

SAARC ENVIRONMENT ACTION PLAN

(Adopted by the Third Meeting of the SAARC Environment Ministers)

Malé, 15-16 October 1997

Introduction

1. The Leaders of SAARC in a number of their Summit meetings have raised concern on the deteriorating state of the environment and urged action to address these environmental concerns.
2. The Heads of State or Government during the Ninth SAARC Summit held in Male on May 12-14, 1997, expressed the urgent need for implementation of the recommendations of the two studies, on the 'Greenhouse Effect and its Impact on the Region'; and the 'Causes and Consequences of Natural Disasters and the Protection and Preservation of the Environment'. They also welcomed the offer of the Maldives to host a meeting of the SAARC Environment Ministers to focus more directly on the environmental concerns of the region including the, formulation of an Action Plan for immediate implementation of recommendations contained in the two Studies, while taking into account the recommendations made by the Meeting of the Environment Ministers in New Delhi on April 2-3, 1997.
3. In pursuance of the above, the SAARC Environment Ministers having met in Male on October'15-16, 1997 decided to take the following actions and adopted this Action Plan:

Aims and Strategies

4. The Action Plan is intended to address regional environmental concerns, to enhance the environmental management capabilities of the region and is aimed primarily towards implementation through co-ordinated national and regional activities.
5. The protection of the environment is considered as the axis of the Action Plan, and human well-being is its ultimate goal.
6. The aim of the Action Plan would be achieved by pursuing the following strategies:
 - a. Assessment of the environment in order to assist the governments of Member States in decision making to cope properly with environmental problems particularly those concerning natural disasters and climate change.
 - b. Development and updating of national environment action plans and implementation of plans and programmes both at the national and regional levels to address the main environmental concerns in the SAARC region.
 - c. Development of legal instruments, providing the legal basis for co-operative efforts to protect and preserve the environment and develop the region on a sustainable basis

d. Increasing people's sensitivity to and involvement in, finding solutions for environmental problems in the region through awareness and educational programmes.

e. Organization of supporting measures including finance and national and regional institutional mechanisms needed for the implementation of the Action Plan.

Environmental Assessment

7. Environmental assessment is one of the basic activities which will support the prudent management of the environment and will facilitate the implementation of the other components of the Action Plan. A SAARC State of the Environment Report will be prepared by the end of 1999. The format for the Report is to be indicated by the SAARC Secretariat. To provide the necessary information for the Report, each member state will produce a national state of the environment report by the end of 1998.

8. Harmonization of environmental standards is essential for management of the environment and particularly for pollution control in the regional context. To initiate this process, Governments will submit to the Secretariat information about existing environmental standards in their countries. To facilitate this process, it is requested that the SAARC Technical Committee on Environment and Meteorology take up this issue and submit to the Secretariat a format for submission of information.

9. Some of the SAARC countries are particularly vulnerable to global climate change and the projected sea level rise. Vulnerable nations would continue to monitor, survey and collect data on climate change and sea level rise. Member states would record and share meteorological and oceanographic data for their common benefits.

10. Member States reiterate the need to assess the impact of climate change on the region on a regular basis and to disseminate this information and examine the possibility of establishing a group of eminent scientists and experts to undertake this task.

11. Concerned Member States reaffirm their commitment to actively participate in the ongoing work of the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) focused on regeneration of degraded watersheds and conservation of the Himalayan ecosystem.

Regional Co-operation and Capacity Building

12. There is an urgent need to strengthen the mechanisms for sharing experience, information and resources on disaster preparedness, mitigation and management. In this regard, the Technical Committee on Environment and Meteorology should conduct a workshop to examine the mechanisms for sharing information on disaster preparedness and mitigation.

13. Governments would designate national nodal points on water resources management to facilitate networking for exchange of information, scientific data and appropriate technologies. They would also share this information, data and technologies within mutually agreed frameworks of co-operation.

14. Concerned Member States will provide support in monitoring variability and change of climate and sea level rise; in assessing the impacts of climate- change; and support national efforts aimed at developing strategies and measures on adaptation to climate change through sharing of expertise and training.

Regional Institutions

15. Member States agreed on the need for establishing a SAARC Forestry Centre that would have a coordinating role in exchange of information, expertise, training programmes and monitoring in the fields of forestry. The SAARC Secretariat should identify the existing institutions in this field and consult Member Countries regarding the modalities for the operation of such a Centre.

16. Member States also agreed on the necessity for the establishment of a SAARC Coastal Zone Management Centre. The Government of Maldives offered to undertake the feasibility study for such a Centre.

Legal Framework

17. Recognizing the importance of sound environmental protection in the region, the Member States agreed to study the feasibility of a Regional Treaty on Environment in the context of existing international conventions. The SAARC Secretary-General was requested to liaise with the Member Countries for further necessary action in this regard.

Implementation

18. The main responsibility for implementation of this Action Plan lies with governments of the Member States. To facilitate the efficient implementation of this Plan at national level, each government would prepare a national Action Plan on the environment and submit it to the Secretariat by end of July 1998.

19. Each Member State would identify a nodal Ministry, to monitor the progress in the implementation of this Action Plan and to closely co-ordinate with the SAARC Secretariat, and inform the Secretariat by the end of 1997. In establishing institutional arrangements for implementing the Action Plan, a mechanism should be formed which utilises, to the greatest extent possible, the expertise available in the region and the capabilities of existing regional organisations and co-ordination bodies such as the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme. Where necessary, national institutions should be strengthened so that they could participate actively and effectively in the implementation of the Action Plan.

20. The SAARC Technical Committee on Environment and Meteorology in their regular annual meetings, should also consider the implementation of the Action Plan, set priorities and monitor its progress.

21. The SAARC Environment Minister would meet annually as decided in the Ninth SAARC Summit to consider the state of the environment in the SAARC Region. It was also decided that the Ministers Meeting will be preceded by the meeting of the SAARC Technical Committee on Environment and Meteorology in order to facilitate the work of the Ministers.
