



## CLIMATE-FRAGILITY RISK FACTSHEET

# SOUTH ASIA

South Asia is *one of the world's most climate-vulnerable regions*. Many countries in the region lack the resources and capacities needed to cope with the worsening impacts of climate change. And climate change is increasingly interacting with socio-economic, demographic and political factors to exacerbate fragility risks. While some of these challenges are country-specific, many of them transcend political boundaries and therefore require regional responses and strategies.

### 4 CLIMATE FRAGILITY RISKS IN SOUTH ASIA

Four pathways that link climate change to insecurity and conflict in South Asia are:

#### 1 Risk 1: Escalation of regional tensions due to competition over resources

**Water** is among the most contested resources in South Asia. Climate change, in combination with other social, economic, managerial and infrastructural challenges, is expected to worsen the region's **water stress** and **scarcity** issues. Tensions linked to increasing water stress, which often overlap with **ethnic, nationalistic** and **religious cleavages**, could further escalate existing discontent and conflict.

#### 2 Risk 2: Worsening economic and livelihood insecurity

As South Asia's economy is highly dependent on **agriculture**, climate change is increasingly becoming a major driver of livelihood insecurity and economic losses. Heat waves, salinisation, and extreme weather events are causing **health problems** and declines in **food production**, driving up **food prices** and poverty levels. Food and livelihood insecurity risks are undermining **social stability** and **governmental legitimacy** and enhancing insecurity and conflict risks.

#### 3 Risk 3: Increased migratory movements and rapid urbanisation linked to slow- and rapid-onset disasters

**Extreme weather events** are often a direct or indirect driver of displacement and migration across South Asia - and these are becoming more intense. Disasters caused by sea level rise, cyclones, storm surges, land subsidence and high precipitation events threaten people's survival and exacerbate livelihood insecurities and poverty. Climate change has also intensified **rapid rural-urban migration** in South Asia, straining existing resources and damaging ecosystem services in urban areas and thus undermining cities' abilities to cope with disasters. These effects can, in turn, ultimately undermine **social stability** and **governmental legitimacy**.

#### 4 Risk 4: Compounding risks of crime, extremism and terrorism

The climate fragility risks South Asia faces are compounded by poverty, inequality and other structural failings that disproportionately affect marginalised segments of society, particularly **women and children**. Climate change could thus exacerbate existing conditions of **conflict and instability** in some regions and even bring about more **military interventions**. Climate change-related disasters could also provide an entry point for **terrorist groups** to gain popular support and boost their legitimacy through rescue and relief activities, e.g. as occurred in the aftermath of the 2010 floods in Pakistan.

### CLIMATE IMPACTS

South Asia is climatically diverse and heavily dependent on **monsoonal rainfall**. Climate change is projected to impact the region in a number of ways, including, among others:



Increasingly unpredictable precipitation patterns



Increasing annual mean temperatures



Sea level rise

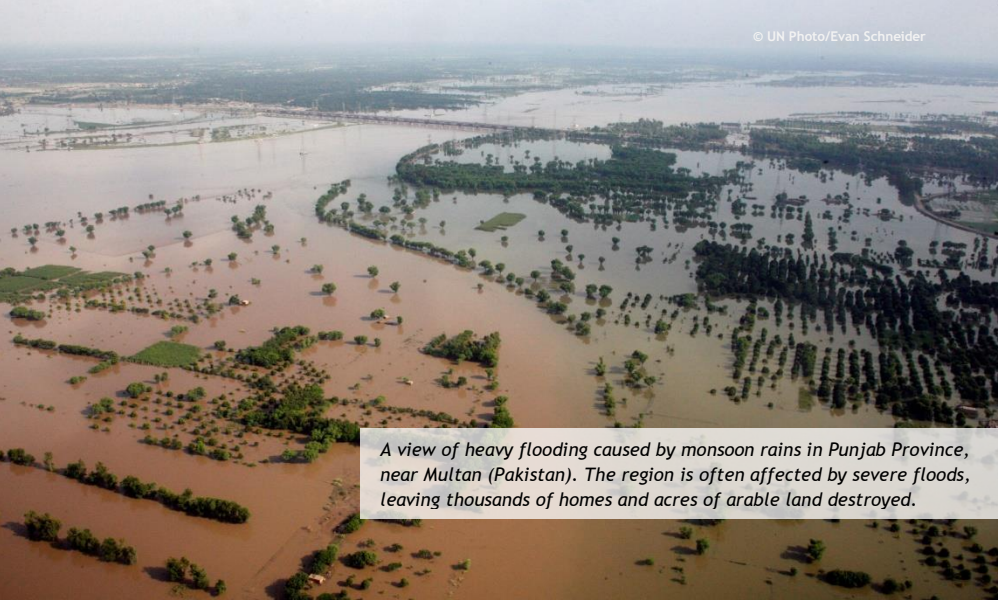


Increasing flooding risks and glacial melt



Increased intensity and frequency of extreme weather events

In addition to climate change impacts, other environmental challenges such as increased **pressure on resources, deforestation and pollution** are expected to threaten the region's stability and livelihoods further.



A view of heavy flooding caused by monsoon rains in Punjab Province, near Multan (Pakistan). The region is often affected by severe floods, leaving thousands of homes and acres of arable land destroyed.

## 5 ENTRY POINTS TO ADDRESS CLIMATE FRAGILITY RISKS

At present, there are **no dedicated frameworks that directly address climate-fragility risks** or the security implications of climate change in South Asia. Existing regional and sub-regional cooperation institutions focus solely on disaster risk reduction (DRR) and emergency responses, or address resource-sharing issues without considering climate change. Beyond the overarching necessity to create more evidence-based and actionable knowledge on climate security in South Asia, entry points for addressing climate-fragility risks could include **actions** to:

- 1 **Facilitate and strengthen regional cooperation:** To respond to regional tensions over resources, existing **frameworks on climate change and DRR** need to be revitalised and operationalised. This would help build local capacities and early warning systems. It is important to formulate a regional framework that integrates various perceptions for a **holistic implementation** of regional climate change policies.
- 2 **Enable and bolster transboundary river basin cooperation:** Sustainable management of the Himalayan ecosystems is vital for the countries dependent on the **Himalayan rivers**. Coordination and joint river basin management between upper and lower riparian countries can prevent conflict and build trust. **Climate-proofing existing river water sharing agreements** is important and requires **strong diplomatic support**.
- 3 **Support adaptation and DRR efforts to secure livelihoods:** To prevent livelihood deterioration and anti-state grievances, it is essential to tackle the **food-water-energy nexus**. Regional cooperation on **energy** could help populations become more resilient and build trust between countries. Moreover, building up **insurance sectors** to protect the poor should be a focus point.
- 4 **Manage human mobility and urbanisation:** As of now, there are no suitable legal instruments to deal with climate-related **cross-border migration** in South Asia. Mutual bilateral and regional agreements are necessary to address this, especially when it comes to improving **data collection** and building **information sharing mechanisms**. Creating, supporting and expanding **city networks** in South Asia could also help deal with the security implications of urban stress and climate change.
- 5 **Understand and prevent violence, extremism and terrorism:** Analysing how socio-economic grievances, resource degradation and climate change interact with and potentially fuel recruitment and violence by **non-state armed groups** would enable policy-makers to develop more effective policies to counteract them. Diplomatic efforts could help develop different **preventative mechanisms** such as community-based initiatives.

## SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTS

- South Asia is home to **1.8 billion** people.
- More than **33%** of the world's poor live in South Asia.
- The economy is highly dependent on **agriculture**.
- South Asia is the world's fastest growing region, with the majority of countries recording **GDP growth rates of above 5%** in 2018.
- South Asia is among the most **diverse** regions in the world and hosts communities of all the major **religions**.

## POLITICS & SECURITY

All South Asian countries are technically democracies, but many have faced severe disruptions over the past few decades in the form of political transitions and violent conflict. Currently, terrorism is a major threat in the region, and stability in the region is further under threat from (secessionist) insurgencies, border disputes and sporadic communal conflicts.

## FURTHER READING

- **Climate-Fragility Risk Brief: South Asia**. (full version)
- Nordqvist, Pernilla and Krame, Florian. (2018). [Climate Change and Violent Conflict: Sparse Evidence from South Asia and South East Asia](#). SIPRI.
- Ghazi, Tariq Waseem, Muniruzzaman, A. N. M. and Singh, A. K.. (2016). [Climate Change & Security in South Asia: Cooperating for Peace](#). Global Military Advisory Council on Climate Change Paper No. 2.

## LEGAL NOTICE

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The **Climate Security Expert Network**, which comprises some 30 international experts, supports the **Group of Friends on Climate and Security** and the **Climate Security Mechanism of the UN** system by synthesising scientific knowledge and expertise, advising on entry points for building resilience to climate-security risks, and helping to strengthen a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities of addressing climate-related security risks.

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