

Monsoon - the lifeline of the South Asian region - brought havoc this year amid the COVID Crisis. [Altering of the rainfall pattern due to climate change led to innumerable natural calamities leading to loss of life and property.](#) Destruction of Tea Plantation in Kerala after heavy rains led to a landslide which took the lives of over 50 people and many homes were destroyed. Landslides and flash floods have not spared even Nepal. Floods in North-East India and Bihar are now annual affairs and this year an estimated [8 million people were affected](#) due to inundation of rivers in Eastern India. Rising temperature due to climate change has made extreme rainfalls a frequent event in South Asia. [In Bangladesh too, almost one-fourth of the low-lying areas were inundated.](#)

Not only human, animal lives too are severely affected due to climatic havocs. The wildlife parks and forests were inundated due to floods in NE India and rare one-horned rhinoceros were killed among a hundred other animals who lost their lives due to drowning. Submergence of Mumbai streets are an annual affair too, but this time, even the streets of New Delhi were inundated. Flash floods are not a problem in itself. They usually used to happen during May when harvesting of spring crops was already over. [The early flash floods of this year, which arrived in April itself, caused huge loss to the farmers of NE India and Bangladesh, submerged homes of many, along with huge loss of infrastructure.](#)

Why is it that floods have become an annual affair in the south Asian region? Why is the issue taken so casually despite its recurrence? Why can't the lessons be learned and tragedies avoided saving livelihoods, lives and homes of millions of humans and animals? Let's find out what is fundamentally wrong in the approach.



View of massive landslide blocked Sunkoshi River at Mankha VDC in Sindhupalchowk district, Nepal/ PHOTO/BHASWOR OJHA /KANTIPUR

## A Web of Loopholes

South Asia is home to about one-fifth of the world population & almost [one-third of this total population is living below the poverty line](#). Despite the region being the [world's second-fastest-growing region](#), there is a huge challenge of balancing rapid economic growth and poverty along with achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), keeping in mind the looming climate crisis and environmental changes.

[Geographically, there is wide diversity in the region](#) - with Bangladesh, Bhutan, Northern India & Nepal lying in the Himalayan Region and facing the risk of extremities like flash floods, landslides which destroy agricultural crops, property, infrastructure along with risks for human health and wildlife. On the other hand, we have a long coastline of over 7000 Km in India, coastal areas of Bangladesh, island nations of Sri Lanka and the Maldives which

are at the risk of sea-level rise leading to the displacement of human settlements, risks of food security due to destruction of agricultural land, saltwater intrusion & destruction of the livelihoods of those who depend on Tourism and fisheries sectors.

Due to similarity in the geographical features and close proximity of the countries to each other, the approach of each country should closely resemble each other depending on the common problems. [Unfortunately, it is driven out of their regional problems without paying any heed to the collaboration or synchronization of the strategies.](#) There are some common issues which characterise the region as a whole for most of the parts – high population density, haphazard urban development, encroachment on low lying areas/ flood plains, lack of comprehensive planning for infrastructure taking into consideration the geography of the region & lopsided involvement of a large segment of the labour force in the agriculture sector. Environment policies gained prominence in the region since the last decade of the 20th century still most of them haven't been updated, given the changing times.

India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan are inhabited by a large segment of the poor population and hence, their approach towards environmental laws and regulations is designed keeping in mind the growth and development aspirations of the country. Even though they focus on [3Rs](#), Polluter Pays Principle, Efficient resource utilisation and awareness generation, in practice, the goals related to GDP growth overpower the health of the environment.

Even though South Asia as a whole has a very high share of poor population and development of the region along with poverty reduction is a common goal of each country, we have an outlier in the group which is also one of the best performers, not only in the region but in the whole world. Bhutan too had similar choices to make between development and protection of the environment (to minimise and reduce climate crisis) along with minimisation of the impact of the former on the latter and its people. [Through the National Environment Strategy of 1998, Bhutan chose to follow a “Middle-Path of Development” which strives to achieve this balance.](#) It focused on carving laws and policies suited to the country's geographical peculiarity along with sustainable management of its natural resources.

Formulation of laws has been done by the neighbours of Bhutan as well but what makes Bhutan stand out among its peers is the [adherence to these laws by its citizens and effective monitoring and enforcement to achieve the desired results.](#) The constitution of Bhutan guarantees 60% of the forest cover maintenance which is unique in itself. When, on the one

hand, south Asian countries are famous for their lax implementation of environmental regulations, Bhutan's constitutional guarantee is a benchmark of commitment towards the environment for all the countries of the world.

To quote an example of the BBIN Motor Vehicle Agreement (MVA), Bhutan rejected ratifying the agreement in 2017, citing concerns of increased pollution due to motor vehicle movement from the neighbouring countries which would not only harm its stakeholders but also pollute its environment. BBIN corridor was a multi-modal freight corridor proposed by India in 2014 to strengthen trade relations between Bhutan, Bangladesh, India & Nepal. This shows the commitment towards the environment of Bhutan when we often come across the issue of haphazard urban planning and development activities taking place in the low lying flood plain areas of Bangladesh and India.



Bangladesh/ Image source: EJF

## Where lies the Solution

A common approach towards any natural calamity in India, Nepal and Bangladesh is mitigation and response, instead of prevention and preparedness. There is lack of awareness and commitment of the community towards climate change and impact, lack of

government's effort towards standardization of damage assessment methodologies, or planning a coordinated approach towards joint prevention and preparedness plans, especially in the shared international boundary regions. For instance, in the North-East India & Bangladesh can hold stakeholders meet with Bhutan to [share the knowledge and expertise to avoid the damage](#) caused by flash floods in the region which have increased in intensity during the past decade.

When in the past three decades, since environmental policies were designed by the countries of the region, individual approach and solitary dealing with climate change has not provided any fruitful results, it's necessary to come forward and take the help of best performers. The SAARC, too, can play a significant role here in providing a common platform to the region so that environment and climate change can be integrated into the socio-economic goals of the countries along with a region-specific but [holistic approach](#) towards preparedness for natural disasters. Sustainability is the key to the future of Earth and the rate at which we have damaged the environment in the past few decades to win the race of development is going to be very costly for all of us if we fail to slow down the climate change process now.

**CERTIFICATE COURSE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

SIX-WEEK ONLINE COURSE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS  
BY THE KOOTNEETI

**JOIN TODAY!**

team@thekootneeti.com  
courses.thekootneeti.in  
(+91) 120 4565994

*The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Kootneeti Team*

Facebook Comments