



SAARC

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Greetings to One and All,

It is with immense honour and pride that we welcome you to the esteemed council of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), a vital regional body dedicated to fostering cooperation, development, and stability among its eight member states: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. SAARC serves as a platform to address shared challenges, promote economic growth, and enhance regional resilience in the face of pressing issues such as climate change, economic disparity, and disaster management. In this council, we will focus on a critical and urgent issue: addressing climate-induced displacement in South Asia, with an emphasis on creating a regional framework to protect the rights of displaced persons, ensure equitable burden-sharing, and coordinate adaptation and relocation strategies.

As delegates, you are expected to thoroughly understand your country's position on climate displacement, including its vulnerabilities, policies, and past actions. You represent your nation's interests, which may differ from your personal views, and are tasked with defending your delegation's stance with diplomacy and respect. Your role is to engage in constructive dialogue, propose innovative solutions, and collaborate to address the complex challenges of climate displacement, which affects millions across South Asia.

This background guide serves as a starting point to help you grasp the scope and complexity of climate-induced displacement in the region. It outlines key issues, such as the lack of legal recognition for climate refugees, the burdens of internal and cross-border migration, and the need for regional cooperation through SAARC. However, this guide is not exhaustive. Delegates are strongly encouraged to conduct in-depth research to uncover unique perspectives, data, and solutions specific to their country's context. Creativity and originality are paramount in drafting position papers and resolutions. We urge you to think innovatively, propose actionable frameworks, and explore new ideas to address this multifaceted crisis.

As the Chair, I expect all delegates to maintain professionalism, respect differing viewpoints, and engage in diplomatic negotiations to forge consensus. The issue of climate displacement demands urgent action, and your contributions will shape the future of regional cooperation in South Asia. Let us work together to craft solutions that uphold the dignity and rights of displaced persons while fostering resilience and solidarity among SAARC nations.

Once again, we warmly welcome you to the SAARC Council. We wish you all the very best in this Model United Nations session and in your future endeavors. Let us embark on this journey with determination to create a sustainable and equitable future for South Asia.

Best Regards,

Chairperson

Ashtami Kukreja

NMMUN'25

ISSUE 1:-

Regional Framework for Managing Climate Refugees in South Asia

Background

South Asia is among the world's most climate-vulnerable regions, grappling with dense populations, heavy reliance on agriculture, and exposure to intensifying monsoons, cyclones, sea-level rise, and glacial melt. Over the past decade, extreme climate events have triggered mass displacements: devastating floods in Pakistan (2022), recurrent cyclones in Bangladesh and India, prolonged droughts in Afghanistan, and rising sea levels threatening the Maldives' very existence. The World Bank (2021) projects that by 2050, over 40 million people in South Asia could become internally displaced due to climate change, with millions more potentially crossing borders. While most displacement remains internal, informal cross-border movements are increasing and expected to surge, particularly in low-lying coastal areas and river deltas.

A critical challenge is the absence of legal recognition for climate refugees under international law. The 1951 Refugee Convention does not cover environmental displacement, and most South Asian states, non-signatories to the Convention, rely on inconsistent, ad hoc national policies. This leaves climate-displaced persons vulnerable, often without access to legal protections, humanitarian aid, or basic rights. As a result, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) faces growing pressure to establish a regional framework to address these gaps. Such a framework would aim to protect displaced persons' rights, ensure equitable burden-sharing among member states, coordinate adaptation and relocation strategies, and secure funding and technical support from international partners like the World Bank and Green Climate Fund.

Timeline of Developments

- **2007:** IPCC AR4 report underscores South Asia's extreme vulnerability to climate-induced migration.
- **2010–2015:** Nansen Initiative consultations identify South Asia as a hotspot for disaster-related displacement.
- **2015:** Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD) is established to implement Nansen recommendations globally.
- **2019:** Bangladesh integrates climate migration into its national adaptation plan; India begins exploring internal relocation policies.
- **2020–2022:** Severe flooding in Bangladesh and Pakistan displaces millions, highlighting the urgency of regional solutions.
- **2023–2025:** Civil society coalitions, such as Climate Action Network South Asia, advocate for SAARC-led frameworks to address climate displacement.

Key Issues

1. **Legal Gap:** No South Asian country recognizes climate refugees under existing refugee or asylum laws, leaving their rights and status ambiguous.
2. **Cross-Border Displacement:** Cyclones and floods drive informal cross-border movements (e.g., from coastal Bangladesh to India), risking statelessness, exploitation, or deportation without legal frameworks.
3. **Internal Migration Burden:** Climate-induced migration is largely internal, with rural populations flooding into overcrowded urban centres like Dhaka, Karachi, and Mumbai, fuelling slum expansion, resource competition, and social tensions.
4. **Burden Sharing:** Frontline states like Bangladesh and the Maldives demand regional solidarity, arguing they cannot manage displacement alone, while larger states like India and Pakistan face political sensitivities around border control.
5. **Institutional Weakness:** SAARC's Disaster Management Centre exists but lacks funding, political prioritization, and a specific mandate to address climate displacement.

Countries' Positions

- **Bangladesh:** Highly vulnerable, especially in coastal and delta regions, it strongly advocates for international and regional recognition of climate refugees, seeking robust relocation support and financing.
- **Maldives:** Faces an existential threat from sea-level rise and pushes for legal recognition of climate refugees and guaranteed relocation pathways.
- **India:** A central actor, cautious about binding refugee commitments due to border concerns but open to humanitarian cooperation, resilience funding, and structured labour mobility programs.
- **Pakistan:** Prone to catastrophic flooding, it advocates for disaster risk reduction and international financial aid to manage displacement.
- **Nepal:** At risk from glacial melt and flooding, it supports adaptation financing and planned relocation strategies.
- **Sri Lanka & Bhutan:** Endorse non-binding declarations, adaptation funding, and regional data-sharing initiatives.
- **Afghanistan:** Severely impacted by drought and desertification but lacks institutional capacity to address displacement effectively.

Past UN and Regional Involvement

- **SAARC Disaster Management Centre (2006):** Established to coordinate disaster response but hampered by limited funding and no displacement-specific mandate.

- **SAARC Comprehensive Framework on Disaster Management (2007):** Focuses on risk reduction but omits displacement issues.
- **Platform on Disaster Displacement (2015–present):** Supports global efforts to address disaster displacement but lacks a South Asia–specific legal instrument.
- **Civil Society Initiatives (2024):** NGOs and academics in South Asia draft model frameworks to guide regional policies on climate migration and protection.

Possible Solutions for SAARC

1. **SAARC Declaration on Climate Refugees:** A non-binding statement recognizing climate displacement and committing to principles like temporary protection, non-refoulement, and humanitarian assistance, serving as a political first step.
2. **Regional Climate Mobility Pathways:** Develop legal migration channels, such as temporary visas or labour permits, for disaster-displaced persons, with pilot programs among willing SAARC states.
3. **South Asia Climate Resilience & Relocation Fund:** Pool contributions from member states, supplemented by donors like the World Bank and Green Climate Fund, to finance planned relocation, host community support, and adaptation projects.
4. **Data & Early Warning Hub:** Create a regional platform, potentially within the SAARC Disaster Management Centre, to collect displacement data, forecast risks, and coordinate joint emergency responses.
5. **Planned Relocation Guidelines:** Establish regional standards to ensure relocations protect land rights, livelihoods, cultural identity, and community cohesion.

Conclusion

South Asia urgently requires a coordinated regional response to climate displacement. Given sovereignty concerns and political complexities, a binding treaty may be premature. However, SAARC can initiate action through a non-binding declaration, data-sharing mechanisms, and pilot mobility projects. These steps could evolve into a comprehensive, binding framework with robust legal protections, financing, and regional cooperation, ensuring the rights and dignity of climate-displaced persons are upheld.

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ISSUE 2:-

Cross-Border Disaster Coordination in the Himalayas

Introduction

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), established in 1985, unites eight member states—Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka—through shared historical, cultural, and geographic bonds. Among the region’s critical challenges, natural disasters are a top priority, particularly in the Himalayan belt spanning Nepal, India, Bhutan, and Pakistan, with interconnected river systems affecting Bangladesh and Afghanistan. This region faces earthquakes, landslides, glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs), avalanches, and climate-exacerbated weather events like intensified monsoons and cyclones. These disasters transcend political boundaries, causing widespread loss of life, mass displacement, and severe economic disruption across multiple nations. For SAARC, effective cross-border disaster coordination is not only a humanitarian necessity but also a cornerstone for regional stability, human security, and long-term sustainable development. The urgency of this issue is amplified by climate change, which heightens the frequency and intensity of disasters, making regional cooperation imperative to mitigate impacts and build resilience.

The Challenge of Geography and Climate

The Himalayan region is one of Earth’s most vulnerable ecosystems, characterized by steep, unstable terrain, active seismic zones, and rapidly melting glaciers. Climate change exacerbates these risks, with rising global temperatures accelerating glacial melt, triggering erratic monsoons, and increasing the likelihood of floods, landslides, and avalanches. For example, a GLOF in Nepal could send devastating flash floods downstream, inundating communities in India or Bangladesh. The 2015 Nepal earthquake, which killed nearly 9,000 people and affected India and Bhutan, demonstrated the transboundary nature of these disasters. Similarly, monsoon floods in Pakistan, like those in 2022 that displaced millions, often impact downstream regions. These interconnected risks highlight the limitations of unilateral responses. Without coordinated early warning systems, data-sharing, and joint response mechanisms, the region faces preventable loss of life, prolonged recovery periods, and heightened vulnerability, particularly for rural, agriculture-dependent communities.

Regional Cooperation Under SAARC

Recognizing the need for collective action, SAARC established the SAARC Disaster Management Centre (SDMC) in 2006, later transitioning to an interim unit in Gujarat, India. The SDMC aims to provide policy advice, build capacity, train member states, and enhance regional cooperation in early warning, information sharing, and emergency response. The SAARC Comprehensive Framework on Disaster

Management (2007) emphasizes disaster risk reduction but lacks specific provisions for cross-border coordination. Political tensions, particularly between India and Pakistan, have often hindered effective collaboration, resulting in inconsistent real-time coordination during crises. Despite these challenges, mechanisms like the SDMC offer a foundation for progress. Joint efforts in sharing meteorological data, standardizing communication protocols, and conducting cross-border rescue operations could significantly reduce losses. However, underfunding, limited mandates, and political rivalries continue to limit SAARC's effectiveness in disaster management.

Humanitarian and Economic Implications

The consequences of inadequate disaster coordination are profound. Delayed responses lead to avoidable loss of life, prolonged displacement, and irreparable damage to livelihoods, particularly in rural, farming, and tourism-dependent communities. For instance, Himalayan disasters often destroy agricultural land and infrastructure, pushing already marginalized populations into poverty. In 2022, Pakistan's floods caused over \$30 billion in economic losses, with ripple effects on neighboring economies. Poor coordination can also exacerbate tensions, as border communities compete for scarce resources or face unregulated cross-border displacement. Conversely, successful cooperation fosters trust, reduces regional tensions, and aligns with SAARC's goal of integration. Disaster management offers a politically neutral platform for collaboration, allowing member states to prioritize human welfare over divisive issues. Effective coordination could save lives, protect economies, and strengthen regional solidarity.

The Role of Technology and Data Sharing

Advancements in technology offer transformative opportunities for disaster coordination. Satellite imaging, predictive modeling, and real-time meteorological data can provide early warnings for floods, landslides, and earthquakes. A regional data-sharing platform could enable local authorities to prepare communities proactively. For example, India's advanced satellite systems could support early warning efforts across the region, while Nepal's glacial monitoring could benefit downstream nations. Joint training exercises, prepositioned relief supplies, and standardized communication protocols could further enhance preparedness. However, challenges remain: sharing sensitive data raises national security concerns, and political mistrust may hinder transparency. SAARC must develop frameworks to ensure equitable access to technology and data, fostering trust through transparent, mutually beneficial agreements.

The Way Forward For SAARC

Enhancing cross-border disaster coordination is both a necessity and an opportunity. Institutionalizing cooperation through a regional early warning hub, joint response protocols, or a SAARC Disaster Relief Fund could mitigate impacts. Such measures would require overcoming political barriers, securing funding from international partners like the World Bank or UN, and aligning national policies. Successful coordination could also build goodwill, potentially easing longstanding regional tensions. As climate change intensifies Himalayan risks, SAARC must act

urgently to strengthen its role. By prioritizing shared resilience, member states can transform a shared challenge into a catalyst for unity and sustainable development.

Questions a Delegate Should Consider

1. How can SAARC mitigate political tensions to foster trust in disaster response?
2. Are member states willing to share sensitive meteorological and satellite data in real time?
3. What mechanisms can enable joint cross-border rescue and relief operations?
4. How can international partners, such as the UN or Green Climate Fund, support SAARC's capacity?
5. What steps can ensure disaster preparedness reaches marginalized rural communities?
6. Can SAARC align climate adaptation policies to build long-term resilience?
7. How can technology be leveraged without exacerbating inequities among member states?
8. What funding models can sustain a regional disaster coordination framework?

Conclusion

Cross-border disaster coordination in the Himalayan region is a critical challenge that demands SAARC's leadership. By fostering trust, leveraging technology, and building robust frameworks, member states can reduce the human and economic toll of disasters. This agenda offers a chance to transcend political rivalries, prioritize human welfare, and strengthen regional unity. Delegates are encouraged to conduct thorough research, propose innovative solutions, and collaborate to craft resolutions that address both immediate needs and long-term resilience. The future of South Asia's most vulnerable populations depends on your ability to forge a collective, actionable path forward.

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