El Niño – Is South Asia ready?

Sarang Shidore
Director of Studies & Senior Research Fellow
Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft
South Asia

- Typically –
  - Bangladesh
  - Bhutan
  - India
  - Maldives
  - Nepal
  - Pakistan
  - Sri Lanka

- Will also talk about the adjacent region of SE Asia
El Niño – Likely impacts on South Asia

- In general, drought and extreme heat are of greatest concern
  - Reduced agricultural yield
  - Water shortages (gender impacts)
  - Hydropower
  - Outdoor labor & public health
  - Violence?
- Cyclone activity expected to be weaker or near-normal
- Less floods (but not everywhere)
National plans - Bangladesh

- Natural disaster “basket case” to leader
  - Focus on floods and cyclones
  - $10 bn investments
  - Cyclone shelters
  - Embankments
  - Early warning systems
  - Evacuation plans

- National Adaptation Plan (2022)
  - Builds on less ambitious plans starting in 2005
  - Addresses drought and extreme heat
  - Preparing ~ 20 cities/towns for receiving climate migrants
India

- Has led the way in Heat Action Plans (HAP)
  - 2013 (Ahmedabad)
  - Now 130 cities have or are formulating HAPs
  - Have already saved lives
- CPR study revealed significant gaps
  - Funding not appropriated
  - Most vulnerable not addressed adequately
- Agricultural distress
  - Migration
- Hydropower
Myanmar and spillovers

- Myanmar
  - Undergoing extreme violence/repression/insurgency
  - Cyclone activity expected to reduce
  - Rice key crop, yields will fall
  - Impacts on violence?
  - Spillovers to India, Bangladesh
Transnational cooperation

- Transnational cooperation needs to be stepped up as we approach 1.5°C
- Regional organization (SAARC) is moribund
- Alternative organizations
  - BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal)
  - IORA (Indian Ocean)
  - Quad
BIMSTEC

- Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation
- Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand
- Founded in 1997, Secretariat in Dhaka
  - Structure
  - Track record
  - Budget
  - Indian role
Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)
Final thoughts

- South Asia shows major variations in terms of El Niño preparedness (and its increased variability due to climate change).

- Bangladesh’s adaptation efforts have been most innovative on extreme weather and migration, India has led on HAPs.

- All states are struggling with agricultural distress.

- Transnational cooperation is far below its potential.

- Regional spillovers from Myanmar need watching.
Thank you!

sarang@quincyinst.org
@globalsarang