



REGIONAL COOPERATION ON

CLIMATE CHANGE IN SOUTH ASIA

POST EVENT REPORT



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SUMMARY OF THE SEMINAR

On November 22, 2022, a Seminar on “Regional Cooperation on Climate Change in South Asia” was jointly organised by The Centre for Strategic Perspectives (CSP) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) in collaboration with the Hanns Seidel Foundation Pakistan (HSF). The discussion was attended by 75 participants including experts from relevant fields, academics, practitioners, and students from around the county. Detail of the panellists is in Annexure A.

The report represents a detailed analysis of the collective views and speeches of the panellists presented during the seminar. The seminar focused on multiple dimensions, i.e., Climate Diplomacy, Climate Financing, and Transition towards a Green Economy etc. The speakers highlighted the significant impact of Climate change in South Asia; Climate Justice for developing countries; COP27 Loss and Damage Fund; and Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation. The panellists provided valuable policy recommendations in this regard.

INTRODUCTION

South Asia is witnessing unprecedented impacts of climate change, including more frequent and intense extreme weather events, climate-induced migration, widespread crop failures and dramatic shifts in biodiversity. The recent flood in Pakistan is manifestation of this reality which has created climate emergency with 33 million lives affected and internally displaced by the recent flash floods.

As the magnitude of such disasters grows more frequent, there is an urgent need for regional cooperation on climate change. In this regard, it is important to explore the issue of climate change and its impact on countries in the region. Cooperation at regional level provides an opportunity to focus on an alternative climate diplomacy model while identifying possible avenues for collective climate actions.

In this context, this seminar was aimed to explore the issues, challenges, and the pathways available to address the Climate change issue in the region. The purpose was to deepen the knowledge and suggest structural systems, policies, and right interventions at national and regional level to facilitate the process and address it at all levels. Moreover, it also aimed to streamlining the research themes for a better understanding of the issue in the long run.

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE SEMINAR

The Seminar brought together a panel of experts, leading academicians from renowned institutions, to discuss Regional Cooperation on Climate Change in South Asia. The issue was discussed under the three broader sub-themes: Climate Diplomacy, Climate Financing, and Transition towards a Green Economy. Ambassador Shafqat Kakakhel was the keynote speaker at the event. The following findings emanated from the three sessions:



CLIMATE DIPLOMACY

- The starting point for climate diplomacy in South Asia is the decoupling of the political differences from the cooperation on climate change. This is an existential issue in the region.
- Unlike traditional security, the success of climate diplomacy is dependent on information sharing; more information sharing results in more trust building, confidence, and cooperation. For this, countries in the region must be aware of their own strengths, weaknesses and leveraging power.
- South Asian diplomats, especially those from India and Pakistan, had actively participated in the negotiations leading to the adoption of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
- Initiatives for regional cooperation in South Asia on Climate Change have been undertaken by the Governments of the region themselves, the United Nations Agencies, Funds and Programs e.g., the UN Economic and Social Commission for

the Asia Pacific region (UNESCAP), the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank.

- The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) climate related activities were triggered by the decisions of 3rd and 4th SAARC Summits held in Kathmandu and Lahore in 1987 and 1988 respectively. They called for preparation of studies on “the Causes and Consequences of Natural Disasters and the Protection and Preservation of the Environment” and “the Greenhouse Gases Effects and Impacts on the Region.” The studies were completed in 1992.
- In 1992, a Technical Committee on Environment (TCE) was established, whose recommendations were included in SAARC’s Environment Action Plan (1997) and the SAARC Action Plan on Climate Change (2009-2011). Both plans called for exchange of information and expertise and best practices on tackling environmental issues, including climate change.
- Since 1992, the South Asian Environment Ministers have met nine times and adopted declarations describing the region’s concerns about climate change issues prior to the annual COPs. However, at the COPs delegations of the SAARC countries have seldom, if ever, made efforts to synchronize their efforts and have, instead, supported the delegation of the country chairing the G 77.
- The indefinite postponement of the 19th SAARC Summit has dealt a deadly blow to the most important regional cooperation forum of South Asia and undermined the prospects of mutually beneficial cooperation in this highly climate change- vulnerable region.
- Currently, the global climate diplomacy is taking place in a distorted environment where key principles of “polluters pay” and “equity” are being diluted.
- Leaders in South Asia have the capacity and vision to put in place the mechanisms. However, there are weaknesses of limited resources and extra emphasis on bilateralism instead of multilateralism.
- The recent proactive diplomacy by Pakistan at COP 27 is another stream of diplomacy. Bringing everyone on the same vision and achieving consensus on Loss and Damage fund was not an easy task but Pakistan maintained the unity of the group. At the same forum, the resolution on fossil fuel tabled by India and supported by 95 countries is also a major achievement in this regard.

CLIMATE FINANCING

- The establishment of loss and damage fund at COP27 is a positive development but the region should not solely rely on international support.
- In 2022, international community made a commitment of US\$ 100 billion but provided only 83.3 billion. Promises were not kept and only 16 percent of this 83.3 billion came from climate financing. The rest of 84 percent came from private financing.

- Furthermore, majority of this funding is going in a mitigation, not in adaptation. Surprisingly, 73 percent of this funding is in the form of loans and only 27 percent is the grant. This is a serious issue for all the developing countries of South Asia especially when they are not the principal polluters.
- The green climate fund is an important milestone but the US\$100 billion has not been accounted for, the adaptation fund exists but the amount available is not large enough, calls for increasing adaptation finance have been made but unsuccessfully.
- Loss and Damage fund was a flash point at COP27, the recent floods in Pakistan played a big role in bringing it into the main stage. A fund was established but it is very vague.
- There is a need to mitigate the harmful impacts of climate change in South Asia but due to socio-economic and political vulnerabilities the regional countries have low adaptive capacities. Its response to climate change is linked to its limited financial capacity.
- Given the limited financial ability of Pakistan to deal with climate induced calamities, it must go for international financing. Though, historically Pakistan has had very limited access to climate related adaptation funds therefore, there is a need to focus on how to access different climate finances

TRANSITION TOWARDS A GREEN ECONOMY

- Green Economy, as a concept has its roots in the notion of sustainable development resulting from the Rio Conference in 1992.
- Climate crisis can be seen as a window of opportunity to make a successful transition towards Green Economy by reorienting development goals.
- In the context of South Asia, the development goals should be poverty reduction, reduction of inequality, and improvement of quality of life, as the regional countries are fortunate enough to be endowed with natural resources to meet these goals.
- Several countries of the region have embarked on ambitious programs for higher energy efficiency and development of renewable energy sources.
- In addition to individual solar panels, government should also build the national grid of solar panels (solar parks) as Pakistan is rich in terms of sunlight. Wind energy generation could quite work well in some areas of Pakistan especially the coastal areas.
- Other than establishing a Loss and Damage facility, COP27 has not provided substantial measures to control pollution.
- Transition towards Green Economy involves urban policy framework that focuses on regenerative urban planning.
- Energy, Transportation, and Agriculture are the three sectors that contribute to the most carbon emission in South Asia.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Climate change is one of the greatest challenges of the present and future. Since, this is a global event, cooperation at regional and international level is significant.
- As the magnitude of climate induced disasters grow more frequent, there is an urgent need for regional cooperation on climate change.
- The starting point for climate diplomacy in South Asia is the decoupling of the political differences from the cooperation on climate change. This is an existential issue in the region.
- Pakistan and the regional countries should prioritize the issue of climate change in their regional initiatives and collaborations. Implementation will be the key to success in terms of containing and mitigating the impacts of climate change.
- In terms of climate change, Pakistan needs to take control of its sources of pollution e.g., air, water garbage and toxic waste, instead of dumping it on the poor. The access to clean water and air is also among the basic rights.
- Learning from experience is important for building a climate resilience as well as for getting financial assistance. As a member of G77 and COP27, Pakistan should make effort for getting funds to ease the resource challenges.
- Pakistan should also shift to EURO 5 from traditional fossil fuel or EURO 2. It would considerably improve the smog situation in Pakistan.
- The government of Pakistan should also provide subsidies and incentives to farmers to facilitate a transition towards a modern drip irrigation system and other more water-efficient irrigation mechanisms from the flood irrigation system.
- All countries of South Asia must cooperate and come up with a regional solution. There is a need for paradigm shift on climate change from “country-focused” to “people-focused.”
- The South Asian countries should put their political differences aside and join hands together to make a solid case as a one regional group e.g., Asian Group.
- South Asian countries should use the space outside the negotiating space and continue to cooperate through INGOs e.g., SACEP, ICIMOD, ISA, CDRI, ADB, etc.
- Traditional diplomacy responses in case of climate change in South Asia will be counterproductive. The outcome in case of traditional security issues is zero-sum but in case of non-traditional security issues, the outcome must be win-win.

- There is a need to link private finance and public finance to de risk investment and create a better enabling environment for investment in South Asia, through use of Spatial Econometrics as a pivot to revolve all its planning and future strategies to cope with increasing regional problems.
- Pakistan needs to prepare a cadre of individuals who understand climate issues and finance and can prepare projects accordingly.
- Policy framework that necessitates businesses and jobs to prioritize environmental and societal aspects should be given priority by decision makers in the region.
- There is a need for developing building codes for developing energy-efficient buildings and policy measures that ensure equitable allocation of water and use of incentivize public transport system.
- Incorporating demand management in climate protection measures is necessary because without sustainable consumption there cannot be sustainable production.
- Sustainable policy measures that improve regional cooperation in energy sector, revive national and regional navigational routes, and incentivize renewable energy for irrigation and promotion of environment-friendly crops are necessary in South Asia.

PICTURES OF



THE EVENT



CONCLUSION

- South Asia is witnessing unprecedented impacts of climate change like extreme and frequent weather patterns, climate-induced migration, widespread crop failure and dramatic shifts in biodiversity.
- Cooperation at regional level provides an opportunity to focus on alternatives like climate diplomacy model while identifying avenues for collective climate actions.
- The COP27 has produced a reasonably good outcome at international level in terms of recognition of loss and damage fund. However, the greatest work needs to be done on national level.
- The recent flood in Pakistan has also shown that how important this topic is specifically for Pakistan which has created climate emergency with 33 million lives affected.
- The reason why Pakistan is experiencing floods after ten years is a lack of learning and mitigation measures from 2010 flood experience. Pakistan is experiencing floods due to absence of planning or ignoring the post-disaster learning.
- The South Asian region and each one of its eight countries are vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change. Their vulnerability to all effects of climate change has been documented by the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in its fourth assessment report issued in 2007 and subsequent reports.
- In addition to socio-economic and demographic conditions, the South Asia's vulnerability to the adverse effects of climate change has been also shaped by its geographical and topographical features.
- The climate change-related initiatives of SAARC do signify impressive progress in identifying the core areas of urgently needed cooperation measures to lessen the negative effects of climate change. The institutional infrastructure comprising more than a dozen regional centres is potentially capable of delivering worthwhile results provided the Governments of the region muster the political will to utilize them.
- Climate diplomacy needs to be driven by science at the multilateral level. Besides SAARC, a separate regional organization on climate change is need of an hour.
- The consistent engagement between India and Pakistan on climate change would not only strengthen the COP process but also enhance the region's ability to translate some of those promises.
- Discussion to achieve cooperation in policy framework, implementation programs, and financing in South Asia will take time therefore, increasing public awareness of this very crucial development is of utmost importance.



PARTICIPANTS OF THE SEMINAR



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