

BACKGROUND TO THE SAARC CIVIL CONFERENCE ON CLIMATE CHANGE

South Asia is home to one of the oldest civilizations in the world. The sub-region includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The region comprises of three per cent of the world's land mass and the geographical expanse includes a variety of mountains, plateaus, dry regions, river basins and beaches. The region is an amalgamation of myriad, multicultural ethnic, religious or linguistic groups that have a common bond to their own heritage, culture, values and ways of life.

Climate change impacts are already being felt by a large percentage of people in the sub-region. There is sufficient scientific evidence to show that the impacts of higher temperatures, more variable precipitation, more extreme weather events, and sea level rise will continue to intensify. These changes are already having major impacts on the economic performance of South Asian countries and on the lives and livelihoods of millions of poor people who ironically are most vulnerable to the impacts, having contributed the least if nothing at all.

Economic development and environmental quality were always thought of as independent entities; we now find them closely linked. Sustainable development is a priority for all the countries in the sub-region and now has a new meaning in the light of climate change. The concept of sustainable development carries with it the premise that economic, environmental and social well beings are interrelated. It highlights the need to improve the quality of people's lives in a manner that doesn't diminish or compromise the environment's capacity to provide for future generations. In the South Asian region, this capacity stands severely endangered as of now due to the threats posed by climate change.

In order to address the emerging challenge of climate change in South Asia, it is essential to focus on diverse response options and instruments for possible solutions. Emphasis must be placed on increasing responsibilities of all stakeholders and more cooperative efforts towards building capacity and exploring the range of response options. Increased awareness of the possible impacts will prove to be an important coping mechanism for the vulnerable communities.

Objectives:

The objective of the conference is to highlight the need for a successful outcome at Copenhagen, to protect the concerns of millions of poor and vulnerable communities in the countries of South Asia. It will provide an assessment of the progress so far and the implications from the South Asian perspective. The outcome will also focus on ways to strengthen regional cooperation and identifying means of collective and collaborative actions towards fighting the challenge.

The countries in South Asian region are negotiating in blocks like LDCs, +5, G77&China group, etc... but there is very little interaction happening as SAARC to discuss common positions of and coordination action in South Asia. Since South Asian region is highly vulnerable to the adverse impacts, the relations within SAARC member countries may strain due to deep impacts on food, energy, water, demography, health and economy. Thus it is necessary to strengthen dialogue on coordinated climate change action from SAARC platform – a regional intergovernmental body for South Asia.

Civil SAARC –

The event will be organized by members of Climate Action Network – South Asia (CANSA) on 19-20th October 2009 in New Delhi on the eve of South Asian Environment Ministers meeting on Climate Change, the first such initiative so far. The event will focus on discussing 4 pillars (Shared Vision, Mitigation, Adaptation, Finance & Technology) of Bali Action Plan in the regional context. The outcomes will aim for expectations from COP 15 in Copenhagen this year.

