



Regional Strategy for Coral Reef Management in South Asia



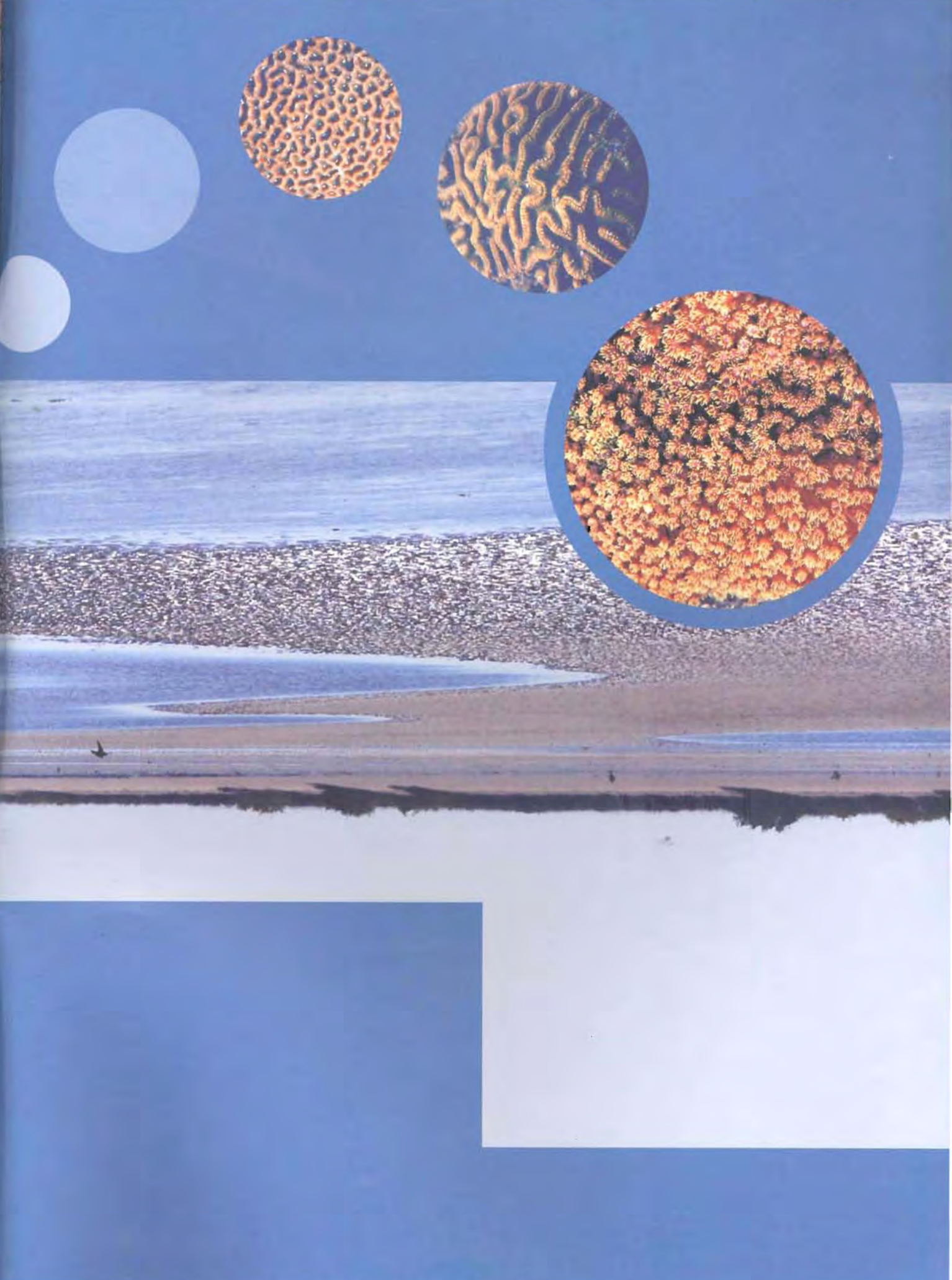
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SACEP



GEER
Foundation





Regional Strategy for Coral Reef Management in South Asia



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Preface

Coral reefs form a uniquely placed ecosystem which supports a wide range of biodiversity which is comparable to that of tropical rain forests. Reefs are structures in sea waters, usually near the shoreline, built of the calcareous formations by small organisms. Coral reefs hold an entire array of species including a variety of marine vegetation, corals, fish, crabs, octopus, sea anemones, sea horse, sea slug, etc. Apart from being of great socio-economic value to the local reef dependent communities, reefs are the most colourful ecosystem on earth. However, due to enhanced human activities on the land and in the sea, such a fascinating ecosystem is facing serious threats across the globe.

Most of the coral reefs lie near the shore line in the tropical world. South Asia holds a very significant proportion of the world's coral reefs requiring collective and coordinated efforts for their conservation.


South Asian Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP) is an inter-government organization of South Asian countries for furthering the cause of environmental conservation and protection in South Asian region. South Asia Coral Reef Task Force (SACRTF), a programme of SACEP, brought the conservation of coral reefs into focus and took an important decision in its first meeting to develop a Regional Strategy for Coral Reef Management with a view to enhancing the capacity of various institutions actively involved in management and conservation of coral reefs in South Asian Seas Member Countries which includes Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Gujarat Ecological Education and Research (GEER) Foundation, India is actively involved in ecological education and research and has a long experience of research and survey in marine eco-systems involving mangrove and coral reef ecosystems. The task of developing the aforesaid regional strategy for coral reef management in South Asia was assigned to GEER Foundation by SACEP. It gives me immense pleasure to present this strategy document which gives a plan for capacity building of different institutions and stakeholders such as policy makers, managers, research institutions, NGOs and reef dependent communities. An attempt has been made to present a plan for identifying the capacity gaps and filling these gaps in a time frame of five years.

The strategy has been developed through a consultative process with SACEP representatives of different member nations during SACRTF meetings and the feedback received from various individuals, funding organizations, etc. A presentation about the draft report of the strategy was made during the third meeting of SACRTF held at Chennai, India on 16 December 2008. The feedback received from members have been incorporated in this final draft of the strategy.

We may mention that developing this strategy was a process of immense learning for GEER Foundation. We are thankful to SACEP and SACRTF members for assigning this task to GEER Foundation and for their valuable contributions to the development of this strategy document. We are hopeful that this will go a long way in conserving the unique, valuable and yet fragile coral reef ecosystems in South Asia.

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Executive Summary

The coasts of South Asian countries encompass biologically diverse coastal and marine ecosystems. The region is endowed with numerous estuaries, lagoons, mangroves, coral reefs, sea-grasses and wetlands that provide essential habitats for many rare and valuable species, which in turn contribute vital goods and services to millions of people. The South Asian countries of Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have coral reefs. At present, these coral reefs are facing threats due to natural and anthropogenic factors. Many reef dependent communities are facing severe hardship as coastal resources are no longer able to sustain their livelihoods. The stakes are high and the issues are many and, in such a critical situation, the management and conservation of coral reefs face great challenges.

South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP) initiated specific programmes to deal with the management and conservation issues by establishing the South Asia Coral Reef Task Force (SACRTF). In the first meeting of SACRTF, it was decided to develop a regional strategy for coral reef management in South Asia and the task was assigned to GEER Foundation, India.

The strategy document essentially emphasizes strengthening of institutions viz. policy making institutions, management level government agencies, research and academic institutions, NGOs and village level organizations involved as stakeholders in coral reef management. The proposed strategy suggests that after a thorough scrutiny of their expected roles, existing capabilities and available infrastructure facilities, various institutions and organizations should be covered by organization specific capacity building programmes addressing the identified gaps. These capacity building programmes would involve steps like strengthening the information base, knowledge base, manpower planning, training, skill up-gradation, orientation and awareness generation among stakeholders and strengthening of infrastructure including provision of necessary implements. Three thrust areas have been identified for actions which include 1. understanding the coral reef ecosystems and the threats faced by them, 2. measures for reducing threats and 3. raising awareness. The strategy also deals with monitoring and evaluation and prescribes a time frame of 5 years for completing the various tasks included in the strategy.

It is expected that this strategy will improve the status of conservation and management of coral reefs in South Asia and encourage systematic and collective approach in dealing with the management and conservation issues pertaining to coral reefs.



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