Decarbonizing South Asia

World Sustainable Development Summit Side Event

Concept note and Agenda

Background. The South Asia Region (SAR) is particularly recognized as highly vulnerable to climate change, with increasing populations exposed to very high and often extreme climate risks. The region is observably susceptible to adverse effects of climate change, including temperature increase, precipitation variations, extreme weather events, and sea level rise. Many of the worst climate impacts could still be avoided by adhering to goals agreed under the U.N. Framework on Climate Change (UNFCC) with the objective of limiting global warming to "well below 2°C". All the SAR countries have pledged to tackle climate change and ratified the 2015 Paris Agreement as a part of their long-term economic growth and sustainable development plans. Governments in the SAR are actively pursuing ambitious policies to address climate change and have submitted their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) outlining their intent to take climate action in the form of post 2020 goals.

While per capita greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in SAR are still very low, they could increase significantly because of urbanization and rising middle-income standards. This is especially true of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, where the choices made in power sector and energy efficiency investments will largely determine whether development can be decoupled from increasing carbon emissions. While COVID-19 has disrupted economic and social activity across the region, emissions are still expected to quickly return to higher levels across the region after a small drop in 2020. Emissions in South Asia have also significantly increased the air pollution crisis in countries like India and Pakistan. World Health Organization estimated that in South Asia alone, approximately 1.32 million people died from the effects of air pollution, accounting for nearly 31.06% of global deaths from air pollution.

Low-carbon transition and decarbonization of economies will not only contribute to the global climate goals but also help countries chart sustainable growth pathways while addressing climate-related (physical and transition) risks. It is now widely recognized that it is essential to decouple economic growth from unsustainable pressures, such as those leading to global climate change, and to ensure a successful transition towards a low-carbon economy while at the same time creating jobs and boosting sustainable growth. The development path adopted by the countries in the foreseeable future will impact their preparedness to a range of climate policy shocks as these policies are being increasingly adopted by governments and private sector. It is therefore important to understand the channels through which a low-carbon transition could affect the economies and the possible speed of such a transition while at the same time ensuring preparedness of the economies to a low-carbon transition. For SAR to play its part in the effort to curb global emissions, success will hinge on considerable investment in renewable energy as well as emphasis on battery storage, a shift to hydrogen economy, increased use of electric vehicles in transport, and reduced emissions from agriculture. Additionally, there is a need to manage a smooth transition to avoid stranded assets and their social, economic and financial impacts. This has become increasingly important in the current context as economies will require significant investments that could boost sustainable economic recovery coming out of the current COVID crisis.

Objectives. The objective of this session is to discuss a possible pathway for South Asian countries to achieve full decarbonization by 2050 while ensuring a just transition. Beyond supporting the implementation of NDCs and decarbonization goals, the focus of these pathways will also be on identification of strategies that can positively influence the attainment of economic growth and societal objectives — e.g. those linked to human health, food security, biodiversity, local environmental quality, energy access, livelihoods, and equitable sustainable development

Agenda

Welcome Remarks: TERI Representative
Introductory Remarks: Abhas Kumar Jha, Practice Manager, DRM and Climate Change, World Bank
Deep decarbonization pathways-An overarching framework: Stephane Hallegatte, Lead Economist, World Bank (tbc)
Decarbonizing South Asia: Possible approaches: Muthukumara Mani, Lead Economist, World Bank
India's low-carbon modeling overview: Ritu Mathur, Director, Integrated Assessments & Modelling
Panel Discussion:
Neha Mukhi, Senior Climate Change Specialist, World Bank (moderator)
Ali Sheik (Pakistan) (tbc)
Utpal Bhattacharjee, GHG Mitigation expert, UNDP Bangladesh representative (tbc)
Chirag Gajjar (WRI) (tbc)
Closing Remarks: A.K. Jain (Secretary, Ministry of Coal) (tbc)