



Review

Environmental diplomacy in South Asia: Considering the environmental security, conflict and development nexus



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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Environment
Security
Development
Diplomacy
Pakistan
South Asia

ABSTRACT

Environmental security concerns have broadened the national security agenda and discourse of international relations. Yet environmental insecurity issues have endured impacts on livelihood, human security, social equity, human rights, internal security, political stability, economic growth and development of the state. Environmental challenges, such as climate change, water scarcity and energy security are shaping development and consumption patterns, which are possible causes of inter-state conflict in South Asia. This paper is an attempt to evaluate the nexus of climate change, energy and water security with conflict and development. Furthermore, we argue for the need for environmental diplomacy in Pakistan within the South Asian context. The argument is that integration of development with environmental factors and peacemaking has potential to achieve sustainable development in South Asia.

1. Introduction

Diverse environmental challenges, such as water quality, water scarcity, air pollution, climate change, secure energy supply, biodiversity loss and waste management, have threatened developed and developing countries alike (Houghton, 2009). Further, environmental changes are raising the severity of impacts from poor health, livelihood and economic growth to political instability. They are affecting a variety of groups, ranging from individuals, families, communities, various ethnic groups, biological species, local and national governments (Khagram et al., 2003).

Among environmental challenges, energy security, water scarcity and climate change have notable importance and inter-connections with each other. The connection between environmental changes and violent conflicts is recognized globally (Khagram et al., 2003). Environmental insecurity and conflicts are the result of migration to and overuse of fragile land, misuse of natural resources and other environmental effects (Butts, 1994). The survival of state remains threatened without contemplating the source of insecurity, i.e. broadened and predominant environmental factors (Khagram et al., 2003). However, developing countries face more severe impacts of environmental problems than developed countries because of poor governance, poverty, political instability, drop-in foreign assistance and mobilized anti-state activists (NA, 2000; Le Billon, 2001). The lack of capacity of local and national institutions to settle conflicts over depletion and

degradation of natural resources is the emerging problem (UNFPA, 2012).

South Asia encompasses diverse sovereign states of different sizes, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The region consists of transition economies vulnerable to climate change, energy crisis, resource exploitation, and water scarcity, along with rapid increase in demand for these resources. Moreover, increasing demand, economic development, mismanagement of resources, lack of regional cooperation, inadequate policies and environmental factors are resulting in conflicts associated with water and energy security, impeding trade, development and environmental security. The objective of the paper was to study the nexus of climate change, energy, and water security, conflict and development, deriving the need for environmental diplomacy in South Asian context.

2. Environmental security and development

Global environmental politics has an emerging agenda within international relations to ascertain environmental security challenges (Falkner, 2014). The accomplishment of environmental security is likely to be part of the daily political debate in the long run (Graeger, 1996). The resulting discourse is to translate environmental security concerns into national security practices and broaden the security agenda (Trombetta, 2008). Thus, environmental security issues are interconnected with decision-making patterns, anthropogenic threats to

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ecosystem health, global systems and state institutions, and a normative context within which to achieve sustainable development (Stoett, 1994; Falkner, 2014). There are also numerous significant threats arising from human and environmental interactions at the local and regional level. The scarcity of renewable resources, including cropland, forests and water along with demographic pressures, and structural ingenuity impedes the development and resulting in clashes between various social groups (Bocchi et al., 2006). The security-environment linkages may determine violent circumstances due to environmental degradation or change (Graeger, 1996). Environmental insecurities directly affect sustainable development and indirectly have a bearing on internal security, human security, social equity, justice and social rest (Khan, 2001; Bocchi et al., 2006). Lifestyle and environmental securities are hence closely cohesive and strongly linked with access to natural resources in developing countries (Rwabizambuga, 2007). Le Billon (2001) for instance, traces the dwindling sponsorship of the Cold War in Africa. It has compelled armed groups to rely on revenues from natural resources, such as oil, gems or timber, to sustain their activities. They justified the excessive resource extraction and predation with subjugation of the rights of people to determine the use of their resources and environment.

3. Environmental diplomacy at the regional level

Existing research recommends setting up of policy agendas for climate change (Milman and Arsano, 2014), such as the enforcement mechanisms to globally abate greenhouse gas emissions outside the game framework (DeCanio and Fremstad, 2013). The Paris Agreement after COP21 offers a remarkable basis for diplomacy and a global framework to address climate change mitigation (Kinley, 2017). The adaptation of river treaties, joint monitoring mechanisms, treaty enforcement, conflict resolution, powerful intergovernmental organizations (Tir and Stinnett, 2012), are illustrations of a variety of mechanisms that govern flow variability (Drieschova et al., 2008). Others include hydro-economics, which is the strategic fiscal investment in water sector (Siska and Takara, 2015), and offers the possibility of successful procurement of energy (Cheema, 2011). By incorporating environmental politics and policies (Mumme, 2003), trust, active participation and stakeholder collaboration and cooperation (Giordano et al., 2002), it becomes possible to achieve environmental security and sustainable development. Therefore, a neutral and non-aggressive tool of negotiation and trust building is required to cope with environmental challenges. Environmental and green diplomacy, due to its neutral and non-aggressive nature with the role, participation and leadership by emerging powers, could potentially settle conflicts to achieve sustainable aspiration (Papa and Gleason, 2012; Ioan, 2013). The environmental cooperation through Indus Water Treaty between India and Pakistan (IUCN, 2014a), Ganges Water Treaty between Bangladesh and India (Brichieri-Colombi and Bradnock, 2003), Mahakali Water Treaty between Nepal and India (Mirumachi, 2013), and South Asian Cooperative Environment Program, are some examples of successful environmental diplomacy.

4. Environmental conflicts and need of environmental diplomacy in the context of Pakistan and South Asia

A large number of people in South Asia cannot access energy due to poverty, which is perhaps, the greatest challenge facing the region. The survival and prosperity of human society are centered around energy (Sovacool, 2014); still, political elites mismanage energy needs of their countries for decades and fail in providing energy resources to people (Ebinger, 2013). The threat of energy security may result in dependence on imported fossil fuel to meet the energy demands of growing populations. (Mahmood et al., 2014). Energy endowments vary among South Asian countries and not all neighboring countries cooperate in the region to secure it from each other (Singh, 2013). Energy hence

should be a functional area for regional cooperation (Tripathi, 2012).

Energy trade seems feasible in South Asia due to growing energy demand and outstripping domestic supply gap in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka. Meanwhile, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, Turkmenistan and Iran have excessive energy than their national demand due to endowment of resources (The World Bank, 2008). Securing energy to import and trade, such as natural gas (Sen, 2000), from Turkmenistan, Iran, and Qatar to South Asia may be an economically viable option to improve regional cooperation and prosperity (Mahmood et al., 2014). However, the successful procurement of energy depends on secure and safe corridor from resource-rich states to resource-deficit states and geopolitical facets. Pakistan's geostrategic position in relation to energy-rich Central Asian states has potential to develop an energy corridor if combined with CPEC. In other words, it may become an economic and energy corridor for the entire region (Sahir and Qureshi, 2007; Cheema, 2011).

The Pakistan-China Energy and Economic Corridor (PCEEC) provides an alternative option of constructing secure oil pipeline to shunt the Strait of Malacca (Shaikh et al., 2016). Many consider Pakistan as an energy corridor for energy import from Central Asia, Iran and Middle East due to its unique geostrategic position (Sahir and Qureshi, 2007; Cheema, 2011; Mahmood et al., 2014; Shaikh et al., 2016). This PCEEC has the potential to strengthen regional connectivity, commercial, fiscal, geopolitical and social benefits associated with energy and economic connectivity for both countries (Shaikh et al., 2016). However, a balanced geopolitical approach with regional economic cooperation may help to secure national, regional and global energy security (Sahir and Qureshi, 2007). Economic initiatives, mutual contingencies, confidence building measures, political will, right of way, private participation, affordability, climate change and environment may improve regional connectivity through environmental diplomacy. Furthermore, the utilization of energy rings, development of SAARC energy grid and cooperation are essential to ensure energy security in South Asia (Tripathi, 2012; Singh, 2013). Thus practicing environmental diplomacy has the ability to cultivate regional cooperation around energy trade in the region.

Environmental degradation, climate change and growing population have resulted in rising water consumption pattern, which has led to inter-state conflicts (Khalid, 2010). Climate change has resulted in multiple forms of environmental degradation: these include glaciers melting, flow variability of Himalayan Rivers System and the Indus Basin (Swain, 2013), violation of water treaties, conflict (Begum and Nosheen, 2011), shocks to food production, reduced water availability, and increasing demand for hydropower (IUCN, 2014b).

Climate change-induced losses will have ultimate impacts on the livelihoods of people and development in South Asia (Bandara and Cai, 2014). General discursive shifts and changes in climate change policy were identified during the last decade in India (Isaksen and Stokke, 2014). There is hence, the need to initiate negotiation, trust, and develop climate change policy and adaptation measures at the regional level (Bandara and Cai, 2014).

Water security is also considered as an important national security issue, with a political agenda beyond environmental and development concerns (Swain, 2013). Water conflicts between upper and lower riparian are most prominent in South Asia. It is creating inter and intra-state conflicts. Inter-state hydro-politics is among the top agenda in South Asia. The four major river basins originating from the Himalayas and irrigating the water-stressed regions of South Asia are needed to sustain livelihoods and edibles. Environmental degradation, climate change, growing industry, agricultural expansion, and burgeoning population lead to inter-state conflicts and water security that need urgent attention (Khalid, 2010; Khalid et al., 2014). The demarcation of boundaries without considering headwaters and their command areas at partition of sub-continent in 1947 (Malik et al., 2012), extensive Indian government plans of dams and hydropower projects, environ-

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