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Climate Change Cooperation: A Case Study of SAARC

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A B S T R A C T

South Asia is the region which is most vulnerable to the calamities of climate change. It is producing serious implication for the region like water, food and health insecurity. In addition to that global warming in the region is leading to the loss of human habitat and migration problems. The only threat that is deemed as credible and common among the SAARC countries is the climate change. Being highly prone to the appalling cataclysms of climate change that have resulted in to health, habitat, food and water security, the SAARC states had gone for cooperation from time to time in the past. To what extent the climate change cooperation will bring peace and stability in the region? In addition to that implications of climate change for south Asia and the steps taken by SAARC in order to cope with it will be discussed in the paper.

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Introduction

Since the last decade of 20th century there has been a seismic shift in the security doctrines of the states. With the end of cold war and the emergence of non-state actors like drug cartels, terrorist networks, cyber criminals and sea pirates, the world has entered into a new-age threat known as non-traditional security threat. Besides that one of the imminences faced by the nation-states is the environmental degradation. There has been an overwhelming consensus among the scientists that the unusual and abrupt changes in the weather pattern in the last two decades have given birth to catastrophic extremities in the world. In order to get access to scientific data, the world meteorological organization (WMO) and United Nation Environmental program (UNEP) established a body known as Intergovernmental panel on climate change (IPCC). The IPCC, in 1990, bore out in its report that the threat is real and human induced. As per reports the global south, especially the south Asia is the most vulnerable to climate change. Nine out of ten countries which are most vulnerable to climate change are

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underdeveloped and mostly belong to the global south (David Eckstein, 2016). Among them the most affected countries that belong to south Asia are Sri-lanka and India that lies at no: 4 and no: 6 respectively at climate risk index 2016. While Bangladesh and Nepal are at number 13 and 15, respectively, on the climate risk index 2016. The data emanates that the South Asian region is at greater climate change. However,Since the independence from British Raj, the relation among the countries of south Asian region is marred by conflicts. Deadly wars, for instance, between Pakistan and India has taken place in the past seven decades. Besides that, conflict between India-Bangladesh (Border dispute) and India-Sri-lanka (Tamil dispute) had also occurred in the south Asia region. The only organization SAARC, established in 1985, had failed to bring peace and stability in the region among the countries, owing to absence of common threat perception. The ASEAN, for illustration, is a successful organization because it felt a common threat from the communist China. The only threat that is deemed as credible and common among the SAARC countries is the climate change. South Asia being home to $1/5^{th}$ world's population is at extreme risk of climate change, suggests UNFCCC reports. The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, 2005 earth quake and 2010 floods in Pakistan manifest that the region is highly vulnerable to climate change. Being highly prone to the appalling cataclysms of climate change that have resulted in to health, habitat, food and water security, the SAARC states had gone for cooperation from time to time in the past. To what extent the climate change cooperation will bring peace and stability in the region? In addition to that implications of climate change for south Asia and the steps taken by SAARC in order to cope with it will be discussed in the paper.

Neo-functionalists, like Ernest Hass provide solution to resolve disputes through his theory. He based his argument on the European coal and steel community. Furthermore, it had been defined that how the ECSC brought peace and stability in the region. The theory occupies middle ground rejecting both the traditional theory of Realism (power-oriented) and legalism; believe strictly on institutions and it laws for the purpose of bringing peace. Functionalists demarcate between high politics (power related issues) and low politics (welfare issues) and contend that the latter may lead to the potential pursuit of collective interest of any community. Working in low politics will produce incremental effects and consequently will have effect in the area of high political issues. If peace is built through this process it would be a "working peace system". A peace that would contribute to bringing countries together in active manner rather than pushing them apart led by traditional state-centric interest. In order to produce better results and execute common interests there need an effective administration of issues through the establishment of organizations. The organization must be established according to the functions they are intended to perform. Simply, "form should follow the function". Through this way institutions can be instrumental in accomplishing the common interests of all the actors having no concentration of traditional state-centric power. Haas presents the argument based on limited cooperation of the ECSC. SCHUMAN DECLARATION states that, "*This merging of our interests in coal and steel production and our joint action will make it plain that any war between France and Germany becomes not only unthinkable but materially impossible*" (Schuman, 1950). It implies that cooperation in low political issue (economy) will have spillover effect and would lead to the peace and stability in the European region. Furthermore, the Schuman declaration also asked for "higher authority" having binding decisions upon the member states that would consequently lead to European federation. The theory of neo-functionalism is highly applicable on SAARC. The region is marred by high traditional state-centric issues, for instance, Kashmir issue, Siachin issue etc. The region can move towards peace and stability if it starts cooperation in the low political issue like climate change which is a common threat to the entire south Asian region. However, the issue needs proper administration through a higher authority, which is only possible when an institution is constructed under the SAARC which solely deal with environmental issues. The institution must be authorized like

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the ECSC and its decisions shall be binding on the participant states. Working in low political issue for the common interest of the states will have spillover effect. The peace which will be built on spillover effect would be "working peace system". It will be consequential and bring states together to work for common good that is environment. Thus, the incremental process will solve the high political issues and make a south Asian community.

Implications of Climate change for the SAARC

South Asia is the region which is most vulnerable to the calamities of climate change. It is producing serious implication for the region like water, food and health insecurity. In addition to that global warming in the region is leading to the loss of human habitat and migration problems. These challenges will be discussed below in the context of south Asian region.

Water Security

Owing to the rapid climate change the world may face severe water scarcity in the 21st century. The fresh water resources like glaciers are melting and draining day by day with the increase in average global temperature. The intergovernmental panel on climate change (IPCC) confirms that the volume of arctic summer ice is half as much that of 1950s. It shows that the world is heading towards appalling water insecurity threats. Global warming in the region is creating sheer implication for south Asian countries. For instance it will pose further non-traditional security challenges in the future for the region. As corroborated by a report in 2007, "owing of melting of Himalayan glaciers, throughout south Asia one billion people will face water shortage leading to droughts and land degradation by 2050" (UNFCCC, 2007). It seems that climate change will have direct implications for the inhabitants of the SAARC region. Not only does the water security affect the common people (droughts, water pollutions and diseases) of the region, it will also pose traditional security challenge. Pakistan and India had gone for a brief tiff over water dispute in 1948. In 2016, in response to Modi's threat of stoppage of water to lower riparian Pakistan, the foreign advisor of Pakistan, Sartaj Aziz, said that inhibition of water would be considered as "act of war". (Fazil, 2017). The scarcity of water is leading towards two-pronged dispute, i.e. traditional and non-traditional.

Health Security

The toxic anthropogenic emission of gases amounts to depletion of Ozone layer, consequently producing direct health implication for man. Clean air and water that are essential for maintaining good health are being polluted by climate change. Heat wave, extreme weather conditions like floods and droughts and variation in the mean precipitation level due to climate change are directly consequential to the human health. Due to abrupt increase in temperature as much as 140000 excess human casualties will occur between 1970-2040, estimates the WHO report. Cardio-vascular and respiratory diseases will increase due to severe heat wave. Asian countries have countered strong heat waves in the past three decades. Between 1980 and 1998 India faced eighteen heat waves that resulted into 1300 deaths (Akram, 2014). Besides that, the rise in temperature and humidity level has increased the transmission of victor-borne diseases like dengue fever, yellow fever, malaria and Encephalitis. Reports predict that an average increase in 3-4 degree centigrade may double the reproduction rate of dengue fever. Naeem Durrani, Merlin's malaria expert in Pakistan was quoted to have said to express tribune that only in 2014 as much as 1.3 to 1.5 million malaria cases have been reported". He further said that situation in 2015 was worse than that of the preceding year. Especially in flood-hit areas the malaria cases might reach to 2 million. Among other diseases, acute conjunctivitis, river blindness and sleeping sickness can

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be attributed to severe floods and rainfalls due to climate change in Pakistan. The statistics regarding health insecurity owing to the abrupt climate changes emanates that the SAARC region is at extreme risk. On policy level, nationally and regionally, emergency level measures are needed in order to cope with the scourge of global warming.

Food security

"Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life", according to world food summit 1996. The food insecurity will be enhanced through reduction of arable land and food production by climate change. A report published by IPCC (intergovernmental panel on climate change) bore out that as much as 2.5 million people has been fallen prey to the catastrophes of abrupt climate change between 1980-2000. Among them 98% belonged to the 3rd world countries. The statistics manifests that global south are at receiving end due to climate change. Especially, the SAARC region is at much receiving end due to the abrupt climate change. It has been reported that in South Asia by 2050, 132 million people will be at the risk of severe hunger (IPCC, 2007). The constant floods, droughts and rise in the temperature of sea water had caused severe food crises in the Pakistan. In 2010, the floods destroyed one fifth of the country land thus pushing 20 million to hunger and severely damaged their agriculture sector (WFP 2012). It has also been estimated by the report that between 2003-2009 the food insecurity rose from 38% to 50%. Along with that India, Pakistan and Bangladesh could not able to achieve MDGs in order to reduce hunger in their respective countries. It is worth mentioning that due to climate change the food insecurity is increasing day by day pushing the inhabitants of the region to severe hunger.

Human habitat and migrations

It is a natural process that in order to make themselves secure, homo-sepians will go for safe havens. The unwarranted calamities, owing to the climate change have forced the human being to migrate from its natural habitat. Reports predict that by 2100 the sea level will rise approximately 0.5m to 2m. The rise in sea-level will directly affect the coastal states and island countries, hence resulting in mass migration and displacement of a big chunk of populace from its natural habitat. According to Karachi Tidal Station data, during the past 100 years the sea level has risen 1.1 mm/year, which are engulfing at an average of 80 acres of land per day. The major affectee of the rise of the sea level is Thatta, almost six divisions of thatta previously considered as prosperous are now considered as poorest part of the country due to the intrusion of saline water of sea. Secondly the floods in 2010 have displaced millions of people, a report (impact of 2010 floods on rural and urban on rural and urban populations at six month) confirms that floods made 86.7 percent people to leave their homes, among them 76.9 % was urban and 83.3% was rural populace. The report further states that as much as 46.9 % lived in IDPs camps within the first six month of floods. The rise in sea-level will escalate migrations in the south Asia. Bangladeshi government confirms that rise in sea-level up to one meter will displace 14-30 million people in Bangladesh only. It can be said that due to the climate change people are losing their habitats, moreover, they are being deprived from their ancestral and culture places.

Employment security

Along with the aforementioned non-traditional security problems due global warming, there are reports which establish the facts that the rate of unemployment will increase with the rise in global

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temperature. Says a Norwegian research report that by end of this century, the EU-inhabitants will lose between 40-80 jobs per 100,000 people due to intense heat stroke. Taking a glint at Pakistan, we would come to know that Pakistan is at risk of unemployment as 21% of its GDP is supported by agriculture sector which employ 45% people. The statics emanates that agricultural lands destroyed by sea water and floods will cause acute unemployment problem as Pakistan is highly vulnerable to climate change. According to the express tribune report, Karachi is house to approximately 17 million people, attracting as much as one million migrants since it has greater employment opportunities. It also produces 42% of Pakistan's total GDP. The implications of climate change for Karachi would be severe in the future as the sea level is rising. It will cause migrations and unemployment on larger scale, making it difficult for a big chunk of population to bring bacon home. Besides that, it will directly hit the country's economy thus resulting into loss of jobs.

Climate change cooperation in the SAARC

Since its inception in 1985, the SAARC is going for cooperation time and again with regards to climate change. However, due to lack of integration in the region and led by high politics the organization cannot make a breakthrough. The first major initiative taken by the institution was in 1987, the third SAARC summit, Katmandu. The major area of focus was to initiate a regional study to find out the causes and consequences of climate change. Secondly, its aim was to submit a report in regards to preservation and protection of environment. The study was completed in 1991. The forth SAARC summit 1992 in Islamabad, Pakistan, initiated a similar type of study named as "Greenhouse effect and its impact on the region". The recommendation of the study was submitted in 1992. It provided a panoramic view regarding the environment and climate change consequences in the region. Founded on the aforementioned two reports a technical committee was formed in the same year to suggest measures for prompt action.

In 1997 SAARC environmental action plan was adopted in the third ministerial meetings in Male. It provided the aims and strategies for the future cooperation. Furthermore, the plan called for assessment of environment, regional cooperation and capability building, defined a legal framework and implementation of plan. A clear concern had been raised by the ministers of state over the degrading situation of environment in South Asia. The forth meeting of environmental minister of SAARC in 1998 issued a declaration named as "Colombo declaration on a common environment program". The ministerial meeting reaffirmed *"the commitment to the implementation of international and regional agreements for the protection of the environment and the sustainable use of natural resources in the region*" (SAARC, 1998). The declaration also insisted upon eradication of poverty as cause of climate change. Concerns were emanated by the ministers over the lack of progress in providing modern technologies and resources by the industrialized countries as per the Rio Summit 1992.

Moreover, Foreseeing the threat of climate change, the SAARC for the first time adopted "SAARC action plan on climate change" in Dhaka, July 2008, the object was to accentuate "south-south support in terms of technology and knowledge transfer" …. "To support global negotiation process under UNFCCC"…" impetus for regional level action plan on climate change through national level action" . The plan devised a framework under which the SAARC countries would cooperate with each in the future in order to adopt new technologies and ways and mitigate the effects of climate change in the future. In the 16th SAARC Summit, THIMPU Nepal, the leader welcomed the climate change as theme for the summit, and showed great concerns for the degrading environment in the region which is leading to man-made calamities. As the **Thimphu Silver Jubilee Declaration** called for "effective regional programmes in early warning, preparedness and management including response

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and rehabilitation while remaining within their respective national laws and procedures". The reason for adoption of THIMPU declaration was to ensure the implementation of SAARC action plan. A group named as intergovernmental expert group on climate change (IGEG.CC) was established in order to work on the goals of reviewing, monitoring and to facilitate the recommendations put forward under SAARC action plan.

Looking at the aforementioned agreements and cooperation, it is clear that the members are concerned about the calamities caused by the anthropogenic emission of green-house gases. Instead of having slow progress, the organization had established some norms, institutions and framework. It can be regarded as bigger achievement in south Asia because the rgion is mired by traditional, state-centric and high-political issues.

The declarations and policy-statements have produce norms and conceptual foundations on which the SAARC countries can embark upon and cope with ecological system and environmental change. The SAARC environmental action plan 1997, SAARC action plan 2008, Delhi statement 2009 and Thimpu silver jubilee declaration 2010 have produced normative structure in order to define the issue areas, enhance cooperation and ensure its implementation in the region. Most significantly, the cooperation has helped the SAARC to come out with a common position and present it on international forums. For instance, in the UN climate change conference COP-15 (Copenheghan) and COP-16, a joint position was adopted by Sri-lanka and Bhutan with regards to the SAARC.

In addition to that SAARC coastal zone management service (SCZMS) has been established in Maldives, by 2004 to ensure management, planning and sustainable development of the five coastal states of the region. In addition to that the preservation of bio-diversity in the coastal zone was ensured. Moreover, forestry zones like SAARC forestry center in Bhutan and research institutes like SAARC meteorological center in Bangladesh had been established in 2006 and 2007. The purpose is to ensure practical implementation of the frameworks, norms and declarations made on the SAARC forum.

Climate change cooperation and peace-building in the SAARC

The common threat perception as far as climate change is regarded had led the SAARC institution towards cooperation time and again. However, owing to structural flaws and weak integration the region has not achieved sustainable peace. The charter of SAARC, article: X excludes any bilateral and contentious issue from deliberations and discussions. The Sri-Lankan president criticized the article by saying, *"In our wisdom we said that bilateral disputes should not be discussed before the SAARC forum. But when conflict confronts us do we turn a blind eye? Could we not evolve a new mechanism where at every meeting at Foreign Minister's level we have informal close door meetings where we could air our views candidly?.... SAARC must not end up as a deaf, dumb and blind association. If we brush issues under the carpet because they are unpalatable, we will be taking the first step in crippling SAARC."* The bilateral issues related to environment are not being discussed on the forum which amounts to weakening of the SAARC. In order to address the issues there must be a conflict resolution mechanism in SAARC that deal with bilateral issue. For instance, ASEAN has its conflict resolution mechanism that has succeeded in overcoming the internal conflicts. Once the constitutional issues of SAARC are being addressed, the institution will come up as strong overarching power in the region. States relinquishing a certain degree of sovereignty would definitely attain the collective interests like preserving the fragile ecology of the region. Moreover, a strong institution will provide an effective forum of cooperation for the conflicting parties to resolve their issues emerging due to climate change. The cooperation will be consequential to peace building in the region.

The SAARC environmental action plan 1997 provides a complete framework that deals with the

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cooperation of the countries with regards to environment. However, the onus of implantation lies on the government of the parties' state. For instance, national action plans will be devised by the SAARC states which will be implemented on national level. South Asian region being underdeveloped will prioritize economy over environmental issue, thus ignoring the fragile economy. Instead of concentrating the ecological issue to states, it should be entrusted to local and non-governmental organization. Moreover, the issue should be devolved to societal level. With the passage of time, the interplay of social interest groups and academia will lead to mutual trust, negotiation and trans-boundaries cooperation that will be consequential to built sustainable peace.

Once the institutional flaws are rectified there are different means and ways through which the cooperation can lead to sustainable peace-building. A special report named as environmental peace building: condition for success presented by Alexander Carius points out that peace can be built through taking Trans-border initiative by conservation of environment (conservation parks) and joint management of international river basins. Not only the Homo sapiens but also the environment is the prime victim of climate change. Cooperation in the environment can be considered as serious option for sustainable peace-building in the region. However, relying only on environment cooperation cannot build peace; it can provide a plate-form for cooperation between the conflicting states (Cairus, 2006). For instance, the Trifinio Plan enhanced the cross border cooperation by providing an institutional framework to the trio Central American countries Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. The process in the civil-war torn area was initiated via technical cooperation by organization of American states and the inter-American institute of cooperation of agriculture. A study and a pilot project were started by the water-shed straddling the boundaries of the countries. The plan enhanced the cross-border cooperation, helped promoting dialogues among the governments and catalyzed the economic ties of the countries. In the case of SAARC, peace can be built by water if the head-works of Indus water is managed effectively by Pakistan and India. However, Indus water treaty is there, but owing to melting of Himalayan glaciers with a faster rate Pakistan and India come out with a conflict. Effective management backed by the SAARC framework can provide a forum for the sheer rivalries to discuss the issue that will have spillover effect on high political issues. Consequently, it will lead to sustainable peace.

Secondly, cooperation in conservation of nature is deemed as beneficial for peace building in the region. Trans-boundary Ecological buffers zones such as "peace parks" will transcend environmental cooperation to economic and political cooperation. The collective preservation of nature through joint mechanism backed by institutions can help states preserve sustainable peace. Siachin Peace Park on the eastern edge of Karakorum is a proposal worth-mentioning. Currently the stand-off between India and Pakistan is costly and according to some scholars it is unacceptable and absurd. The park would preserve white leopards, ibex and natural habitat for other animals living there. Along with that it will help diminishing the artificial boundaries and promote tourism. Above all it will pave way for cooperation diffuse the stranded relations and bring an end to the economically costly and unjustified standoff on the top of the most beautiful glacier of the world (Ali, 2008).

Conclusion

The vulnerabilities of the region due to climate change, as emanated by different studies, is eminent and of great concern. The sheer insecurities like food, water, health and habitat need to be addressed on emergency through cooperation by SAARC. The cooperation will have two-pronged effect. It will not only lead to protection of fragile ecology but it will also help in resolution of high political issues and will be consequential in building a sustainable peace.

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