Energy and Water Security in South Asia

Over the years, the South Asian region has grown increasingly energy deficient with a rising population. For example, access to electricity is crucial for both economic as well as social development. However, most South Asian nations continue to face challenges in meeting domestic energy requirements, which have already given rise to conflicts over resources such as water in the region.

At the same time, much of the South Asian population also remains vulnerable to water scarcity. The population bulge experienced over the last 60 years has dramatically decreased per capita water availability in the region, leaving scores not just vulnerable to water but also food insecure. This state is further exacerbated by the continued reduction in per capita availability of arable land for those dependent on agriculture (Shah and Lele 2011).

Both energy and water scarcity have given rise to geo-political differences between countries in the region. With the rising demand of water (for both domestic as well as energy generation use) in India and Pakistan and the building of dams by the former, the Indus Water Treaty has come under strain as well (Ahmad 2012). Further, deteriorating climate conditions due to water-related events have aggravated such conflicts (IDSA 2010).

It has thus grown imperative to take note of both, energy as well as water security in the region at large. While energy demands may contribute toward conflicts between countries, water insecurities can put local communities at immense risk. In this backdrop the energy and water situation in the region calls for policy actions that can be adopted at the regional level without subjecting the population to further losses as have been witnessed in the past.

So far, no agreements have been effectively met to address these common challenges to the region. However, it was only recently that a trade agreement on export of hydropower electricity was signed between Central Asian and South Asian states, involving Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan and Tajikistan. According to this agreement, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan would jointly export 300 MW of hydropower electricity to Afghanistan and 1000 MW of electricity to Pakistan (Central Asia, 2013).

The panel on energy and water security in South Asia aims to establish a repository of concrete policy actions that can be implemented at the regional level for effective energy solutions and resolution of water disputes in the region. South Asia, home to a quarter of the world's poor, is likely to be subject to conflicts out of competing interests on energy and water resources. Tomorrow may not hold too well for the region at large if national and bilateral policies continue to ignore mutual benefit sharing over natural resources.

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