EUROPEAN UNION

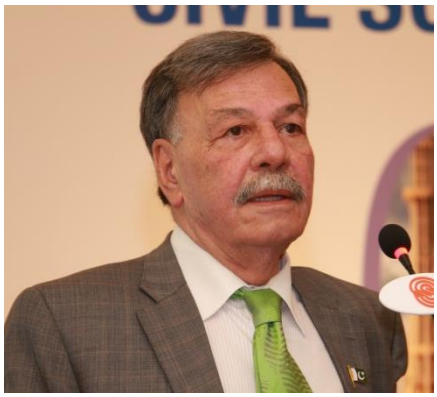
CSCCC

Climate Change: Cooperation among South Asian States

Shafqat Kakakhel

Climate Perspectives

This Project is funded by the European Union



Ambassador Shafqat Kakakhel served as a member of Pakistan's Diplomatic Service (1969-1998) until his appointment as UN Assistant Secretary General/ Deputy Executive Director, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) from August 1998 until December 2007.

Since his retirement and return home, Kakakhel has been engaged in efforts to promote environmental protection and sustainable development, with focus on climate change policy. He has been a member of the advisory committee supporting the Ministry of Environment; the Energy Finance Board assisting the M/O Water and Power;the Sustainable Development Policy Institute and the Mountain and Glacier Protection Organization. Mr Kakakhel served as a member of the Executive Board of the UN Clean Development Mechanism (2009-13) representing the developing countries in the Asia and Pacific region.

Civil Society Coalition for Climate Change (CSCCC)

CSCCC provides a networking platform for civil society organizations, climate experts, academia, researchers, media, private sector and concerned citizens to exchange ideas and build synergies while preserving and strengthening the autonomy and independence of its members. The coalition approach was adopted to enhance civil society capacity for effective engagement with policy makers to support mitigation and adaptation actions that build resilience and reduce vulnerability at all levels by integrating adaptation into relevant socio-economic and environmental policies for sustainable development. The concept of the coalition is in line with the Lima-Paris Action Agenda (LPAA) and Paris Agreement on Climate Change which recognizes civil society as a key player in framing climate policies to strengthen climate governance. The strategic focus of the coalition also covers Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development particularly SDG13 (Climate Action). CSCCC works with "A Whole of Government Approach" and follows the guidelines of "Open Government Partnership (OGP)" to achieve its objectives.

The Civil Society Civil Society Coalition for Climate Change (CSCCC) is a licensed Coalition (registered under Section 42 of the Companies Ordinance, 1984) dedicated to highlighting the subject of climate change in Pakistan and influencing policymaking at the regional, national and subnational levels through research, knowledge-sharing, and advocacy.

Disclaimer:

This publication is a part of CSCCC's 'Climate Perspectives' series- a collection of narratives by thought leaders on climate change, which explores emerging and historical issues relating to the changing climate, its impacts and implications across a broad range of sectors in Pakistan. The Climate Perspectives series is an initiative that aims to encourage knowledge sharing and promote informed discourse on climate change. The views and analysis contained in the publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of CSCCC.

Please visit:
Website: csccc.org.pk
Facebook:https://www.facebook.com/cscccpak

At the outset, I would like to thank the Institute of South Asian Studies of the National University of Singapore, in particular Professor Subarea Mitra and my dear friend Dr Iftekhar Chowdhury, for the opportunity of visiting this Institute and speaking to you on a subject of existential significance for the human race, especially the peoples of South Asia.

Climate change is now widely recognized as the defining challenge of our time. It is a global threat which can only be addressed through concerted efforts and cooperative actions by the international community. It has taken the international community a bit more than three decades to recognize the multifaceted risks associated with climate change and agree a set of measures to address its impacts as well as prevent the further deterioration of the global climate.

In 1987, the World Metrological Organization(WMO) and the United Nations Environment Programme(UNEP) in response to the concerns voiced by the scientific community, decided to jointly establish the Inter- governmental Panel on Climate Change(IPCC) in 1987 to scientifically probe the nexus between human actions and the climate and regularly assess the impacts of climate variation and appropriate responses there to The IPCCC published its first assessment in 1990 and four more since then drawing upon the research carried out by hundreds of climate-Related centers the world over. The IPCC reports focus on all relevant aspects of climate change such as its drivers, its impacts, and, most importantly, measures to contain the further destabilization of the climate.

In 1990 soon after the IPCC published its first assessment, the UN General Assembly initiated inter- governmental negotiations on an agreement on climate change which led to the adoption in June 1992 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change(UNFCCC) at the UN Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio.

The UN Climate Convention confirmed the consensus reached by the scientists that climate change was already underway, that it had been caused by human activities, especially the concentration of old and induction of fresh emissions of carbon dioxide and other GHGs, that a drastic reduction in the release of GHGs would help in stabilization of climate whilst continued emissions would heighten global warming causing a disruption in the weather patterns and triggering a rapid melting of the arctic permafrost as well as frequent floods , droughts, and storms. The Convention held the large scale emissions by the advanced countries since the Industrial Revolution responsible for the variation in the global climate and required them to lead the efforts to stabilize the climate by curtailing their carbon emissions. Developed countries also agreed to assist the developing countries to adapt to the negative effects of climate change and to deploy renewable sources of energy in order not to contribute to the further worsening of the climate. The Kyoto Protocol agreed in 1997 committed 38 developed countries to reduce their carbon

emissions by 5% over the 1990 levels up to 2012.

The second most important agreement on climate change is the Paris Agreement on Climate Change adopted by 195 countries in December 2015.The Agreement, whose elements were under discussion since 2009, offers a blueprint for addressing the risks posed by climate change and engendered the hope that the international community will be able to prevent a worsening of the destabilization of the global climate.

The election of Donald Trump, a well-known climate skeptic, and the nomination of the Oklahoma Attorney General Mr Scott Pruitt, who shares Trump's skepticism about climate denier as head of the powerful US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA),

has led to widespread fears of regressive steps by the Trump Administration on global climate issues. During his election campaign, Donald Trump had vowed to scrap the Paris Agreement. We do not know whether under President Trump the US will opt out of the Paris Agreement. But there is no doubt that the ability of the international community to limit the anticipated increase in global surface and ocean temperatures as well as adapt to the effects of climate change that are irreversible will determine the success or failure of efforts to eliminate widespread poverty in the world and achieve a minimum of prosperity and wellbeing for all human beings during this century and beyond.

Given the limited time available to me I do not intend to address, at length, the science of climate science.I am sure most of you know the consensus among 97% of the world scientists that the climate change and global warming have indeed taken place and human actions are responsible for it.They point out that global land temperature has gone up by an average of between 0.8 to 1 degree Celsius since the Industrial Revolution. The past decade and especially the past three years have been the hottest in human history.Sea levels have already surged by 20 cm.Scientists believe that the increase in the land and ocean temperature has resulted largely from the emission and build up of huge quantities of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases from the burning of fossil fuels such as coal, oil and gas for producing energy, massive deforestation, and transformation of range land and wildernesses into highways, cities and suburbs and other built up areas.

According to climate scientists and empirical evidence , the increase in temperature has already led to the faster than usual melting of the arctic permafrost and ice and snow in the high altitude glaciers all over the planet. The erosion of the mass of the glaciers would reduce the intake of fresh snow and ice by the glaciers and reduce the amount of freshwater available for human consumption and other uses. The recession of glaciers would also release large quantities of methane lying beneath ice as well as raise the sea levels all over the planet. Low lying islands states and coastal regions could be swept away by the surging sea waters. Rising sea water might threaten human settlements and agricultural lands and aquifers forcing the farmers and

fishing communities to seek shelter and livelihood elsewhere.

Climate change would disrupt the global climatic and metrological system causing an increase in the number, duration and intensity of extreme weather events such as floods and droughts, ,heat waves, storms and hurricanes.Higher temperature would accelerate evaporation of surface water whilst exacerbating the thirst of trees, crops and livestock.Higher level of warming means more water- borne and heat-related diseases and epidemics.The monsoon patterns would become more erratic, triggering precipitation either too early or too late, too heavy or too little, causing floods or droughts.

As you know, during the past few decades the number of extreme events such as hurricanes, storms, floods, droughts and heatwaves has already gone up in different regions and countries of the world.Unless checked, an unabated spike in global warming would make frequent and devastating weather phenomena the norm rather than the exception!

According to the IPCC, the cumulative effect of the impacts of climate change would be a net reduction in the quantity of freshwater which would reduce agricultural and livestock productivity, hydro- power generation, slowing down the overall pace of socio-economic development.

The adverse effects of climate change have been and will be experienced by all countries and regions. But they will hit the small island states and coastal areas and the poorer countries the hardest because of their weak resilience to cope with sudden and frequent extreme events such as floods, droughts, tsunamis, heat waves, and storms which destroy infrastructure and livelihoods and dislocate people.The negative effects of higher temperature will disproportionately affect developing countries with large coastal areas, higher rates of population growth, widespread underdevelopment and poverty, economies that are based on agriculture or extraction of natural resources, poor quality of governance and corruption, and historic vulnerability to extreme weather events.

Let us now look at the situation in South Asia, home to more than 1.5 billion human beings living in eight sovereign states.

All eight countries of South Asia share most of the features of vulnerability : they have large and rapidly growing populations; two South Asian states- Sri Lanka and the Maldives- are island states; three- Bangla Desh, India and Pakistan- have large coastal regions; most have agro- based economies; most are plagued by mis-Governance and corruption. The entire region has historically been exposed to extreme weather phenomena. Happily, some of South Asian states have recently achieved impressive socio- economic development and poverty alleviation. All of them, unfortunately, are highly vulnerable to the adverse consequences of climate change, a fact that has been corroborated by the IPCC and climate modeling carried out by climate and metrological organizations within South Asia.

South Asian states have responded to climate change. They have been actively participating

in the global climate change discussions since the late 1980s. Their delegates have articulated the positions of the developing countries in the negotiations culminating in the adoption of the UNFCCC and the subsequent annual conferences of the Parties to the Convention.Although India is the only SAARC member state whose emissions of carbon and other GHGs have recently gone up considerably, accounting for around 5% of the global emissions, all countries of the region have signed the Paris Agreement and pledged to reduce or to not increase their GHG emissions.

All South Asian states have formulated national policies on climate change aimed at protecting their economies and people from the negative impacts of climate change.In India, in addition to the efforts made by the Central Government to promote a climate resilient economy, several state or provincial governments have also developed their own climate strategies and plans of action.There are more than a hundred non- governmental and civil society organizations engaged in climate change – related activities in the SAARC region, loosely linked through the Climate Action Network South Asia(CANSA).

As far as I know, there is little or no cooperation on climate change- related issues at bilateral level between member states of SAARC. However, the need for cooperation at the regional level on environmental issues in general and the challenge of climate change in particular was recognized as far back as 1982 with the establishment of the South Asia Cooperative Programme for Environmental Protection (SACEP) with the encouragement of the UN Environment Programme. The Ministers of Environment of SAARC have held numerous meetings since the late 1980s.The ministerial and summit meetings of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) have discussed Environment and climate change since 1987.The fifth SAARC Summit had declared 1992 as the SAARC Year of the Environment . The standing Committee on Environment was set up in 1991.

For a number of reasons, they SACEP, whose HQ is located in Colombo, has remained small, poorly resourced and ineffective organization; it has survived largely as a small research and advocacy outfit.

The ministers of environment have served as the key policy level forum for defining the South Asian regions positions on global environment and climate change issues.The meeting held in July 2008 in Dhaka has been the most remarkable.The meeting spelt out the consensus positions of SAARC countries on the key elements of a new inter- governmental agreement on climate change to be negotiated at the climate change conference in Copenhagen in 2009. It also adopted a SAARC Action Plan on Climate Change calling for cooperation in capacity building, promotion of best practices, and research on mitigation and adaptation, development of climate friendly technology, management of climate change-induced extreme events , exchange of metrological data etc. The outcomes of the meeting were endorsed by the SAARC Summit held in the fall of 2008.

Since the early 1990s, declarations on the outcomes of SAARC summits have invariably included references to climate change, often endorsing the recommendations of the ministers of environment or studies commissioned by previous summits. However, the SAARC Summit in Thimphu in 2010 was the most remarkable. The Summit was officially dedicated to the topic of climate change. Its deliberations focused on measures to strengthen cooperation in addressing climate change. The Summit adopted a statement on climate change and the document on the outcome of the meeting was captioned 'Towards a Green and Happy South Asia'!

The Thimpu Summit launched four climate change- related initiatives: Natural Disasters; Monsoons; Mountain Eco-systems; and Marine Biodiversity for promoting cooperation and coordination with a view to strengthening their resilience to adapt to the adverse effects of climate change. The Summit also established an Inter- governmental Expert Group on Climate Change to meet at least twice a year to suggest measures for cooperation on climate change. It also called for detailed studies on climate risks and the feasibility of mechanisms for promoting investment in low carbon technology. Further, the Summit called on the member states to strengthen the half a dozen regional centers established under SAARC auspices or blessed by the Summits for promoting climate- related research and development. (The centers described as SAARC centers include the centers dealing with Agriculture and Metrological Research in Dhaka; Energy in Islamabad; Disaster Risk Management in India; Coastal Zone Management in the Maldives; and Forestry in Thimpu).

How do we assess the progress achieved in promoting climate change- related cooperation? The progress achieved thus far has been largely at the declaratory and rhetorical level. The SAARC summits made lofty pledges of cooperation at regional and global levels which have remained unfulfilled. Despite tremendous intellectual capabilities, South Asia has failed to provide the much needed leadership to the Group of 77 in forcefully advancing the core interests of developing countries on crucial elements of the global climate agenda- such as Climate finance, technology transfer, Compensation for loss and damage, capacity building etc.- at the annual meetings of Parties to the UNFCCC.At the Paris Conference of Parties in 2015, the only sub-region which did not present a sub- regional statement was South Asia. None of the SAARC regional centers has realized its potential in terms of catalyzing cooperation on key issues related to mitigation, adaptation, climate friendly energy and technology, and capacity development. All of them are handicapped by lack of political recognition and support as well as human, technological and financial resources. The four eco-systems initiatives launched by the Thimpu Summit have not made any significant progress other than organizing a few seminars and workshops. The Expert Group assigned to propose specific ideas on cooperation has met a few times but without any headway. The inability of the ministers of environment to meet during the recent past despite the important development before and since the adoption of the historic

Paris Agreement is a telling commentary on the state of cooperation in South Asia on climate change issues. Having said this, I should acknowledge the efforts of South Asian non-governmental and civil society organizations to maintain contacts and cooperation taking advantage of the modern means of information technology.UN Agencies , the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank and international climate research institutions have undertaken a variety of activities to identify areas of mutually beneficial cooperation in South Asia in different climate- relevant sectors such as energy efficiency and development of renewable energy, food security, and disaster management. They have also organized seminars, workshops, and conferences to enable south Asian experts to meet and exchange ideas on cooperation.

There are several reasons for the inadequate cooperation on climate change in South Asia. The most daunting challenge is the lack of political to promote regional cooperation in general and on environment and climate change issues in particular.SAARC has somehow failed to garner

The political ownership that has helped other regional mechanisms such as ASEAN to make impressive strides despite the lack of historic, infrastructural and communications links that had existed in South Asia during colonialism. The lack of political will is vividly reflected in the virtually static growth of the SAARC Secretariat and its inertia- prone decision making processes. There has been no serious effort to consider measures for strengthening SAARC; even the recommendations of Inter-governmental expert groups established by SAARC itself have not been implemented. Recently, the disdain toward regional cooperation was highlighted by the casual manner in which the 19th SAARC summit scheduled to be held in Islamabad in November 2016 was cancelled. The deficit of political will can be explained to a large extent in terms of the inability of the larger countries of South Asia to carry out sustained and uninterrupted dialogues on their differences and disputes. The domination of decision making in SAARC by the ministries of foreign affairs at the cost of the line ministries dealing with subjects directly relevant to climate change is yet another impediment to regional cooperation. The organizational structure of SAARC summits does not appear to be conducive to enable serious deliberations on complex and multi-dimensional subjects like climate change.

The poor state cooperation and collaboration on climate change at the regional level in South Asia has kept the enormous potential for mutually beneficial cooperation un-tapped. I will mention a few areas in which cooperation is imperative. At the global level, south Asian states need to work together to ensure that the global climate – related decision making processes under the Paris Agreement and other multilateral arrangements take due cognizance of their needs and concerns. At the regional level, South Asian countries need to jointly generate credible knowledge base for decision making on a host of climate related topics. These include the physical monitoring and assessment of the patterns of the Himalaya, Karakoram and Hindu Kush glaciers and the

monsoons which together account for the bulk of the freshwater resources of the region; Scientifically sound studies and modelling on evaluating the impacts of climate change on the flows of the rivers shared by two or more south Asian countries, notably the Indus, the Ganges, and the Brahmaputra as well as the trans- boundary aquifers would help prevent suspicions and misunderstandings among the lower riparian states. It would also be useful to undertake objective assessments of the potential of regional cooperation to incentivize technical collaboration and investments.

In the area of mitigation aimed at reducing the region's carbon footprint, the scope for joint investment in energy efficiency and development of renewable sources of energy such as solar, wind, and bio-mass appears substantial. In regard to adaptation, the possibilities are huge, especially in agriculture and livestock, afforestation, disaster risk prevention and management and alleviating the adverse health impacts of higher temperatures.

The development and deployment of climate resilient technology in energy, agriculture, and water resource management is widely considered useful and offers considerable potential for cooperation. Dissemination of best practices in forecasting of extreme weather events is another promising area for enhanced cooperation and collaboration. Similarly the cross cutting imperative of building the capacities of governance mechanisms at all levels needs to be considered.