

Call for Papers
UNESCO MADANJEET SINGH INSTITUTE OF SOUTH ASIA REGIONAL
COOPERATION (UMISARC)&Centre for South Asian Studies
Pondicherry University
A Background Note for an International Conference on
Environment and Sustainable Development in South Asia
19-21 October 2016

Environment – meaning the ecological and climatological aspects present on the Earth – has come to signify more than mere scientific studies that concern with the physical and chemical composition of the elements that make up the Earth and its atmosphere. The word, linked to sustainability, is gaining an importance in defining how countries interact with each other and how they regulate the activities of their societies from ecological perspective, how international agencies define the conditions for extending aid to developing nations and how poor nations struggle to improve the livelihoods of their citizens. What commenced as a dialogue in the late eighties, sustainability today is translated in terms of livelihood, food and energy security. In this sense, what is being debated in academic and policy circles is that there is a closer link between environment and sustainable development to achieve food, energy and human security. Scientists, academicians and policy makers today seriously don their thinking on methods to reduce carbon foot print, prevent climate damage and sustain and protect resources for the future use of coming generations by using them responsibly. Developing countries, particularly, those who have been enthusiastically aping the developed world by undertaking mega projects, are rethinking and re-planning to avoid the irreparable damage to be caused to the eco systems and environment by re-evaluating many of the developmental projects on the basis of studying their impact on livelihood of millions of marginalized and poor people in their countries.

The President of EU and Sweden's former environmental ambassador, Erik Hammaraskjold, eloquently highlighted how environmental issues have become the main aspect of foreign policy agenda internationally. Prior to this, the Brundtland Commission could identify how development could cause immense damage to the environment. To sustain the human life on earth and to preserve resources for coming generations, the commission advocated the importance of sustainable development. This resulted in re-defining the development agenda from the environmental perspective. In course of time environmental security has become a part of national, regional and global policies of nations. Similarly the issue of climate change has become a part of foreign policy deliberations among nations as it has a strong link with energy security. Access to and dependency on energy is a power factor and a country's ability to maximize its dependence on renewable energy and to reduce dependence on fossil fuel has become a dominant paradigm for discussions among nations

at global level. Thus the term “Green Diplomacy’ is coined and used by UN and OSCE to resolve the disputes between nations. For example, Armenia and Azerbaijan’s border issues essentially revolved around sharing of natural resources. The Doha round of WTO negotiations in 2001 highlighted how environment has become an issue of conflict of interest in international trade. International aid agencies started using environmental compliance as one of the important bench marks for extending international aid to the needy nations.

Environmental and Sustainable Development in South Asia

South Asia is home to more than over a sixth of humanity. The eight nations in the region have a lot in common and the burden of managing their environment and resources carefully by balancing them with the consumption needs of bulk of their populations is one of the serious challenges that need attention, analysis and a debate across the region. Here three factors are to be taken in to consideration. They are: one, how environment sustains life; two, how it contributes to enhance standards of living; and three, how it provides sustenance to millions of populations in the Tribal and Scheduled areas and millions of others in urban/semi urban areas directly or indirectly. For instance, forestry in India alone contributes to employment of 481,000 persons, and contributing to one per cent of GDP and providing sustenance to nearly eight per cent of its population (Tribals in scheduled areas. There is inconsistency in the sentence above). In the case of Bhutan and Nepal, forestry contributes to 6.9 per cent and 4.3 per cent of GDP respectively. The economic advantage of managing the natural resources needs further analysis. Apart from economics, environmental issues have an intricate relationship with emerging regional cooperation in South Asia. A careful consideration of regional dynamics reveals that behind the precipitous relationship between India and Pakistan, amongst a host of other issues, the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) and a issue like Kishanganga project is equally responsible for the ups and downs in their relations . Similarly, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan have multi-dimensional interests affecting their economy on account of major projects undertaken by India on its rivers and forests adjoining these countries. The Teesta river project, for instance, is a major concern in the relations between India and Bangladesh. Excessive trawling remains a major concern between India and Sri Lanka. And confiscation of boats and arrest of fishermen from Tamil Nadu remains a delicate issue for both the countries.

Environment in South Asia is not only a inter-governmental factor but is also an intra-country issue too. Economic growth in these countries essentially revolves around the use of resources for nation building. Building of dams, roads, rail networks, aerodromes, exclusive economic zones and trade centers involves huge costs in terms of natural resources. Mega projects like Narmada have displaced lakhs of people and destruction of

thousands of hectares of forest land. The socio-economic impact of such project warrant serious debate around environment vs. sustainable development, particularly in regions like South Asia where social security is a major concern for majority of population. While a number of constructive steps have been initiated by governments individually and collectively through SAARC, and BIMSTEC, focus of these efforts are confined to trade/economic cooperation rather than on sustainable exploitation of common resources .

In view of the above, the UNESCO Madanjeet Singh Institute for South Asia Regional Cooperation (UMISARC)/Centre for South Asian Studies, plans to organize a three day international conference on ***“Environment and Sustainable Development: Challenges and Opportunities for South Asia Regional Cooperation”***, during 19-21 October 2016. The Conference would debate on issues related to ‘Environment and Development’, broadly covering the following areas:

- Environmental conditions in South Asia
- Causes of environmental changes in South Asia
- Dams, displacement and migration
- Environmental degradation and its impact on people
- climate change and its impact on agriculture
- Environmental Movements in South Asia
- Gender and Environment
- Sustainability and Development
- Regional cooperation initiatives on environment

The UMISARC & Centre for South Asian Studies invite papers (5000-6000 words) for the above mentioned conference. The Conference Committee will scrutinize the abstracts/papers and accordingly invitation will be sent to those papers selected. The Centre will bear the expenses of accommodation and local hospitality.

Last date for submission of one page abstract (about 350 words) and title of the paper: **28 July 2016**

Last date for submission of full Paper: **15 October 2016**

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