

# Post - 2015 South Asia Development Agenda

## Executive Summary

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The South Asian Sub-region (SAS) 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 and stands severely endangered as of now. It is therefore essential to focus on diverse response options and instruments for possible solutions. Ensuring sustainable development and growth of the SAS is beyond the scope of individual countries. This is especially true in vulnerable countries that face multiple stresses such as: poverty and unequal access to resources; weak institutions; and food and water insecurity, in spite of rapid advances in technology and economic resources. Therefore, due emphasis must be placed on increasing responsibilities of all stakeholders and collaborative efforts towards ensuring a healthy environment for the future.

Out of the eight billion people inhabiting Planet Earth, more than one billion people are still facing extreme poverty and income inequality. At the same time, unsustainable consumption and production patterns have resulted in tremendous escalation in terms of economic and social costs and may even jeopardize the life on our planet. Achieving sustainable development will require global actions to pave the path for further economic and social progress, requiring growth and employment, as well as strengthening environmental protection. Sustainable development will need to be inclusive and the strategies to attain this must be ambitious, action-oriented, collaborative, and also adaptable at different levels of development.

Major events like United Nations Millennium Declaration and the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) - Johannesburg 2002, in the recent past, have distinctly articulated the sustainable development challenges and priorities for the global community over the next decade. Poverty eradication has been clearly identified as the foremost global challenge and an indispensable prerequisite for sustainable development, particularly for the South Asia region and the developing countries. Rio+20 is United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development for ‘future we want’ where world leaders, scientists, corporate, private groups and other stakeholders from across the globe came together to shape up sustainable development in context of the three dimensions social, economic and environmental focusing on the emergent need of eradication of poverty, advancement in social equity and ensure environmental protection.

The SAS holds a population of around 1.5 billion, which is increasing at the annual rate of 1.8 percent, despite covering only 4.8 percent of the world's total land mass. As the population is increasing exponentially, the demand for goods and services also increases, leading to unsustainable consumption of natural resources and resource inefficiency. Rapid population growth aggravates poverty in developing countries by producing a high ratio of dependent children for each working adult. Hence poverty continues to be a major problem in South Asia countries. Natural resources are under extreme

pressure due to increasing human population and urbanization. The negative effects of urbanization and industrialization can be listed as degrading ambient air quality, poor solid waste disposal and unsustainable consumption pattern & resource inefficiency. Air quality of South Asian countries is affected by the release of pollutants like particulate matter and gaseous emissions like sulphur oxides (SO<sub>x</sub>), nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>). This pollution is evident in the form of degrading ambient air quality of major cities; the per capita emission of CO<sub>2</sub> in 2010 was 1.4 metric ton. Solid waste generation and disposal has also emerged as a major environmental issue, with 39.8% of population having access to improved sanitation facilities. Due to lack of proper solid waste disposal and lack of improved sanitation technology, urban areas are facing one of the most serious environmental problems - surface and ground water contamination. The water availability and water quality is also affected by rapid urbanization, population growth and industrialization.

One of the key drivers of the region - Climate change is already taking place, and the South Asian countries, particularly the poorest people, are most at risk. The impacts of higher temperatures, more variable precipitation, more extreme weather events, and sea level rise are felt in South Asia and will continue to intensify. Due to sea level rise, low-lying coastal cities will be at the forefront of receiving most of the impact, being most vulnerable to the risks of sea level rise and storms. The emission of greenhouse gases have also increased at an alarming rate, further adding to the threat of climate change. According to Fifth Assessment Report of the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change); extreme climate events will have an increasing impact on human health, security, livelihoods, and poverty, with the type and magnitude of impact varying across South Asia. Another negative impact of climate change is loss of Bio-diversity, which will have an impact on ecosystem services, which will further affect the benefits received by the people directly as well as indirectly. South Asian region has been subject to some of the world's worst disaster situations, causing immense loss of life and tremendous damage to property. The region is most exposed to natural disaster like GLOFs, flooding, cyclones. Twenty major glacial lakes in Nepal have been found to be potentially dangerous with respect to GLOFs. These challenges are already having a major impact upon the economic performance of South Asian countries and on the lives and livelihoods of millions of poor people.

These alarming trends call for an urgent response for mainstreaming environment into developmental plans and processes. 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. It is therefore, poverty eradication and environmental sustainability have been very clearly identified as the major challenges in the path of achieving sustainable development in the SAS.

In order to have the response options and instruments for possible solutions for achieving the sustainable development in the SAS, "Post 2015 South Asia Development Agenda" was spearheaded by Development Alternatives (DA), in collaboration with South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and other stakeholders through a participatory process.

Post 2015 Sustainable Development Agenda (SADA) identifies the common and trans-boundary priorities of South Asian countries to achieve Sustainable Development. The document serves as a long

term policy planning tool and identifies 3 key priorities, mainly: ***eliminating poverty and creating human security, securing economic base*** and ***strengthening institutional system***. Post 2015 South Asia Development Agenda set priorities for cooperation of the South Asia states with innovative approach. The document was prepared in a participatory process in consultation with the concerned line Ministries of member countries, intergovernmental organizations, international organizations, expert institutions and civil society organizations.

This document is expected to provide the strategic direction for the pursuit of sustainable development in the SAS. It is important to note that this document addresses the issues at the sub-regional level, building upon national level issues and policies but particularly addressing those transcending and common to the countries in the SAS. It is expected that the document will be used by policy makers in the SAS countries as well as the officers and decision makers in the regional and international organizations active in the development process of the SAS.

The Post 2015 South Asia Development Agenda has been structured into four sections:

**Section 1:** This section provides a brief history and perspective of sustainable development at global and regional level. It also reviews the sustainable development challenges that have been articulated more recently in global deliberations. There was a strong sense that Agenda 21 evolved out of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) at Rio in 1992 had not been pursued vigorously enough. Hence there was a reaffirmation of commitment to the Rio principles and the Millennium Declaration. The WSSD agreed on a Plan of Implementation to further build upon the achievements since UNCED and commitments in the Millennium Development Goals. The Rio+20 - United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development which took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 2012 – is considered to be an historic opportunity to define pathways to a safer, more equitable, cleaner, greener and more prosperous world for all.

**Section 2:** This section focuses on the challenges that threaten to cripple the efforts towards holistic development of the South Asian region. The section begins by tracking the performance of the South Asian countries in achieving the MDGs. Identifies major environmental issues, drivers and also analyses the gaps in existing policy addressing these issues.

**Section 3:** This section focuses on the identification of priorities areas for South Asia and framing of Sustainable Development Agenda for the region. The development agenda pivots around four key priority areas: Eliminating Poverty and Creating Human Security; Conserving Natural Resources; Securing the Economic Base and Strengthening the Institutional System. These key priority areas rest upon the four pillars of sustainable development (economic, social, environment and governance).

*Eliminating poverty* involves a complex model of creating human security and managing population growth and its impact at the same time. Each of these actions is based on the tripod of accessibility, affordability and availability. Direct and indirect measures include creating mass awareness, empowering women with education skills and investing in developing an infrastructure for health, education etc.

*Degradation of natural resources* requires urgent action in terms of arresting industrial pollution, promoting sustainable human settlements and conserving bio-diversity.

*Secure financial and economic base:* A number of measures could be taken to secure the economic base and financial situation of the region, like promoting technological cooperation, building a sub-regional trading block and promoting sustainable development, with minimal external assistance.

There is a need to *Strengthen the Institutional Systems* to cater to the emerging priorities of the sub-region. Evolving mechanisms to formulate policies and implement them at all levels of the system (local, national, regional and global) is vital for the countries to achieve the goal of sustainable development. Building local capacities, improving national governance, enhancing South Asian cooperation and responsible global systems are some of the important measures that could be taken to strengthen the governance mechanism at local, national and regional levels. The *regional cooperation* will be extremely useful in mutually supporting and reinforcing the national and local initiatives.

**Section 4:** This section describes how Green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication can be one of the vital tools available for achieving sustainable development and could also provide appropriate policy options. Green Economy contribute to eradicating poverty as well as sustained economic growth, enhancing social inclusion, improving human welfare and creating opportunities for employment and decent work for all, while maintaining the healthy functioning of the Earth's ecosystems. It emphasizes the need for the four pillars of sustainable development to be strengthened, fully integrated and properly balanced, giving particular attention to social equity and good governance. *Following measures should be taken to achieve the green economy in the South Asia region: Political Commitment; Reformed Policies, Legislation and Schemes; Private Sector Investment and Involvement; Stakeholder Partnerships and Community Participation; Incorporating Sustainability in Education, Vocational and Capacity Building Programmes; Investing in Research and Development; Investing in Knowledge Management; Technology Transfer and Financial Arrangements; Environmental Governance; Investing in Infrastructure; Need for Innovation and Promoting Regional Cooperation in Sharing of Best Practices, Resources and Strengthened Implementation Systems.*