



Launching of SAAPE Poverty and Vulnerability Report at the Opening Session of the Conference

South Asian Regional Conference on Women's Political Participation and Representation Held

A South Asian regional conference on 'Women's Political Participation and Representation' was organised in Kathmandu, Nepal on 11-12 September 2013. The conference was organised by SAAPE Women's Rights Campaign Group with the aim to develop a work-plan to ensure women's representation in politics and decision making level in South Asia.

The conference was inaugurated by the Vice-President of Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, Paramananda Jha. Inaugurating the conference, Vice-President Jha said that overall development of the country is possible only when there is equal participation of women in the decision making level. The problem of discrimination against women in the SAARC countries are common, he said and stressed the need of organising common campaigns for the empowerment and rights of women.

The conference was attended by around 200 women leaders, lawmakers, right activists, civil society leaders, parliamentarians and human rights defenders from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Ms. Bidhya Bhandari- Chairperson of All Nepal Women Association (ANWA) and former minister of Nepal, Ms. Pasya Padma- Chairperson of Farmer Union of Andhra Pradesh, India and Executive Member of All India Kishan Shabha, Ms. Sajida Zulfiqar- Member of Parliament, Pakistan, Ms. Thalatha Athukorale- Member of Parliament, Sri Lanka, Ms. Rangina Kargar- Member of Parliament, Afghanistan, Ms. Rowshan Jahan Sathi- Member of Parliament, Bangladesh and Dr. Shobha Raghuram- Founder and Advisor of SAAPE also addressed the conference.



Kathmandu Declaration handed over to Dr. Ram Baran Yadav, President of Nepal

Ms. Bidya Bhandari, Chairperson of ANWA said that, it was the historical achievement to make 33 per cent women's representation in the previous Constituent Assembly (CA) in Nepal and a campaign should be launched to ensure 50 per cent women representation through the upcoming election.

Dr. Netra Timilsina, Coordinator of SAAPE stressed on the need of change in the patriarchal practices through education and campaigns to end violence against women and social discrimination.

At the end of the opening session, the 'SAAPE Poverty and Vulnerability Report 2013' was jointly launched by Vice President Jha and women political leaders, women parliamentarians and women's rights activists of South Asian countries.

The conference has adopted a 9 points Kathmandu Declaration which was handed over to the President of Nepal Dr. Ram Baran Yadav on 12 September 2013 during a brief meeting with the South Asian women delegation.



A group photograph of the conference participants

Post 2015 Development Agenda: Civil Society Concerns

Discussion on Post-2015 Development Agenda has started among stakeholders in view of the time line set for the one and a half decade long Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) coming to an end within the next two years. As a part of the civil society, we have two responsibilities to fulfil: first, to assess what we have achieved as citizens of the world and particularly of South Asian, in terms of the eight MDGs related to poverty alleviation, education, gender equality and empowerment of women, child and maternal health, environmental sustainability, reduction of HIV/AIDS and communicable diseases, and building of a global partnership for development. Second, it is important to question whether the bases required to proceed further with the new development agenda have been established or whether we need a new paradigm in development sectors as the existing MDGs have followed a misleading path.

Development discourse in South Asia is not a new issue which is always filled with superficial logic. Our decades long experience of struggle for justice and equality show that South Asian governments have not thoroughly evaluated the existing exclusionary model of development, that is, equitable development. Although they have made considerable effort to address the poverty agenda, they are limited in papers. They seem competent enough to set a number of good action agenda on paper, but the major issue lies in implementation as these new action agendas shape the behaviours of governments and corporates differently from what has been practiced in previous decades.

A discussion among members of SAAPE, which was followed by an online submission of SAAPE's comments on the reports and documents developed by the UN regarding Post 2015 Development Agenda. The document highlighted the major loopholes and shortcomings in the MDG concept: the fact that MDGs never prioritised the concept of equitable development. It aimed to achieve the so-called target haphazardly without understanding the ground realities and planned activities related to MDGs apparently, concentrating only on the fulfilment of the target. It neglected fully the social aspects of development such as people, their involvement, struggles and relation to the community. For example, one of the MDGs, *universal education*, was set but it never clearly defined whom the education was for, where these people were located, what their real situations were like or how it connected to social and economic aspects. The concept excludes the fact of people's struggles for justice, their victimised situation because of their status as peasants, fisher folks or workers. These are the groups who have never been in enabling environment for education because of their struggle for rights to land, justice against suppression and oppression and so on.

The MDGs did not address issues of vulnerable groups such as different sections of women, workers, peasants and oppressed communities. It does not deal with issues of workers' rights, trade union rights, gender

justice, and demilitarisation without which the so-called targets can hardly give justice to these communities. In the context of South Asia, the issue of anti-land grabbing movements are pertinent and needs to be addressed by the Post 2015 development initiative. Land grabbing for the sake of SEZ, industrialisation, development of tourist resorts, establishment of military base and so on need to be stopped immediately as these are the lands of the people; these are resources that they depend on for their livelihood.

Moreover, political rights of women has still not been guaranteed despite the decades-long women's movements. Without women's representation in decision-making bodies in the political process, it is not likely that their rights will be ensured. These are significant socio-political issues that the MDGs should have encompassed and must be incorporated in the new set of international development goals.

SAAPE, as a part of its mission, brings together civil society groups and movements across South Asia to jointly strategise and take actions to contribute towards poverty eradication. It aims to bring about effective changes in the socio-political spectrum by countervailing the harmful and unsustainable economic policies of globalisation, privatisation and liberalisation responsible for perpetuating poverty in South Asia. Its basic promises are grounded on the reality that the present dominant top-down development paradigm lacks proper dialogue with and participation of, the primary rights holders- the poor and marginalised - in policy, planning, and decision-making; this is a major obstacle to eradicate poverty. Moreover, the dominant global economic policy regime grounded on neo-liberalism led financialisation goes against the principle of inclusive and sustainable development blatantly trampling upon the basic human rights of peoples.

Any development agenda to be made in the advent of UN needs to be pro-people discarding the old and traditional concept of 'one-size-fits-all' policies. A welcome step being taken now is 'sustainable development' but equally important is to deliberate whose sustainable development we are talking about. The governments reiterating this slogan should be strictly monitored by the agencies like the UN, focusing on their accountability, and particularly on how sustainable development is being enforced. An assessment of the lives of people on our planet makes it clear that inequality is what needs to be addressed irrespective of whatever slogans we use. Priorities need to be focused on the world's consumption and production pattern and one should examine how sustainable development fits into this context because one the one hand there is a class of affluent people with more than enough resources for consumption and production and on the other, a majority with a serious lack of the same. Last but foremost; the major issue to focus on is ensuring redistributive justice and the role of international corporations such as the US in the Kyoto Protocol.



A girl child in Dailekh district of Nepal collecting cooking firewood.

Post-2015 Development Agenda: Reduce the Widened Gap

"The cost of taking action now will be much less than the cost of dealing with the consequences later."

Executive summary, A New Global Partnership:

Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development

One world: One Sustainable Development Agenda

On 31 July 2012, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon appointed 27 civil society, private sector, and government leaders from all regions of the world to a High Level Panel (HLP) to advise him on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. The HLP on the Post-2015 Development Agenda released "A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development," a report which sets out a universal agenda to eradicate extreme poverty from the face of the earth by 2030, and deliver on the promise of sustainable development. The report calls upon the world to rally around a new Global Partnership that offers hope and a role to every person in the world.

In the report, the Panel calls for the new post-2015 goals to drive five big transformative shifts (Post-2015 HLP, pg. 7):

1. Leave no one behind

The target is to completely eradicate poverty by 2030, which is a welcome step but one that leaves out certain communities who still does not have access to development practice. The document does not categorically speak about the strategies to obtain this ambitious goal.

2. Put sustainable development at the core

The HLP report has set the following priorities:

"to integrate the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability. We must act now to slow the alarming pace of climate change and environmental degradation, which pose unprecedented threats to humanity. (Post-2015 HLP, pg.8)"

However, there has been a draw away from ratified agreements. The 'how' of this is not explained at all-given

the complete lack of will in both public and private sectors, only the poor have borne the burdens of unsustainable development with their knowledge of sustainable, respectful and just development being rapidly devalued or privatised by powerful market forces.

3. Transform economies for jobs and inclusive growth

This includes economic transformation, believed to be the medium to end extreme poverty and improve livelihoods by harnessing innovation, technology, and the potential of business. More diversified economies, with equal opportunities for all, can drive social inclusion, especially for young people, and foster sustainable consumption and production patterns. However, some crucial issues have to be taken into consideration in this regard such as:

- a. Why do we assume that rapid urbanisation is progressive? And is this a solution in South Asia where the rural poor outnumber urban poor and investments for food self-sufficiency have considerably declined?
- b. Plant closures, retrenchment and unemployment have resulted in millions of job losses. Subsidy cuts and mounting debts mark South Asian economies, for example, migrants form the bulk of the unorganised sector in India. The growing 'casualisation' and feminisation of labour and an increasing differential between regular and casual wage rates have aggravated the conditions of distress migrations.

4. Build peace and effective, open and accountable institutions for all

The priority set for this is "... to recognise peace and good governance as a core element of wellbeing, not an optional extra." However, in our context we need to realise that most countries in South Asia already have these legislations in place, implementation is the issue.

5. Forge a new global partnership

The HLP has set the following priorities regarding the need for a new global partnership:

"...to develop a new spirit of solidarity, cooperation, and mutual accountability must underpin the post-2015 agenda. This new partnership should be based on a common understanding of our shared humanity, based on mutual respect and mutual benefit. It should be centered around people, including those affected by poverty and exclusion, women, youth, the aged, disabled persons, and indigenous peoples. It should include civil society organisations, multilateral institutions, local and national

governments, the scientific and academic community, businesses, and private philanthropy."

However, the document is silent on the issue of accountability, particularly on the big question of how to enforce this. Similarly, when we seriously assess the lives of people on our planet, it becomes clear that inequality is what needs to be addressed. Priorities need to be equally focused on the world's consumption and production pattern. Last but not foremost, ensuring redistributive justice and the role of international corporations, including the US, in the Kyoto Protocol is the main issue to deal with here.

Are MDGs unprecedented progress? What about widening gap?

Countries may have 'progressed' in terms of database but the main 'achievement' of the MDG is that development goals set so far look much like stereotypes, that are not even close to ground realities of excluded and marginalised sections of the population in South Asia. While the aggregate data may be promising, South Asia shows alarming trends- growing poverty gaps, poor status of girl-child, malnutrition, decreasing state investments in social welfare, very high inequality trends and economic growth over and above equality. The highest mortality rates per 100,000 live births is that of Afghanistan (1,700 in 1990 to 1,900 in 2000). Nepal's data on the same becomes most questionable (activists claim not less than 700 per 100,000 live births but the data collected by the government authority shows 229).

A vast majority of the people in South Asia are persistently struggling for better livelihood and survival. About 1.6 billion people, 40 per cent of the world's poor live in South Asia, today. A distinguishing factor is the large variation in population size as well as the level and pace of socio-economic development across the region which is not similar to regional groupings in other parts of the world.

Problems directly related to people's lives such as poverty, hunger, water, sanitation, education, health care and so on require state intervention and active state policies with execution-ability and state capability. However, South Asian states have been privatising these necessities without seriously considering its long-term impacts. This haphazard promotion of privatisation has created a widening poverty scenario in South Asia. The widening gap between the rich and poor is thus the outcome of economic development policies as it promotes technological innovation through technologies that are not value neutral. They are in the control of limited private companies, that is, among the elites, who often stand against peasants and workers. Furthermore, technological innovation is driven by neo-

MDG Progress Index 2013

Country	2013	2012	2011	2010	2010-2013 (change)	Ex. Pov	Hun	Edu	Gen	Child Mort.	Mat. Mort	HIV/AIDS
Afghanistan	3.5	2.5	1	0	3.5	-	-	0.0	0.0	0.5	1.0	1.0
Bangladesh	5	4.5	4.5	2.5	2.5	1.0	1.0	-	-	1.0	1.0	1.0
Bhutan	6	5	4	3.5	2.5	1.0	-	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	0.0
India	6	5.5	4.5	4.5	1.5	1.0	0.5	1.0	1.0	0.5	1.0	-
Maldives	8	6	3.5	4.5	3.5	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Nepal	6	6	5.5	5.5	0.5	1.0	0.5	0.5	1.0	1.0	1.0	0.0
Pakistan	5.5	5	3	3.5	2	1.0	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	1.0
Sri Lanka	7	6	6	4	3	1.0	0.5	1.0	1.0	1.0	0.5	1.0
Average	5.88	5.06	4	3.5	2.38	0.88	0.5	0.63	0.69	0.81	0.88	0.63

1= on track; 0.5= partially on track; 0.0= off track

Source: "2013 millennium development goal progress index – get the data," Claire Provost, *The Guardian*, 29 May 2013, downloaded from: <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2013/may/29/millennium-development-goal-progress-data>

The table shows South Asia's progress on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) between the years 2010 and 2013. Scores are given based on whether the country is on track (denoted by 1.0), partially on track (0.5) or off track (0.0) on achieving each of the eight targets. As per this index, a maximum score of 8 is possible for each country; maximum score achieved means the country is on track in meeting all eight targets.

The Maldives, with a total score of 8, seems not only on track in achieving all eight targets but has also made the greatest progress since 2010 to 2013, from 3.5 to 8. Sri Lanka is not far behind with a total score of 7, and a progress score of 3 since 2010. The two targets Sri Lanka is only partially on track in meeting is eradication of extreme hunger and reduction of maternal mortality rate by three quarters between 1990 and 2015.

The progress scores of Bhutan, India and Nepal are 6 each. Bhutan's progress score since 2010 has upped by 2.5, India's by 1.5 and Nepal's by 0.5. Bhutan and Nepal are both off track on their target to halt the spread of HIV/AIDS and to provide victims with universal access to treatment. Nepal is lagging behind in meeting its target to eradicate extreme hunger and achieve universal primary education. Moreover, the country's total

progress has remained constant in 2012 and 2013, and its change in progress score from 2010 to 2013 is the least in the whole region. Further, India is only partially on track in achieving its goals of extreme hunger eradication and reducing under-five mortality rate by three quarters between 1990 and 2015.

Pakistan's difference in progress scores from 2010 to 2013 stands at 2, with the current progress score as 5.5. The country is not completely on track with four of its targets: extreme hunger eradication, universal primary education, reduction in child mortality rate, and reduction in maternal mortality ratio along with universal access to reproductive health care.

Bangladesh is falling behind considerably on its target to provide sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. No data is available on the targets of gender equality and education. Its current total progress score lies at 5 with a difference of 2.5 since 2010. The difference in scores from 2010 to 2013 (from 0 to 3.5) shows a great upward climb for Afghanistan. However, missing data on its targets of poverty and hunger eradication and the negative trends for gender equality and education makes it difficult to assess the true nature of such a change.

liberal economic policies which by nature, is not poor or marginalised sensitive.

Development discourse in South Asia is filled with superficial logic to explain the lack of development in the context of post development agenda, with blunt comments such as, "skills and information are the root causes of the problems." South Asian governments have not thoroughly evaluated the existing exclusionary model of development, which poses as a major problem in the current time.

Governments of South Asia have made considerable effort to address the poverty agenda, at least in their papers. They seem competent enough to set a number of good action agenda on paper, but the major issue lies in implementation as these new action agendas shape the behaviours of governments and corporates differently from what has been practiced in previous decades. An ahistorical and apolitical agenda denies true justice to those who have always been forced to survive with the bare minimum rather than granting them a life of dignity and enhanced citizenship. Every development issue when unraveled for execution or when articulated involves communities, nation states and global commitments, the truth of the growing transformation of public ownership into private enjoyment cannot be ignored or escaped. If this has to be changed we must ensure that every commitment means the surrender of private privileges for the sake of commonly sustainable futures.

What Development Agenda now?

So far the goals have been designed in such a superficial manner that the only outcome has been the widening gap between the haves and have nots. They must be designed focusing on the large sections of excluded groups, for instance making sure progress at all levels of income can be tracked, and providing social protection to help people build resilience to life's uncertainties.

The UN's priority in this context must fall on the monitored and punitive measures for noncompliance, including removal of licenses for operation. There is no mention of documents which have had sufficient bearing – such as the Kyoto Protocol, the Brundtland Commission, Rio and the numerous UN ratified documents - which now have been set aside by several nations. 'Development and growth has been perceived and projected as a progressive, altruistic and peaceful amelioration of the conditions of people's lives. However, historically, people have suffered from increasingly violent contestations for power:

The rhetoric of "transformative people-centred and planet-sensitive" development

This slogan has done no more than to promote the dominant neo-liberal paradigm, a framework that will not allow changes that go against elite interests. Thus, in reality, there is no evident shift in the new vision. The rhetoric does not translate into serious changes in the balance of power and wealth.

Is this incoherence vital to sustaining unsustainable growth? It appears so, given the avoidance of any discussion on the gaps that have prevented just development. Is the UN and its numerous agencies willing to take positions autonomous of vested interests and entirely on the side of those denied development rights?

"Sustainable development is rich in imagination and poor in historical action."

To ensure equal futures, wealthy nations must be willing to make certain sacrifices; they must understand the consequences of their actions for people whom they do not know. Citizens need to be empowered for the exercise of responsible and informed participation. Sustainable development and democracy must coexist at every level of agency and choice¹.

Conflict and Violence

Nation states and international regimes are to blame for the devastating effects of conflict and violence, an integral part of certain types of development models and anti-people centered development.

Gender Dimensions of Poverty

Despite the rhetoric of equality, a vast majority of the world's women population face poverty and discrimination. How they partake the new development agenda has not come out clearly in the development agenda. Unequal social relations are the by-products of wealth accumulation. The post 2015 development agenda should address the gender dimensions of poverty which need to be underscored in terms of world consumption pattern, focusing on women's share of this burden.

Reach out to poor and excluded people

The development goals after 2015 need to focus on countries in conflict architecture and the basis of their partnership must be transformed. For this, the strategy

1. Raghuram, Shobha (2011). Sustainable Development: The Citizens Predicament. *Development*, 54(2) 143–146.

of South-South cooperation should be promoted in a transparent and democratic manner.

Deregulation and privatisation of public resources

The sweep of characters deregulation and privatisation of public resources renders the state an ally to private interests, whereby tax payers are subsidise transnational corporations. This is the reality that lives through every document that the affected are forced to accept in the name of development consensus. The narrative sections must retain the politics of these perceptions and the implications they may have for the poor. It is crucial not to forget whom these documents are being prepared for. Any development related document should be able to question particularly who reigns in faulting governments and against the international institutions, who have withdrawn with both hands most of their support for serious equitable development in favour of wealth accumulation.

All four documents refuse to take structural positions on what has failed and why it has. They call for linkages to be established but with the assumption that there are perfect symmetries of expectations and aspirations in societies marked by class, caste and gender divides. The issue is whether holistic development is possible when private interests override public needs.

Overproduction and overconsumption of people's resources

What policies have perpetuated overproduction and overconsumption in the North and among the elites of the South? The economic recession and the responses of the US in its bailouts should give us a clear idea of what private capital will do to control both state and its development policies.

Social movements: an alternative paradigm for bringing change

The voices and movements at the grassroots are imperative for any kind of change. Lessons from these movements should be used to achieve equitable development. In this case, for example, SAAPE as a regional network of mass movements, grassroots, women, labourers and peasants, has been working unitedly for the eradication of poverty from South Asia. Issues of food sovereignty, labour rights, women's rights,

gender justice, demilitarisation and social justice are some of the major concerns raised by SAAPE. For instance, the member organisations of SAAPE have been facilitating the anti-land grabbing movements in South Asian countries. In India, SAAPE members have been launching movements entitled India Peoples' Campaign against Land Grabbing" and come with up with the Kolkata Declaration that looks into the demands and vision for future actions. The movement urges the government to take immediate and effective steps to stop land grabbing that has accelerated in recent years in the name of SEZ, industrialisation, development of tourist resorts, establishment of military base and so on. The focal organisations of SAAPE in Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are campaigning for food sovereignty and against land grabbing and have been mobilising thousands of people around these issues.

SAAPE's women rights campaign group advances the movements for political rights of women in South Asia realising the fact that without their representation in decision-making in the political process, it is not likely that their rights will be ensured.

Participation and aspirations of working class

SAAPE, as a part of its mission, brings together civil society groups and movements across South Asia to jointly strategise and take actions to contribute towards poverty eradication. It aims to bring about effective changes in the socio-political spectrum by countervailing the harmful and unsustainable economic policies of globalisation, privatisation and liberalisation responsible for perpetuating poverty in South Asia. It's basic premises are grounded on the reality that the present dominant top-down development paradigm lacks proper dialogue with and participation of, the primary rights holders- the poor and marginalised - in policy, planning, and decision-making; this is a major obstacle to eradicate poverty. Moreover, the dominant global economic policy regime grounded on neo-liberalism led financialisation goes against the principle of inclusive and sustainable development blatantly trampling upon the basic human rights of peoples.

As a contribution to the alternative development paradigm, SAAPE has been publishing its Poverty and Vulnerability Report every 3 years since 2003 in which not only root causes of poverty and proven alternatives at the grassroots are presented but also pertinent issues linked to poverty eradication needing organised voices at the grassroots people's level are also covered. Available on our website (www.saaape.org).

Repression against women: BNPS continue the protest across the country



Protest against sexual abuse and repression of women

The Bangladesh Nari Pragati Sangha (BNPS) mobilised a human chain on January 2013 as a protest against sexual abuse and repression of women. This was prompted by a series of rape cases that had been reported in preceding months; 14-year-old school girl gang-raped for three consecutive days in Tangail and another indigenous girl raped and murdered in Rangamati district. The BNPS-led protest demanded justice for victims and legal action against perpetrators and involved thousands of women from grassroots women's groups, community forum leaders, youth clubs and human rights forums. The protest was held in Dhaka, Chittagong, Sandwip, Mohangonj, with participants even organising processions in Barhatta and Netrakona.

SAAPE anti-land grabbing campaign meeting in Sri Lanka

A meeting was organised in Sri Lanka, where 18 members from the SAAPE anti-land grabbing campaign group (part of the Praja Abhilashi, National Fisheries Solidarity Movement (NAFSO) and Food Sovereignty Network of South Asia) attended the programme held on 2 March 2013 at NAFSO, Negombo, Sri Lanka. Herman Kumara, convener of NAFSO and core committee member of SAAPE, delivered the introductory note. Welcoming the group, he established the agenda of the meet and emphasised the significance of linking and strengthening the ongoing land struggles in South Asia. The session was chaired by Abdul Razaak, All Lanka

Peasants' Front (ALPF), a member organisation of SAAPE campaign against land grabbing, who briefed the gathering about the work of Praja Abhilashi network on land issues.

Balram Banskota, Dy. Secretary General of All Nepal Peasant's Federation (ANPFa) and SAAPE member, highlighted the major land issues in India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. He discussed the peoples' resistance in Singur, West Bengal against land grabbing by Tata Company, which broke out when the so-called communist state government allowed MNCs to grab land. He also narrated the Sri Lankan post-war context as very much conducive to investors to grab natural resources such as land, forests, sea, coasts and other inland water bodies. He suggested that the use of national security mechanisms is difficult to challenge and even the court ignores people's voices when it comes to issues of national security and national economy. His note also addressed the fact that we all have a role to play in protecting people's right to land, food and livelihood.

Individuals from Mullikulam, K. Sothi narrated stories about how post-war security measures have adversely affected peoples' basic rights such as that of housing, land and decent life in their original land. People from Mullikulam were displaced in 2006 when the final war began and the military forced villagers to vacate their houses for 2 days to clear the area, promising to return the houses and property to the rightful owners. However, till date, these families have not resettled and now live as internally displaced persons (IDPs). In December 2012, secretary to the defense ministry and the Cardinal of the Catholic Church approached the villagers and stated that the site would be used to build a naval base and that the displaced could not go back to their original houses and lands. Though they were compensated with land outside the village, it is not enough for proper shelter, income and safety, completely disrupting their way of life. Representatives explained the type of activities people are carrying out with the support of some concern groups including NAFSO.

Other displacement issues induced by tourism development projects such as that in Kalpitiya were highlighted by Francis Raajan, Coordinator of the Praja Abhilashi network. According to him, 1700 hectares of land has reportedly been allocated for tourism development. The so-called tourism development project has displaced thousands of fisher folks, mainly owing to the fact that having lived in those villages from generation to generation, they have no land, deeds or legal documents to prove their ownership. Sri Lanka's tourism project, with its plan to build 17 hotels in 14 islands is sure to damage people's livelihoods and

sabotage their rights to food, land and decent life. However, as the islands are scattered, the issue lacks a united voice. The session held was part of the attempt to bring people's voices together to resist land grabbing in the Kalpitiya islands. Praja abhilashi network, as a land network and NAFSO as a fisheries organisation are working with the affected communities. NAFSO is currently working with Pesticide Action Network and the Pacific (PAN AP) to document the seriousness of land grabbing along with its affect the socio, economic and environmental rights of communities, and to build up a national strategy to address the issues. The research paper is to be used as an advocacy tool against land grabbing.

The food sovereignty week of action launched by NAFSO, PA and FSNSA was discussed in the meet, focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of the interventions. The SAAPE anti-land grabbing campaign group observed that the media is not giving substantive attention to the issue and is unwilling to change pre-set attitudes about tourism, the fact that it will bring prosperity and better the lives of the rural marginalised groups. In the process, the media, under pressure from investors, fails to represent the voices of communities affected by land grabbing. Thus, the necessity of a media strategy was discussed in the meet. The group stressed the importance of documenting real life struggles of leaders and committed people in the media in order to inspire membership from the rest of the community.

In closing, the group re-emphasised the major issues the networks concerned with land issues in Sri Lanka should focus on, some of them being issues related to tourism and coastal development, IDPs, development displacement issues in the post war context and so on.

Mr. Banskota emphasised the importance of collective efforts to work against globalisation, liberalisation and privatisation in South Asia. Also, emphasis was given to the use of SAARC secretariat as a mediator to communicate people's issues to state and government authorities.

Preparation Meeting for 'South Asian Peasant Convention'

The SAAPE food sovereignty campaign group organised a preparation meeting for the 'South Asian Peasant Convention'. The meeting was held on 29 May 2013 at EquityBD building, Dhaka, Bangladesh. The main agendas of the meeting were to gather national peasants' organisations of Bangladesh and share issues



Participants of the interaction programme

experience and lessons from the SAAPE campaign against land grabbing, discuss the South Asian Peasants' Coalition and its next convention, and report on campaign activities and its progress and plan in Bangladesh. The meeting was attended by the representatives from Bangladesh Kisan Sobha, Bangladesh Krishok Federation, Karma Jivi Nari, Bangladesh Krishok Forum, Online Knowledge Society, EquityBD, CoastBD, Bangladesh Krishok Songa, Bangladesh Bhumihin Samittee, Labour Resource Centre, Food Sovereignty Network Bangladesh, Food Security Network Bangladesh and Right to Food Network.

Balam Banskota shared the updates on behalf of SAAPE and All Nepal Peasant's Federation (ANPFa) in the meeting. Rezuul Karim Chaudhary, Badrul Allam and M. H. Munir were among others who stressed on the need to strengthen farmers' organisations in South Asia. The meeting also gathered information about the major farmer's organisations and CSOs in Bangladesh with their working areas, number of membership, type and priority of their work and contact details to extend the membership of SAAPE and South Asian Peasant Coalition.

Denouncing the Scrutiny of the EAW law in Afghan Parliament by Afghan civil society

In Afghanistan, the government and parliament have been trying to confiscate the rights of women which have been included in the law of the country. A number of Afghan parliamentarians have branded the law on the Elimination of Violence against Women (EAW) as un-Islamic, according to a press release issued by the

Afghan Women's Network on 22 May 2013. The law on EVAW, which has been enacted through a decree of the President of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in 2009, is considered a major step forward in the legal protection of women's rights after the Afghan Constitution.

The EVAW law, which aims at addressing the grave situation of violence against women and young girls in the country, is a joint achievement of SAAPE members in Afghanistan, Afghan women from civil societies, parliament and government. The law criminalises child marriage, forced marriage, selling and buying of women for the purpose or under the pretext of marriage, ba'ad (giving away a woman or girl to settle a dispute), forced self-immolation and 17 other acts of violence against women including rape and beating.

Participation of SAAPE in EU workshop as regional civil society representative

From 18-19 April 2013, European Union (EU) organised the workshop on "Regional NGO Networks" in Brussels, Belgium. In that programme, SAAPE was invited as a strong and visible civil society network from South Asia.

The main purpose of the workshop was to discuss and compile suggestions, which will be utilised to develop the EU development plan. Dr. Netra Prasad Timsina, Coordinator of SAAPE, participated in that workshop. Dr. Timsina provided his inputs in the workshop.

Declaration of South Asian Conference on Women's Political Participation and Representation

11-12, September 2013, Kathmandu Nepal

We the women rights campaigners from south Asian Countries working in members of parliament, political parties, civil society organisations, business and academia gathered in Kathmandu on 11 and 12 September 2013 on the invitation of All Nepal Women's Association to acknowledge the women's struggle, to enhance the solidarity and strengthened the regional and in country movement for women's equal political participation and representation in the south Asian countries have collectively agreed that engendering politics and governance is an urgent needs for peace, prosperity and to end human poverty in south Asian region.

Realising the marginalisation and structural exclusion of women's from governance and political participation has reinforced the feminisation of poverty;

Confirming the discrimination and violence against women are further hindering women's accession and influence in politics and governance;

Reaffirming the exclusion of women from politics and governance is violation of fundamental human rights and breaches the spirit of universal declaration of human rights;

Recognising the women's meaningful engagement in politics and governance can contribute for reducing gaps in society and promotion of peace and dignity for all;

Reconfirming Women's participation in politics and governance is not an endowment rather entitlement of women and compensation for historical and structural exclusion of women;

Recalling the 14 points declaration made by South Asian Women's Conference in 2009 for breaking barriers and claiming women's space in south Asia

Call for political parties, governments and civil society organisations including mass media for taking adequate steps with sincere commitment and practical realisation for equal representation and participation of women in politics and governance;

The conference appeal for following actions to engender politics and governance in south Asia:

1. Citizenship is the foundation for accessing and influencing politics and governance, we call government of south Asian countries to ensure full and equal citizenship rights for women

2. Current notion of delegative liberal democracy model is failed to ensure women's proportionate participation, we demand for reforming democratic system to be more progressive, women friendly and able to recognize and adequately respond the women's needs
 3. The election modalities on are crucial for attaining women's proportionate participation, we appeal the election commissions of south Asian countries to practice special gender policy that promotes ethical, safer and adequate legislative measures for making women's equal representation and participation in election in many ways as voter, candidate, political campaigner and election observer as well as electoral officials.
 4. Criminalisation of politics and corruption in political system has further hindered women's participation and representation in governance, we call upon political parties, governments, civil society and media to expose the crimes and corruption in politics and to seek accountability and political integrity from political parties.
 5. Women's political participation and representation in governance is adversely influenced by all discriminatory and harmful cultural practices including early marriages, dowry, violence against women, misconception of witchcraft, exclusion from education and economic engagement.
 6. We call government and civil society to take adequate effective actions to end such kind of structural cultural barriers against women's equality in society.
 7. The patriarchal mindset among the male dominated parliamentary system has not recognised women's competency, the conference call for interventions on changing the patriarchy mindset among political leaders and parliamentarians.
 8. We declare united regional movement lead by women political leaders together with activists, civil society, workers' union, academia and business sector to further reclaiming women's equal space in politics and governance of south Asia.
 9. We acknowledge and appreciate the steps taken by people, women and political parties of Nepal to have one-third women parliamentarians in past constitution assembly. We are not fully assured the continuity of 33 percent participation in upcoming election. We call for political parties, in solidarity with struggling civil society and women leaders, at least to institutionalise the 33 percent women's representation in upcoming constitution assembly, to have 50 percent participation in local governments and to move ahead for equal women's representation at all level of political parties and governance.
- We thank the Rt. Honourable President of federal democratic republic of Nepal Dr. Ram Baran Yadav for availing his precious time and encouragement provided to the participants of the conference. We also thank the Rt. Honourable vice president of federal democratic republic of Nepal, Paramananda Jha for his encouraging speech and being with us during inauguration of this conference.

Celebrate women power for peace, justice and dignity!

12 September 2013, Kathmandu Nepal

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