

Cover Story



The changing facets of climate emergencies: South Asian perspective

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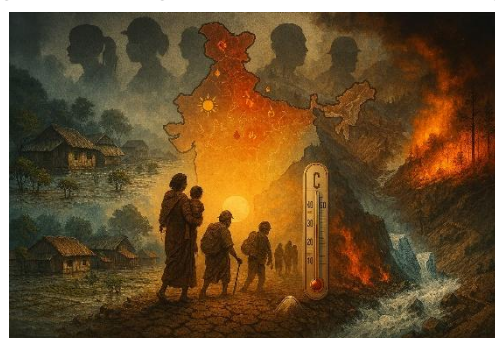
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South Asia is among the most climate vulnerable regions in the world (1). Due to its diverse geographical and climate context, changing population dynamics and sociopolitical nuances, climate vulnerabilities are often exacerbated and multiplied. Climate emergencies due to these vulnerabilities could also expose existing gaps and widen economic and societal inequalities in the region. This dichotomy could pave the way to more complex emergencies, impacting the social and economic fabric of South Asia.

Evidence is loud and clear. By 2050, South Asia could see climate migrants totalling over 40 million crisscrossing the region, fleeing for safety from climate impacts. By 2030, annual economic losses from climate change in the region will average, a staggering 160 billion USD putting more vulnerable people into poverty (2). Closer to home, 19 million Sri Lankas live in locations set to become moderate or severe climate hotspots by 2050. Moreover, average annual disaster losses related to housing, infrastructure, agriculture and relief could reach USD 313 million by 2050 in Sri Lanka (3).



Emergencies due to seasonal flooding, droughts, landslides and disease outbreaks are not new to South Asia. However, due to impacts of climate change either the magnitude or frequency of these emergencies have increased (4). More than ever before, South Asians are bracing for multiple hazardous events with cascading impacts due to climate change. Beyond the conventional emergencies, South Asia is witnessing the emergence of new climate related emergencies as well.

Extreme heat waves with increasing intensity have become almost a norm in India (5). Due to rising sea levels, Bangladesh is experiencing recurrent salinity intrusions in coastal regions (6). Continuously dry winter seasons in Nepal have given rise to forest fires raging across the country (7). Additionally, glacial lake outburst flooding in Northern Pakistan is fast becoming a major threat to local population (8). Impacts of such unconventional climate emergencies are feeding into climate migration and new breed of ‘climate refugees’ in South Asia (9). Hence, paradigm shifts in the way we approach in preparing for these unconventional emergencies are warranted. Appreciating the likelihood of multi hazard scenarios and their cascading impacts is a must. Reorienting South Asia’s conventional emergency preparedness systems to address ‘new climate normal’ is a timely and urgent necessity.

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