

Dhaka Symposium Declaration

The International Symposium on Climate Change and Food Security in South Asia was held at the University of Dhaka from 25 to 30 August, 2008. It was jointly sponsored by the Ohio State University, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (UNESCAP), University of Dhaka and the Government of Bangladesh. The symposium was attended by around 250 participants from 17 countries.

Climate change has multi-dimensional impacts on agro-ecosystems in South Asia, including increases in temperature, declines in fresh water availability, sea level rise, glacial melting in the Himalayas, increased frequency and intensity of extreme events, and shifting of cropping zones. They all impact agriculture and the related food sector as well as the general economies, societies and environment in South Asia.

Agriculture is a bearer, a contributor as well as a mitigator of climate change. Small landholders (<2 ha) and resource poor, subsistence farmers predominate in the region and contribute to CO₂ emissions. The per capita land area is <0.1 ha in many countries in South Asia and is rapidly decreasing because of conversion of land to non-agricultural uses, soil degradation and continued population growth. The serious problems of soil degradation and desertification are likely to be exacerbated by climate change through accelerated erosion, fertility depletion, salinization and acidification. Subsistence agriculture, characterized by low productivity and extractive farming, is extremely vulnerable to climate change. The latter may constrain attainment of food production targets in the South Asian countries.

The symposium identified several key recommendations, knowledge gaps, and opportunities for policy makers, researchers and extension systems, international organizations, and NGOs to implement programs designed to minimize short- and long-term vulnerability of the South Asian region to climate change. Principal recommendations are to:

- Create a Climate Change and Food Security in South Asia Network (CCFSSANet) and establish a South Asia Climate Outlook Forum (SACOF).
- Stimulate multi-disciplinary research on climate change and food security in South Asia and identify effective mitigation and adaptation options, including carbon sequestration in different ecosystems.
- Initiate and strengthen cooperation among academic and research institutions, international organizations, and NGOs to provide opportunities for strengthening institutions, human resource development and capacity building.
- Develop innovative financial mechanisms to scale up technical and financial support for the adaptation efforts of the South Asian countries.
- Promote adoption of mitigation and adaptation options through payments for ecosystem services such as carbon trading.
- Strengthen regional institutional and policy mechanisms to promote and facilitate implementation of location-specific adaptation and mitigation practices.

The symposium urges the development partners and the private sector to fund the implementation of programs that reflect the recommendations outlined above that deal with the mitigation and adaptation to climate change while advancing food security in South Asia. The participants thank the University of Dhaka and the Bangladesh Government for hosting the symposium and providing all the necessary facilities.

30 August 2008, Dhaka, Bangladesh