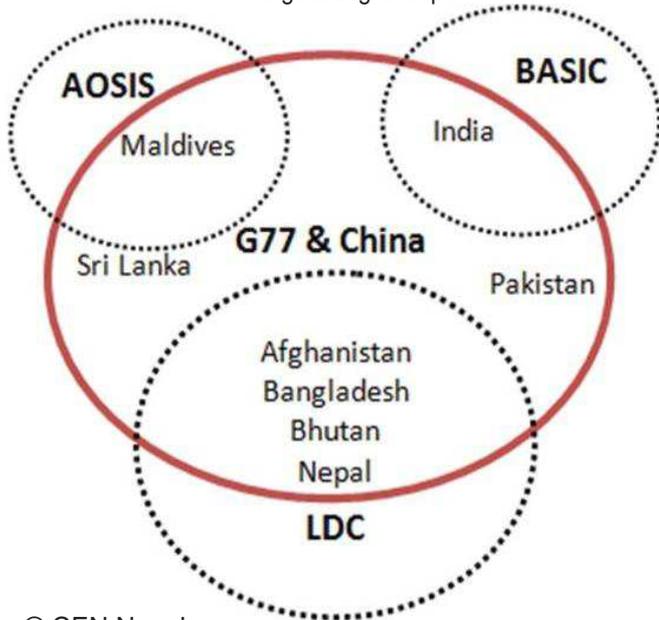
a . SAARC Countries in International Negotiations

The UN climate change negotiations have been ongoing since 1995. The Bali Action Plan set a deadline of two years for the parties to agree on how they would multilaterally deal

with climate change, but the end of the two-year period saw a controversial outcome in the form of the Copenhagen Accord. The Copenhagen Accord, despite its pros and cons, laid a foundation, and the 16th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 16) to the UNFCCC in 2010 produced a positive outcome in the form of the Cancun Agreement. Given the pulls and pressures characteristic of the multilateral process, the COP17/CMP7 meetings concluded. Some important and some controversial decisions were made at the following meetings:

- 1997 - Kyoto Protocol
- 2005 - Montreal Protocol
- 2007 - Bali Action Plan
- 2009 - Copenhagen Accord
- 2010 - Cancun Agreement
- 2011 - Durban Platform for Enhanced Action

Figure 6: Current Membership of SAARC Countries as Different Negotiating Groups



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All of the SAARC countries except Afghanistan have ratified the Kyoto Protocol. All the countries of South Asia are part of the large negotiating bloc in the UN climate change negotiations, which consists of the G-77 countries and China. However, Bhutan, Nepal, and Bangladesh are also members of the LDC Negotiating Bloc, while Maldives is aligned with the Association of Small Island States. India is aligned with the BASIC group, which consists primarily of Brazil, South Africa, India, and China; although it is not a negotiating group per se, it is definitely a powerful bloc in the climate change negotiations.

In the last year, SAARC was also recognized as a regional bloc by the UNFCCC. Although it is not a negotiating bloc, it has an observer status.

b. Priorities of SAARC Countries in Inter-national Negotiations

Given the differences between the countries in South Asia in terms of their varying size, their diverse economies, and the different levels of their socio-economic development, it is not surprising that their priorities are also different.

For countries like Afghanistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Maldives, and Bangladesh, the priority is to access the "adaptation fund", while for Pakistan and India, it is primarily to access the CDM fund. India has categorically stated that it is not interested in accessing the adaptation fund, but instead would not be averse to contributing to it.

Given these differences in priorities, the vision of each country would therefore also be different.

In line with the Bali Action Plan, all the countries in the region, with the exception of India, have a vision of pushing the temperature rise to as far below 1.5°C as possible, with a peaking year by 2015. India maintains that it is for pushing for a temperature rise of 2.0°C and is opposed to a discussion on having a peaking year by 2015, with the caveat that unless the developed countries act first, a binding decision on having a peaking year would be detrimental to India's growth and development.

On other issues related to climate negotiations, India again stands isolated from the rest of the countries of South Asia with respect to a "legally binding instrument" for all countries. India is opposed to having a "legally binding instrument" that would cover all countries, as it feels that this would entail having to take on binding mitigation commitments at some point of time, which is likely to be sooner rather than later, and which India feels would affect its growth and development.

The third area where India again stands isolated is with regard to financial flows and the sources of financing. Bangladesh had proposed "passenger aviation levies" as a means of raising funds for the Climate Fund. This suggestion was tacitly supported by all the other countries in the region, with the exception of India. India believes that such a move, which would cover all passengers and all airlines, would be against the principles of the UN Convention.

The fourth area where India's position differs from that of the other countries is with regard to mitigation targets. The other countries of the region, although they do not state it explicitly, also believe that rapidly developing economies such as China, Brazil, South Africa, and India should take on legally binding emission-reduction commitments.

at some point of time, while India’s argument is that it is too early to talk of such commitments.

Yet another area where the countries differ is with respect to the definition of “vulnerable countries”. India and Pakistan believe that other countries, including the LDCs and African countries, are as much vulnerable to climate change as other countries, due to their geographical location and their huge populations of poor people amongst other factors. Maldives, Bangladesh, and Nepal contend that India cannot be considered a “vulnerable country” to climate change. However, this difference in opinion does not really have much of a bearing on country dynamics, largely because India has declared itself not to be in the race for accessing “adaptation funds”.

The table below (Table 7) shows the number of projects accessed by the South Asian countries.

Table 7. Number of Projects Accessed by South Asia Countries				
Country	Number of projects funded on			Total
	Adaptation	Mitigation	REDD+	
Afghanistan	-	1	-	1
Bangladesh	4	3	1	8
Bhutan	-	-	-	0
India	4	6	-	10
Maldives	2	3	1	6
Nepal	5	3	-	8
Pakistan	1	1	-	2
Sri Lanka	-	-	-	0

Source: www.faststartfinance.org (as of February, 2012).

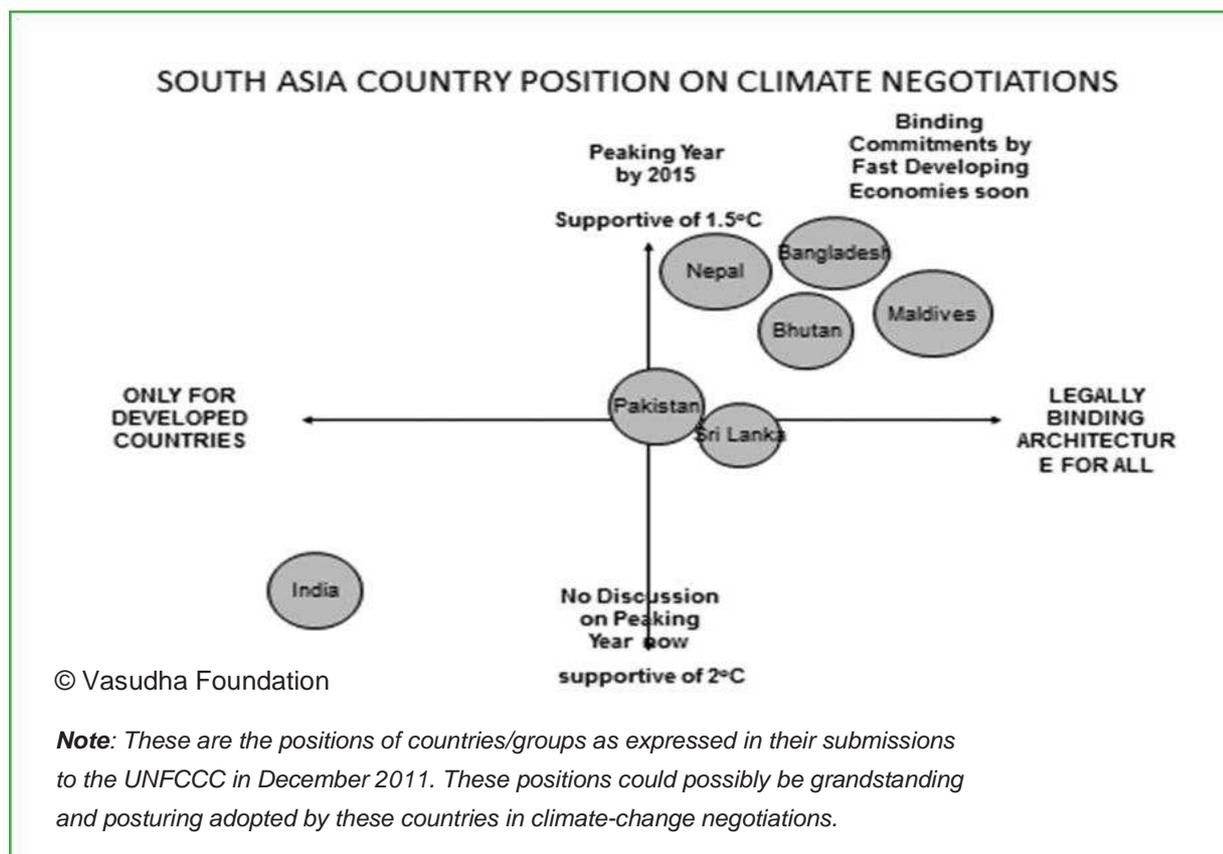
c . SAARC countries’ positions and areas of convergence

The areas of convergence between these countries are limited to the extension of the Kyoto Protocol to the second commitment period, which was agreed to in Durban, and to the extension of plans for deeper mitigation amongst the developing countries.

In addition, with the commencement of COP17 to the UNFCCC in Durban, all these countries agree that there should be a strong regime for technology development and deployment and that the promised USD 100 billion for climate finance by industrialized countries must come in soon.

The COP17/CMP7 outcomes have been useful in extending the protocol for another period, but the outcomes are still not binding. What is required at this stage is a legally binding commitment that is just and fair and that can, in the immediate period, check the threats of rising temperature that have been projected in several reports. The establishment of the DPEA–Durban Platform on Enhanced Actions is yet another opportunity for the SAARC countries to come together and formulate a common position that ensures a fair, equitable, just, ambitious, and binding deal.

The country position on climate change is given below:



While these countries are from the same region, there are vast differences in their socio-economic conditions. These differences also influence the positions of the respective countries in various international negotiations, including the UNFCCC. It is therefore natural that these differences in perspectives and priorities are also reflected in the SAARC declarations.

An area in which the approach has been rather tardy is financing. Since most of the countries look to India for financing and India is unwilling to commit huge funds, keeping in view the international dynamics of climate-control negotiations, the funding for SAARC is rather slow, and, indeed, not forthcoming.

It is possible that the thinking among Indian policy makers is that if they were to make available huge funds to SAARC for climate-related projects and programmes, this would possibly act as a counter to the country's current approach, which is that it needs to put aside all its monies for growth and development and to not take on legally binding mitigation actions, although domestic action in this regard is prevalent.

Further, India is perhaps also aware of the fact that most of the countries in the region expect it to take on binding emission-reduction targets. This assumption may well be valid, since, for example, South Africa's position on climate change took a complete U-turn after it aligned itself with the African Union, which has a position that is similar to the one held by the countries in South Asia, with the exception of India.

The points of convergence that can be seen in the SAARC declarations are primarily with regard to the need for conducting joint research and scoping studies, a point on which almost all of the developing countries agree.

Nevertheless, the SAARC countries of the region also have made joint statements at different forums. This shows that these countries share some issues of convergence and some common positions. One among them is the statement made by a representative of Bhutan on behalf of SAARC at COP15 in Copenhagen in 2009. The statement high-lighted the importance of the principles of equity, and of the common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities of the South Asian countries in conducting global negotiations on climate change. Also, the SAARC nations called for negotiations to be conducted in an open, transparent, and inclusive manner, so that the outcome could enjoy the support and ownership of the international community, particularly of those who are most affected by climate change.

Likewise, paragraph 7 of the statement clearly highlights the agreed common position of the SAARC nations, as follows:

Any effort at addressing climate change must take into account historical responsibility and must be in accordance with the principles of the UNFCCC, the Kyoto Protocol and the Bali Action Plan. SAARC believes that the way forward must include the international community's commitment to:

- (i) Provide adequate, new and additional resources easily accessible to address the full incremental cost of tackling climate change, under the authority of the Conference of the Parties (COP)/Conference of the Meeting of the Parties (CMP), that do not divert funds for development;*
- (ii) Allocate at least 1.5% of the GDP of Annex-I countries to meet the adaptation needs of all developing countries;*
- (iii) Urgently adopt operational guidelines for facilitating flows of short-term funds for undertaking climate change activities. Similar guidelines need to be developed for subsequent funds in due course;*
- (iv) Ensure balanced and separate financing for both adaptation and mitigation;*
- (v) Ensure access to adaptation finance for all developing countries that are vulnerable to adverse effects of climate change, with special focus on LDCs and SIDS;*
- (vi) Ensure effective access to and funding assistance for the transfer of climate-friendly technologies;*
- (vii) Set up technology innovation centres and networks in SAARC region and globally to promote development and transfer of technologies addressing adaptation and mitigation issues;*
- (viii) Establish an International Centre for Adaptation, Research and Training in SAARC region, as a medium for sharing experience in adaptation;*
- (ix) Provide adequate and full support for conservation of forests as an integral part of the REDD Plus mechanism;*
- (x) Deep and legally binding greenhouse gas emission reduction commitments by all developed countries with effective timeframes as recommended by the IPCC; and*
- (xi) Immediate action by all nations on the basis of the Bali Action Plan*