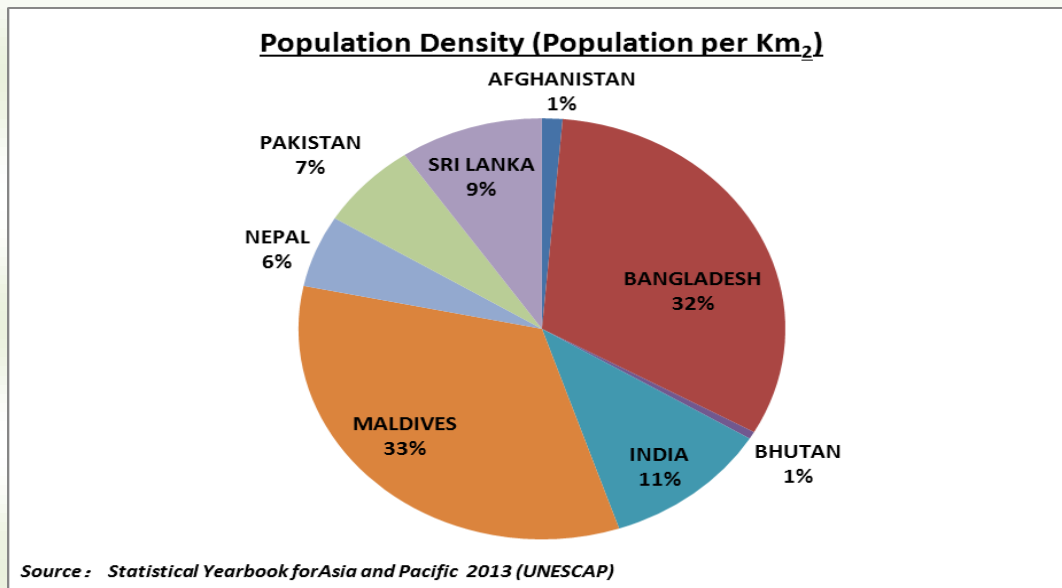


Environmental Challenges in South Asia

The consultative Committee of the South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP) held its 126th meeting on 26/04/2016 under the chairmanship of H. E. Mr. Y. K. Sinha, High Commissioner of India to Sri Lanka. Mr. Sinha while appreciating the role of SACEP in coordinating the environment issues among South Asian countries expressed his concerns about the increasing challenges of environment pollution. He emphasized a greater and urgent need to figure out ways and means for controlling the increasing level of environment pollution in South Asia. The remarks are very valid and timely as various studies also indicate increasing level of environment pollution of air, water and land resources in South Asia.

The South Asian Sub-region comprises of eight countries - Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka – is one of the fastest growing sub-regions of the world. It is blessed with rich and diverse natural resource base, which has historically supported economic development and sustained rural livelihoods. South Asian is home to a population of around 1.5 billion (almost 1/4th of the global population), which is increasing at the annual rate of 1.8 percent, despite covering only 4.8 percent of the world's total land mass and is therefore one of the fastest growing sub-regions in the world. As the population is increasing exponentially, the demand for goods and services also increases, leading to unsustainable consumption of natural resources due to increased pressure.

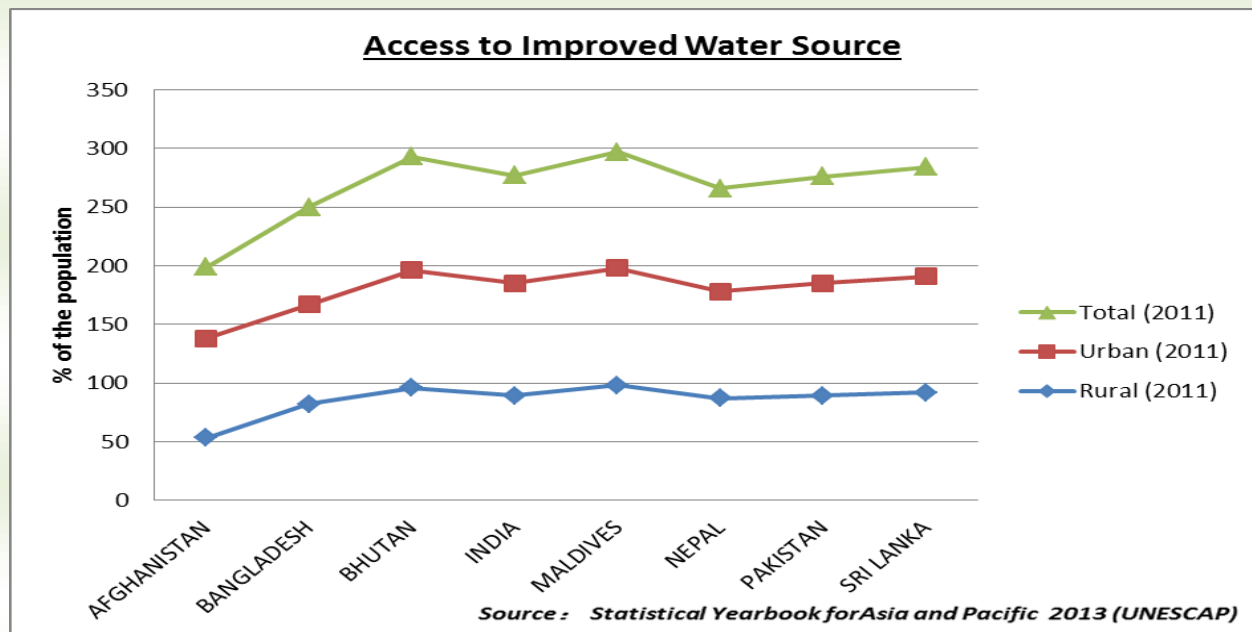


South Asian Sub-region is blessed with the oldest civilizations, rich and diverse natural resource base, which has historically supported economic development and sustained rural livelihoods. South Asia is facing a host of environmental challenges linked to poverty and hunger as nearly 40 percent of the world's poorest population lives in South Asia, rising inequality, poor levels of human development, wide infrastructure gaps, widespread food and energy insecurity and high risk of disasters. Its topography encompasses a broad spectrum of amazing range of mountains, plateaus, dry regions, intervening structural basins and beaches. The majestic landscape of south Asia extends from the Mount Everest to the world's lowest sea beaches in Maldives. The entire coastline runs for about 11,696 km, right from western Pakistan beaches to the eastern Bangladesh coast, with wetlands occupying an area of 1,34,161 sq km. The region is uniquely characterized by a tropical monsoon climate.

South Asia continues to push the world's economic center of gravity to the east, with India on track to become the world's second largest economy by 2050. South Asia has yet to cross many a hurdles to attain the lofty goals of sustainable development. The challenges however include dwindling fresh water resources and poor water quality due

to lack of sanitation (SDG-6), Increased use of coal and fossil fuel as source of commercial energy and fuel-wood and animal dung cakes in domestic sector despite possessing huge sources of renewable energy (SDG-7), Unsustainable city planning and management amid the emergence of the largest agglomerates like Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Dhaka and Karachi (SDG-11), Unsustainable consumption and production is leading to resource in-efficiency (SDG-12), vulnerability to climate change and global warming (SDG-13), marine environment of Indian ocean is experiencing huge pollution from various sources (SDG-14) and deforestation, land degradation, and loss of biodiversity (SDG-15). The global community has been grappling for a long time to understand the crux and gravity of these challenges in order to remove these road-blocks in the path of sustainable development.

Indicators of the fresh water quantity and quality are not showing a healthy trend as access to water resources in South Asia is the second lowest (23%) after Pacific (21%) in the world. Similarly, access to sanitation is only 38% which is the lowest in the world. Dumping of untreated sewage and industrial effluents into water bodies has turned water resources toxic for human consumption besides making it lethal for freshwater biodiversity. Heavy fertilizers and pesticides use has contributed to the pollution of both surface and ground in South Asia. Increased use of coal and fossil fuel for power generation and fuel wood and animal dung as source of domestic energy has trapped South Asia in a vicious circle of highly unsustainable sources of power and energy. Thus indoor and ambient air quality is experiencing high level of pollution mostly in urban centers. South Asia is facing increased tendency of rural to urban migration for better life prospects leading to emergence of high population densities in cities. Lack of urban planning, inadequate space and resources has increased the air, water and land pollution in major urban centers in South Asia.



Unsustainable consumption and production is quite visible in South Asia which has led to a high degree of resource in-efficient society in the world. South Asia is blessed with the world famous beaches hosting rich biodiversity in Maldives and deep sea harbors, long coastline and busiest maritime transportation routes of the world, however increased pressure on marine resources from various land and sea based sources of pollution coupled with climate triggered sea level rise is posing a great deal of threats to these resources in South Asia. Land resources are also experiencing increased pressure on forests and other terrestrial ecosystems leading to loss of biodiversity at much faster rates than ever witnessed before. South Asian region has been subject to some of the world's worst disaster causing immense loss of life and tremendous damage to property. These challenges have a major impact upon the economic performance of South Asian countries and on the lives and livelihoods of millions of poor people.

Capacities of the public sector policy and implementation institutions and professionals are weak amid weak civil society and private sector institutional base. The common citizens are not aware of the gravity and severity of environmental problems and are therefore not taking part in any such initiatives. The private sector contribution towards environment protection is negligible and the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has never been used for environment protection. Baseline data on SDGs indicators is not available at one place and it is therefore not possible to holistically plan for them in South Asia.

Major events like United Nations Millennium Declaration-MDGs, adoption of Agenda and the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) - Johannesburg 2002, Rio+20; the future we want, the SACEP Post-15 Development Agenda and now SDGs have distinctly articulated the sustainable development challenges and priorities over the next decades. Achievements of the goals and targets of Environmental SDGs have clearly been identified as the most pressing global challenge and an indispensable prerequisite for sustainable development, particularly for the South Asia region and the developing countries. Rio+20; “ the future we want” attempts to shape up sustainable development in the context of the three dimensions social, economic and environmental development focusing on an integrated and inclusive development. With a view to address the challenges associated with the achievements of SDGs Goals and Targets in South Asia,

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