

State of the Environment Report of South Asia

The 10th Governing Council of SACEP held in January 2007 at Kathmandu recommended greater cooperation between SACEP and SAARC in the field of environment management of the region. It also requested UNEP to extend its continuous support to the SACEP's programmes in the region.

In order to fulfill the above decisions, SACEP Secretariat has sent a detailed plan of cooperation to the SAARC Secretariat under the MoU signed between the two organizations.

The 2nd meeting of the Technical committee on environment and forestry of SAARC held in May 2006 at Dhaka, Bangladesh recommended that the task of follow-up and preparation of South Asia State of the Environment report be entrusted to the SACEP. It was endorsed by the 7th meeting of SAARC environment ministers in May 2006 and 32nd session of the standing committee of the SAARC in August 2006.

Subsequently, SACEP initiated discussions to carry forward the above decisions and SACEP prepared a draft Terms of Reference for preparing South Asia State of the Environment Report and sent it to the SAARC and UNEP for their comments (Annex 1). The Director (Environment) of SAARC has informed SACEP that he will arrange a meeting between the three organizations shortly to finalize the above.

Draft Terms of Reference for Preparing South Asia State of the Environment Report 2008

Introduction

State of the Environment (SoE) reporting at the national, regional and global level is now a well-recognized activity. It is also a legislative requirement in many countries. SoEs have a great value for the decision-making in the government and participation of civil society organizations and the public in formulating policies and programmes for environmental protection and sustainable development. The 1st report of State of the Environment of South Asia was prepared in 2001. Therefore it is highly recommended by many regional forums that the new SoE report should be prepared to facilitate the sustainable development activities of the region.

The Second Meeting of the Technical Committee on Environment and Forestry of SAARC held in 22 May 2006 at Dhaka, Bangladesh recommended that the task of follow-up and preparation of South Asia State of Environment Report be entrusted to the SACEP. It was endorsed by the Seventh Meeting of the SAARC Environment Ministers in 24 May 2006 at Dhaka and also the Thirty-second Session of the Standing Committee of SAARC in August 2006.

SACEP had been actively collaborated with UNEP and the National Governments in preparing National and South Asia Regional SoE reports in 2001. SACEP also feel that it is an urgent need for the updating of the South Asia Regional and National SoE reports.

Objectives

The purpose and objectives of the preparation of South Asia State of the Environment Report are to:

- Provide objective, accurate and scientifically credible information about the condition and prospects of the South Asian environment;
- Increase governments, international and national agencies, and public understanding of these issues;
- Provide an early warning of potential problems;
- Report on the effectiveness of policies and programs designed to respond to environmental change, including progress toward achieving environmental standards and targets;
- Make recommendations for strengthening policies and programmes; and
- Help development of a long-term strategy for integrated management of environmental issues in the region.

The report should be contained following categories:

Executive summary

Part I Regional overview

1. Background

In this chapter, information on Geographical location, population, land area and history of formation, Biophysical zoning and Climate of the region should be given.

2. Resources and its usage

The natural resource base like land, inland water, biological resources minerals, coastal and marine resources of the region and its current usage need to be highlighted here. It should also give the potential of future usage in a manner of sustainability.

3. Socio-economic and culture

Different religions, traditions and beliefs, cultural heritage, demography and its trends, health and epidemic aspects, and livelihood aspect of the people have to be discussed

4. Political and governance structure

5. Economies

6. International and regional commitments

Status of participation in international environmental conventions and the regional agreements and cooperation should be highlighted

Part II Key environmental concerns of the region

Under this part, all key environmental issues in the region should be identified. Each issue would be discussed in detailed and each issue will be in a separate chapter.

General terms of reference for all chapters of environmental issues

The chapter should begin with an introduction explaining why the issue is important in South Asia and how it relates to global issues. Thereafter, chapter should proceed to describe issue concisely in terms of Driving force, Pressures, State, Impact and Responses (DPSIR)

Driving forces

These are the human influences and activities which, when combined with environmental conditions, underpin environmental change (positively or negatively). For example, the driving forces behind climatic and atmospheric change include increased burning of fossil fuels for transport, and industrial and domestic energy production.

This category should include:

- past driving forces, which still exert influence on the current state
- present driving forces

- predicted future trend in driving forces, in the short term (1-2 years), medium term (2-10 years), and long term (10+ years) . The trend in driving forces must be reported in terms of its direction (i.e. will the force increase or decrease) and by how much (e.g. will it be a linear increase/ decrease, exponential increase/ decrease?)
- the geographic location, and extent of influence of driving forces
- the nature of the influence of the driving force (e.g. is it a linear relationship between force and impact?)

Pressures

These are the pressures on the functionality and quality of the system or resource, resulting from the driving forces mentioned above. For example, in the chapter on Climatic & Atmospheric Change, increased emissions of SO₂, NO_x, CO₂, and CH₄ constitute pressures on the natural system.

This category should explain:

- synergistic or cumulative pressures resulting from diverse driving forces, where applicable
- the spatial scale of the pressure
- the expected future trend in pressures, in the short, medium and long term, in terms of direction, and magnitude

State:

This refers to the current status of the system or resource, in terms of quality of the environment, and quantity and quality of natural resources. In the chapter on Climatic & Atmospheric Change, for example, current gaseous and particulate concentrations in the atmosphere may be used to describe the state, together with current climatic variables such as minimum, mean, and maximum temperatures, mean annual precipitation and precipitation distribution.

This category should include:

- a description of the current state
- recent trends in resource or system health, for as long as data are available
- the geographic extent of the problem

Impacts:

Impacts are environmental responses to pressures on the current state. Impacts of climatic and atmospheric change, for example, include human health impacts, changes in agricultural productivity and quality of yield, and higher incidence of corrosion of infrastructure.

Impacts should be reported in terms of:

- changes in quantity and/or quality of the resource or system
- changes in functionality of systems
- knock-on effects on other systems or resources (including social and economic systems)
- synergistic or cumulative environmental impacts
- the time frame of the impacts (i.e. short, medium & long term)
- the time required to repair any environmental damage, reverse negative trends, or improve environmental quality should be reported
- the spatial extent of the impacts

Responses:

These are society's responses to environmental changes and concerns. Responses include actions (a) to mitigate, adapt to, or protect human induced negative impacts on the environment, (b) to halt or reverse environmental damage already inflicted, and (c) to preserve and conserve natural resources. Responses to climatic and atmospheric change include ratification of the UNFCCC, drafting of a white paper on climate change, formation of the National Committee on Climate Change, etc.

This category should include:

- international agreements signed by countries of South Asia
- national laws
- management strategies required by law (such as EIAs, IEEs)
- recommendations for sustainable policies and strategies
- levels of compliance and enforcement

Reference should be made to national and international standards, laws, treaties, and agreements wherever applicable, particularly when reporting on the current state and recent trends in environmental quality, and human responses to environmental change.

Outcomes

Each chapter must contain a section on the consequences or outcomes of the current situation. This will describe the effectiveness of the responses and the sustainability of the system. In the chapter on Climatic & Atmospheric Change, for example, outcomes may include reductions in emissions, a shift towards greater use of renewable energy sources, stimulation of research and development of cleaner technologies, etc.

Linkages

The DPSIR categories must follow through logically, making explicit the linkages between causes and effects. The purpose of using DPSIR categories

is to make the information interpretive, not merely descriptive, and linkages between these categories must be explained. In addition each chapter must contain a section which lists linkages to related issues in other chapters, and cross references with other driving forces, sources, impacts and responses. This is required to assist in compiling the chapters into an integrated report, which will provide information for practical decision making.

Data Issues

The current situation with regard to data availability and quality should be reported here. For example, if critical data sets are unavailable, inaccurate, or out-of-date, this should be noted. Recommendations should be made for future data collection exercises.

Conclusion

Each chapter must conclude with a summary of the main points, and recommendations for the way forward. This may include mitigatory actions, further research, increased awareness of environmental issues, etc. It is important to highlight positive aspects, as well as concerns.

Part III Challenges and recommendations

- This part of the report should clearly identify the present and future challenges faced by the individual countries as well as the region as a whole in managing the environment sustainably and achieving globally set targets like Millennium Development Goals and the targets of WSSD. It should make recommendations to overcome these challenges in the country level and regional level.
- Identify the areas where the regional cooperation is necessary
- Role of the regional and international agencies to address the issues effectively should identify
- The role of the SACEP should also identify and make recommendations on way forward.
- If there was any problems faced during getting the information and data like availability, reliability, accessibility, gaps, etc. has to be describe and make suggestions to overcome those in future.
- Special attention should be made to identify the areas where the countries of the region can present common position in international forums. A mechanism should be suggested for it.