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Climate Resilience in South Asia: **Pathways for Regional Cooperation**

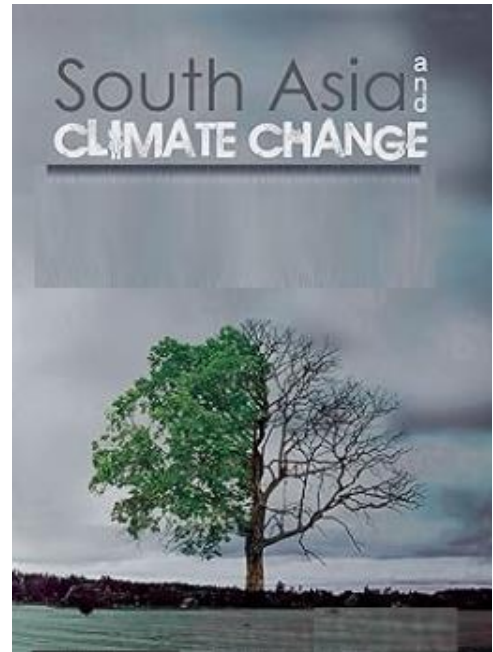


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Introduction

South Asia stands at the epicenter of a climate crisis that demands immediate and unprecedented regional cooperation. As the world grapples with accelerating environmental changes, this region—home to nearly one-fourth of humanity—faces climate challenges that transcend national boundaries and require collective solutions. The latest data from 2024-2025 paints an alarming picture: **Asia is warming at twice the global average**, transforming what were once manageable environmental challenges into existential threats affecting over 2 billion people. The year 2024 alone witnessed devastating climate impacts across the region. **Hundreds of people died in India due to heavy rainfall**, while soaring



temperatures and intense precipitation accelerated glacier melt in the Himalayas, triggering catastrophic floods and landslides downstream. Marine heatwaves of strong, severe, or extreme intensity affected most ocean areas surrounding Asia—the largest extent on record. These events underscore a harsh reality: climate change in South Asia is not a distant threat but a clear and present danger reshaping lives, economies, and ecosystems across the subcontinent.

From the melting glaciers of the Hindu Kush Himalayas that feed rivers sustaining billions, to the rising seas threatening the Maldives and Bangladesh's coastal communities, South Asian nations share interconnected vulnerabilities that demand coordinated responses. The region's shared river systems, monsoon patterns, and ecosystem dependencies mean that climate impacts in one country inevitably affect its neighbors. Yet paradoxically, South Asia features the least amount of transnational climate cooperation of any region globally—a gap that must be bridged if the region is to build meaningful resilience against accelerating climate change.

Current Climate Challenges in South Asia

The climate crisis manifests across South Asia through multiple, interconnected challenges that threaten human security, economic stability, and environmental sustainability. Understanding these challenges requires examining both their regional scope and country-specific impacts, as each nation faces unique vulnerabilities while contributing to shared regional risks.

Water Scarcity and Hydrological Stress

Water security represents perhaps the most critical climate challenge facing South Asia. **A staggering 74% of the region's population grapples with high water stress**, making South Asia one of the most water-stressed regions globally. This crisis stems from multiple factors: population growth, rapid urbanization, agricultural expansion, and increasingly erratic precipitation patterns driven by climate change.

The region's dependence on glacier-fed rivers compounds this challenge. Himalayan glaciers, often called the "Third Pole," provide water security for nearly 2 billion people across South Asia. However, rising temperatures have doubled the rate of glacial melt since the early 2000s, creating a paradox of short-term flooding followed by long-term water scarcity.



Countries like Nepal and Bhutan, heavily dependent on hydropower generation, face particular vulnerabilities as glacial lake outburst floods threaten infrastructure while changing water flows undermine energy security.

Agricultural Disruption and Food Security

Agriculture, which employs over 40% of South Asia's workforce and contributes significantly to regional GDP, faces mounting pressures from climate variability. Changing monsoon patterns, increased frequency of extreme weather events, and rising temperatures



disrupt traditional farming cycles and reduce crop yields. Pakistan's 2022 floods, which submerged one-third of the country and affected over 33 million people, destroyed millions of acres of crops and demonstrated agriculture's vulnerability to extreme weather.

India, the region's agricultural powerhouse, experiences annual losses of billions of dollars due to climate-related crop damage. Heatwaves increasingly threaten wheat production in northern states, while erratic rainfall patterns affect rice cultivation across the subcontinent. These impacts reverberate beyond national borders, affecting regional food prices and security, particularly for import-dependent countries like Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

Urban Vulnerability and Infrastructure Stress

South Asia's rapidly growing cities face compounded climate risks. Urban heat islands exacerbate temperature increases, while inadequate drainage systems struggle to cope with intensifying rainfall events. Cities like Dhaka, Karachi, Mumbai, and Colombo regularly experience flooding that paralyzes transportation, damages infrastructure, and displaces vulnerable populations.

The 2024 heatwaves across the region highlighted urban vulnerabilities, with temperatures exceeding 45°C in multiple cities. These extreme heat events disproportionately affect urban poor populations, who often lack access to cooling systems and live in heat-absorbing structures. The economic costs of such events include reduced productivity, increased energy demands, and strain on healthcare systems.

Coastal and Marine Ecosystem Degradation

South Asia's extensive coastlines face multiple climate-related threats. Bangladesh experiences some of the world's most rapid sea-level rise, forcing millions to relocate from coastal areas. The Maldives, with an average elevation of just 1.5 meters above sea level, faces an existential threat from rising oceans. Sri Lanka's coastal communities grapple with saltwater intrusion that contaminates freshwater supplies and degrades agricultural land.

Marine ecosystems across the Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea show signs of stress from warming waters, acidification, and pollution. The region's fisheries, which provide livelihoods for millions and protein for hundreds of millions, face declining yields due to changing ocean conditions. Coral bleaching events, driven by marine heatwaves, threaten biodiversity and coastal protection services that reefs provide.

Country-Specific Vulnerabilities

While sharing regional challenges, each South Asian nation faces distinct climate vulnerabilities. **Pakistan** confronts extreme flooding in the south and glacial melt risks in the north, with the 2024 monsoon season again bringing widespread destruction. **India's** vast territory experiences diverse impacts, from Himalayan glacial risks to coastal vulnerabilities in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, and severe heatwaves across the northern plains.



Bangladesh remains one of the world's most climate-vulnerable countries, facing simultaneous threats from sea-level rise, cyclones, flooding, and saltwater intrusion. **Nepal** and **Bhutan** confront glacial lake outburst floods and changing precipitation patterns that threaten their hydropower-dependent economies. **Sri Lanka** faces intensifying droughts and floods, while the **Maldives** confronts the ultimate climate challenge: potential submersion due to sea-level rise.

These interconnected challenges highlight why **11 of the 20 most climate-vulnerable countries globally are located in Asia**. The scale and scope of these risks underscore the urgent need for coordinated regional responses that transcend national boundaries and political divisions.



Regional Cooperation Imperatives

The climate challenges facing South Asia cannot be adequately addressed through isolated national efforts alone. The region's shared river systems, interconnected ecosystems, and common exposure to climate risks create both vulnerabilities and opportunities that demand coordinated regional responses. Understanding why cooperation is not just beneficial but essential requires examining the interconnected nature of South Asian climate systems and the limitations of unilateral approaches.

The Interconnected Nature of Climate Systems

South Asia's climate systems operate across national boundaries, making regional cooperation a practical necessity rather than a diplomatic choice. The monsoon system, which provides 70-80% of the region's annual rainfall, affects all South Asian countries simultaneously. Changes in monsoon patterns—whether delays, early onset, or intensity variations—create cascading effects that ripple across borders through shared river systems and atmospheric patterns.

The Himalayan mountain range serves as the region's "water tower," feeding major river systems including the Indus, Ganges, and Brahmaputra that flow through multiple countries. Glacial melt and changing precipitation in the mountains affect downstream water availability in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal simultaneously. Climate adaptation measures in upstream countries directly impact water security and flood risks in downstream nations, making unilateral water management both ineffective and potentially destabilizing.

Transboundary Environmental Challenges

Environmental degradation and climate impacts in South Asia frequently transcend political boundaries. Air pollution from one country affects air quality in neighboring nations, while deforestation and land-use changes alter regional precipitation patterns and biodiversity. The Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea represent shared marine ecosystems



where overfishing, pollution, or conservation efforts by one country affect the entire regional marine environment.

Cross-border migration induced by climate impacts creates additional challenges requiring regional coordination. As sea-level rise displaces populations in Bangladesh and the Maldives, or as drought forces migration from rural areas, the resulting population movements affect multiple countries and require coordinated policies for management and integration.

Current Cooperation Deficit

Despite these clear imperatives for cooperation, South Asia currently features the least amount of transnational climate cooperation globally—a tragic irony given the region's extraordinary vulnerability and interconnectedness. This cooperation deficit stems from several factors, including historical political tensions, data secrecy issues, and institutional weaknesses in existing regional organizations.

Data secrecy particularly hampers effective cooperation. Governments across South Asia often restrict access to climate and environmental data, preventing the development of integrated regional monitoring systems and early warning networks. This secrecy extends to hydrological data, weather information, and environmental monitoring—precisely the information needed for effective cross-border climate cooperation.

The Imperative for Shared Early Warning Systems

Climate impacts increasingly require rapid, coordinated responses that transcend national boundaries. Extreme weather events, flooding, and drought often affect multiple countries simultaneously, making regional early warning systems essential for effective disaster preparedness and response. The 2024 flooding across Pakistan and northern India demonstrated how cross-border coordination could have reduced casualties and economic losses through better information sharing and joint preparedness measures.

Effective early warning systems require shared meteorological data, coordinated monitoring networks, and joint analysis capabilities. Such systems can provide

communities and governments with crucial advance notice of approaching climate hazards, enabling evacuation, resource prepositioning, and protective measures that save lives and reduce economic impacts.

Economic Imperatives for Cooperation

The economic case for regional climate cooperation is compelling. Climate impacts impose enormous costs on South Asian economies through damaged infrastructure, agricultural losses, health impacts, and reduced productivity. The World Bank estimates that climate change could reduce South Asian GDP by up to 8.8% by 2050 without adequate adaptation measures.

Regional cooperation can significantly reduce these costs through shared resources, coordinated investments, and economies of scale in climate action. Joint infrastructure projects, shared technology development, and coordinated financing mechanisms can achieve climate resilience more cost-effectively than isolated national efforts. The success of regional cooperation in other areas—such as disaster risk reduction through SAARC initiatives—demonstrates the potential for expanded climate cooperation.



Building on Existing Foundations

Despite current limitations, South Asia possesses institutional foundations that can support enhanced climate cooperation. SAARC has made some progress in disaster risk reduction, while organizations like ICIMOD (International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development) facilitate regional cooperation on mountain ecosystems and climate adaptation.

The region also benefits from shared cultural values, historical connections, and common challenges that create natural foundations for cooperation. Successful examples of cross-border collaboration—from the Indus Water Treaty to joint conservation initiatives in the Sundarbans—demonstrate that effective regional cooperation is not only possible but can endure even during periods of political tension.



Pathways for Cooperation

Transforming South Asia's climate challenges into opportunities for regional resilience requires comprehensive cooperation across multiple dimensions. The pathways outlined below represent interconnected strategies that, when implemented collectively, can build the foundation for a climate-resilient South Asian community.

Policy Alignment and Harmonization

Effective regional climate action begins with harmonizing national policies and creating coordinated adaptation frameworks. Currently, South Asian countries develop climate policies in isolation, often leading to conflicting approaches that undermine regional effectiveness. Policy alignment involves several key components:

Harmonized National Adaptation Plans

Countries should develop National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) through consultative processes that consider regional impacts and opportunities for coordination. This includes aligning adaptation priorities in shared ecosystems, coordinating infrastructure development in transboundary regions, and ensuring that national policies support rather than hinder regional cooperation.

Regional Climate Governance Structures

Establishing dedicated regional climate councils or strengthening existing institutions like SAARC's environmental committees can provide ongoing coordination mechanisms. These structures should have technical expertise, political authority, and financial resources to facilitate policy coordination and implementation oversight.



Standardized Monitoring and Reporting

Developing common standards for climate monitoring, data collection, and progress reporting enables better regional coordination and learning. Standardized approaches facilitate comparative analysis, best practice sharing, and coordinated responses to emerging challenges.

Shared Technology and Innovation

Technology cooperation can accelerate climate resilience while building regional capacity and reducing costs through shared development and deployment efforts.

Regional Renewable Energy Integration

South Asia possesses enormous renewable energy potential that could be harnessed through regional cooperation. Bhutan's hydropower surplus could serve regional markets, while India's solar capacity could complement Pakistan's wind resources and Nepal's hydropower. Regional energy grids would enhance energy security while accelerating the transition away from fossil fuels.

Climate-Smart Agriculture Networks

Developing and sharing climate-resilient agricultural technologies can enhance food security across the region. This includes drought-resistant crop varieties, efficient irrigation technologies, and soil conservation techniques adapted to regional conditions. Regional agricultural research networks can coordinate development efforts and facilitate rapid technology transfer.

Integrated Data and Monitoring Platforms

Breaking down data silos through shared monitoring platforms would revolutionize regional climate cooperation. Integrated systems for weather forecasting, water resource

monitoring, and environmental tracking can provide the information base needed for effective coordination and early warning systems.

Innovation Hubs and Technology Transfer

Establishing regional innovation centers focused on climate adaptation and mitigation can accelerate technology development and deployment. These hubs can facilitate collaboration between researchers, entrepreneurs, and policymakers while ensuring that innovations address regional priorities and conditions.

Institutional Mechanisms and Governance

Strong institutional frameworks provide the foundation for sustained regional cooperation, offering coordination mechanisms that can weather political changes and evolving circumstances.

Strengthening SAARC Climate Initiatives

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, comprising Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, provides an existing platform for enhanced climate cooperation. Despite political challenges that have limited SAARC's effectiveness, the organization's disaster management initiatives demonstrate potential for expanded climate action. Strengthening SAARC's climate mandate requires renewed political commitment, adequate financing, and technical capacity building.





BIMSTEC as an Alternative Platform

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation offers an alternative regional platform that bypasses some of the political obstacles affecting SAARC. BIMSTEC's focus on technical cooperation and economic integration makes it well-suited for climate initiatives, particularly those involving coastal and marine issues affecting Bay of Bengal countries.

Regional Collaboration Centers

The UNFCCC's Regional Collaboration Centre for MENA and South Asia demonstrates the potential for dedicated climate institutions. Expanding such mechanisms or establishing South Asia-specific climate institutions can provide focused technical support, capacity building, and coordination services for regional climate action.

Specialized Climate Agreements

Developing specific agreements for climate cooperation—such as regional early warning systems, shared monitoring networks, or coordinated adaptation measures—can provide legal frameworks for sustained cooperation even when broader regional organizations face political constraints.

Community Engagement and Civil Society Partnerships

Effective climate resilience requires engagement at all levels of society, from grassroots communities to academic institutions and civil society organizations that can build cooperation from the ground up.

Grassroots Climate Networks

Local communities often possess valuable indigenous knowledge about climate adaptation and can implement solutions at the community level. Regional networks of



community organizations can share best practices, coordinate local adaptation measures, and build social resilience that complements government efforts.

Youth Climate Movements

Young people across South Asia increasingly recognize climate change as their defining challenge and are building cross-border networks for action. Supporting youth climate movements and providing platforms for their engagement in policy processes can build long-term constituencies for regional cooperation while bringing fresh perspectives to climate challenges.

Academic and Research Collaboration

Universities and research institutions across South Asia can collaborate on climate research, student exchanges, and joint programs that build intellectual foundations for regional cooperation. Research partnerships can generate the knowledge base needed for effective climate action while training the next generation of regional leaders.

Civil Society Partnerships

Non-governmental organizations, professional associations, and civil society groups can build cross-border relationships that complement and support government cooperation efforts. These partnerships often prove more resilient to political tensions and can maintain cooperation momentum during difficult periods.

Financing and Capacity Building

Climate action requires substantial financial resources and technical capacity that can be more effectively mobilized through regional cooperation and coordination.



Regional Climate Finance Mechanisms

Climate finance in South Asia grew from \$26 billion to \$41 billion between recent assessment periods, demonstrating increasing financial flows but also highlighting the need for better coordination. Regional finance mechanisms can pool resources, reduce transaction costs, and leverage international funding more effectively than fragmented national approaches.

Leveraging International Support

The **World Bank's delivery of \$42.6 billion in climate finance in fiscal year 2024** represents significant international commitment to climate action. Regional coordination can help South Asian countries access these resources more effectively through joint proposals, shared platforms, and coordinated programming that demonstrates regional impact and sustainability.

Innovative Financing Platforms

India's GIFT City and similar financial centers can serve as platforms for cross-border green finance, facilitating investment in regional climate projects and enabling innovative financing mechanisms such as green bonds, climate insurance, and blended finance instruments tailored to regional needs.

Capacity Building Networks

Regional training programs, technical exchanges, and capacity building initiatives can build the human resources needed for effective climate action. These programs can share costs across countries while ensuring that capacity building efforts address regional priorities and facilitate ongoing cooperation.

South-South Learning and Knowledge Exchange

South Asian countries can learn from each other's experiences and share successful adaptation and mitigation practices. Systematic knowledge exchange programs can accelerate learning, avoid duplication of efforts, and ensure that successful innovations spread rapidly across the region.

Case Studies and Success Stories

Despite current limitations in regional climate cooperation, South Asia has several examples of successful cross-border collaboration that demonstrate both the potential for expanded cooperation and the benefits such partnerships can deliver. These case studies provide valuable lessons and models for scaling up regional climate action.

The Indus Water Treaty: A Model of Enduring Cooperation

The Indus Water Treaty between India and Pakistan, signed in 1960, represents one of the world's most successful examples of transboundary water cooperation. For over **60 years**, **this treaty has survived multiple wars, political crises, and diplomatic tensions**, demonstrating the potential for environmental cooperation to transcend political conflicts.



Treaty Structure and Success Factors

Under the treaty's framework, **India received control of roughly 20% of the total water carried by the Indus river system, while Pakistan received 80%**. The treaty allows India to use western rivers for limited irrigation and unlimited non-consumptive uses such as power generation, while giving Pakistan primary rights to the waters of the Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab rivers.



The treaty's success stems from several factors: clear allocation mechanisms, dispute resolution procedures, technical cooperation through the Permanent Indus Commission, and regular data sharing requirements. These elements have enabled the treaty to function even during periods of severe political tension between the two countries.

Climate Change Challenges and Modernization Needs

While the Indus Water Treaty has proven remarkably durable, climate change poses new challenges that require treaty modernization. Accelerating glacial melt, changing precipitation patterns, and increased extreme weather events affect water availability and timing in ways not anticipated when the treaty was signed. The 2025 temporary suspension of the treaty by India, following security incidents, highlighted both the treaty's vulnerability to political pressures and the urgent need for climate-informed updates.

Modernizing the treaty for climate resilience could include provisions for adaptive water management, joint monitoring of climate impacts, coordinated flood and drought response, and shared infrastructure for climate adaptation. Such updates could serve as a model for climate-proofing other regional cooperation agreements.

Lessons for Regional Climate Cooperation

The Indus Water Treaty demonstrates that sustained cooperation is possible even between countries with difficult political relationships when based on clear agreements, technical collaboration, and mutual benefit recognition. The treaty's institutional mechanisms—regular meetings, data sharing, and dispute resolution procedures—provide models for broader regional climate cooperation frameworks.

Himalayan Glacier Cooperation: Building Scientific Networks

Cooperation on Himalayan glacier monitoring and adaptation represents an emerging success story that demonstrates the potential for science-based regional collaboration on climate issues.



The 2018 Regional Network Agreement

In 2018, senior government officials from **Afghanistan, Bhutan, India, Nepal, and Pakistan agreed to launch a regional network** to boost mountain economies and address glacial risks. This World Bank-facilitated initiative focuses on coordinated glacier monitoring, shared early warning systems, and joint adaptation planning for glacier-dependent communities.

Shared Monitoring and Research Initiatives

The regional network has facilitated shared research on glacier dynamics, coordinated monitoring of glacial lakes, and joint assessment of climate risks to mountain communities. Countries have begun sharing data on glacier mass balance, lake formation, and water resource projections—information that is crucial for downstream flood preparedness and water resource planning.

Recent Developments and Expansion

India's 2025 call for greater regional cooperation on glacier melting, delivered at international climate forums, reflects growing recognition that Himalayan climate risks require coordinated responses. The expanding cooperation includes joint research projects, shared monitoring technologies, and coordinated adaptation planning for mountain communities.

Implications for Broader Climate Cooperation

The Himalayan cooperation demonstrates that scientific collaboration can build foundations for broader climate partnerships. Technical cooperation on monitoring and research creates working relationships between institutions and builds trust that can support expanded cooperation on adaptation and mitigation measures.



Bay of Bengal Mangrove Restoration: Ecosystem-Based Cooperation

Mangrove restoration efforts in the Bay of Bengal illustrate how ecosystem-based approaches can facilitate regional cooperation while delivering climate adaptation benefits.

The Bangladesh-India Sundarbans Initiative

The Bangladesh-India Sundarbans cooperation initiative represents one of the most significant cross-border conservation efforts in South Asia. This World Bank-supported program focuses on joint ecosystem management, sustainable livelihoods development, and climate adaptation in the world's largest mangrove ecosystem.

The initiative includes joint ecotourism development, coordinated conservation planning, capacity building for local communities including women, and shared research on ecosystem services. These efforts recognize that the Sundarbans ecosystem transcends national boundaries and requires coordinated management to maintain its climate protection services.

Regional Bay of Bengal Programs

Broader regional cooperation involves **eight countries working together to protect the Bay of Bengal ecosystem**, including Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Indonesia. These programs focus on sustainable fishing practices, marine pollution reduction, and ecosystem restoration that benefits approximately **400 million people living along the Bay's coasts**.

Climate Resilience Outcomes

Mangrove restoration efforts in Bangladesh have demonstrated significant climate resilience benefits, according to UNDP reports. Restored mangroves provide crucial protection against storm surges, coastal erosion, and sea-level rise while supporting livelihoods and biodiversity. The success of these efforts has inspired similar initiatives across the region.



Sub-regional Community Resilience Initiatives

The Sub-regional Initiative on Community Resilience to Climate Change in the Bay of Bengal builds on ecosystem restoration success to develop comprehensive community-based adaptation programs. These initiatives integrate mangrove restoration with livelihood development, disaster preparedness, and climate education for coastal communities.

Regional Disaster Response: Building Institutional Capacity

SAARC's progress in disaster risk reduction demonstrates the potential for regional institutions to facilitate effective climate-related cooperation, even amid broader political challenges.

SAARC Disaster Management Framework

Despite political limitations affecting broader SAARC cooperation, the organization has made meaningful progress in disaster risk reduction through technical cooperation, capacity building programs, and joint exercises. The SAARC Disaster Management Centre facilitates information sharing, coordinates regional responses, and builds institutional capacity across member countries.

Cross-border Early Warning Developments

Regional early warning system development represents one of SAARC's most promising initiatives. While still limited in scope, pilot programs for flood forecasting, cyclone tracking, and drought monitoring demonstrate the potential for expanded regional cooperation on climate-related disaster preparedness.

Joint Response Mechanisms

Regional disaster response exercises and mutual assistance agreements provide frameworks for coordinated action during climate emergencies. These mechanisms



have facilitated resource sharing, technical assistance, and coordinated responses during major disasters, demonstrating the practical benefits of regional cooperation.

Lessons for Climate Cooperation Expansion

The success of SAARC disaster management initiatives suggests that technical cooperation on specific, practical challenges can build momentum for broader climate cooperation. Starting with concrete, immediate benefits—such as early warning systems or emergency response—can create the trust and institutional capacity needed for more comprehensive climate partnerships.

Conclusion

South Asia stands at a critical juncture where the urgency of climate action converges with unprecedented opportunities for regional cooperation. The evidence presented throughout this analysis underscores a fundamental truth: the region's climate future depends not merely on the adequacy of national strategies, but on the collective will to transform shared vulnerability into shared strength through innovative, sustained regional partnerships.

The challenges facing South Asia are undeniably daunting. With **Asia warming at twice the global average** and **11 of the 20 most climate-vulnerable countries located in the region**, the scale of required adaptation and mitigation efforts exceeds what any single nation can achieve in isolation. The 2024 climate impacts—from devastating floods to record-breaking heatwaves—serve as stark reminders that climate change respects no borders and demands responses that transcend traditional diplomatic boundaries.

Yet within these challenges lie extraordinary opportunities. The region's shared river systems, interconnected ecosystems, and common climate vulnerabilities create natural foundations for cooperation that, once activated, can deliver benefits far exceeding the sum of individual national efforts. The success stories examined—from the six-decade durability of the Indus Water Treaty to the emerging Himalayan glacier cooperation networks—demonstrate that sustained regional partnerships are not only possible but can endure even during periods of political tension when grounded in mutual benefit and



technical collaboration.

The pathways forward require simultaneous action across multiple dimensions: harmonizing policies to create coherent regional strategies, sharing technologies and innovations to accelerate solutions deployment, strengthening institutional mechanisms to provide sustained cooperation frameworks, engaging communities and civil society to build grassroots support, and coordinating financing to leverage resources more effectively. These pathways are interconnected and mutually reinforcing—progress in one area catalyzes advances in others, creating positive feedback loops that can rapidly accelerate regional climate action.

The financial resources increasingly available for climate action—with **South Asian climate finance growing from \$26 billion to**

\$41 billion and international institutions like the World Bank delivering **\$42.6 billion globally in 2024**—provide unprecedented opportunities for regional initiatives that can demonstrate the effectiveness of cooperative approaches while building the institutional relationships needed for long-term partnership.

Perhaps most importantly, South Asia possesses a unique asset in this endeavor: a population of nearly 2 billion people whose creativity, resilience, and determination have repeatedly overcome seemingly insurmountable challenges throughout history. The region's rich cultural heritage of cooperation, shared philosophical traditions emphasizing interconnectedness, and demonstrated capacity for innovation provide powerful foundations for building climate resilience through solidarity.

The vision that should guide this transformation is clear: a South Asia where shared vulnerability becomes the catalyst for unprecedented cooperation, where regional partnerships accelerate climate solutions, and where the benefits of collective action create positive momentum for broader collaboration across all areas of mutual concern. This is not merely an environmental imperative but a pathway toward regional stability, prosperity, and leadership in global climate action.

As South Asia moves forward, the choice is not between national sovereignty and regional cooperation, but between isolation in the face of overwhelming challenges and partnership that multiplies capacity for effective response. The region's climate future—and indeed its broader future—depends on choosing cooperation, innovation, and shared responsibility



over fragmentation, competition, and narrow self-interest.

The time for incremental action has passed. What South Asia needs now is transformative regional cooperation that matches the scale and urgency of the climate challenge. Such cooperation will not eliminate climate risks, but it can build the resilience, adaptive capacity, and mitigation potential needed to protect the region's population and ecosystems while contributing meaningfully to global climate action. In rising to meet this challenge together, South Asia can demonstrate that regional cooperation represents not just a strategy for climate resilience, but a pathway toward a more sustainable, equitable, and prosperous future for all.
