South Asia: Climate Migration Hotspot

Why in news?

The World Development Report on Migrants, Refugees, and Societies states, migration will become a necessity to cope with global economic imbalances, diverging demographic trends, and climate change.

What is climate migration?

- Climate migration is a subcategory of environmental migration.
- It refers to the migration of people by obligation or by choice, either temporarily or permanently, within a State or across an international border due to sudden or progressive climate change.
- It occurs due to extreme weather events, including floods, heat waves, droughts, and wildfires, as well as slower-moving climate challenges such as rising seas and intensifying water stress.

What is the situation of South Asia in this context?

- South Asia is the world's most impacted area of climate displacement hotspots.
- This including the Hindu Kush-Himalaya region, coastal areas, island nations, and deltaic and semi-arid regions of South Asia.

Affected by	Countries
Sea level rise and coastal floods	Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka
Glacial melt and temperature rise	Bhutan, Afghanistan and Nepal
Threat of submersion	small island nations like Maldives

Why South Asia is the climate migration hotspot?

- High population density, poverty, and inadequate infrastructure are the major reasons for the exacerbated situation.
- Other climatic reasons like cyclones and earthquakes are prone to this region.
- By 2050, nearly 216 million South Asians could be displaced due to climatic reasons.
- Already, over 9 million internal displacements happened in 2020 in South Asia, making it the region with highest number of new displacements due to climate change.

In 2020, cyclone Amphan alone displaced five million people across South Asia.
In 2015, Nepal's Gorkha earthquake displaced 2.6 million people, and left over 6 lakh homeless.
Over 7.9 million people were displaced by the floods in Pakistan, in 2022.

What are the impacts of Climate displacements?

- **Migration** - Poor economic capabilities reduce the adaptive capacity of communities to climate change events and promote migration.
- **Livelihood** - Climate displacement results in job losses, food insecurity, and an overall overcrowding of resources.
- **Social & Economic Costs** - It creates further migration and incurring other social and economic costs.
    - **Economic costs** - Loss of skilled labour and reduced productivity.
    - **Social costs** - Breakdown of social networks and communities, mental health issues, social unrest, and conflict.
- **Resource crunch** - Climate migration multiplies existing threats like overcrowding and conflicts over resources sharing
- **Over burden on cities** - The rural-urban migration forced by the failure of agriculture, overburdens the cities which already operates at full capacity.
- **Increase in violence** - Climate vulnerability and violence are correlated which could be seen in the conflicted areas.

What should South Asian countries do?

South Asia would have an estimated 50 million climate refugees by 2050.

- **Adaptation** - Improve resistance and resilience by introducing sustainable solutions.
- Structural gaps need to be corrected such as making coastal areas resistant and strengthening infrastructure.
- **Comprehensive Policies** - South Asian countries needs comprehensive policies to address climate displacement.
- Governments in the region must develop targeted policies that address the specific needs of climate-displaced communities.
- Policies should also focus on providing alternative livelihood opportunities and social protection programmes.
- **Support** - Adequate international aid to be given to meet the needs of affected communities.

What are the implications of COP27 on climate displacement?

- COP27 identified ‘displacement’, ‘relocation’, and ‘migration’ as some of the concern areas which would be addressed through ‘loss and damage’ financing.
- The ‘loss and damage’ framework was developed at COP27 of UNFCCC, aimed at supporting most impacted countries and viewed as an integral part of climate justice.
- The amount of funding required, and the designation of funders are not determined and remains a concern.
- The climate migrants and climate refugees are yet to find their voice in the global platform.

References

The Hindu -South Asia’s climate migration is a ticking bomb



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