

Earth Day 2017

Theme-Environmental and Climate Literacy

Earth Day is commemorated on the 22nd April every year with a new theme. The theme for the year 2017 is **Environmental and Climate Literacy**. This year Earth Day is unique as it is the first one after signing of the Paris Agreement. Environmental and climate change literacy play fundamental role in changing the attitude of citizens to the mother earth. Today the biggest threat to earth is from human being as most of our anthropogenic activities and production and consumptions of goods and services are not sustainable. To address the anthropogenic issues, we must focus on educating and making aware the people about the environmental and climate change issues. This will help build a world that values environmental protection and cultivates sustainable communities for all people.

South Asia is a region comprising of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, South Asia makes less than 5% of the world's land area that hosts nearly a quarter of the world population (World Statistics 2016). This renders it one of the most densely populated areas of the world that alarmingly continues to grow at more than 1.3% annually (World Bank 2017)

For a multitude of reasons, South Asia is a hot spot for climate change. A lot has been written and talked about the vulnerabilities of the region to the impacts of global warming but much less about what is being done by countries of the region to adapt to climate change and very little about what must be done and how the wider world might best help with it. This short report attempts to analyze the adaptation to climate change challenges and identify opportunities in South Asia.

South Asian countries consume relatively much less energy per capita than people elsewhere in the world or Asia. However, it produces only a fraction of what it uses leaving a huge deficit in the energy balance to be met with imported fossil fuels that come with a major cost to the exchequer and the environment resulting from their direct and indirect climate footprint.

A major challenge faced by the region in relation to climate change include unpredictable patterns of rainfall that increasingly comes in short spells of heavy downpour constraining farmers' ability to farm productively. The problem is more acute in the rain-fed areas. Downstream communities experience devastating flash floods as witnessed in many South Asian countries over the past two decades in south Asia.

Creating awareness among the people, including politicians and civil servants in decision-making positions, was considered important by the participants of the APAN Forum organized jointly by SACEP, APAN and Government of Sri Lanka in Oct 2016 at Colombo, Sri Lanka. The underlying consideration was that although people may have been dealing with different aspects of climate change and sustainable consumption and production in their daily lives over the years, these were relatively new concepts that people had difficulty to understand and relate to, especially as to their relevance, implications and importance locally and globally. The President of Sri Lanka, while speaking at the inaugural ceremony of the APAN/Sri Lanka Next Forum on 19th October, 2016, struck a chord with the audience when he argued that raising public awareness was the highest priority if the challenges of climate change and sustainable development were to be addressed effectively.

Political Commitments at the highest level of the polity and numerous success stories dotting the South Asian landscapes and seascapes fall much short of what the enormity and expediency of the climate change adaptation challenge demand. Much of the middle-level policy and civil service remains indifferent if at all fully aware of the need to act, and now. Urgent and short-term fire-fighting takes priority over important measures required to be undertaken for the long term. The fact that climate change is a persistent phenomenon may require long term policy, strategies and plans.

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