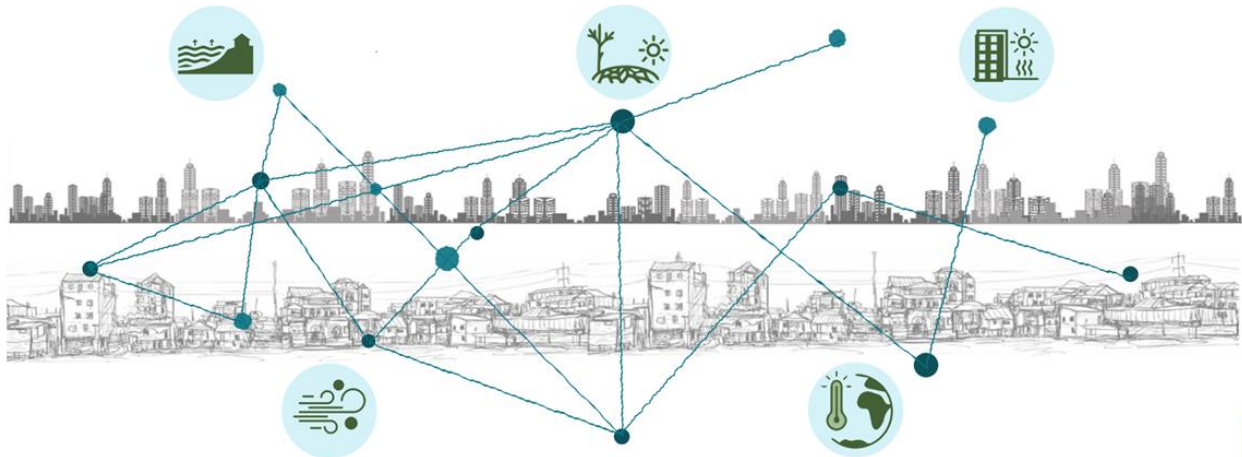# Towards Spatial-Environmental Justice
## Creating and Nurturing Transnational Climate-Aware Knowledge Network



The 21st century city – the city of the global South – is simultaneously a space of excitement and anxiety. Posited as engines of growth, these sites of economic concentration contribute hugely to the GDP. Of the 600 cities likely to generate over 65 percent of world GDP by 2025, 440 (expected to contribute 47 percent) are from the global South including India, Brazil, and China (Dobbs, Remes et al. 2012, Dobbs, Smit et al. 2011). Yet, the contemporary Southern city grappling with rapid, unregulated urbanisation is a site of economic disparity, and socio-spatial inequality. In the current context of changing climates, these inequalities lend a visible degree of exacerbation to the everyday living of the poor and the marginalised. Thus, a course correction aiming spatial and environmental justice is an emerging imperative.

The physiographically diverse Indian subcontinent - comprising of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh Nepal, Bhutan, Sri-Lanka, and Maldives - showcases a rich tapestry of socio-cultural, geographic, and spiritual commonalities.[1] The largest urban agglomerations of Delhi, Mumbai, Dhaka, Kolkata, Karachi, and Bangalore encompass an unprecedented scale and complexity. The region hosts 23.6 percent of the current global population (UNPFA, 2023), with an average urbanisation at 34.6 percent (CIA 2023). While Bhutan is the most urbanised with 44.4% of its population living in urban areas, India, Bangladesh, and Nepal are urbanising rapidly at an upwards of 3 percent per annum. Adding to the complexity are the patterns of urbanisation, erasing the 'neat' distinction between the urban and rural (Bartels et. al 2020) to manifest in a new spatiality – the peri-urban. Marked by higher densities, the peri-urban is also the spatiality that suffers from development deficits be it housing, water supply, sanitation and, or waste management.

Amidst the global cacophony on changing climates, notably, the subcontinent contributes a relatively low 8.25 percent share of the global GHG emissions (UNDP, CAIT 2020) with significant internal variations: India's share is the highest at 6.67% while Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Maldives have negligible contributions. Bhutan stands out as a carbon-neutral nation with zero percent contribution to the global GHG emissions (UNDP, CAIT 2020). In response, countries across the subcontinent have made bold climate pledges - the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) - to reduce GHG emissions and

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[1] The Eastern states in India- West Bengal and Assam share cultural and linguistic commonalities with Bangladesh. Similarly, Bhutan, Nepal and parts of Northern India share cultural and spiritual practices. The Maldives, Sri Lanka and India share common maritime borders and cultural linkages.

strengthen adaptation against climate hazards.[2] However, the predominant policy and plan focus remains on the former as against strengthening adaptation of the most vulnerable (Schipper & Burton, 2009).

Building climate resilience amidst this entwined complexity posed by urbanisation and marginalisation has become a defining challenge in this region. The homogeneity of the problem and the common objectives of addressing and (re)solving climate induced vulnerabilities is an opportunity for transboundary shared learning, while fully recognising the contextual complexities. Collaborations and alliances addressing similar challenges albeit in different geographic, cultural, and socio-economic contexts, present opportunities for cross learning as well as building capacities towards urban climate resilience. It is in this context that we envision a Transnational Climate Aware Knowledge Network - constellations of people and teams across boundaries (e.g., spatial, disciplinary) to develop, distribute, combine, and apply collective knowledge to address a problem - as a crucial response to addressing (and resolving) urbanisation and climate change induced vulnerabilities.

In forging the knowledge network, we engage with the following questions (a) how, and to what extent, can these geographies learn from each other given their commonalities as well as their sociocultural and regional contextualities? (b) how can this mutual learning process enhance awareness on the climate crisis 'from' the Indian Subcontinent? (c) to what extent can the expertise and experience of multiple actors assist in resolving the complexities of scale and replication arising out of heterogeneous contexts?

*Our efforts and outreach are intended to hold an intentional space for a community of individuals and organisations working at the intersection of climate change and socio-spatial justice, keen on contributing, developing, distributing, combining, and applying collective knowledge to address the shared challenge problem.*

## References

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[2] India and Nepal have committed to transitioning to non-fossil fuel-based energy resource production and eventual transition to a net zero scenario by 2070 and 2050 respectively. Bangladesh and Pakistan have promised to reduce their projected emissions by 2030, Sri Lanka promises to increase its forest cover by 32% by 2030 and become a carbon neutral nation by 2050, Maldives commits to focus on adaptation to manage its disaster risks while promising to become carbon neutral by 2030 subject to international support. (UNDP, CAIT 2020).