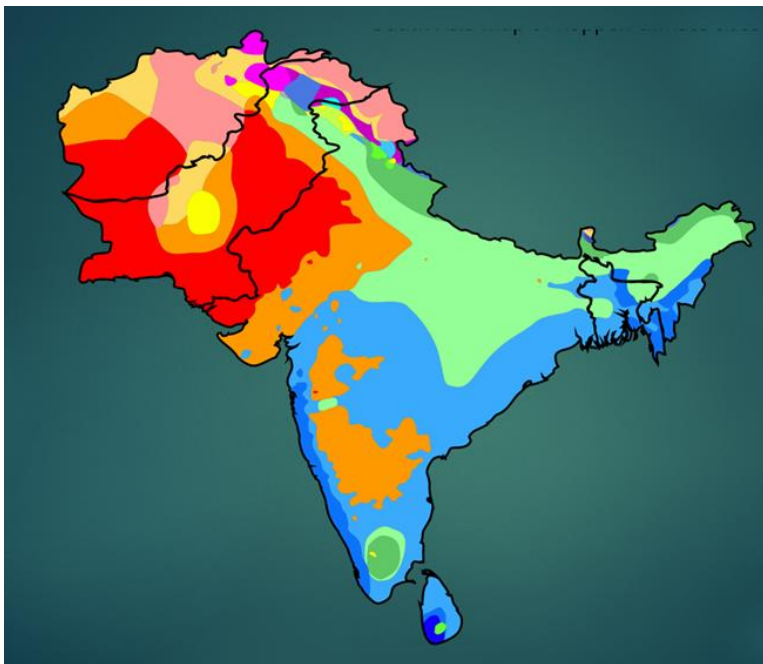


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Climate Change, Poverty and Sustainable Development Practices in South Asia: Issues and Way Forward



APAC Report • January 2025

**Turkish Center for Asia Pacific
Studies (APAC)**

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Climate Change, Poverty and Sustainable Development Practices in South Asia: Issues and Way Forward

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1. Executive Summary

"Climate change and climate risks are intimately linked, as they both directly and indirectly contribute to global warming (Masud, Sahara, & Kabir, 2023). Climate change refers to any significant alteration in the mean or variability of climatic attributes that persists for an extended period, typically decades or more (Chakraborty, Pattanayak, Mandal, Das, & Roychowdhury, 2014). Even minor changes in the planet's average temperature can lead to larger, potentially dangerous climate and weather pattern shifts. Extreme weather events, such as floods, droughts, and storm surges, are becoming more frequent and severe, threatening lands, livestock, crops, and food supplies (Yan & Alvi, 2022). Those living in fragile environments, who are already vulnerable to hunger, are most affected by climate change (Mahapatra, Walia, Rao, Raju, & Saggurti, 2021). The anticipated impacts of climate change on Earth's biological and physical systems are drawing global attention. Climate change affects all regions, posing varying health risks to human populations depending on their location and lifestyle (Dhital, Koirala, Dhungel, RK, & Gulis, 2016).

The IPCC report shows that global surface temperature has risen by 1.09°C in 2011-2020, compared to 1850-1900, due to successively warmer decades since 1850 (Chakraborty, Pattanayak, Mandal, Das, & Roychowdhury, 2014). Global heating is reducing the snow cover and sea ice in some regions and intensifying heavy rains and forest fires in others, leading to drastic changes in existing habitats (United Nations, 2022). Human activities, principally through the emission of greenhouse gases have unequivocally caused global warming, with global surface temperature reaching 1.1° C above 1850-1900 in 2011-2020. Due to historical and current imbalances in land use, energy use, and consumption and production patterns between and within nations, as well as between regions, people, and lifestyles, these emissions have continued to rise (Lee, Romero, & Core Writing Team, 2023). Climate-induced risks threaten nations worldwide, but poor countries are particularly vulnerable because of their low adaptive capacity and their heavy reliance on climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture (Aryal, Sapkota, Rahut, Marennya, & Stirling, 2021). Asia is experiencing the highest temperature in the last 30 years, with average temperatures in 2021 reaching 0.86°C above the 1981-2010 average, and 2020 the warmest year on record since 1900. Extreme precipitation events such as storms, floods, and landslides, which have led to over 48 million people directly affected and 4,000 lives lost in 2021 in the region are becoming more frequent (Asian Development Bank, 2023). Less than 0.4%, 0.5%, 7%, and 4% of global CO₂ emissions were produced between 1850 and 2019 by LDCs, SIDs, Africa, and South Asia, whereas around 39% was produced by North America

and Europe having the United States contributing 23% and Europe contributing 26%(United Nations, 2022).

The climate departure will have a significant impact on the lives of poor people. The climate change shocks push such poor people below the absolute poverty line (Fujii, 2016).The empirical evidence substantially supports the hypothesis that the lower a household's level of income, the greater the likelihood of being negatively impacted by disasters caused by nature(Laplante, 2010).

Despite the issue of sustainable development raised in the 1970s, it was in the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987 (WCED or Brundtland Commission) that the term was coined and also defined as "development that meets the needs of present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"(Le Blanc, 2015).

Some causes that promote sustainable development include "equitable distribution of growth's benefits, prudent resource management, and a decrease in the detrimental effects of economic growth on people and the environment" (Serageldin, 1996). Thus, sustainable development ensures the well-being of the human person by integrating social development, economic development and environment conservation and protection.

This report concentrates on the key questions: How is the South Asian economy currently performing? What impacts is climate change having on South Asia? Why are South Asian countries committed to sustainable development in the face of climate change? How is climate change affecting the socio-economic and geographic sectors of South Asia? What are the primary concerns related to climate change in this region? How is climate change contributing to the increase in poverty levels in South Asia? What strategies could South Asian countries adopt to cope with climate change and poverty and promote sustainable development in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

2. Discussion on South Asia's Economic Scenario

South Asian economies are shifting from agriculture to industry and service sectors, with a per capita income of US\$ 2,078, higher than Africa's US\$ 1,944 and lower than East Asia's US\$ 9,960(World Bank , 2023). South Asian economy has been adversely affected by global monetary tightening followed by fiscal vulnerabilities, rising inflation, and extreme weather conditions (United Nation, 2023). South Asia, home to 1.97 billion people, showcases a diverse human population, with adherents of various religions living together in eight countries, speaking

hundreds of languages, sharing cultural similarities, and celebrating differences (Dokuru,, Horwitz, Freis, Stallings, & Ehringer, 2024).

South Asia's projected GDP growth is 6.5% by 2030, with a per capita income of US\$3,446, and a population of 2.06 billion (Asian Development Bank, 2017). When visualizing individual South Asian countries; Maldives, Bangladesh, and India are economically prosperous states followed by Pakistan, Bhutan, and Nepal. The economic crisis hard hit Sri Lanka in 2022-2023 and is now on the path of economic recovery. A country such as Maldives, India, and Sri Lanka did a lot in the past to break their level of poverty. Presently, Maldives's poverty has remained at a mere 5.4 percent out of the total population followed by India (10.2 percent) and Sri Lanka (14.3 percent)(*See, Table No. 1*). The incident of poverty in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh are high whereas Nepal and Bhutan have succeeded to lessen the level of poverty within few decades due to continuous inflow of remittance and their continuous policy-cum economic reform initiatives (*See, Table No. 1*). It is revealed that Maldives, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and India have higher level of per capita GNP followed by Bangladesh and Pakistan in South Asia.

Table No. 1

South Asian Countries: At Glance

Countries	Population (Million)	Poverty	Annual GDP Growth	Per capita GNP (US\$)	Inflation
Afghanistan	31.40	49.4	-20.7	600	11.2
Bangladesh	174.24	20.5	7.1	2570	6.2
Bhutan	0.76	12.4	4.7	3040	5.6
India	1383.00	10.2	6.8	2150	6.7
Maldives	0.58	5.4	12.3	9600	2.3
Nepal	29.48	18.2	5.8	1220	6.3
Pakistan	227.00	21.9	6.0	1470	12.2
Sri Lanka	22.18	14.3	-7.8	4030	46.4

Source: ADB (2023), Basic Statistics – 2023, Asian Development Bank, Manila.

South Asian countries have enjoyed comfortable growth in the past few years except during the COVID-19 pandemic. South Asia's real GDP growth has remained at 4.8 percent and India's growth was 5.8 percent in 2023; projected to further grow 5.9 percent and 6.7 percent respectively for South Asia and India in 2024 (World Bank, 2023). Global energy prices have fallen from their peaks, which has eased domestic inflationary pressures and improved terms of trade for most of the South Asian countries. But domestic prices remained high; especially food prices, which has dampened growth in private consumption and worsened consumption inequality. The manufacturing industry in South Asia has seen increased limitations because of the region's weak demand, shortages of imported inputs brought on by import restriction laws, and a lack of foreign exchange reserves (Xie & Bussolo, 2023). The Russia-Ukraine War has further deteriorated the South Asian economy as fuel import, industrial raw materials; and cooking oil prices have been hiked. The prolonged conflict between Russia and Ukraine in South Asia has also hit the tourism sector.

There is ample space for growth for individual South Asian countries. Abundant workable population, rich culture and heritage, fauna/flora, blue sea and natural gas deposits, mineral ores deposits, rich coastal areas, mighty Mountains, fertile land; etc., are the major determinants of the future growth course of individual South Asian countries. The meaningful allocation of available renewable energy among South Asian countries further supports on growth of South Asia. Gradual digitization and expansion of service sectors, circulation of a common currency, and strong and conflictless union of South Asia could further support obtaining collective socio-economic prosperity of individual South Asian countries in the decades to come.

3. Climate Change and South Asian Countries

The South Asian economies are becoming increasingly vulnerable to many climate risks. Coastal areas and megacities are exposed to rising sea levels and intensifying storm surges; while many inland regions will have to cope with heightening climate variability that results in too much or too little water (Oppenheimer, et al., 2019). Increased health hazards, financial strains, and utility costs are brought on by rising temperatures and extreme weather events, which also worsen the problem by deteriorating local air and water quality (Ahmed & Suphachalasai, 2014). Additionally, the coastal areas of Bangladesh, India, Maldives, and Sri Lanka are at high risk from projected sea level rise, which may result in displacement of human settlements, loss of agricultural land, and negative impact on tourism and fisheries (Oppenheimer, et al., 2019). It has been witnessed that the reduction in the availability of water in South Asia will also threaten the food-drinking water and energy security in the region. The projected losses from climate change in GDP per capita for South Asian countries are higher than the global average of about 7 percent, with Bhutan facing a potential loss of 18 percent, Nepal 13 percent, India 10 percent, and Pakistan 10 percent in 2100 (WBG, 2021).

Because of their lack of diversity and reliance on a small number of industries for employment and economic growth, developing nations are more susceptible to the effects of climate change. Millions of people particularly from Africa, South America, and South Asia, are now at risk of food insecurity and decreased water security due to climate extremes, with the most vulnerable industries being agriculture, forestry, and fisheries. The Himalayas support 1.5 billion people in floodplains, with 10% of rivers' volume coming from glacier melting, vital for maintaining dry season river flows (Hamid Baba, 2021). But with the rising temperatures, the ice mass of the Himalayas is retreating more rapidly than the global average. Reduced water availability during summer months- which represents 60 percent of the annual flow – may have serious impacts on the region when people need water most for irrigation, hydropower, or more (ADB, 2022). In the short term, this means increased risks of flooding, erosion, and mudslides in Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and North India during the wet season. Thus, the melting of snow coincides with the summer monsoon season, and any intensification of the monsoon and/or increase in melting is likely to contribute to flood disasters in Himalayan catchments (UNFCCC, 2019).

Climate modeling predicts a 2.4°C to 4.5°C annual temperature increase in South Asia by the end of the century, with sea levels predicted to rise at least 40 cm by 2100, causing extensive coastal flooding and potential loss of 88% of ocean coral reefs (Sawarkar, Miththapala, Krishnan, Ariyabandu, & Sasikumar, 2012). Changing patterns of rainfall or melting snow and ice are

altering the freshwater system, affecting the quantity and quality of water available in many regions, including South Asia. Most of South Asia has warmed during the 20th century and into the 2000s on a national level with more temperature extremes in South Asia (Pachauri & Meyer, 2014). South Asia, accounting for 6-7 percent of global Green House Gas (GHG) emissions, is facing increasing pressure from India and other nations to commit to necessary reductions and prevent further emissions increase (Kakakhel, 2012).

The impact of climate change in sectors such as Agriculture, Forest ecosystems, Water Resources, Health, Energy, etc.; is immense. Higher temperature and elevated CO₂ levels initially cause increased photosynthesis; but beyond the physiological limits of crops, productivity will be reduced. Under extreme conditions, warming will lead to severe droughts, floods, and storms and ultimately damage the crop. Rapid displacement of people from disaster-prone areas further deteriorates their socio-economic status, and they are prone to poverty and climate-borne diseases. It has been projected that under the elevated temperatures and CO₂ conditions; the tropical and sub-tropical regions of India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka will experience a decline in their main staple food rice yield of as much as 23 percent by 2080s (ADB, 2014). Climate and adverse weather events are expected to cause a general increase in the number of cases of both vector and waterborne diseases. Climate change is expected to increase mortality rates in South Asia due to diseases like Dengue, Malaria, and Diarrhea, potentially causing a 1.8% annual GDP loss by 2050 (Kafle, 2023).

4. Climate Change and Level of Poverty: Developing Countries, South Asia

Climate and environmental degradation have been linked to the poverty traps. Climate change could impact human capital accumulation, leading to reduced investment in children's education, nutrition, and health, potentially worsening inter-generational poverty transmission due to more intense climate-induced disasters (Hallegatte, et al., 2014).

Financial liberalization, policy reforms, and economic opening led to a decrease in the poor population in South Asia to 262 million in 2020, representing 38.2% of the world's total poor scenario. Bhutan and Sri Lanka's HDI remained higher in 2020, while Nepal, India, and Bangladesh's HDI increased from 142, 131, and 133 respectively in 2020 (Embassy of Sweden, 2022). The magnitude of poverty increases with the change in climate or climate-borne disasters. This has been witnessed each year in countries such as India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal; etc. Climate change is also increasing inequality between the richer and poorer countries. Global warming has boosted economic growth in temperate countries, while reducing annual growth in hot-climate countries, leading to exacerbated global inequality over the past half-century (Ghorai & Tapia, 2022).

Climate change's negative consequences will be particularly severe in developing countries due to their geographical and climatic characteristics, reliance on natural resources, and low adaptive capacity. The poorest people are most susceptible since they have fewer resources and are less adaptable and the impact on these poor economies will limit their growth potential (Abeygunawardena, et al., 2003).

Flooding is the most common climatic threat in the world, causing ten million home displacements each year, primarily affecting low-income households, hence poverty plays a significant role in susceptibility (McDermott, 2022).

Climate change impacts are unevenly distributed, with the poorest countries and people suffering the most. These regions are already warmer and face high rainfall variability. They heavily rely on agriculture, which is climate-sensitive, and suffer from inadequate health provision and low-quality public services. Their low incomes and vulnerabilities make adaptation to climate change difficult (Stern, 2007).

Climate variability changes may worsen poverty in emerging nations by increasing the vulnerability of impoverished households. This is owing to a strong reliance on agriculture and other climate-sensitive natural resources for income and well-being, as well as a lack of the financial and technological capacity to handle climate risks (Skoufias, Rabassa, & Olivieri, 2011). The regions where climate change is expected to push most people into poverty by 2030 are Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia (Jafino, Walsh, Rozenberg, & Hallegatte, 2020). Under high climate change scenarios, the number of people pushed into extreme poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, East Asia, and Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean are 39.7 million, 35.7 million, 7.5 million, and 5.8 million people (by 2030) respectively (Jafino, Walsh, Rozenberg, & Hallegatte, 2020).

Table No. 2

Temperature Change (° C) in South Asian countries – 2030, 2050 and 2080

Countries	2030			2050			2080		
	A ₂	A ₁ B	B ₁	A ₂	A ₁ B	B ₁	A ₂	A ₁ B	B ₁
Bangladesh	0.9	1.9	1.0	1.6	2.5	1.6	4.2	4.2	2.9
Bhutan	1.5	1.9	1.7	2.3	2.6	2.2	4.5	4.4	3.2
India	0-6-1.8	0.9-2.4	0.7-2.0	1.3-2.9	1.4-3.5	1.1-2.6	3.0-5.6	2.8-6.2	1.9-3.7
Maldives	0.9	1.0	0.8	1.6	1.5	1.3	3.3	3.2	2.2
Nepal	1.6	2.0	1.7	2.5	2.9	2.3	4.8	5.0	3.4
Sri Lanka	1.0	1.1	1.0	1.5	1.5	1.3	3.6	3.3	2.3

Source: (Ahmed & Suphachalasai, Assessing the Costs of Climate Change and Adaptation in South Asia, 2014).

The above data in Table 2 depicts that South Asian countries like Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka are predicted to experience temperate climate conditions by 2030, 2050, and 2080 due to increased CO₂ levels. This will result in hot summers, flooding, droughts, snow melting, displacement, and diseases, leading to poverty, malnutrition, and food insecurity. The livelihoods of poor and indigenous communities will also suffer. Governments are urged to focus on social sectors, reducing focus on growth and infrastructure expansion. The increasing frequency and severity of weather disasters pose risks to food production and household living expenses. Rising food prices would hurt the urban poor most, as more than half of their budgets are devoted to food and, unlike their rural counterparts, they do not produce themselves (Gustafson, 2013).

5. Sustainable Development Practices in South Asia

The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) defines sustainable development as ‘the ability to meet the needs of the present without compromising the future generations who have their own specific set of needs as well’ (WCED, S.W.S, 1987). In other words, development is crucial for meeting human wants and improving the quality of life (Goniadis, 2015). Sustainable development ensures the well-being of the human person by integrating social development, economic development, and environmental conservation and protection. A country's economic development is related to its human development, which encompasses, among other things, health and education.

According to Le Blanc, a framework for international cooperation that aims to support sustainable development would necessarily put a heavy emphasis on three dimensions:

- The need to eradicate poverty and hunger.
- The global ecological footprint of humanity, and,
- The management of global commons (Montaldo, 2013).

Earth Summit was held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 with the agreement by member states to launch a process to develop a set of sustainable development goals (SDGs). The experts reaffirm the importance of sustainability is always being critical and aware of the social dimension of the environment(Enders & Remig, 2014). The overall goal of sustainable development is the long-term stability of the economy and environment, this is only achievable through the integration and acknowledgment of economic, environmental, and social concerns throughout the decision-making process (Emas, 2015). Fankhauser & Stern, 2016, rightly conclude that "Climate change is a threat of a completely different magnitude. It is not a localized problem; it is planetary in scale. It is systematic, rather than marginal requires systematic analysis and a radical response (Fankhauser & Stern, 2016).

South Asian countries are committed to achieving the 2030 Agenda's SDG goals, including poverty reduction, zero hunger, good health, quality education, gender equality, clean water, sanitation, affordable energy, decent work, infrastructure, and economic growth, as well as reducing inequality, sustainable cities, responsible consumption, climate action, life below water, peace, justice, and partnership for sustainable development(United Nations, 2024). South Asia lags on many social, economic, and environmental development indicators. South Asia still accounts for 36 percent of the world's poor and unacceptability high rates of undernourishment, child stunting, child wasting, and child mortality among the regions of the world (ESCAP, 2018). Sustainable development in the areas of food, water, and energy is a major problem for all nations around the world, particularly in South Asia where there is a danger of unending population growth(Jha & Mishra, 2014).

Some South Asian countries' human capital index is lower than what their GDP per capita would predict. South Asia still lags over key infrastructures such as electricity, water, sanitation, and communication in comparison to East Asia, the Caribbean or Latin America. Afghanistan ranks 162 out of 167 for SDG goals achievement, while Bangladesh ranks 107 in South Asia. Bhutan ranks 61 out of 167, while India ranks 109. The Maldives has achieved more than Bhutan at 67. Nepal ranks 95, Pakistan ranks 137, and Sri Lanka scores 93 out of 167. East and South Asia have shown strong performance in SDGs(Sachs, Lafortune, & Fuller, 2024). This means South Asian countries have achieved more on the front of poverty reduction, assurance of good health and well-being to the people, gender equality initiatives, provision of clean energy to people and maintain of peace, justice, and strengthening of institutional capabilities, etc(Sachs, Lafortune, & Fuller, 2024). Poverty reduction in South Asia hinges on reducing inequality through targeted pro-poor policies. However, economic growth is necessary but not by itself sufficient to implement such policies. An improved level of governance would facilitate the adoption of such policies by helping to protect the general public's interest rather than being hostage to vested interests (United Nations University, 2004).

South Asia is on track to achieve the extreme poverty target. However, the achievement of 1st SDGs goal is threatened by loss from national disasters, lack of access to basic water and sanitation services, and inadequate government spending on education, health services, and

social protection (ESCAP, 2021). Spending needed for education, water, sanitation, and roads SDGs are distinctly lower in India than elsewhere in South Asia. On average, South Asian countries' additional costs to meet the education SDG are about 2 percent of GDP, with some countries facing additional costs of more than three times this average. Additional spending on water and sanitation is also lower in India and South Asian countries relative to emerging economies (Garcia-Escribano, Mogues, Moszoro, & Soto, 2021).

Ironically, while South Asian countries have contributed the least GHG emissions globally, they are nevertheless among the countries worst affected by climate change. The impact of climate change will likely worsen the challenges already being faced by South Asia, including those related to hunger, poverty, security, inequality, and health (Mbah, Shingruf, & Molthan-Hill, 2022). Addressing the growing effects of climate change, which are entwined with socioeconomic, demographic, and political issues and increase the likelihood of fragility, presents problems for the South Asian region (Romita, 2021).

6. Conclusion

The transformation of South Asia's economy has been underway for several decades, with a shift towards industry and service sectors from the traditional agriculture sector. Almost all South Asian countries have opened their economies to foreign investment, demonstrating a commitment to gradual liberalization. This includes the privatization of state-owned enterprises and a gradual process of financial liberalization, resulting in a continuous inflow of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into the region.

Despite these developments, the South Asian economy lags behind East Asia in terms of per capita income, which stands at US\$2,078, with GDP growth not exceeding an average of 4 to 5 percent per annum. While Sri Lanka is recovering from crisis, other South Asian nations, including the Maldives, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Bhutan, and Nepal, have experienced improved economic conditions. These nations have seen a decline in poverty levels over the years, although Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh still require significant improvements. Thanks to FDI and inward remittances, Nepal and Bhutan have successfully reduced poverty and experienced respectable economic growth. However, as South Asian economies become more intertwined with global economic activities, they become susceptible to external shocks such as oil price hikes, conflicts, or recessions.

South Asia possesses an array of assets, including natural resources, human capital, rich mineral ores, fertile soil, the mighty Himalayan ranges, diverse fauna and flora, and a rich cultural heritage. If these resources are harnessed effectively for development initiatives, the South Asian economy could see further growth over the years. Additionally, sustainable and multi-purpose use of the region's abundant water resources could accelerate economic growth in South Asia.

South Asian countries are vulnerable to the climate change process. They are prone to climate risks situation. Rising sea levels and depletion of coastal areas, snow, and glacier melting particularly in Himalayan regions; frequent drought, flood, hurricanes; etc.; are borne with the climate change in South Asia. Climate change is affecting the socioeconomic and cultural facets of the people and communities in South Asia, which has hindered their livelihood, earnings, and expectation of involvement in various income-generating activities. Furthermore, food insecurity and internal migration of people have been witnessed in South Asian countries due to floods, landslides, avalanches; etc., which are happening each year due to climate change. The coastal areas of Bangladesh, India, Maldives, and Sri Lanka are at high risk from sea level rise whereas Afghanistan, Nepal, and Bhutan are vulnerable to frequent landslides, melting of glaciers, and probable bursts of glacier lakes in upper mountain regions. These have resulted in the displacement of people, loss of forest and agricultural land, and adverse impacts on their economies' sub-sectors such as fishery, tourism, etc. The projected cost of climate change on South Asian GDP is much for almost all countries of South Asia. Furthermore, climate change has made drinkable water scarce in the summer season; plain land is found to be extremely hot in summer which leads to plain parts inhabitable for the people of South Asia. Due to climate change, the water levels of run-off rivers from the Himalayas have decreased gradually over the years. By the end of the 21st century, a 2.4°C to 4.5°C increase in annual temperature could cause further anomalies in South Asia, negatively impacting the livelihoods of most residents.

Climate change is correlated to the level of poverty in the countries of the world. The adverse climate situation is aggravating poverty in South Asia too. Excessive heat, floods, and landslides happening in South Asia are affecting and draining the people's tangible and intangible assets, in turn, impacting their capital accumulation and reductions on the children's education, nutrition, health, etc. It has been witnessed that the poverty level in South Asia has dropped promisingly and stood at 262 million in 2020 (in terms of US\$ 1.90 a day). South Asian countries such as Bhutan and Sri Lanka have been more successful in improving their HDI level followed by Nepal, India, and Bangladesh. High dependence on natural resources for livelihood and their limited capacity to adapt to the climate; South Asian people are found to be trapped in poverty. Thus, climate variability is likely to add to the already high vulnerability of poor households, which would exacerbate the incidence, severity, and persistence of poverty in the countries of South Asia. It is projected that by 2030, under a high climate change scenario; 35.7 million people in South Asia will be pushed towards extreme poverty.

The agenda of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was launched targeting the majority of the developed as well as developing countries of the world setting 17 goals from no poverty to economic growth, climate action, sustainable development, etc. South Asian countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka are committed to fulfilling the SDGs goals through action and policies. The basic tenet of sustainable development is to attain long-term stability of the economy along with preservation of the environment which could be achieved through meaningful integration and comprehension

of economic, environmental as well as social concerns through farsighted decision-making processes. Economists and social thinkers believe that climate change is a global phenomenon; efforts from each of the nations are desirable to lessen the adverse shocks of climate change and it is also a gradual process of fixing it with action, policy, advocacy, cooperation bearing collective efforts amongst the countries nearby or close to.

Despite the commitment to attaining the aforementioned goals of SDGs; South Asia lags in fulfilling some core social, economic, and environmental development indicators. South Asia still accounts for 36 percent of the world's poor with high rates of undernourishment, child stunting, child wasting, and mortality. South Asia still lags on access to key infrastructure such as electricity, water, sanitation, and communication compared particularly with East Asia, the Caribbean, or Latin America. South Asian countries such as Bhutan and Maldives have performed well in obtaining SDGs goals with a ranking of 60-60 out of 167 score. This phenomenon for India and Pakistan remained good with a 100 plus ranking while this score for Sri Lanka remained at below 85 score. In sum, South Asian countries have been successful in achieving SDG 1, SDG 3, SDG 5, SDG 7, SDG 16, etc. This means one could reveal that South Asia succeeded in achieving good performance on poverty reduction, health access, gender equality, assurance of clean water to its population, etc. South Asian countries are facing some similarities and differences based on their SDGs progress and challenges. To meet all SDGs goals by South Asian countries on the dateline is a very arduous and time-consuming task. For this, there is a dire need for huge investment in the social and infrastructure sectors by each South Asian country. Besides, proactive policies and people's participation could aid South Asian countries on the front of obtaining major SDGs goals in the years to come. Without a huge amount of investment in the social sector by the governments of South Asian countries, say for at least a decade or more; the dream of attaining SDGs goals will not be obtained.

Climate change response policies are most effective when they are integrated with national development strategies and planning. Given that climate change is a shared concern among South Asian countries, such actions necessitate cooperation and coordination within the region to promote capacity building, research and development, and the sharing of best practices. South Asia should adopt a 'Green Growth' path to mitigate the potential adverse effects of climate change. To achieve this, South Asian countries should increase their investment in sectors such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries, water management, and renewable energy, implementing sustainable practices over the coming decade.

Educational programs, starting from lower grades, can play a crucial role in raising awareness about the negative consequences of climate change. This long-term strategy can yield better outcomes in mitigating the impact of climate change. Furthermore, advocacy and research on the adverse effects of climate change should be conducted, and the findings should be reflected in the policies and programs of each South Asian country. This approach will further aid in mitigating the negative impact of climate change.

The SDGs provide a universal, apolitical development agenda to which all South Asian countries have committed as signatories. This shared commitment could be harnessed to reinvigorate regional cooperation towards achieving these common goals. Through platforms like SAARC or BIMSTEC, South Asian countries could enhance sustainable development initiatives, addressing climate change issues through mutual understanding and robust cooperation for the well-being of their populations. Such efforts could help reduce the existing culture of poverty and foster desirable growth in the coming decades. Therefore, donors should consider offering soft, repayable loans in South Asia and investing in the priority sectors identified by each South Asian country in their respective plans and programs. This approach would also support the achievement of relevant SDGs in the future.

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