

## **Environmental Coordination in South Asia**

South Asia comprises the countries of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The region has been the cradle of several great civilizations and is today home to about 1.5 billion people, more than one-fifth of the world's population. The region covers an area of approximately 42,916,000 km<sup>2</sup>, same as that of the continental United States but with four times the population, it is already one of the most densely settled regions of the world.



South Asia is bordered in the south by the Indian Ocean, in the South-east by Bay of Bengal and in the South-west by the Arabian Sea. Occupying a major portion of the Indo-Malayan realm and a smaller portion of the Palaearctic realm, this region is representative of five of the fourteen major ecological regions called biomes, which demonstrate the biodiversity and vegetation patterns of the region as determined by climate, water, geology, soil and diverse topography. South Asia's topography consists of an amazing variety of mountains, plateaus, dry regions, intervening structural basins, beaches, etc. It varies from world highest point, the Mount Everest to the world lowest, the sea beach.



Increase in population and urbanization coupled with a very rapid pace of economic development, environment in South Asia is facing ever increasing challenges from various anthropogenic activities. Cities are the worst hit where air and water quality has greatly been deteriorated leading to various diseases. To coordinate and address the emerging environmental challenges the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) was established as an inter-governmental organization in 1982 by the governments of South Asia. The primary objective of SACEP was to promote and support protection, management and enhancement of the environment in the region and other objectives are:

- To promote cooperative activities in priority areas of environment of mutual concern;
- To ensure that these activities are beneficial individually and collectively to the member states of the region;
- To extend support as needed through exchange of knowledge and expertise available among the member countries;
- To provide local resources towards implementation of projects and activities.
- To maximize the impact of support received from donor countries and other sources.

SACEP is also an appropriate forum for action on trans-boundary environmental issues. These are issues where the geographical scope or impact extends beyond national boundaries. One such area of engagement is control and prevention of air pollution and its likely trans-boundary effects.

Hosting and coordinating regional arms of international programmes and activities have been a major role played by SACEP and therefore, SACEP is serving as the secretariat for the South Asian Seas Programme since 1983, which comes under the umbrella of UNEP Regional Seas Programme.

During the 33 years of its existence, SACEP in collaboration with various partner organizations and member states had implemented a number of programmes in the field of Air Pollution, Biodiversity, Clearing-House Mechanism, Climate Change, Coastal and Marine Environment, Combating Illegal Trade in Wildlife, Data and Information Management, Environmental Education, Environmental Law, Environmentally Sustainable Transport, Multi-lateral Environmental Agreements and Waste Management etc.

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