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South Asia and the Post-2015 Development Agenda

Key priorities identified to achieve sustainable development in South Asia

Nairobi, 23 June 2014 – Countries in South Asia need to use their collective strength to overcome major poverty and environmental challenges and drive the region towards sustainable development, according to a report by the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP), in collaboration with UNEP.

Despite the significant achievements in poverty reduction made by the South Asian countries, the region remains home to over 40 per cent of the developing world's poor. More than 570 million people survive on less than US\$1.25 a day and over 60 per cent live without adequate sanitation.

To compound the challenges of population growth and poverty, environmental degradation and climate change, South Asia has also been exposed to increased frequency of natural disasters, which is undermining the sub-region's economic performance. This has placed a major burden on the poorest and most vulnerable, who depend highly on natural resources. As a result, approximately 1 billion people are expected to face increased risks from reduced water supplies, decreased agricultural productivity and enhanced risks of floods, droughts and cholera.

"The environmental challenges in South Asia – including poor air and water quality, inadequate solid waste disposal and degraded natural resources - are a daily reality for people who suffer the economic and health costs. Adequately valuing and investing in the natural capital on which many of the poor rely is vital for inclusive growth," said Kaveh Zahedi, UNEP Regional Director and Representative for Asia and the Pacific.

The *South Asia Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda* report identifies the common and trans-boundary priorities for South Asian countries—Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka—to achieve sustainable development. These priorities include poverty eradication, creating human security, securing an economic base, and strengthening institutional systems.

"The impacts of climate change pose a threat to human security which makes our people, especially the poor, vulnerable. Increasing temperature, extreme weather events, and rising sea-levels call for an urgent response in mainstreaming the environment into our developmental plans and processes," said Mr. S.M.D.P. Anura Jayatilake, Director General of SACEP.

Political commitment, reformed policies, legislations and schemes, and private sector involvement are but a few measures that are needed for the transition to a green economy in the sub-region.

SACEP and UNEP have recently reviewed their cooperation and have agreed to collaborate in responding to sustainable development issues, including sustainable consumption and production, air pollution, chemical and waste management, trans-boundary marine water and biodiversity. SACEP and UNEP have also agreed to support the implementation of the framework for South Asian action in their transition towards a green economy.

Other findings of the report include:

- 85 per cent of the Maldives could be under water by 2100 due to sea-level rise;
- 100 per cent increase in per capita CO₂ emission from 0.7 metric tonnes in 1990 to 1.4 metric tonnes in 2010;
- Greenhouse gas emissions have increased by 30 per cent in 2010 (16,359 thousand metric tonnes of CO₂ equivalent in 2005 and 21,973 thousand metric tonnes of CO₂ equivalent in 2010);
- 48 per cent of all threatened plant and animal species face risks from habitat loss caused by agriculture and aquaculture, residential and commercial development, etc;
- Annual percentage growth rate of GDP has decreased from 7.6 per cent in 2004 to 4.9 per cent in 2012;
- The economies of Southern Asia's countries have grown by merely 4 to 6 per cent and the gross national income by only 1.4 per cent.

The *Post-2015 South Asia Development Agenda* report is available for download at:
www.sacep.org

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