

IPCS Regional Workshop on

Climate Security in the Bay of Bengal

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INSTITUTE OF PEACE AND CONFLICT STUDIES



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Cover photo: Broken embankment leads to flooding of village. Taken on May 25, 2009 by Anil Gulati. [Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.0 Generic (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)]. Indian Water Portal via Flickr.com. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/indiawaterportal/3583138158/in/album-72157618971219791/>

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Introduction

On 15-17 December 2022, the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS) convened a **Regional Workshop on Climate Security in the Bay of Bengal**, in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The track 1.5 workshop bookended IPCS' 2022 activities in our multi-year project with the Clingendael Institute on the security implications of climate change in Southern Asia.

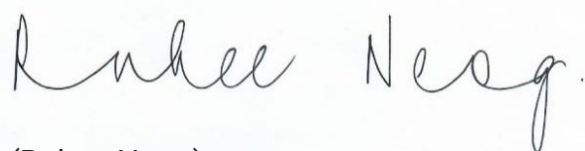
Our workshop focused on the Bay of Bengal because the sub-region is a site of both climate and ecological vulnerabilities. It is also an area of geopolitical contestation framed within the Indo-Pacific narrative. How these two developments interact however is still marginal to both security and climate change discourses. IPCS' research and programming since 2021 has sought to address this gap by producing regional knowledge on climate security.

We invited multidisciplinary participation from scholars and practitioners representing the core Bay of Bengal countries. Over three days, security *and* climate change experts:

- Tested the analytical utility of climate security
- Explored decision-making enablers and constraints
- Identified potential avenues for transnational climate security collaboration
- Produced regional knowledge on the security implications of climate change.

A majority of the workshop's participants were able to authoritatively speak to either climate change or security issues, but not both together. A traditional conference format would have therefore been inadequate. We designed our conversations around national security and climate change priorities; a simulation exercise to experiment with national and regional decision-making; and working groups to develop and evaluate regional frameworks.

The working groups comprised mixed nationalities and expertise. Participants were offered the opportunity to be in the driver's seat, whether by moderating sessions or proposing agenda amendments. Each session was conceived to inform the next, with the overriding goal of de-siloing our understanding of climate security. This report distils the workshop's main observations.



(Ruhee Neog)

Participants



- **Abinash Mohanty**, Global Sector Head, Climate Change and Sustainability, IPE Global
- **Akash Ramnath**, Junior Research Fellow, Planetary Security Initiative (PSI), Clingendael Institute
- **Angshuman Choudhury**, Associate Fellow, Centre for Policy Research (CPR)
- **Air Marshal Anil Chopra (Retd.)**, Director General, Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)
- **Dr. Dhanasree Jayaram**, International Climate Protection Fellow, Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and Assistant Professor, Manipal Academy of Higher Education (MAHE)
- **Dinakar Peri**, Senior Assistant Editor, *The Hindu*
- **Dr. Dinusha Panditaratne**, Advisor and Head, Asia, Governance and Peace Directorate, Commonwealth Secretariat
- **Cdr. Indika Wijesinghe**, Sri Lanka Navy, and International Liaison Officer, Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR)

- **Janhavi Pande**, Researcher, South East Asia Research Programme, IPCS
- **Dr. Louise van Schaik**, Head, EU and Global Affairs Unit, Clingendael Institute
- **Rear Admiral M. Abu Ashraf (Retd.)**, former Assistant Navy Chief (Operations), Bangladesh Navy
- **Lt. Cdr. P. Ashok Varma**, Operations Officer, Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), Indian Navy
- **Dr. Philips J. Vermonte**, Senior Fellow, Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Indonesia and Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, Universitas Islam International Indonesia (UIII)
- **Dr. Pushp Bajaj**, Consultant, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- **Prerana Priyadarshi**, Deputy Director (Projects), and Senior Researcher, Centre for Internal and Regional Security, IPCS
- **Ruhee Neog**, Director, IPCS
- **Ambassador S.H.U. Dissanayake**, Ambassador of Sri Lanka to Turkey
- **Segufta Hossain**, Research Director, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS)
- **Shawahiq Siddiqui**, Founding Partner, Indian Environment Law Organisation (IELO)
- **Siddharth Anil Nair**, Researcher, South East Asia Research Programme, IPCS
- **Lt. Gen. Vinod Bhatia (Retd.)**, former Director General of Military Operations, Indian Army, and former Director, Centre for Joint Warfare Studies (CENJOWS).



An Assessment of National and Regional Climate Security Approaches

The Bay of Bengal region is home to some of the worst climate-affected countries in the world. Over the past few decades, some have begun to place greater emphasis on climate change in their policy agendas. Participants asserted that climate change—unless addressed cohesively—would play a significant role in shaping national and regional security concerns.

Countries in the Bay of Bengal are also cognisant of their collective climate challenges. These include, but are not limited to: sea level rise, rising sea-surface temperatures and salinity, land loss, glacial melt, altered riverine systems, intense and frequent cyclones, prolonged droughts and flash floods, heatwaves, biodiversity loss, etc. Participants acknowledged that there is also a growing understanding that these challenges will exacerbate existing vulnerabilities in the energy, food, water, health, and economic security domains. Climate change will raise stresses, risks, and costs for the region and the countries that inhabit it.



Participants agreed that there is no region-wide, uniform understanding of the security implications of climate change. They also agreed that climate change will have serious politico-military implications, raising existing tensions and/or creating new ones. With

notable exceptions, regional policy elites characterise the ‘climate security’ framing as a securitisation of what should be a development-led discourse. While participants were also of the view that climate change itself may not be a security concern—at least not now—they urged formal policy recognition of its security ramifications.

In fact, informal government acknowledgement of the security implications of climate change can sometimes be discerned in their policy measures. This discernment is even more visible at the operational level, within the military. The reservations therefore appear chiefly to be about discourse framing, i.e., ‘climate security’. Participants suggested that policy stakeholders are more receptive to discussions on ‘climate change and security’ rather than ‘climate security’, even though both ultimately mean the same thing. This discursive reluctance stems from an absence of policy understanding of what the terminology entails, thus deterring both national or regional, high-level dialogues on the subject. Differences in priorities are an additional deterrent of region-wide conversations on climate security. These include:

- **Geographic distinctions.** E.g.: Upper vs. lower riparian states, deltaic coastlines, average elevations, mountain ranges, etc. lead to differentiated climate change impacts
- **Domestic political contexts and attitudes.** E.g.: Demographic and electoral considerations can influence the extent to which democracies commit to climate mitigation and adaptation policies
- **National structural and institutional constraints.** E.g.: Inefficient governance can contribute to falling short of budget absorption and expenditure targets; district/state-level mechanisms are unregulated or not held accountable
- **Financial and technological capacities.** E.g.: Several Bay of Bengal countries are hamstrung by a lack of financial incentives and services to support national resilience, mitigation, and adaptation measures for climate change
- **Geostrategic interests.** E.g.: Threat assessments for individual Bay of Bengal actors can vary, leading to different foreign policy positions on geopolitical issues (such as competition around connectivity, resources, territory, etc.).

While these challenges can be appreciated, the Bay of Bengal’s common climate vulnerabilities and threats may pose even bigger challenges. Participants agreed the sub-region must therefore work towards a collective understanding of, and institutionalised dialogue on, climate security. They identified national security constraints as one major obstacle to full-fledged regional cooperation on climate security (such as with the sharing of sensitive information).





Participants proposed **12 themes** around which Bay of Bengal climate security frameworks could emerge:

- i. Climate data collection, modelling, and sharing
- ii. Climate change impacts on regional river/water-sharing agreements
- iii. The regulation of illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing
- iv. Legal mechanisms to counter illegal and destructive climate and environmental activities
- v. Military-to-military cooperation on HA/DR and early warning
- vi. Permanent/impermanent and climate-induced migration
- vii. Community and gender-based climate policy planning
- viii. Public awareness and climate change
- ix. Renewable energy and sustainable development
- x. Climate change as part of domestic and local governance
- xi. Regional foreign policy approaches
- xii. National and sub-national climate change institutions.

Three Climate Security Frameworks for the Bay of Bengal

As explained in the Introduction, the workshop also featured breakout discussions. Participants were organised into three working groups comprising mixed nationalities and expertise. Each group was tasked with developing a Bay of Bengal climate security framework that responded to a specific prompt and built on pre-existing knowledge as well as more recent information exchanged and accumulated over the first two days of the workshop. The three base scenarios were:

- **Group A:** Emergency Bay of Bengal Leaders' Summit on recent local, catastrophic climate events
- **Group B:** Scheduled Bay of Bengal Leaders' Summit on the security implications of climate change
- **Group C:** Upcoming BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) Summit meeting.

Each group proposed short, medium, and long-term national and regional measures. Working group deliberations were followed by presentations and a feasibility session to vet the actionability of these proposals.

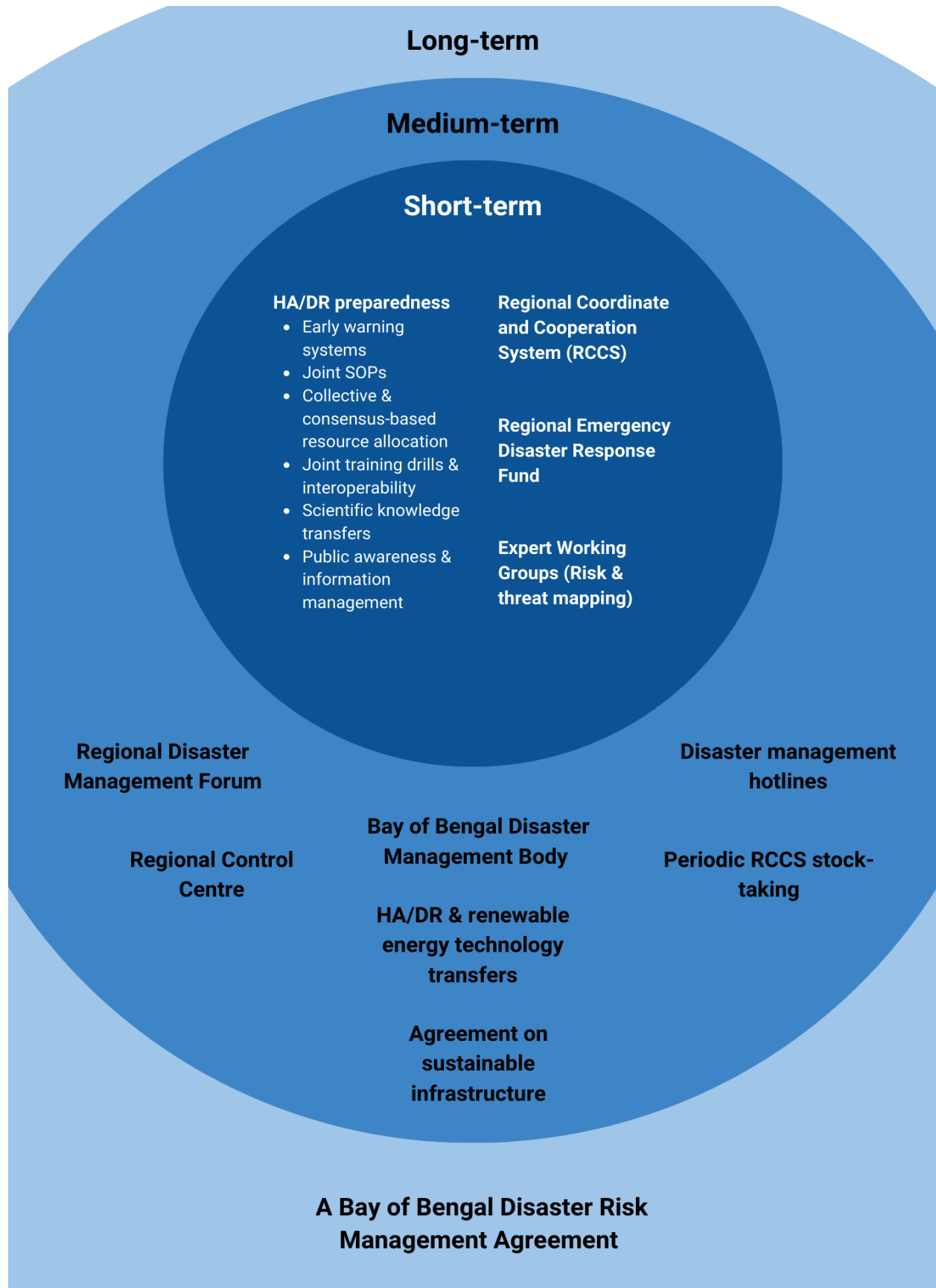


Group A

Emergency Bay of Bengal Leaders' Summit on recent local, catastrophic climate events

Group A streamlined their base scenario to focus, in the short-term, on improving regional emergency response and preparedness. They found existing mechanisms such as BIMSTEC's Environment and Climate Change vertical, IORA's (Indian Ocean Rim Association) Disaster Risk Management core group, or the Sendai Framework to be inadequate: either too large from a management standpoint or not inclusive of certain members in the region. Given the lack of region-specific coordination on multi-hazard climate events, Group A proposed the establishment of a **Regional Coordination and Cooperation System (RCCS)**. This, they argued, could be achieved in the short-term in the form of an MoU. In the medium to long-term, the goal was to see it transform into a disaster risk management agreement, and then potentially into a treaty.





Group B

Scheduled Bay of Bengal Leaders' Summit on the security implications of climate change

Group B developed their base scenario into short-to-medium term measures that would enable countries in the Bay of Bengal to first acknowledge, and then better plan for climate security challenges. They focused on improving collective action through more synergised problem and pathway identification. Foreign policy differences aside, the key issue for this group was the dearth of country-wise data on climate threats and their transboundary impacts in the Bay of Bengal. Group B identified a fundamental need for basic collaborative mechanisms to monitor, map, and model climate data in the region. As a result, they proposed the establishment of a **Regional Monitoring Mechanism**. The long-term goal was to develop a consensus-based approach to climate security threats, informed by shared data on climate change impacts on transboundary food, water, and migration issues. The Regional Monitoring Mechanism would evolve into a secretariat to manage and coordinate financial, operational, and regulatory concerns.





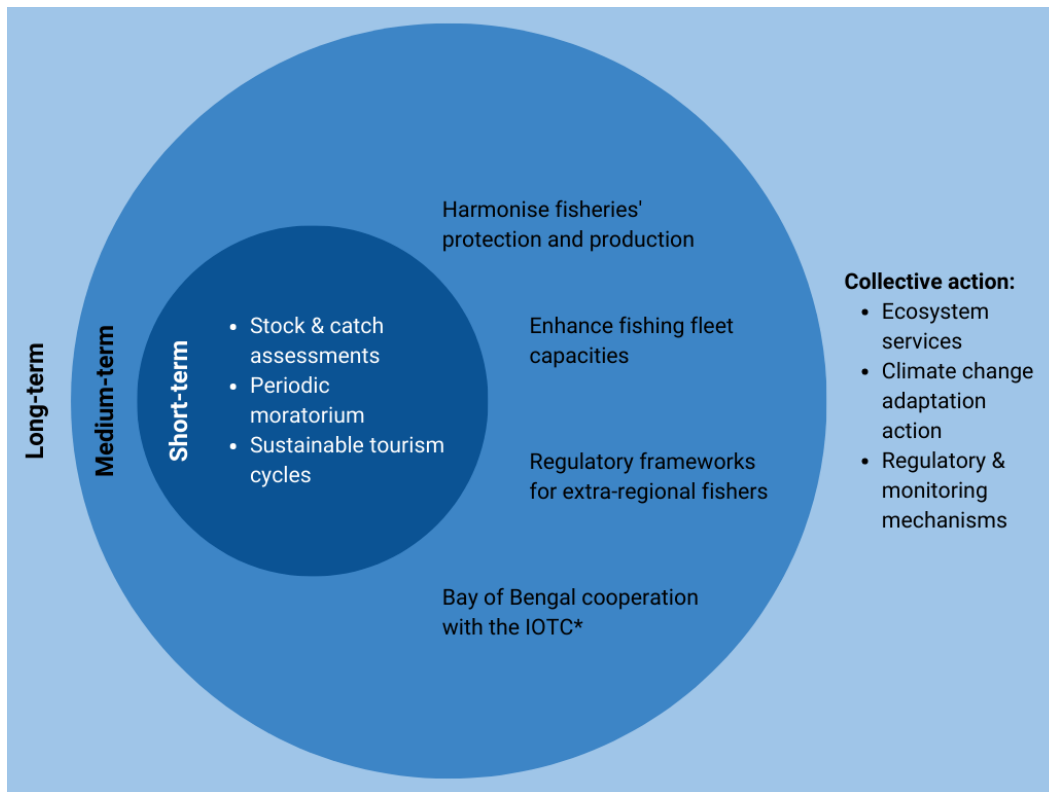
Group C

Upcoming BIMSTEC Summit meeting

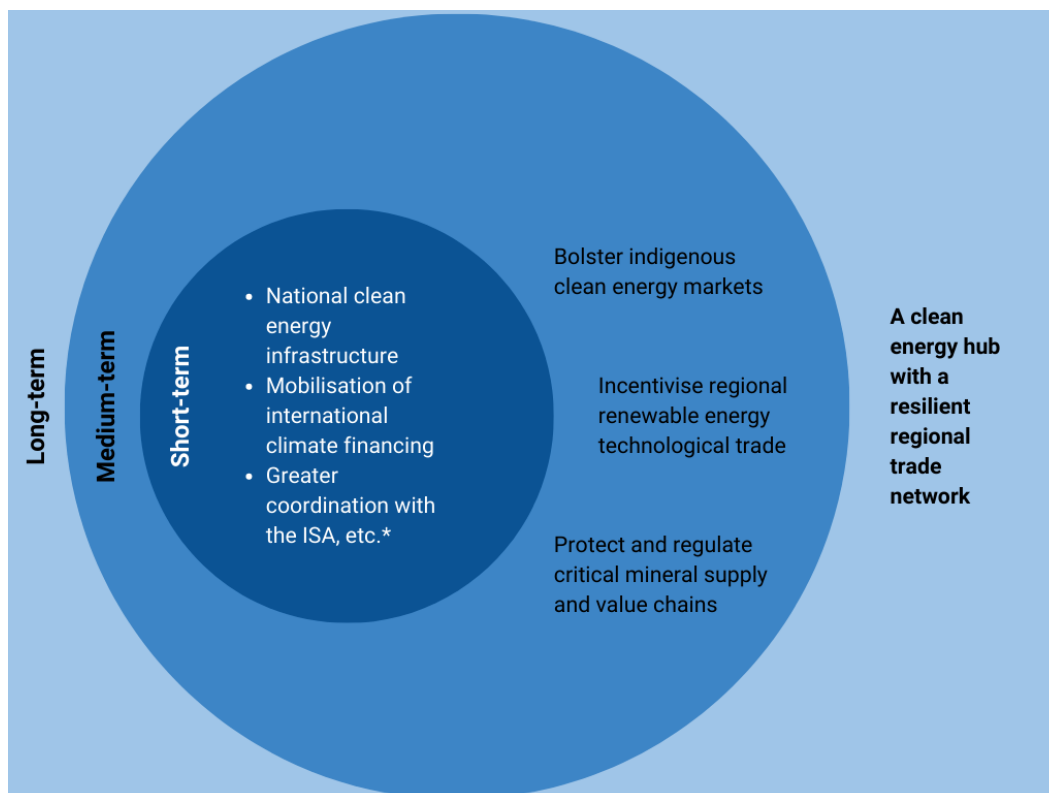
Group C's base scenario evolved into medium-to-long term measures to socialise climate security in the Bay of Bengal. This involved an exploration of how climate change intersects with the areas of collaboration within BIMSTEC's charter: trade, investment, and development; connectivity; people-to-people contact; science and technology innovation, etc. Group C proposed a **provisional climate security agenda** to be taken up by the BIMSTEC secretariat. The long-term goal was to develop a broad people-driven, solutions-based, multi-sectoral pathway to deal with climate security in the Bay of Bengal. Group C centred their approach on strengthening BIMSTEC as a node for cooperation.



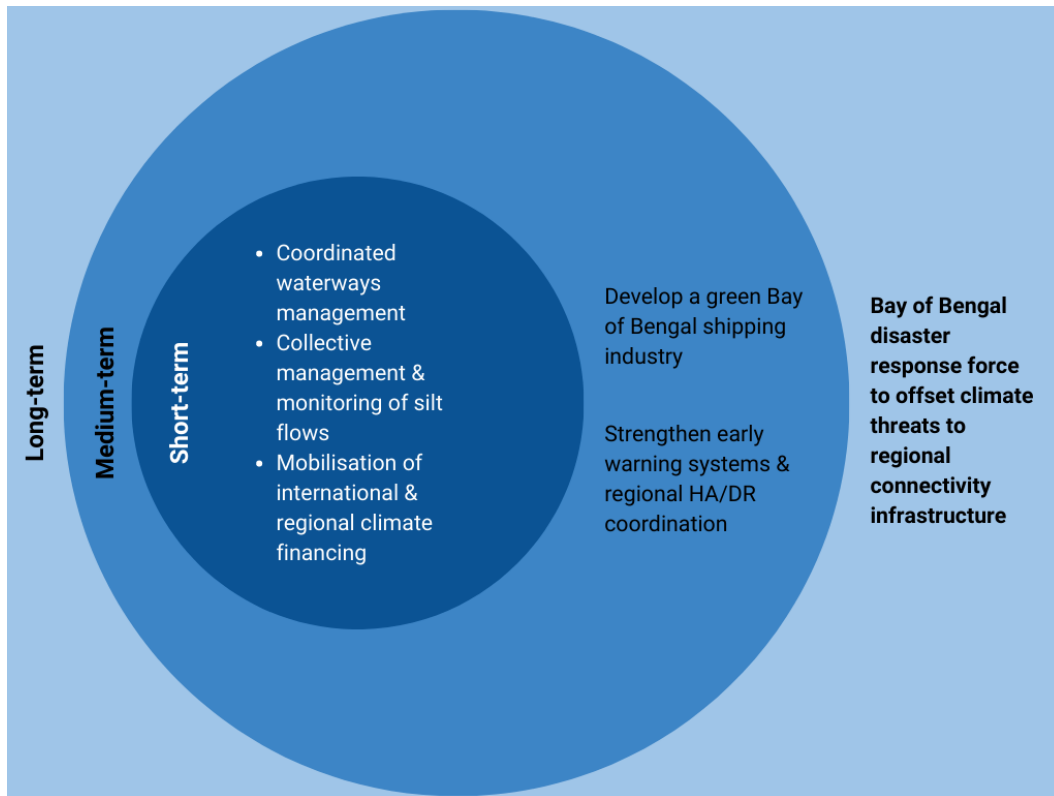
1. Sustainable fishing and climate security (*IOTC: Indian Ocean Tuna Commission)



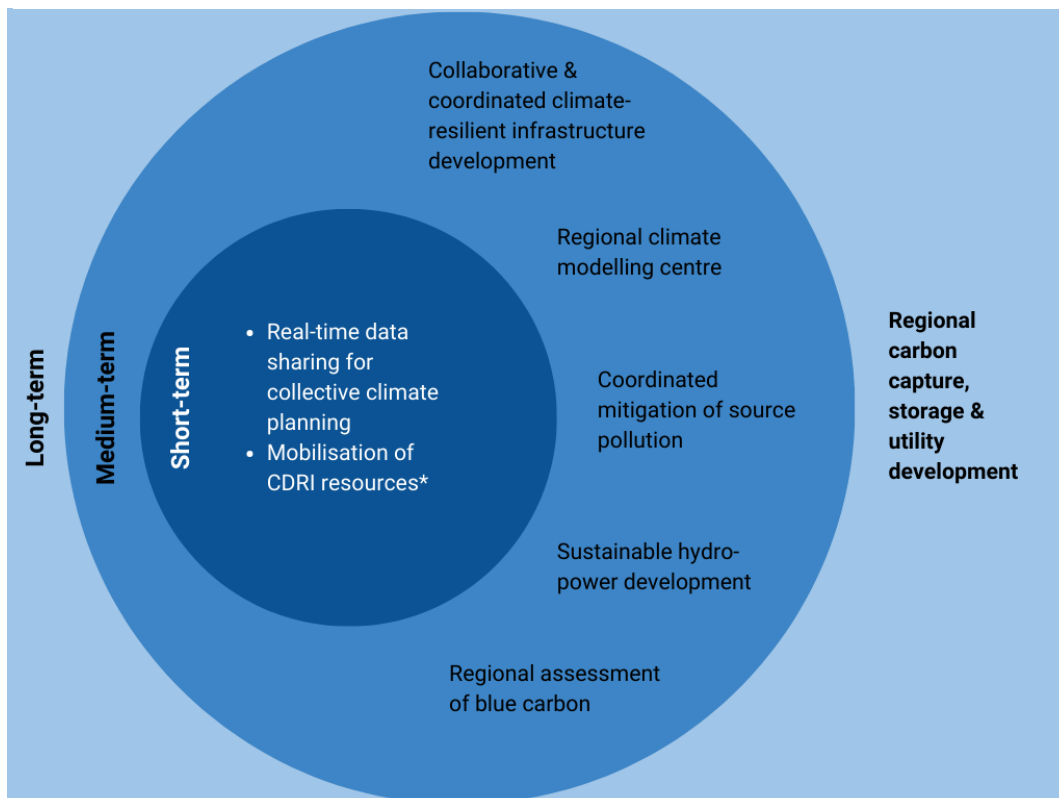
2. Clean energy and climate security (*ISA: International Solar Alliance)



3. Maritime connectivity and climate security



4. Technology and climate security (*CDRI: Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure)





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The Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS) was founded in 1996 to develop an alternative framework for peace and security in South Asia and the extended neighbourhood. It aims to bring policy-relevant research into scholarly and public debate through publications, programmes, capacity-building of the next generation of thought leaders, and global outreach. IPCS is an independent think-tank whose research and policy recommendations do not subscribe to any political view or interest.

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