

As COP falters, South Asia must build its own collaborative climate platform

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The message emerging from global negotiations at this year's COP30 is unmistakable: the world is on the verge of slipping past the 1.5 degree Celsius threshold, and the window for meaningful action is rapidly narrowing. Despite urgent warnings from the United Nations and decades of promises, the global north continues to fall short on its commitments to finance, equity, and climate justice—even over 30 years after the Earth Summit first set a collective direction in Brazil. With the Paris Agreement struggling to deliver ambition at the scale and pace required, calls for a renewed, reimagined form of climate multilateralism—one shaped by the priorities, realities, and leadership of the global south—have become louder and more compelling than ever.

In this moment of reckoning, we, parliamentarians from some of the world's most climate-vulnerable South Asian countries, put forward the idea of regional climate multilateralism as a concrete response to that call. We see this as a model grounded in solidarity and justice but animated by the urgency that COP30 has made impossible to ignore. Such a framework must enable South Asian nations to pool scale, resources, knowledge, and diverse climate needs, while sharing technological and financial capacities in sectors where transformation cannot wait.

South Asia has been living with the intensifying impacts of climate change for well over a decade. Studies show that by 2050, the region could face economic losses amounting to nearly 1.8 percent of its annual GDP due to floods, sea-level rise, extreme heat, and droughts, alongside irreversible non-economic losses in the form of lives, livelihoods, cultural practices, and traditions. The region's shared geography, ecosystems, and resources are layered over a long, intertwined political and developmental history. This combination makes South Asia acutely vulnerable to climate risks, but it also creates opportunities for coordinated action—if countries choose to act strategically and together.

It is, therefore, imperative that South Asian countries create robust institutional mechanisms to respond to the climate

emergency in ways that are mutually beneficial and capable of projecting a strong, unified voice in global climate forums. Moving in this direction would mean willing South Asian nations taking the initiative to establish a shared regional body—potentially named the “South Asian Climate Cooperation Council (SACCC)” or the “South Asian Climate Change Coalition”—hosted on a rotational basis and guided by clearly defined priority areas for

is the level of urgency required for climate action in the region today, prioritising both mitigation and adaptation on a war footing.

Other regions in the global south have also demonstrated the power of theme-based coalitions to tackle climate change and manage the energy transition. The Eastern (or Western) Africa Alliance on Carbon Markets and Climate Finance, formed to facilitate market mechanisms under Article 6 of the

and transmit power to each other during lean periods of production. The initiative has the potential to lower energy costs, diversify supply for energy-poor regions, and tap renewable and low-carbon resources.

Ahead of COP30, South Asian parliamentarians from Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives endorsed the idea of a South Asian joint institutional response to climate change at a meeting held in Colombo

complementary practice-based knowledge. Maldives, for instance, could co-host a South Asia Coastal Climate Resilience Hub focusing on coral reef restoration, sustainable fisheries management, and renewable energy integration for maritime regions. Sri Lanka, with its Sri Lanka 30x30 and Life to Our Mangroves (LOM) initiatives, could offer expertise in nature-based solutions. The region could also draw from Bhutan's Gelephu Mindful City and India's Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) to scale up large urban development programmes that integrate sustainability with economic growth. India could additionally support the scaling up of renewable energy installations, while ongoing power-sharing and grid efforts between India, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Nepal would provide further advantages.

Second, the establishment of a South Asia Green Climate Finance Facility. Translating solutions into action depends critically on the availability of finance. A regional financing facility would enable resource pooling, build capacity to absorb and monitor international finance, and develop a pipeline of high-priority, bankable projects. This could be achieved in coordination with multilateral agencies such as the ADB, World Bank, and Green Climate Fund. The facility could offer a range of instruments—from bonds to risk-mitigation products—to attract international climate finance, while also designing a regional pool of climate action projects to create a conducive environment for investment.

Third, a scientific commission to offer independent advice on the type, scale, and speed of climate action needed to safeguard South Asia's infrastructure, economy, and people across resilience, mitigation, and adaptation. The body should not only focus on fostering technological R&D and innovation but also identify low-hanging technological interventions that deliver low-cost, long-term, and wide-scale change. A collective policy focus across countries could leverage regional scale, lowering the costs of finance and technology. The commission could also convene leading research institutions across the region and facilitate data sharing to advance climate research and mitigate risks.

Climate action is no longer a matter of policy debate but one of how it can be done most cost-effectively. As COP after COP falters, it is time for the global south to define its own future. South Asia faces an unmatched developmental paradox: expanding climate-ready infrastructure while ensuring low carbon emissions. A homegrown, regional, institutional response to this paradox could help pave the way not only for peaceful coexistence but also for the co-production of a prosperous future.



FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

Flood-affected people move to a safe place after several districts flooded, at Chhagalnaiya in Feni, Bangladesh, in August 2024.

collaborative action.

The urgency and criticality of a looming threat like climate change should compel us to work collaboratively as well as strategically. This targeted regional coalition or institution must be designed not only to mitigate risks and tap opportunities for South Asian countries, but also to ensure its own political sustainability.

The idea of such a regional coalition on urgent security, climate, and disaster risk-related matters is not new. The Quad (strategic partnership between Australia, India, Japan, and the United States), for instance, was created in response to post-humanitarian and disaster assistance needs following the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. The region has a history of bilateral disaster-risk assistance, such as during the Nepal earthquake, various cyclones, and the Maldives water crisis. This

Paris Agreement, is one such example. Its aim is to build on existing institutional frameworks and capacities of participating countries. The ASEAN Climate Change and Energy Project under the ASEAN Centre for Energy is another multilateral initiative that could help shape the proposed SACCC.

One promising area is cross-border power connectivity. In 2014, SAARC countries signed the SAARC Framework Agreement for Energy Cooperation (Electricity) to facilitate the integrated operation of the regional grid. There have been advancements through a trilateral power transaction—from Nepal to Bangladesh via the Indian power grid—which is already operational. This could also be extended under the One Sun One World One Grid initiative, wherein Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, and India could pool their conventional and non-conventional electricity resources

in October this year. The meeting, organised by the South Asian Regional Parliamentary Forum (SARPF) for Climate, Energy and Environment, also discussed possible constitutive principles and a roadmap for realising the SACCC.

There was overwhelming consensus that such a coalition must be formed on the basis of a unique South Asian climate solidarity framework that champions both intraregional justice—foregrounding the poorest and most marginalised—and interregional justice—forming a bloc against the skewed trade and financial practices of the global north.

Among the many provisions, three themes or pillars could serve as the contours of the SACCC. First, a regional knowledge-sharing and innovation hub. South Asia should establish regional innovation centres co-managed by multiple nations to benefit from

16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Uniting for safe digital spaces for women and girls

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“He said if she ever left him, he would share her personal details online.” The threat was not empty. For many women and adolescent girls in Bangladesh, private life and digital life now blur into one. While technology creates vast new opportunities, it also amplifies the violence many women and girls already face offline. Beginning on November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence—held under the theme “UNiTE to End Digital Violence against All Women and Girls”—make the need for action more urgent than ever.

The 2024 Violence Against Women (VAW) Survey reveals a harsh truth: 76 percent of women in Bangladesh have faced at least one form of intimate partner violence in their lifetime, ranging from physical and sexual assault to emotional abuse and controlling behaviours. Nearly half (49 percent) experienced this in just the past year.

For the first time, the national survey included questions on technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV), marking a critical step toward understanding how digital tools are misused to harm women and girls. The survey captures only a limited set of acts, so the true scale is likely higher. The survey revealed that 8.3 percent of women reported TFGBV in their lifetime, and about five

percent, roughly 30 lakh women, in the past 12 months.

This violence is not random; it disproportionately targets the young and digitally connected. Sixteen per cent of young women aged 20–24 reported this abuse, compared to 1.4 percent of women aged 60 and above. In city corporations, lifetime prevalence reaches nearly 12 percent. While strangers constitute the largest group of perpetrators for online harassment (46 percent), the survey reveals a disturbing offline-to-online continuum of harm.

Within marriages, women described image-based sexual abuse occurring alongside physical violence, with husbands using intimate photos as tools of blackmail, such as “I will share everything on social media.” In dating contexts, where premarital relationships remain stigmatised, perpetrators threaten exposure to coerce and control. Women in public-facing roles report deepfake exploitation, impersonation and smear campaigns designed to force them into silence.

The harm of online abuse does not stay on the screen. Digital violence frequently spills over into offline spaces, leading to physical abuse and, in the most tragic cases, femicide. The psychological toll is profound, causing severe anxiety, depression and social isolation. As one survivor, subjected to image-based abuse at 16, told researchers: “I felt like I had to die. Many times, when I saw my bad pictures, I thought of suicide.”

Stopping this abuse is difficult because technology evolves faster than awareness or the law. Many survivors do not know how to preserve evidence or where to turn. Tragically, they are often blamed, shamed, or told the abuse is their fault. This lack of a clear, supportive pathway to justice only compounds the trauma.

However, a different future

is possible. Bangladesh has a strong foundation of community mobilisation, youth engagement and civil society commitment. To build on this, laws, policies and accountability systems must be urgently strengthened. Legal frameworks must safeguard personal information and hold the technology sector accountable, ensuring that online spaces are safe by design.

This is particularly critical as Bangladesh approaches the parliamentary elections in February 2026. Rising political tensions heighten the risk of digital violence, including harassment, intimidation and disinformation, aimed at silencing women leaders, candidates and voters. Current law enforcement and judicial mechanisms must adapt to these evolving threats. Protecting women's rights in the digital space is essential not only for their safety but for the integrity of Bangladesh's democratic processes. The United Nations calls for stronger protections to ensure all women can participate freely and safely in the country's democratic life.

Prevention must also start early. Building Digital Intelligence (DQ) among girls and young women is essential for their full participation in the economy. Today's online spaces shape how girls learn, innovate and prepare for careers, yet they also expose them to misinformation and cyber risks. Investing in DQ, from cybersecurity and privacy to ethical online behaviour, empowers girls to navigate these challenges.

A digitally confident girl becomes a digitally empowered woman, ready to contribute meaningfully to Bangladesh's growth.

Besides prevention, survivor-centred and accessible response services are needed along with clear leadership and strong coordination across health, social services, police and justice actors. Awareness of the

national hotlines 109 and 999 must be expanded, and their responsiveness strengthened nationwide. Crucially, services must include psychosocial support that addresses the specific trauma of online abuse.

Governments and communities cannot shoulder this responsibility alone. Technology companies must be part of the solution. While some major platforms have begun labelling AI-generated content and removing deepfakes, enforcement remains inconsistent. Companies must act now to make reporting simpler, enforce rules rigorously, and remove harmful content swiftly. Safety, privacy and gender equality must be built into product design, in collaboration with women's rights organisations.

Finally, data must drive action. The VAW Survey demonstrates how national prevalence studies reveal patterns that would otherwise remain hidden. Continued investment in data analysis will help target prevention efforts toward those at highest risk, including young women, those in urban settings, and women with disabilities.

Ultimately, prevention begins with social norm change. Families, schools, religious leaders and youth groups must challenge the attitudes that normalise violence and victim-blaming in both online and offline spaces. Men and boys must be engaged as active allies and partners.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a blueprint for gender equality. We owe it to women and girls to transform the status quo. The United Nations stands firmly with the Government of Bangladesh, civil society and communities to eliminate all forms of violence. Let us unite to create a world where safety and equality are a lived reality for every woman and girl, in every space they occupy.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Track count
- 5 Night fliers
- 9 Field units
- 11 Skilled
- 13 Hackneyed
- 14 2014 Winter Games site
- 15 Load unit
- 16 Like a cardinal
- 18 Fancy homes
- 20 Smelter supply
- 21 “Graceland” singer
- 22 Some bills
- 23 Negative link
- 24 Avril follower
- 25 Farm litter
- 27 Link up
- 29 Band booster
- 30 Sawbuck
- 32 Sicilian port
- 34 John, in Jersey
- 35 Banded rock
- 36 All set
- 38 Pretend
- 39 “Parade” composer

40 Post

- 41 Marsh plant

DOWN

- 1 Barista's creation
- 2 Clue heading
- 3 Inked item
- 4 Determined
- 5 Diamond corners
- 6 Fusses
- 7 Shifting thing
- 8 Bubble, e.g.
- 10 District
- 12 Ocean's motions
- 17 Stimp's pal
- 19 Singer Tori
- 22 Stable diet
- 24 They're underage
- 25 Vatican-based
- 26 Sights
- 27 Clothes line
- 28 Sweatshirt type
- 30 Pollster's find
- 31 Trifled
- 33 School on the Thames
- 37 Corn spike



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