



Editorial

Odyssey Dawn

The air war over Libya is a curious battle without any reasonable justification. It is not only poorly conceived and ill-thought out but it is likely to cause more harm than good for the Libyan people and the people of the region. The legitimacy cover for the air strike is the United Nations 2005 doctrine, called the “responsibility to protect”, nicknamed R2P, which declares that world powers have the right and obligation to intervene when a dictator devours his people. The Libyan intervention is putting teeth into that fledgling concept. This regulation is very ambiguous and flawed as it allows for any interpretation. According to Valdimir Putin, “The resolution allows everything. It resembles mediaeval calls for crusades.”

The ‘responsibility to protect’ doctrine which legitimizes the attack on Libya is still not a part of customary international law but even its advocates must agree that the selective and politically expedient invocation of R2P robs the doctrine of its normative force.

This overzealousness betrays imperialism’s eagerness to retain its hegemonic control over the oil-rich region and prevent any realignment of forces that could be detrimental to its interests. The region had proven accumulative reserve of 103.02 billion tonnes of residual crude oil in 2009, or 55.6% of the proven total global oil reserves. Apart from this it is also aimed at containing the popular upsurges in regimes either by co-opting or defeating the popular revolts to foist regimes loyal to US and its allies.

The political crisis and the popular uprising in the Arab region have dramatically challenged the political legitimacy of US-backed autocratic leaders, at the behest of a new generation of young idealists, inspired by democracy, united by Facebook and excited by the notion of opening up to a wider world. Those revolutions are still in full swing and the great wave of anger, frustration, defiance and democratic demands presently sweeping across the Arab World is the greatest uprising in modern Arab history. The ongoing turmoil in the region has rightly been seen as a result of the political repression and the rapid deterioration of material conditions of the majority of the population. So far these revolts have appeared to be largely secular in character.

Rampant unemployment and the ever-widening income and social inequality along with issues of democratization, human rights and corruption-free governance were the strong under-currents of the political upheaval that overtook most of the gulf countries. The economies of Tunisia and Egypt have been devastated by unbridled neo-liberalism and the dictates of the IMF and the opening of the economy to western corporate plunder.

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Parliamentary Round Table on Food Sovereignty, Islamabad



Parliamentary Round Table on Food Sovereignty, Islamabad



SAAPE Poverty Report Release in Kathmandu

Most of these regimes aggressively pursued the neo-liberal agenda in the economic orientation and surrendered to the dictates of the IMF in economic policies. This meant deregulation of the market and privatization of the public undertakings, with foreign players having free access to financial markets. The policies ensuing from the implementation of the Washington Consensus and the Free Trade Agreement have led to rapid rise in the unemployment rate. Unemployment is currently estimated to be around 20% of the labour force and as high as 50% among the youth.

The rising economic inequality was associated with the declining material standards of a significant part of the population as the prices of basic necessities continued to increase, wages stagnated and gainful employment became even harder to find. Says Nader Fergany, author of the Arab Human Development Reports from 2002 to 2005: “There’s a vicious circle of the small clique getting filthy rich and the rest getting impoverished. We have returned this country to what it used to be called before the 1952 revolution: the 1 percent society. One percent controls almost all the wealth of the country.” (“Tipping point for Egypt’s Downtrodden Masses”, *Financial Times*, January 30.)

The basic lessons that are emerging from the current Arab political crisis should be seen as lessons for societies elsewhere in the Global South. The right wing orthodoxy of neo-liberalism pursued by the ruling class now faces multiple crises and popular revolt against their rule.

Each revolt, of course, may fail: tyrants may unleash bloody repression; military juntas may try to remain in power; traditional opposition groups may attempt to hijack movements; and religious hierarchies may jockey to take control. But what will not die are the political demands and desires that have been unleashed, the expressions of an intelligent young generation for a different life in which they can put their capacities to use.

As long as those demands and desires live, the cycle of struggles will continue. The question is: what these new experiments in freedom and democracy will teach the world over the next decades?

Indeed, our hope is that through this cycle of struggles the Arab world becomes, for the next decade, a laboratory of political experimentation between powerful social movements and progressive governments in the countries of the South.

The rise of democracy reflects the popular will, well-equipped to advance the aspirations of the people. Democracy is the only way to achieve these goals, especially because dictatorships of whatever kind or form only excel in suppressing people’s voices and will. Even the judicial institutions under them are not autonomous or free. Citizens have virtually no recourse to legal redress of grievances, no recourse to a peaceful method of opposition to the rulers and no recourse of correction of misdeeds. Therefore, democracy prevails as the only just model of governance.

The sense of self-empowerment and the genuine desire for democratization made the democracy movement an important and potential game-changer for the whole region. What surprised many was the absence of religious discourse – and the embrace of pluralism. These popular upsurges have also negated the western stereotypical projection that Muslims are somehow incapable of freedom and democracy. These upsurges also assert that people are sovereign and they must be allowed to decide on their future in their sovereign country and not decided by imperial powers.

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SAAPE Poverty and Vulnerability Report

SAAPE News and Events

SAAPE CC and AGM 2010, 04-06 September, Nagarkot, Nepal

The Annual General Meeting and Extended Core Committee Meeting of SAAPE took place from 4-6 of September 2010 in Nagarkot of Nepal. Several discussions and decisions were taken during these meetings, which are summarised as follows:

- After discussing the draft strategic plan of SAAPE, it was realised that it needs further efforts to make it more politically enriched. Therefore, a team comprised of Ajit Muricken, Bushra Khaliq and Sarba Raj Khadka was tasked to work on this and present it to the next core committee meeting for their final review.
- The proposal of People's SAARC (P-SAARC) to SAAPE to host the People's SAARC Secretariat was endorsed. SAAPE was requested to host, by the April 2010, the People's SAARC process in New Delhi.
- The frequency of CC meetings was decided to be twice a year. All the country groups were instructed to complete the process of electing their representatives to the CC by the next meeting date.
- The secretariat was instructed to take the responsibility of recruiting new members (as frequently as possible) and renewing old members every two years, to make use of the membership forms, both hard copies and online soft forms. All the CC members and other constituents of SAAPE were requested to help disseminating the information of SAAPE and inviting interested individuals and organisations to apply for membership. After the SAAPE secretariat receives the application, it should be forwarded to the respective country coordination committee and the thematic groups of the candidate's interest for their feedback / suggestions. When they endorse/reject the application, then only the secretariat will recruit/reject membership.
- The organisational framework along with the additional members in the CC was approved. It was suggested to adopt as the general principle that serious efforts need to make SAAPE not only the regional level body but a movement grounded at the bases in the grassroots.
- The proposal of not having more than one RTFO in one country was approved. In this context, Pakistan

which hosts two RTFOs at the moment was advised to try giving out the labour rights theme to Bangladesh. In the case of exploring possibility of transferring Labour Rights RTFO to Bangladesh, Karamat, Mohi and Rokeya were advised to sit together during Karamat's imminent visit to Bangladesh and decide.

- All country groups were instructed to initiate the country process (mainly in terms of sharing SAAPE initiative, preparing/consulting for country strategy, forming country coordination committee, etc.) and share information with the secretariat within two months' time from the date of such meetings.
- The decision of the previous CC meeting on the size and representation in the core committee was endorsed. The previous CC meeting had decided to have one male and one female representative from each country of the region, plus five RTFO leaders, one SAAPE Coordinator and one European CS representative (observer), making the total number of the CC to 23. The country representatives should have elected/selected by each country process to the new Core Committee, with exception in the case of Afghanistan which will be represented by the current members. Also replacements from Bhutan and Maldives were suggested by the last CC meeting.
- It was decided that the CC members

based in different countries should organise country consultations in their respective countries and elect/select the country CC members as well as form a Country Consultation Committee (CCC) within two months time.

- In relation to SAAPE –SAARC and SAAPE-Europe advocacy/lobby strategies, it was realised that there is a need to have a written campaign, advocacy and lobby document(s). to workout this, a team comprised of Karamat, Mohi and secretariat representative was formed to draft a campaign and advocacy strategy concept and share with the rest of the CC members.
- Having discussed the pros and cons of SAAPE's possible association/affiliation with SAARC either as Apex body or recognised body, it was suggested to explore further with the SAARC about the potential benefits as Apex or Recognised body. The above team was tasked to study this and submit to the forthcoming CC meeting for a decision.
- It was also agreed that SAAPE should continue its engagement with the European Union mechanism either directly or through the likeminded civil society formations (e.g., Eurostep) in Europe.
- Compared to other thematic areas, it was realised that the gender theme has low level of inputs allocated for the period of April 2010 to March 2011. So, the RTFOs were advised to

revise the activities and the corresponding budget in favour of gender thematic group, and the gender related cross cutting activities under other thematic areas. However, it was also agreed that the budget is not the only criteria to judge the importance of thematic activities. Some of the activities can also be implemented without external funding support. It was emphasised that all other thematic groups work in collaboration with the gender theme for activities related to gender/women related issues. It was recognised that gender as a cross cutting theme.

- It was reaffirmed that the RTFOs have the right to plan and implement programme activities as their independent rights, however, they are encouraged to share their plans with other RTFOs and the Secretariat to make it transparent and consistent with the initiatives being taken forward as SAAPE Secretariat will help each RTFO in their endeavours to raise fund and implement the programme activities.
- It was decided that SAAPE has to give priority to respond to the issues of Bhutanese refugees, which is in the 19th year of their unprecedented sufferings, as they have all the rights to their homestead, without further delay.
- In line with the concerns raised at the AGM, all the RTFOs were instructed to revise their workplan as

realistically as possible and share with the secretariat by September 2010. Also a consensus was reached to implement all planned activities within the stipulated time. Both under as well as over expenditures are very difficult to justify, in any case. Therefore, the RTFOs and the secretariat were instructed to revise the workplan in such a way that all the activities are implemented on or before 31 March 2011 and no under and/or over expenditures are incurred.

- It was again endorsed that the ACCs have to work as the extended arms of the secretariat. They must work FULL TIME for SAAPE activities wherever they are stationed. They have to follow strictly the ToR and abide by the contract signed for the implementation of the ToR. It is also the responsibility of the ACC to read all the communications received from elsewhere and share with their respective thematic leaders as per the urgency and importance of such communications. And respond suitably to the sender within reasonable timeframe.

The ACCs have to follow the guidelines, formats and procedures (e.g., programme/activity concept note, fund release request, periodic reports, monitoring reports, coordination, communication, acknowledgement of communication, etc) while undertaking SAAPE work.

One of the prime roles of the ACC is to assist in the publication of the SAAPE bulletin, currently, being published with the support of VAK. The

ACCs of all the themes are instructed to find out relevant news, quality materials and forward the same to VAK. VAK's work for publishing the bulletin was also appreciated.

- The secretariat was instructed to prepare and circulate the compiled trend of income and expenditure for the last three years to the CC members as soon as possible but no later than 10th of September 2010.
- The Editor, Editorial team, country contributors and the publishers of the Poverty and Vulnerability Report 2010 were thanked for their outstanding work bringing the quality report in a different format. VAK's coordination was particularly

applauded. It was agreed to organise region-wise public launching of the poverty and vulnerability report on a specified date.

- The meeting expressed strong solidarity with and support to the people of Pakistan who were then working hard to tackle with the unprecedented calamity that the region faced during the last monsoon rains. It was suggested to visit the flood affected people of Pakistan by a delegation of SAAPE in near future. Karamat was requested to coordinate this visit once he is informed of the possible dates and the team members.

Declaration of South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) Annual General Meeting (AGM)

4-6 September 2010

Nagarkot, Nepal

Fighting Unitedly against Poverty, Hunger and Injustice in South Asia

Context

We, the members of SAAPE from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka met at the AGM from 4-6 Sep 2010 to deliberate on the theme- “fighting unitedly against poverty, hunger and injustices in South Asia” affirm our committment to `intervene on issues of poverty and exclusion contributing for the eradication of poverty and injustice, rejecting the neo-liberal development paradigm and economic strategies and strive for sustainable alternatives that are pro-poor people’.

Poverty in countries of South Asia is accompanied by disparity. The increase in the number of poor is common in all countries. However, this number only indicates the ‘absolute poor’. The number would be far higher if other aspects of a dignified quality of life are considered. The problem of poverty, even in a big country like India that boasts of substantial economic growth, is persistent. Some sections seem to even lapse back into poverty. The situation is thus one of perpetuation of poverty.

There is reason to believe that the ruling elite in all our countries is enamoured by “economic growth” as the be all and end all of the development process. On the contrary, ground reality strongly indicates that even when the country registers high growth rate, there is huge exclusion and marginalisation. SAAPE feels that the time has come for all of us to work not only

with the exploited classes but also with the excluded social groups.

We are profoundly saddened by several recent incidents which has had long lasting implications for the rights of people and their livelihood. The armed conflict in Sri Lanka came to an end with a large number of people from Vanni being displaced and held in internment camps with restrictions imposed on their mobility and fundamental freedoms.

The current global crisis of climate change is a big challenge facing the South Asian countries which are witnessing increasing natural disasters causing devastating impacts. The recent flood in Pakistan disrupting the lives of over 20 million people, nearly 12% of the population is a reminder of this gruesome reality.

We appreciate the historic judgement given by the supreme court of Bangladesh reviving secular character of the constitution and declaring past military regimes illegal. The court also made it clear that the World Bank does not enjoy any immunity. At the same time we are disappointed by the fact that the government of Bangladesh has succumbed to the pressure of the factory owners by imposing wages at a level much below the demand of the garment workers.

Democratic and human rights continue to be thereatened with the imposition of new regulations and curtailment of civil society

activities. In the rise of people's resistance their leaders are threatened, face extrajudicial killings and disappearances.

We are alarmed that the 18th Amendment to the Constitution in Sri Lanka is facilitating immense powers to the Executive virtually creating a Constitutional dictatorship thereby threatening democratic parliamentary norms. It is also regrettable that GOSL has failed to provide a long lasting political solution for the ethnic problems/national problems based on an effective power sharing model.

Economic crisis has been used to attack trade union struggles and curtail worker's rights. We condemn the killing of two trade union leaders in Pakistan.

We condemn ethnic cleansing and demand unconditional release of all the political prisoners and repatriation and rehabilitation of the Bhutanese refugees to their homestead with dignity.

As South Asian, we watched with great appreciation the unique manner in which the Constituent Assembly of Nepal was created. We were particularly overjoyed with the introduction of proportionate representation and equal representation for women, and men in the Constituent Assembly, but today we are disappointed that the work of Constituent Assembly has come to a standstill because of the political impasse. We urge all concerned and especially the members of the Constituent Assembly to rise above narrow considerations reach consensus and put in place a Constitution which will be a trend setter for all other countries in South Asia and beyond. We call for an immediate resolution of the political impasse in Nepal for the consolidation of the democratic processes and introduction of effective agrarian reform

Similarly, we stand in solidarity with the people of Afghanistan and Maldives in their struggle to achieve democracy and long lasting solutions achieving human rights and fundamental freedoms

The region continues to be militarised combined with nuclearisation.

We demand accountability from our political leaders. As demonstrated in Pakistan through natural and human induced calamities are a frequent occurrence in South Asia, the common element in all this is our shocking lack of preparedness (in physical, economic, administrative, legal and other aspects), coupled with a lack of long term vision, especially, to help the excluded groups.

We are disappointed with the South Asian governments and SAARC as a body for their failure to develop a common regional disaster management policy and a mitigation plan. We urge the immediate adoption of a common plan and the establishment of a Task Force to handle disasters in the future arising from climate change and global warming.

We also demand the repudiation of all debts of Pakistan and provide the necessary resources and funds for relief and rehabilitation of communities affected by the recent floods.

Ad hoc approaches and an absence of a policy framework for relief and rehabilitation and reconstruction is a denial of the legitimate rights of the survivors. On the other hand, in a democratic polity the right to relief with dignity and development are the fundamental right of every disaster victim and it is the responsibility of the state and civil society to ensure that.

This is also a unique opportunity for South Asian countries to express their solidarity in terms of aid and political solidarity with the beleaguered Pakistan, and develop common disaster

management mechanism in line with the relevant SAARC Charter.

Women in South Asia

Majority of women in South Asia remain excluded and impoverished. They form the the bulk of the displaced in South Asia. The post conflict situations are fraught with increased insecurity, gender based violence and lack of protection which is directly linked to poverty.

We appreciate the efforts made by Afghanistan, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh and India to facilitate and recognise the greater and effective participation of women in politics and governance challenging the age old prohibitions of patriarchal ideology through legislative enactments and policies. It is regrettable that Sri Lanka has not been able to achieve it's heights in this regard and wish to express our support to all efforts taken by civil society and women's groups working for urgent reforms in this area.

It is important to stress the need to respond immediately to specific needs of women affected by floods in Pakistan as our gesture of solidarity to empowerment of women in practice.

International and Regional Power Dimensions

We recognise the need to evolve consistent multi-pronged strategies to combat the influence of

globalisation, continuing repression and militarisation in the name of war on terror, growing international re-alignments including India-US, and China, shrinking democratic space, marginalisation of human rights, unsustainable development paradigm.

Our Challenges...

Dominant development models and paradigms have failed. It has exhausted all potentialities. We see the accentuation of deprivation at all levels of the people. We see poverty as deprivation of capabilities of people which deny them freedom and human rights and keep them continuously in a state of disempowerment social, economic and political.

We are aware that old slogans are not sufficient for organisation and mobilisation. We need to call for all excluded women, dalits, indigenous, all minorities ethnic, religious and linguistic based on our contemporary understanding to unite to struggle against poverty, hunger and injustice.

The fight for entitlements such as employment, food, education, health, housing, human security, social security, dignity and the like needs to be carried out through the agency of the exploited masses as well as the excluded social groups.

Report on Women's Capacity Building Programme for Political representation and re- visioning Gender Politics

Vagamon 28th – 31st October 2010.

Dalit Intellectual Collective (DIC) organized a four day women's capacity building workshop on the theme 'Women's Political Representation and re-visioning Gender Politics' at Vagamon, Kerala. The workshop was supported by Vikas Adhyayan Kendra (VAK), Mumbai, and the South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE). Eighty participants from five South Indian States participated in the Workshop.

On October 28th evening, about 80 women gathered from various regions and interacted among themselves. The self introductory session started at 6 PM with an introductory note by Dr. C. Lakshmanan. After the self introductory session Dr. Lakshmanan introduced the theme and objectives of the workshop which is to build the broadest possible unity in the movement, with a common perspective of the oppressed sections of the society with a gender focus. This alone will be able to pave the way towards the transformation of the society. (The ultimate goal, of course, is the creation of just and humane society without caste and class, without gender discrimination and with rational and sustainable use of resources.

In the introductory session, he remarked, "The age of globalization and climate change has badly affected the living conditions of women and subjugated communities'. To tackle the issues of marginalization and deprived social status, it is essential to ensure the representation of such communities in public sphere, especially the representation of women. With a view to address the complexity of the issues and dilemmas of protest movements in the course of their encounter with day-to-day realities, we perceived it as essential to constitute a deliberative mechanism".

In the political arena the increasing visibility of Dalit women in local power structures as Sarpanch or member of the Panchayat and assertion of equal rights and upward social mobility has led to increased backlash against Dalit women. The backlash is expressed through a range of humiliating practices that often culminates in rape, or hacking to death of

their kinsmen as indicated by growing atrocities against Dalits. Such incidents underline the need for Dalit women to define their agenda of emancipation.

Focused Areas of the workshop

The workshop focused on the following issues:

Livelihood and Environmental Issues, Climate change and Land Alienation. Increased incidents of extreme climate change are making severe adverse impact on women and the burden of this climate crisis is borne by people living in poverty in rural areas. The impact is severally hitting farmers, peasants, pastoralists, fisher-folk and other marginalized groups.

The assigning of SEZs literally looted the land of people and massively uprooted them from their ancestral property. This is clear evidence from the case of Moolampally, Cochin, Kerala. A group of people were evicted from their traditional land for Vallarpaadam Project. They demanded rehabilitation facilities and support of the state to rebuild their lives. It was in 2008, that the evictees filed a writ petition against state. What happens in other states/regions such as that of Goa is not different. The grabbing of land for SEZ has lashed out grassroots communities all over India.

Women's Movement and its Impact.

A critical interrogation on the character of the women's movements in India is another area of inquiry. It is conceived that the Women's movement in India also confronts the state as the State embodies patriarchy and fails to fulfill its constitutional obligations. The State's response to the women movement was throwing some token concessions, through patriarchal legal amendment with glaring loopholes to co-opt it. The women's movement also exposed the character of the State as a powerful conglomeration of vested upper class/caste and it's main interest which is to oppresses and discriminate against women.

The session started with the lighting up of the lamp. The workshop inaugurated by Gabriele Dietrich. She covered the entire history of women's movements and movements of people resistance in India, their issues and challenges in critical perspective. She urged the people to articulate their need through the struggles and shared her experiences with the grassroots level movements across the country. She pointed out the need of general class movement including all sections of the population with emphasis on human dignity beyond the identity politics. Cultural assertion of the Dalits is important in order to get solidarity among with other forms of movement. But she articulated significance of Dalit women to join other marginalized and exploited groups so that Dalit women's movements do not remain isolated. She narrated the similarities and the general human concerns of various struggles such as Chittal construction worker's problem, violence of the state against Maoist movement, land grabbing in Nagaland, struggles against the SEZ and the Narmada struggle against the eviction of the people from their land. Land grabbing issues and the destruction of natural resources are the central focus of her presentation. She demanded that Dalit and Adivasi question have to be viewed in the larger power question of capitalist and patriarchal structure. She argues that the Dalits have to join with the other organizations working for the general cause of marginalized and exploited. The new untouchability in the form of no opportunity to work and no space for habitat is taking place in today's age of globalization. So it is the need of the hour that the Dalit Women should join with other organizations striving to change new forms of untouchability in the context of the livelihood struggles. For the constructive struggle needs enhancement of understanding about prevailing political economy, workshop of this would not only enrich the understanding but also equip activists to the strengthen and conscientious people. She consolidation and solidarity among different new social movements is need of the hour, programme of this would cement such possibilities.

The next presentation was delivered by Suneetha, Research Scholar, Working on the Special Economic Zone, Hyderabad. She presented a paper on SEZ and its impact on the marginalized. SEZ are the Special

Economic Zones where Indian labour laws are not applicable and they become virtually foreign lands. She presented case studies from Orissa and Andhra Pradesh. SEZ policy was announced in 2000 and the Act enacted without any discussion in the parliament, immediately came into force in 2005. The main objectives of SEZ policy is generation of additional economic activity, promotion of exports of goods and services, promotion of investments etc. *There are 578 SEZs formally approved 322 are notified in India.

She expounded the Impact of SEZs on Women as follows:

- Women lost their livelihood primarily from land base livelihood, collection of fuel wood, small scale agriculture, grafting and fishing.
- SEZ are taking away political rights and dignity depriving of Dalit women's opportunities for self improvements such as education
- Agriculture sector has been transformed into the easier money making industry such as floriculture and horticulture for export.
- Women Agriculture-workers are deprived of compensation
- Women members of SHG are cut off as beneficiaries from all development programmes.

Today land grabbing has become a regular phenomena. So that contestation for land is very important as government is grabbing all over India.

Organizing people specially the unorganized and marginalized is very important but unfortunately Dalit organizations are more male dominated leadership and become patriarchal. Women need to play a very important role and should be strong enough.

In her concluding remark Suneetha emphasized there is a need to revised the issue of SEZs in different parts of the country. As already mentioned it is the poor and particularly the Dalit are not going to get any share in the process of this growth. People are being displaced forcefully from one place to another and being sacrificed for the growth of neo-liberal economic growth. It is the MNC and Indian big

business that make their economic gain through use of land acquired under SEZ.

Therefore for the protection of land and to resist the grabbing of the land by the state in the name of SEZ, it is important to initiate national land struggle under the leadership of Dalit women, most affected by the process.

Education

Dr. Jeebanlata Salam, Programme for the Study of Discrimination and I Exclusion School Social Science, Jawaharlal Nehru University, spoke on the Right to Education Act 2010 and its implications for Dalit and Tribal girl children, in particular. In her main lines of articulation, she argues the crucial role of civil society interventions in the Right to Education bill, 2004 that provided the background of the RTE Act, 2010. She critically highlighted the shifting of the roles and functions of the state in ensuring quality education to children of marginalized communities whose children have been facing empowerment and extremely challenging school environment. Secondly, she protested against the state for removing Early Childhood Care Education, that takes care of children from 0-6 years age group from the bill since ECCE is a feeder and a support to millions of children of urban slum dwellers, casual workers, landless laborers, artisans and destitute families. She further highlighted the case studies of Ganganagar and Dungarpur districts of Rajasthan where education of Dalit and girls children are extremely discouraged to the extent that every girl child sent to school are drop out. That RTE however, empowering, remains an illusion for these communities unless the state and civil society sectors address the issue of social, cultural, political and economic exclusion faced by them, and a host of stubborn social norms such as impinging patriarchy, feudalism, structural violence against Dalits and Tribes in multiple forms.

Jane Peter, a social activist and lecturer in history from UC college, Aluva presented a paper on the history of education in Kerala with special reference to Dalit Community. In the course of discussion a starting reality on Kerala's education sector was revealed by Dr. George K Alex that only 0.7% Dalits are acquired higher education and nearly 13 % of the Dalit youth received secondary level education. Dalits

could only avail public education facilities in the state. The process of globalization constantly alienating educational resources from Dalit community. Due to the acceleration of privatization more than 3000 schools in public sector are going to close shortly, which are identified as uneconomic institutions. The impact on this should be on the state of Dalits are alarming.

Fishing Sector

The narrative from fishing sector gave a detailed presentation on the problems and issues faced by them. Traditionally, women have played a central role in fisher communities' everyday life starting from home making, to marketing the fish and to managing the finances of the household. Women had the traditional right over the fish catch. However, now their role has changed drastically and has left them at the mercy of the market mechanism as most of the fish is sold out even before it reaches as shore.

Due to changes in sea level temperature rise, tropical storms, cyclones have severely affected fisher people's livelihood patterns and wellbeing of the fishing community. Fisher-folk, naturally the most deprived communities are more vulnerable to ecological changes. The depletion of fish resources due to climate change, post-tsunami effects in the coastal economy and the destruction of marine ecology has resulted in pushing the prices of fish further up beyond the reach of the traditional fisher women.

Post-tsunami reconstruction policies adopted by the state led to many of the fishing communities being displaced from their own villages and consequently, fisher women have lost access to the sea and to the fish market. The new communication technology which is only accessible to big merchants has further marginalized traditional fish women vendors. Big merchants use mobile phones and faster modes of transportation to take the fish to the market and are able to fix the prices according to market demands.

The recent Coastal Regulation Zone notification would cause widespread destruction to the livelihood of fishing communities and other poor communities in the coastal areas, resulting in damage to coastal ecology and marine resources. The Fisher communities are engaged in a continuous struggle to protect their livelihood marine resources and

habitant. The struggle is still going on to prevent their implementation of the coastal regulation zone.

Handloom Sector

The traditional handloom sector is gripped by severe crisis and faces threat of extinction largely due to the unfavourable National Textile Policy (Sathyam Committee report 2000) and under the impact of globalization and free-market policies under the WTO Regime. As a result the handloom workers in Kerala and in other states facing a threat of livelihood and employment. Traditional handloom weavers are losing their skills, employments and livelihood as a result of declining demand for handloom products and the exorbitant cost involved in procuring yarn and other raw-materials for production of cloth. The cooperative societies promoted by the state government are controlled by the rich and powerful political lobbies who also control the textile markets and deny market access to handloom products.

The weavers' communities are marginalized, and are at survival risk. Child labours among the weaving communities are rampant and we can witness numerous child labours working in the looms for survival. Literacy is very low among them. Even cases of child prostitution is notable in the handloom sector since Kovalam, International Tourist Centre is eight kms away from Balaramapuram. Their illiteracy is exploited by other sections of the society. Most of them are even not aware of how to calculate. The master weavers also take advantage of women handloom weavers' illiteracy by providing low salary for their work.

Due to decline of handloom industry large number of women especially those from Dalit and other backward caste suffer the most. The panelist demanded that there should be a special social support system from the state for the revival of traditional handloom sector and this will enhance the empowerment and dignity of women working in this sector.

Cashew sectors.

The narrative of women from cashew sectors focused on the severe unemployment faced by them. In search for higher profit several cashew factories have been shifted to Tamil Nadu where the labour cost is

less compared to Kerala. The impact of the shifting of the cashew factories, the women suffer the most. The majority of women working in the cashew industry are Dalit women. Several state owned cashew factories are closing down or function with its under utilization of production capacities, there is very little change of survival of handloom sector. With the new market policy for raw-materials and free market under WTO regime and modernization of production favouring the private sector companies. State is gradually withdrawing from providing support to maintain the production at optimal level in the State owned industries. The division of the workers along political affiliation is causing disunity among the workers and their by losing their bargaining power for better working condition and wage.

The majority of cashew women workers are from Dalit communities. But division along class the caste are factors affecting the unity of women workers in this sectors. The political context demands that overcoming caste/class differences is imperative for women to get united and take up leadership to develop autonomous women's forum to fight against all the divisive forces

Gender and Agriculture

Monoculture for export, supported by high technology inputs and processes – from chemicals and genetically manipulated seeds to computer-controlled irrigation-fundamentally alter traditional production, social relationships and knowledge systems. Instead of crop diversity assuring food choices and genetic diversity (upon which future agricultural production is dependent), monoculture reduces production to a few high cash-value crops for export. Export orientation effects food security as production is no longer for personal and community sustenance. The sale of the product in far away places even affects food security where the sale occurs by depressing local prices and therefore by discouraging local production.

The panelist maintained that Globalised agriculture is also discriminatory in relation to gender and social class. In traditional, community-oriented agriculture, women frequently have key roles; in mechanized, 'globalised' agriculture these roles are lost or assumed by men in the money economy.

Peasants tend to lose their land to big corporations, often TNCs and become agricultural workers for the new owners, affecting social class composition and relations.

Recovery of Dalit Literature, Art, Poetry

Dr. Muse Mary George, presented a paper on "Narratives on Womenhood" which said "A male dominant view on Womenhood subscribed by women writers is an issue in literature which unquestionably accept the mainstream male aesthetics. The contemporary feminist writers challenge is to critically engage with the male oriented aesthetics and cultural domain.

Dr. Mini Alice presented a paper on feminist poetry in Kerala. Politically women writers are little antagonistic towards patriarchal structure. But there are new representational forms are illuminated through the writings of Muse Mary, CS Chandrika et.al. have mentioned in the presentation.

The panelist in their presentation stressed the importance of defending the cultural resources of the Dalit which are increasingly being under attack. This is at a time when they are subject to renewed assaults by forces of economic globalisation as well as by the homogenizing global cultural hegemony, destroying their life and cultural specificities under the banner of assimilation.

This deliberate exclusion of Dalits along with their subjective experiences in the mainstream literature is a great humiliation. It is a denial of their very existence as human beings. Another aspect to this humiliation is the denial of education to all the lower castes, which resulted in curbing the development of any authentic rendering of Dalit and other lower caste experiences in the form of literature. Even if Dalits (other lower castes) managed to educate themselves by their own effort, harsh and inhuman punishments were given as deterrence for other Dalits. This kind of mistreatment and denial of education to a subordinate group is unique to Dalits unlike any other subaltern groups in history.

Literature becomes a weapon in the hands of Brahmins to maintain their hegemony over the rest of the society. It is also used to provide a worldview that is conducive to this project. In this literary world,

Brahmins and those who fight for maintaining the social order were portrayed as heroes. Myths, stories and other kinds of fiction were written to show the supremacy of the Brahmins over the rest, and any personality who challenged this view is depicted as a villain. Gods were portrayed as beings that had similar features as Brahmins, and who acknowledge the supremacy of Brahmins. Demons were portrayed as having the features (with exaggeration) of the lowly.

The dominant themes, underlying their writings, are self discovery, pain and humiliation, self and community transcendence of victimhood, combined with the construction of a new psycho-structure and collective self, as the new social agency for overcoming humiliation, - fighting against exploitation, assertion of rights struggles for social and cultural equality.

The new generation of Dalit writers now faces new set of challenges: the material and socio, cultural traditions and identity and practices have come under increasing attack in the past few decades. Their cultural space is increasingly being squeezed out. The inherent civilizing, mainstreaming and commodification of traditional cultural forms with utter disregard for their world views have pushed Dalit into a state of cultural marginalization and identity crisis.

Apart from the academic session, the participants were provided with additional reading material related to the diverse aspects of the contemporary political economy, which were published in various reputed journals and books. The based on readings different groups mutually elucidated the articles and had extensive discussions.

There was also a group sharing session, in which individual experiences and struggle were shared among the participants. Particularly, one relating to Ms. Alamelu, Rural Women Development Trust, Salem with among the Aruthathiyar community (one of the poorest among the Dalits), in her testimony she narrated her encounter with police, local dominant caste and men among the Dalit. She gives long list of her involvement in resolving many atrocities which Dalit women rape, murder and other forms discriminations. Her plea for solidarity and sought support for documenting the struggle. Listening her

narrative one could comprehend the intensity of courage.

Concluding sessions was chaired by Dr. Somashkhar and Ajit Muricken.

Mr. Ajit Muricken after summarizing the 4-day celebration emphasized the present political challenges and the task before the new social movements. The major tasks are building the broadest possible unity in movement, with a common perspective of the oppressed sections of the society. This alone will be able to pave the way towards the transformation of the society. (The ultimate goal, of course, is the creation of a just and humane society without caste and class, without gender discrimination and with rational and sustainable use of resources). The unity is at three levels.

Revival of the cultural front, movement and action not only to reiterate and revive the earlier positions but also to creatively develop the cultural critique and upsurge so that the new and contemporary issues are also addressed and the formulations become even more rich and relevant. The gender and environmental questions, in particular, along with a critique of consumerist and acquisitive values need to be included in the new formulations.

A struggle for land is necessary since landlessness is a key element in the exploitation and oppression of the Dalits and the Other Oppressed Castes. The struggle should not be confined to mere plots of land which

are soon lost but also to demands for credits, inputs and other supports so that the land becomes viable and supports sustenance.

Right to sustained livelihood is the crucial and immediate issue for the masses in situations of increasing rural unemployment and resultant destitution.

In his concluding remark Dr. Somashekhar spelt out the need for strengthening autonomous women's movements and emphasized that autonomous Dalit women has the potential create a new political discourse and praxis to make a new paradigm shift from the narrow identity politics (which is patriarchal) into larger domains of contestations that have a bearing on uniting all the oppressed caste/class for a new emancipatory politics.

In his concluding remark Dr. Somashekhar also spelt out the following agenda for continuing the struggle for dignity and rights. The issues are:

- Protection of Survival and Sustenance,
- Protection of Resources and Environment,
- Protection of Identities, Autonomies and Pluralities,
- Protection of Human and Democratic Rights,
- Protection of Cultures and Communities.

Prepared by Dr. Lakshmanan & Dr. Alex.



Declaration

We the Dalit women and men from Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Pondichery assembled at Vagamon, in Western Ghats during 27-31st October 2010 realize that we continue to face multiple oppressions and destitution. The caste structure and patriarchy are continuously haunting the economic, political and cultural policies of the state and the norms and creeds of the civil society. It is time, late but not too late, that we get ready to affirm ourselves to recapture our destinies. We find we are dispersed due to many reasons, yet the intensity of our experiences and shared realities compel us to join hands with our sisters and

comrades all over India. We deliberated on the roots of inequities and oppression, emerging forms of widening inequalities and destructive structural changes. We expressed the imprints of violence on the soul and body of Dalit women and also on women and the toiling classes in general. The onslaught of globalization and neo-liberal policies has deteriorated the plight of the marginalized sections; they are uprooted from the soil, deprived of livelihood and access to natural resources. The neo liberal development paradigm is rooted in patriarchal hegemony. The three day deliberations facilitated to realize the objective conditions of the

marginalized women and working class, towards consolidation and solidarity with the Struggles of different new social movements. We have identified four significant areas of alliance hereby.

Right to Work

The process of Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization (LPG) affect women severely in many forms such as in their materiality and their self-hood. Right to Work is inherent in the right to life and livelihood. The onslaught on agriculture has wiped out agricultural labour from their traditional workplaces, alongside with mechanization and climate change. SEZ policies have also contributed to widespread land grab by companies, alienation of puramboke lands and displacement. This leads to migration and ultimately bonded labor, about which governments are in total denial. The gender discrimination at work denies working space for women. The existing work culture is a male defined one. Its time and space is structured by the, male. We the women decide to remake and recreate female spaces and time frames. Right to work provides visibility to women. As invisible creature for centuries, we have been negated, dejected and dispersed from public spaces, thus privatized, objectified and our bodies marketized. At this time we are claiming our subjective identity.

For Gender Equality

We, Dalit women continue to be perceived as the lowest of human beings. We face multiple and complex forms of discrimination and humiliation every day. In spite of all the policy level reservations that supposedly protect us to a certain extent, the inhuman modes of communication with us continue merely because we are women and dalit. Our problems need to be recognized within male dominated dalit organizations, workers' unions in the unorganized sector and environment movements. We also need to join hands with adivasis and indigenous people in the North East suffering violent onslaught of police forces and army due to the prevailing climate of militarization in our country under the slogan of War on Terror. We need to organize consciousness raising exercises to fight the culture of violence and despoliation of human dignity. We dalit women realize that unless we oppose all forms of discrimination, we will continue to be humiliated as women.

Food Security

Multiple forms of scarcities threaten the very existence of humanity, especially women in marginalized sector. Women have been conceived as progenitors and nurturers of the human race and have sustained numerous generations with their toil. Malnutrition, scarcity of food, claims for water and fuel are constantly threatening their very existence. However, the claim for bread is pertinent, and we realized the imperative to establish a Special Food Security Environment (SFSE) for women. We support the struggles of the National Campaign for Food Security and Right to Work. For ensuring food security as a programme it is necessary to liberate lands from the male-hands, MNCs and Market forces and to struggle to make deeds on family lands under female head. To launch a female land right movement to ensure food security is inevitable.

Organize the Unorganized

Under the pressure of globalization traditional sectors are facing server employment crisis and Women are the most affected by this crisis. Most women eke out a living from traditional sector. The onslaught of capitalism dissolved traditional sectors such as Coir, Handloom, Cashew workers and Bamboo etc. The trade union movements are ineffective to find a permanent solution. As women workers from traditional and house-hold industries, we are largely dispersed but our issues are similar. We are facing common threats and scarcities. We need to join together in Unions in the unorganized sector for our very existence. This is our affirmation to unify ourselves to overcome our common threats and agonies.

We the dalit women, the fragmented and scattered, affirm our resolve to build solidarity and support for the empowerment of women who may be further marginalised by the fact of their own identity - - as adivasis, dalits, rural and poor women religious minorities, lesbian and bisexual people etc. We also join mass struggles for a people and nature centered development model focused on production of life and livelihood instead of production for profit.

Summary Report of Climate Conference

1. Name Of Activity:

South Asia Regional Conference on Climate Change and its implications on lives and livelihood of poor people (As per work plan 2010, activity no. 1.1.7)

2. Background, context and rationale for undertaking the activity

Background

Climate crisis has become the scourge on humanity threatening lives and livelihoods in most devastating ways. The serious impacts are being felt on the food and agriculture and food Sovereignty/security of the world and on its majority practitioners - the small food producers, fisher folks and herders and particularly the indigenous peoples, Dalits (Scheduled Caste) and the women. People of South Asia have faced natural disasters' like floods, cyclones, drought and famine as direct consequences of the climate change and wide-ranging impacts with catastrophic magnitude is predicted in the future.

In this dreadful circumstance of developing countries, developed countries; responsible for climate change seems reckless, manifested from the failure of COP15, 16 and etc with their lack of commitment to comply Bali action plan and Kyoto protocol. On the other hand, people's movements around the world are demanding climate justice. They have proposed Food Sovereignty as best alternatives of present paradigm of development to reduce the damage to the nature and natural processes. In one side peoples' movement are calling for the peasants' agriculture to deal with climate crisis but in the next side developed countries are talking about business but not the climate. Whether it is Green Marshall Plan or Bali action plan, until and unless developed countries take the responsibility and pledge on mitigation and adaptation, the situation

remains unchanged.

South Asia is vulnerable to climate change because of its unique topography and fragile mountain ecosystem. The renowned 1600 KM long Hindu Kush Himalayan range crosses almost all countries. There are over 3,000 glaciers and 2,000 glacial lakes along with 6,000 rivers in Nepal only where as the Himalaya is the main source of fresh water in most of the countries of SA accounting for as much as 70% of the summer flow in the Ganges and 50-60% of the flows in Asia's great rivers. Himalayan region, which is considered as Asia's "water tower" and quenches the thirst of billions of people in South Asia region, while also catering to irrigation, hydropower generation, and other recreational services is warming faster than any other region in the world thus rapidly increasing temperature in this region is a major threat to sensitive sectors like agriculture, biodiversity, water and health (Oxfam International, 2009; Local Initiatives for Biodiversity, Research and Development (LI-BIRD), 2008).

South Asia, the home of more than one and half billions people is mostly dependent on agriculture and natural resource. Having the high population of small and family farmers, indigenous groups and poor, the dependence of people in natural climatic condition is very high as compared to any other part of the world. Due to its direct effect on Nature and natural resource, climate variability and change can affect the quality, quantity, and reliability of many of the services natural resources provide. This has a critical impact on food intake, health, and livelihoods of poor people. It can lead to poverty and hunger through direct and indirect routes. Direct impacts are severe and repeated climate shocks can push vulnerable households into a persistent poverty trap.

At the same time, the poor are typically forced to live in marginal lands (e.g. flood-prone, degraded soil, etc) and in living conditions which “are predisposing conditions to ill health”. This includes low quality housing, bad sanitation, and unprotected sources of drinking water, which juxtaposed with undernourishment and deficient health care, makes them highly prone to air and water-borne diseases. The poor are generally dependent on subsistence activities involving extraction of natural resources, which are vulnerable to climate change.

Temperature rise negatively impacts rice and wheat yields in tropical parts of South Asia where these crops are already being grown close to their temperature tolerance threshold. While direct impacts are associated with rise in temperatures, indirect impacts due to water availability and changing soil moisture status and pest and still more disease incidence are likely to be felt. Agriculture is the mainstay of several economies in South Asia as well as the largest source of employment and single largest contributor to the GDP in the region. As three-fifth of the cropped area is rainfed, the economy of South Asia hinges critically on the annual success of the monsoons, indicative of the well-being of millions. In the event of a failure, the worst affected are the landless and the poor whose sole source of income is from agriculture and its allied activities. So, the livelihood and employment of marginalized and poor communities of south Asia is in serious threat due to climate change.

The Kyoto Protocol is on the verge of expiry and it has not been revised and followed. The REDD, Carbon trading and Climate funds has been used to exploit the resource of developing countries by capitalist countries and bring the WTO, IMF and other neo-liberal and imperialist agents within the climate issues. So, we have responsibility to resist against the inhuman act. We, CSO as a peoples’

organization are expected to raise our voices in their favor and work for their interest. It is the right time for us when SAARC has also raised this issue and SAAPE is in the process of engaging with SAARC.

We have realized that present profit oriented model of development always looks for the profit from us in various forms and names. The solution proposed by them hasn’t work and can’t work. So, it was civil society who had a role to play in planning, policy intervention and advocacy and campaigning addressing climate change issue. It was important that, the policy and program execution by both public and civil sector should recognize social sensitivity. Extensive Research on impact assessment and documentation of adaptation strategies followed by dissipation of such effective strategies has to be done. The locally adaptive high-yielding and drought- (even flood) tolerant varieties should be promoted. At the same time, there should be set some strategies based on the common principle to control the emissions of Developed Countries. Though called developed countries should bear the cost of the damage for which they are responsible. They should take the responsibility. Also, climate-forecasting system for reducing hazards and interactive communication for technologies transfer to farmers about climate change and its impacts on vulnerable groups should be developed and made accessible to common people. So, establishing Food sovereignty as an environment friendly and culturally adaptive development approach for farmers to reduce the potential hazard of liberal economy is our call against the false problematic model.

Adaptation is the short term strategy to cope with change and reduce the loss since the change can’t be reversed and mitigation is long term solution to be started immediately to save the nature and humanity from further damage. SAARC has also realized climate crisis as one of the prioritized agenda from

Dhaka summit. But little has done to materialize the declaration. At the historical juncture when SAAPE as a largest CSO have influence on SAARC process, it was the right time for SAAPE RTFO to share the experiences, widely discuss on the issue, formulate plans and policies and act both at grassroots and policy level for the climate justice and formulate adaptation and mitigation strategies. All Nepal Peasants' Federation, Regional Thematic Focal Organization, SAAPE organized the climate conference in this milieu.

Context

We have come to realize that the modern ways of man has placed an enormous stress on the Earth disturbing the natural system of globe: some weather phenomenon has become more frequent and intense while other has become less frequent and intense. The result of the emission of greenhouse gases contributing to the global warming has already resulted in melting of the polar ice caps, rise in sea level, depletion of ozone layer, loss of different species and there is serious impact on livelihood of people. Climatic crisis at present scenario is major form of environment crisis which is not only threatening the livelihood of billions of poor farmers around the world but also the existence of many species around the around. Climate change scenarios predict adverse environmental and socio-economic consequences including frequency and intensity of heat waves, droughts, floods, and typhoons; altered ecosystems; reduced output and productivity of the agriculture, fishery and forestry sectors, loss of livelihood, food insecurity and diminished supplies; and heightened incidence of certain diseases and pests on people, animals and plants. The brunt of these will be borne by poor people and communities who are most dependent on the land and natural resources for their food, livelihood, fuel and medicine yet less equipped to cope to natural disasters and weather variations. South Asian people

are particularly affected because of feudalism, neo-liberalism and socio-cultural hierarchy. Also, due to its fragile mountain ecosystem, weak geological condition, poor economic efficiency and diverse nature of climate, risks are higher in agriculture and other components that constitute the livelihood of rural populations in South Asia. Climate change and its impending hazards, at the present scenario of environmental crisis, has appeared as the most catastrophic threats especially to the small, rural farmers of poor nation depending on natural climatic cycle as their underdeveloped state fails to meet its obligations. Farming is one of the most sensitive fields in response to weather condition of wind, rainfall, hailstone, snowfall, drought, temperature etc. So, the farmers and peasants of underdeveloped countries are at the high risk and are adversely suffering from the catastrophes as the impacts are rampant. This unprecedented climate has serious impacts on people depending on nature and natural climatic conditions for their survival and are worst suffered due to the disaster. Thus, Climate Change is a serious risk to poverty reduction and threatens to development efforts as well as it is the main issue that challenges Food Sovereignty, livelihood and employment.

Rationale

One of the region which is worst suffered from climate change hazards in the world is South Asia due to that millions of poor depending on nature, natural resource and agriculture live in the region and geographically it is more prone to snow melting, sea level rise, loss of traditional varieties of plants and animals. It is the paradox of 21st century world civilization that almost nothing has been done to address the problems from the policy and planning level. Ironically, at local level our communities are contributing both to reduce the impacts and lessen the emissions. Climate information, new eco-friendly

technologies or other adaptation strategies can be considered very significant in this regards but the world has not accomplished it satisfactorily. As we know that climate change is happening and will increasingly affect the poor and adaptation is necessary, to reduce the impacts and help in resiliency and adaptation, South Asian Climate Change conferences was of great importance.

Addressing that climate change is substantively posing direct threat to sustainable development and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in South Asian countries, which have little or no responsibility for the current process of climate change. Addressing that economic and social development and environmental protection are interdependent and mutually reinforcing, and are essential for food security and a better quality of life that is in serious jeopardy due to the disasters caused by climate change (Dhaka Summit, SAARC). Realizing that not only SAARC but also every reports on climate change has recognized South Asia as most vulnerable region to climate change and thereby seriously affecting our agricultural production, crippling our vital infrastructures, diminishing our natural resources and limiting our development options for the future and thus threatening biodiversity, rendering the livelihood of our people to serious risk, hindering the development and thwarting sustained economic growth. Recognizing that sustainable development is the best and most appropriate way to address the threat of climate change and accelerating the process of development is essential in order to build up capacity in the region to cope with likely adverse effects of climate change. It was thus urgent that SAAPE should involve seriously and take some concrete decision in this regard. It is expected that reflecting the voice of voiceless and power of powerless, SAAPE should initiate to address the Food Sovereignty and livelihood

of Peasants and marginalized farmers. The conference was the result. Therefore, when it was very important to clarify the position of SAAPE on commonly called the Bali Road Map including the Bali Action Plan with its four building blocks – Mitigation, Adaptation, Technology Transfer, and Finance and Investment. It was equally important to bring out the civil society perspectives and plan at the verge of expiry of Kyoto protocol and set standards by this meeting? What is the role of SAAPE to save diversity and commonality of interest in the economy, culture, and natural-resource-endowments of the SAARC region, that contain the high mountain ranges with their unique ecosystems, low lying areas, and Small Island States, hills and mountains that offer livelihood for the people, the vast ocean and the seas, the richly endowed biodiversity resources that include the coral reefs and the mangroves, the rocky and sandy deserts, numerous rivers and estuaries that offer livelihood opportunities to millions of our people, which are to be protected for the present and the future generations. How do we, SAAPE, realize the urgency of the immediate need for dealing with the onslaught of climate change including sea level rise, on meeting food, water and energy needs, and taking measures to ensure the livelihood security of our peoples in the South Asia region.

Having responsibility to the needs of our countries and interest and expectation of communities to initiate programs for adaptation measures to diverse impacts of climate change, capacity building and other measures, which, if pursued collectively, will empower millions of poor, the positive steps should taken in terms of awareness raising and other such steps for further upgrading our efforts with appropriate human resources development and cooperation with national and international actors and academia, that exists within our region, this conference was designed. It was organized

to call for the social and environmental justice and respect the mother earth. It was important to denounce the attempts of North to commercialize the essential elements of life in the benefits of transnational companies and raise the subaltern voices.

3. Objectives

This conference was designed to

1. To review the general trends and impacts of climate change of SA on lives and livelihood of poor people
2. To assess the peoples' resilience and impacts/ effectiveness of various existing plans and programs on climate change regards.
3. To plan and formulate strategies on reducing the impacts and mitigating the emissions at local, regional and global level.
4. To build up networking, strengthen the SAAPE movement and design a long term path on its thematic issue
5. To publicize the issue of climate change and attract concern of all stakeholders

4. Methods and process of implementation

The South Asian stakeholders participated in a conference organized by All Nepal Peasants' Federation Regional thematic focal organization on Food sovereignty, climate change, livelihood and employment, SAAPE. The conference was held successfully on 1, and 2 January 2011 which discussed on climate crisis and formulated plans and programs for the coming years. The delegates including SAAPE Thematic members, South Asian Climate activist/experts, CSO leader, Peasants and small farmers, Media Personnel, Youth, Women and Indigenous people, agricultural scientists participated actively shared their experiences and expertise and developed strategies to solve the problem of climate crisis. The following activities were done serially to achieve the objectives of program

1. Experience Sharing: Preparation/

presentation of Country report and briefing paper

2. Interaction: Discussion and assessment of impacts and response of the communities

3. Existing Policy, plans and its execution; Peoples' understanding

4. Local-global linkage: SAARC, other international actors, SAAPE and climate struggle

5. Formulation of plans, policies and strategies

6. Conclusion: Declaration

5. Achievements

- More than 70 CSO representatives and experts from South Asia including 4 from India, 3 from Bangladesh, 2 from Pakistan, one from Sri Lanka and more than 60 from Nepal Participated
- ANPFa chairperson and former deputy prime minister of Nepal inaugurated the program and presented his paper on neo-liberalism and climate crisis
- Impacts of climate crisis in each participating country shared and discussed
- Impacts of Climate Change and Adaptive response of people and communities in each country Assessed
- Mitigation and Adaptive strategies and policies from peoples' perspectives Planned and formulated
- Publicity and advocacy for climate justice and climate finance
- Networking strengthen on South Asian climate issue movement
- Lobbying plus Policy Intervention initiated
- Wider stakeholders influenced on the issues of climate crisis and SAAPE movement

6. Lesson learnt:

It is learnt from the conference that such

program are very effective to share ideas and formulate plans and policies. The participatory discussion and group division was very fruitful in achieving the set objectives of program.

7. Good practices: Political personalities engaged in the climate and agriculture field, Hon. Former deputy Prime Minister of Nepal Com. Bamdev Gautam and General Secretary of All India Kisan Sabha, Atul Anjaan from India participated in the program. It was highly effective and relevant both to discuss the politics of climate change as well as influence the policy makers besides attracting media and public attention.

8. Conclusions

The climate conference was highly successful in formulating CSO plans and strategies to reduce the impacts the climate change on lives and livelihood of small and landless peasants on the basis of sharing of experience and assessment of impacts.

9. Results

a. Policy level results

- Awareness increased and CSO network influenced (Publicity and Declaration)
- Plans and Programs to work jointly for the mitigation and adaptation Formulated

(Decisions and Declaration)

- Team Building: The conference built a strong solidarity and created a forum to work jointly on the issue at regional level
- Networking Benefits-Strong and coherent networker built among the participants.
- The message of Peasants agriculture cools the planet, rights of the mother earth reached to thousands of South Asian peasants
- Thousands of people were aware of the SAAPE thematic stands on climate regards

b. Program level results

- Sharing of experiences on Climate crisis in each of the participating countries
- Assessments and analysis of adaptive response and resilience of peasants across the region
- Media participation and publicity
- Achievements of objectives

10. Variance—Pramesh Pokharel ACC SAAPE/ RTFO food sovereignty, climate change, livelihood and employment ANPFa, Kathmandu, Nepal Reporting Date: January 6, 2011



Kathmandu declaration on climate crisis

Adopted in the South Asia Regional Conference on Climate Change organized by ANPFa,

1st and 2nd January 2011

We the representatives farmers' organizations, political organizations and parties, civil society organizations and non government organizations from Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Nepal having gathered at Katmandu on 1st and 2nd January 2011, with the objective of discussing multiple impacts of climate change including its impact on food sovereignty in the South Asia

express our deepest concern over the vulnerability of the region to climate change, devastating impacts of climate change on lives, food sovereignty, culture of people and especially marginalized people and women, and voice our dissent in the strongest possible manner on the outcomes of on going UNFCCC negotiations, and lament lack of serious and effective policies and

steps of our National governments to tackle this climate crisis. We also call upon UNFCCC, national governments in South Asia and other developing countries, regional Institutions like SAARC, and the civil society to lead expedited efforts to intensify the struggle for seeking pro people solutions to this crisis, based upon the principles of common but differentiated responsibility, climate equity and justice and other principles enshrined in international human rights covenants including UNFCCC, and human rights based approach to development.

We express our grave concern on climate change impacts in South Asia, that it is already having serious impacts especially on our food sovereignty. South Asia is the region of world highest number i.e., 40 % of poor population, and is also highly conflict torn region. Though the regional per capita emission of South Asia is around 0.2 to 10 tons; South Asia is the worse victim of climate impact. According to the IPCC one third of Bangladesh and all most all coastal area of India will be lost due to sea rise. Himalayan glaciers has the probability to complete meltdown, which will create severe drinking water crisis over the entire region. Due to temperature rise and climate variability there will be 35 to 40 % crop loss especially in rain fed regions. Displacement of more than 50 million people mostly farmers and poor is also predicted. Economies of the almost all the countries will be severely affected slowing down the rate of growth and equitable development in the region.

We have already observed the impacts in recent (2010) Pakistan floods, which affected all most half of the country and 20 million people and their life and livelihood. Repeated cyclones in Bangladesh recently (cyclone Aila in 2007 and Sidr in 2009) caused loss of 4500 lives and damages amounting to \$ 3 billions. We stand in solidarity to the people whose lives have been devastated in these calamities.

We have also observed challenges presented by the climate crisis to the highly stressed food sovereignty situation in the region,. Which will not only affect the region but the entire world. Bangladesh is a major importing country, while

Nepal, India and Pakistan are also hardly food self sufficient. Internally in South Asia, food distribution is also unequal, commensurate to the enhancing trend of income disparity, a large (not less then 30 to 40% of the population) number of population depends upon subsidized food supply or by safety net programs. We also observed that how climate change is impacting farmers and farming in the form of rise in temperature, reduction in rainfall and number of rainy days, salinization of soil and water, reduced farm outputs and income, and decrease in production of food, fodder and feed.

We also express our strongest resentment on the inadequate and unbalanced outcomes of the UNFCCC process highly favoring the developed countries and carbon capitalism, and undermining the rights of developing countries, least developed countries and Small island nations. We strongly resist the diversion of the negotiations away from the principles enshrined in the UNFCCC and Kyoto Protocol in the COP 15 and COP 16, and also condemn the Copenhagen Accord and the Cancun Agreement and developing countries submitting to the capitalist and neo-liberal forces.

We call upon our South Asian leaders to take a common position in next UNFCCC, CoP 17, in view of the grave impacts of climate change in the region and demand;

1. Genuine and serious efforts from the developed countries to prevent rise of temperature below 1.5 DC and CO₂ content below 350 ppm.
2. Enhanced emission reduction commitments from Annex 1 countries up to 25-40%, by 2020 (on the basis on 1990 emissions)
3. Recognition of the historical role of Annex 1 countries in bringing world to this crisis and payment of Carbon Debt of at least \$ 100 billions per year.
4. Abolition of all market based mechanisms, which is highly unjust, capitalist and force developing countries

to do all mitigation efforts, while developed countries continue to pollute and further encroach atmospheric space.

5. Transfer of green technology to developing countries without IPR provisions, so that developing countries can benefit from replication and utilization of these technologies.
 6. All climate financing should be in form grant, and which should be additional to the already committed 0.7 % of GDP as aid to the developing countries.
 7. Oppose all sort of involvement of international finance institution (IFI) i.e., World Bank and Asian Development Bank involvement in climate finance.
 8. Respect for the Rights of Mother Earth, which has been a long standing tradition in the South Asian region, and other demands in the declaration of the world peoples Conference on the Rights Of Mother earth and Climate Change held at Bolivia.
 9. Develop a new UN protocol for the climate forced migrants as universal natural person that the developed countries have to take responsibilities of them in accepting their rights to life, shelter, livelihood in view of UNHRD.
- (b) We also urge upon our South Asian leaders,;

1. Respect and recognize that climate change is a regional issue and develop solidarity amongst south Asian countries and they must come up with common minimum regional plan in next Maldives SAARC summit, to be held in November 2011
2. SAARC should take initiative to prepare a study on Assessing on climate impacts in the region, and should prepare Common Agriculture Perspective Plan 2020 in participatory manner looking at the road map for devising common strategy to ensure food sovereignty in the region.

3. Redefine the role and definition of SAARC Food Bank in view of the principles that SAARC food bank is for South Asian hungry people.
4. SAARC should seriously consider on constitution of promotion and preservation of South Asian Seed Bank, as preventing commercialization and corporatization of our local seeds. And as to support national level effort to promote and preservation of our seeds and also to support our community effort in this regard.
5. As South Asian countries share common rivers and where most of the those river source is in Himalayan glaciers, SAARC leaders must come up with common water source sharing and preservation plan so it will facilitate our life line i.e., free water for life and livelihood in South Asia.
6. To immediately implement the declarations issued in the 16th SAARC Summit

We also call upon our national governments in our South Asian regions to take steps to strengthen our national climate resilience and adaptation capacities including;

7. To have a strategic response and action plan based on climate impact assessment done by our national scientists and including the concerns of climate victims, farmers, laborers, and social movements. The plan must be the part of national long term development plan updated regularly.
8. To have constitutional protection to the right of food sovereignty, including rights to food and employment, tillers right to lands, rights for small farmers and share croppers, forest community has rights over forest resources, fisher folk has right over of common water or fishing source, no commercialization of natural resources which will endanger community who is already protecting and whose livelihood depend upon the recycling of those natural resource).

9. Increase public investment in agriculture and strengthen agricultural infrastructure and support services and focusing on preservation and promotion of local seeds system and rights of the small holders and marginal farmers and oppose corporatization of agriculture.

We also call upon our fellow movements, farmers and labors organizations, civil society organizations to

2. Protest and have wider solidarity against neo-liberal forces and carbon capitalism
3. To promote pro farmer and pro poor alternative action researches, especially in respect of sustainable natural resource management and sustainable agriculture.
4. We believe it is the path to uphold the rights of our mother earth and simultaneously ensuring equity and justice in our societies.



Parliamentary round table

Formation of South Asian Parliamentary Forum On food sovereignty

Islamabad

24th January 2011

Two days parliamentary conference demand land rights to the tillers.

Two days round table caucus attend by parliamentarian and civil society representatives from five countries namely Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Nepal. The two day caucus was organized by Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee in coordination with South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication at Islamabad Hotel. It discussed and agreed to form a South Asian Parliamentarian Forum on Food Sovereignty. There are 630 million people in these five countries facing food scarcity and we need to take urgent actions to safe this huge population from further sufferings.

The two days caucus demanded that Mozaraeen of Military and other public Farms should immediately be granted land rights to fight against poverty and hunger among the land less peasantry.

The caucus was attended and addressed by Saeedul Haque MP and chairman standing committee on food and disaster Bangladesh, Mr. Probadh Panda MP Lok Sabha India, Sardar Asif Ahmad Ali federal minister and education

and information technology and former federal foreign minister , Farah Naz Ishfahani MNA, Raheela Baluch MNA, Jamila Gilani MNA, Hamuon Saif Ullah Khan MNA, Riaz Fatyana MNA and chairman parliamentary committee on human rights, Senator Hasil Bizinjo, Senator Dr. Abdul Malik Baluch, Saeed Hashmi provincial minister Baluchistan, Keshab Lal Shershtha former federal minister Nepal, Prem Dangal general secretary All Nepal peasant Federation, Arif Afghani chairman Afghan labour Revolutionary organization, Mustafa Kamal Bangladesh Equity BD, Syed karim Ullah and Syed Abbas Jan Afghanistan.

The two days caucus was also attended by civil society activists and academics and they include Asif Sharif, Professor Maqbool Babri, Dr Ayub Goraya, Mian Aftab Ahmad and Shafqat Nagmi assistant federal secretary ministry of food and agriculture Pakistan and Farooq Tariq secretary Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee,

Giving details of the two days caucus, Riaz Fatyana chairman standing committee on human rights said that the forum will present a comprehensive alternative plan to address the issue of hunger in the all the South Asian

countries. The recommendations included South Asia common market for food and agriculture to enhance the food sovereignty in the region and mutual support during the crisis, to establish agriculture chambers at district level. It suggested ways to ensure adulteration of food and agricultural inputs and products. It was agreed that step should be taken to ensure supply and efficient use of water. It was agreed that access to food as the first and most important human right. It was suggested that the government in the region should rise above the “onion and garlic wars” and support each other in increasing the food availability.

The two days parliamentary round table caucus deliberated and evolved strategies for enhancing food sovereignty and provision of fair wage to agricultural workers and ownership of the land to the peasants. The caucus resolved that one of the most important step for enhancing food sovereignty is land to the tillers and they must have ownership rights of the land that they till.

They rampant privatization of agricultural inputs including fertilizers and pesticides has

increased the cost of the production beyond the reach of the small farmers and has caused the degradation and poisoning of the land and live stock. The multinational companies dealing in agricultural input have put the small farmers under debts and financial crisis by increasing the prices unrealistically. They continue to misguide the farmers towards excessive use of fertilizers and pesticides and government agencies and extension departments of government have miserably failed to provide knowledge and wisdom based advices to the peasants to the extent to the official agriculture department magazine now carries advertisements for the multinational companies and their products. The two days caucus agreed to bring solidarity among the peasant movements in the region. It demanded that government of the region should put an end to the neo liberal policies. It must stop to please WTO and World Bank. WTO has put the agriculture at the mercy of the multinational companies and imperialist countries.

Issued by: Nisar Shah 0300 2147960

Civil Society Demands Suspension Of All Foreign Loans Repayment, Formation Of Commission To Supervise Relief

Press Release

KARACHI, Aug 27, 2010: Speakers at a consultation meeting here on Friday demanded the government that repayment of all foreign loans be suspended forthwith and these amounts be diverted to flood relief and distributed to the provinces in proportion to the magnitude of the devastation caused, size of the IDPs and other related factors.

They demanded that an independent Commission be appointed to negotiate the terms with donors and be entrusted with the task of supervising the distribution of these funds as well as all other relief aid funds and goods received so far or will be received in future by the Federal Government, to all the provinces in a transparent and impartial manner.

The consultation meeting on “Flood, Relief and Politics around Aid” was organized by the Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (PILER) at the Karachi Press Club.

Participants included Secretary General of Pakistan Peoples Party (Sindh) Taj Haider, Shah Mohammad Shah of Save Sindh Movement, Karamat Ali of PILER, Chairman, Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF) Mohammad Ali Shah, Senior journalist Jami Chandio, Ali Hassan Chandio of Sindh Taraqi Passand Party (STPP), former Senator Syed Iqbal Haider, Chairman Pakistan Studies Centre Karachi University, Dr. Jafer Ahmed, Riaz Chandio of Jeay Sindh Mahaz, Ms. Mehnaz Rahman of Aurat Foundation, Mazhar Rahujo of Awami Tahrik, Illahi Bukhshsh of Strengthening Participatory Organization(SPO), Hashim Khoso of Jeay Sindh Mahaz, and Mr Zulfiqar Shah and Ms. Zeenia Shaukat of PILER

Participants asked civil society organizations and political parties, democrats and intellectuals to join hands for providing relief and rehabilitation to flood affected people of the country. They formed a committee to monitor and coordinate

the relief work in flood-hit areas.

The speakers said apart from their failure to mobilize the state machinery and resources in time to deal with possible disasters of the kind the nation is facing today, crass irresponsibility and inefficiency have been the hallmarks of the government’s handling of grave national issues. They underlined the need for a radical restructuring of not only the policies but also the mechanisms employed to implement them.

Executive Director of PIER Karamat Ali emphasized the need to set up an authority at Sindh provincial level on the pattern of the Punjab Disaster Management Authority to supervise the rescue and relief work. “A credible relief management system should be developed,” he added.

“It is the sole responsibility of the government to provide rescue and relief to the people, civil society should assist the civil government,” he said adding that it is the responsibility of the Army to defend the nation, particularly in times of disaster. He suggested that people should be provided cash assistance for an amount equal to minimum wages. “They should have the choice to decide about their future course of action, and whether they want to live in the cities or go back to their towns. State should not force its decisions on people.”

He suggested that provincial government should organize a consultation and invite people from all walks of life to participate. A reconstruction plan should be made for longer term, at least for 10 years, he added.

He demanded that the Sindh government should constitute a commission to investigate the breach of bonds.

Senior Journalist Jami Chandio pointed out that

super flood was not as big a problem as was the government's failure to protect the embankments. He regretted that there are insufficient arrangements at relief camps. People are put in these camps and food is the only item that is consistently provided to them, where as no sufficient medical facilities are present at the camps.

No attention is being paid on psychological needs of the people, he added. He suggested that a joint mechanism be adopted for relief work.

Dr. Jafar Ahmed, Chairman of Pakistan Study Centre, University of Karachi said that the state did not have the capacity to face such a huge disaster. He said the civil society should cooperate with democratic government.

Mohammad Ali Shah, Chairman of Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF) said all destruction was caused due to breaching of bunds because for 15-20 years no repair was made due to heavy corruption in irrigation department. He pointed out that climate change factor cannot be ignored

in this situation.

Shah Mohammad Shah of Save Sindh Movement said it was not a natural calamity, but a manmade disaster because of the mismanagement of irrigation water. He demanded to investigate the breach of Tori Band in upper Sindh. He demanded to publicize the manual of the Sukkur Barrage.

Mehnaz Rahman said many organizations have been working on rescue and relief works these days. She underlined the need for measures to be taken for rehabilitation of the people.

Syed Ghulam Shah of Sindh United Party suggested that a judicial commission be set up to investigate the causes of the disaster and monitor relief and rehabilitation.

A 5-member Committee was formed at the end of the meeting to develop proposals drawn from the suggestions for rebuilding presented in the meeting. Participants agreed to send these proposals to the Sindh Government and maintain a follow up.

All South Asian countries are prone to natural disaster & calamities

Press Release

Women must be given special priority in development economic empowerment programs of grass roots. Women demanded at the South Asian Women Conference in Lahore.

LAHORE; 24th August, 2010: Women Workers Help Line (WWHL) organized a South Asian Women Conference “Role of Women in Building Movements in South Asia” with collaboration of South Asian Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) at Ambassador Hotel Lahore. Women rights & peace activists from Nepal, Sri Lanka & Bangladesh ardently participated.

Sita Kumari, Member Parliament, Nepal said that the women’s movement in Nepal is very strong. All Nepal Women Association (ANWA) is struggling for women rights since last sixty years. In Nepal the parliament has 33% women representation. She said that South Asia is facing many natural disasters and women & children are the worst victims. Government should give special priority to women & children during the relief campaign. She also showed solidarity with the flood victims in Pakistan.

Faisal Bin Majid, from Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha (BNPS) shared that Bangladesh face many natural disaster every year. He offered the services of natural disaster management from Bangladeshi CSOs. He demanded Visa Free South Asia. He said that in our country, women are Ministers Labor, Agricultural and foreign Ministries. Garments industry has the key role in Bangladesh’s economy and majority of women workers are working in this industry.

Nalini Rathnaraja, Women Right & Peace activist, Srilanka said that South Asia have many common challenges. She shared that the Sri Lankan women started the struggle for their rights almost hundred years before. Women got the right to vote even before Europe. The literacy rate in Sri Lanka is higher in South Asia but women have only 5% representation in Assemblies. The Politicians divide the people on the basis of religion, language and ethnicity. She said that patriarchy, poverty, and violation of human rights is common in all South Asian countries. We need to make a collective effort to solve all these issues.

Bushra Khaliq, Gender Thematic Focal Leader emphasized that all countries should decide that what kind of state they want to become. Govt. should provide Education, Health, Justice and Employment opportunities to all. South Asia must develop a Natural Disaster Management System to protect peoples’ lives. She said that there is need to present a combine strategy from the platform of South Asian alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE).

Saleha Athar (International Committee member of World March of Women), Azra Shad, (Chairperson WWHL), Farooq Tariq (Spokesperson Labor Party Pakistan), Fahmida Zafar (President WWHL Khayber Pkhtoonkhwah), Badrun Nisa (Anjuman Mazaraeen Punjab), Shamim Qayyum (Labor Qoumi Movement) also spoke on the occasion. At the end of the conference, the participants resolved:

- 33% of women representation in South Asian Parliament & Assembly must be ensured.
- All discriminatory laws against women in South Asian countries must be abolished.
- All governments must initiate the programs regarding women development & economic empowerment.
- Women & children must be given priority during relief & rehabilitation; as all South Asian countries are facing natural disasters & calamities.
- Make South Asia a Visa free region.
- South Asian countries must have common strategy to cope with natural disasters.
- All the labors & Home Based Workers of South Asia must be issued social security cards and implementation of labor laws be ensured.

Released by: Bushra Khaliq

General secretary, WWHL

Disaster strikes again

Solidarity with the victims of earthquake tsunami and nuclear disaster

March 17, 2011

On March 11, at 2:30 PM (JST), the tremendously powerful earthquake of magnitude 9 hit the vast area of Eastern Japan, comprised of Northeast and Kanto regions. The earthquake gave rise to the formidable tsunami, and the latter devastated numerous cities and towns all along the Pacific coast from the northernmost prefecture of Aomori to the southern Chiba prefecture. At the time of March 17, the number of deaths and missing persons is already close to 20,000, and the number continues to increase.

At the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant of the Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), the symbol of Japan as a “major nuclear-power nation”, all six nuclear reactors from No.1 to No. 6 were damaged and impaired due to the earthquake and tsunami. All the reactors have gone out of control more or less, and dreadful extraordinary phenomena have developing such as gas explosions, fires of housing buildings, reactor-core meltdowns and radiation leaks and spills. The danger of Chernobyl-type nuclear disaster seems to be becoming more and more real. Within a 30-kilometer radius from the nuclear plant, residents have already been ordered to evacuate from the area.

There are now 500,000 evacuees who have lost their houses and/or their dearest family members. Those evacuees have lost their dwellings and foundations of livelihood, due to the threefold sufferings from the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster. Fuel, food, clothing and medicine are terribly in short supply at evacuation sites that have assembled those people who lost their dwellings under the bitter cold.

In this rich and advanced capitalist country of Japan, there have been increase of unemployment and job insecurity, widening social disparity between rich and poor, disintegration of agrarian and fishery rural communities, and discarding of various social securities under the neoliberal policies of the capital. Those victimized social layers are the hardest hit by the earthquake and tsunami.

The earthquake-tsunami damages and the nuclear disaster will widen the structural crisis of Japanese capitalism, and the ruling capitalist regime and its

social forces will necessarily expand and strengthen their social, economic and political attacks against the suffered population and the whole working masses.

At the earthquake/tsunami-stricken areas of Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures, our comrades and co-worker union-activists have already begun activities to support suffered people and to defend their lives and social rights. The pressing priority is to procure food, fuel and housing for the suffered and to secure employment for those who lost their workplaces. Our comrades and co-workers strive to develop and expand popular and autonomous initiatives among working masses and local residents all through their activities.

We call on our international comrades and friends to extend their financial solidarity to the activities of the Miyagi and Fukushima comrades and co-workers.

Furthermore, we call on the international comrades and friends.

The terrible disaster of Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant has made it absolutely clear once again that the nuclear energy is to damage the environment irreparably, to ruin the agriculture and fishery and accelerate the food crisis accordingly, and to put the survival of human being on the earth into a fatal crisis. The capitalist propaganda about “nuclear power generation as efficient and clean resources of energy” has been definitely proved to be an outright lie. The Japanese government and the TEPCO are hiding the truth of the Fukushima disaster and worsening the nuclear crisis further.

Please intensify your global campaigns to oppose the nuclear energy and to abolish nuclear power plants. Advances of your anti-nuclear campaigns are surely to encourage the Japanese sufferers and evacuees and resisting workers and popular masses here.

With our thanks to your encouragements and solidarity to us.

Japan Revolutionary Communist League (JRCL)

National Council of Internationalist Workers (NCIW)

Fukushima Reactor Crisis Forces Countries to Review Nuke Plans

In just a week, the world's nuclear outlook seems to have undergone a dramatic change, following the crisis in Japan's reactors. And in public at least, the Indian government, echoing sentiments elsewhere in the world, has talked of 'safety reviews' and 'reassessments'. Could the crisis in Japan lead to a global meltdown in the nuclear power industry?

At the time of going to press, authorities were still trying to minimise the leak of radiation from reactors in the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant. The quake led to a failure in the cooling systems at the plant, which are critical to the reactor's smooth functioning. The breakdown has led to explosions in parts of the plant and to the release of deadly radioactive radiation.

It's possibly the most serious nuclear crisis since the Chernobyl disaster in 1986.

Chernobyl led to a global reassessment of the dangers of nuclear power with the total nuclear power capacity falling to below 5,000 MW in 2008 from over 20,000 MW in 1987. That trend had begun reversing, with brokerage CLSA last year projecting a fivefold increase in nuclear power capacity addition to 15,000 megawatts a year by 2020.

Little wonder then that the nuclear business is worried about another 'Chernobyl' moment.

China has indicated that its aggressive nuclear expansion plans will slow down, and Germany has even proposed to accelerate the country's move away from nuclear energy.

The Indian strategy

Post-Fukushima, India too said it would reassess its nuclear plans.

Ashwani Kumar, minister of state for earth sciences and science and technology, said, "The tragedy in Japan reinforces the need to strengthen in every possible way the security of our civil nuclear installations against earthquakes and natural disasters. The government of India will take all steps in this

direction."

The government has already decided that the safety of the 20 existing reactors in India will be reassessed afresh in view of the incidents in Japan resulting from an earthquake of magnitude 9 on the Richter scale.

Less than three percent of power generated in this country comes from nuclear power. India's target for 2010-11 was 1220 MW—as of February, barely 18 percent of that target was achieved.

But India has, or till the Japan crisis, had, grand plans. The department of Atomic Energy expects the share of nuclear power in total electricity generated in India to 8.6 percent by 2032. The Indian government has set itself an ambitious target of 63,000 megawatts of nuclear power capacity by then, up from the current capacity of 4780 megawatts (from 20 reactors). The nuclear business is expected to be worth about Rs 6 lakh crore in the next two decades.

The passing by parliament of the nuclear liability bill was expected to pave the way for foreign nuclear component suppliers to enter India

In a few years, around 2000 megawatt capacity is expected to be added in plants in Kudankulam. Another 500 megawatts from fast breeder reactors are in advanced stages of completion. Four 700 megawatt indigenous pressurised heavy water reactors at Kakrapar and Rawatbhata will add another 2,800 megawatt of capacity.

Under the law, the private sector can't independently operate nuclear reactors or set up a nuclear power plant. Under India's Atomic Energy Act of 1962, only the government or government-owned companies can do that. But around 40 power companies have formed a consortium to lobby for the private sector's entry into the nuclear power generation business itself.

Till that happens, companies are eyeing a part

of the lucrative business of supplying components to reactors, ranging from turbine generators to instrumentation and the laying of pipes. Companies eyeing a slice of the Rs 6 lakh crore pie include L&T, Reliance Energy, Tata Power, Walchandnagar Industries, Gammon India, GMR Energy, [Bharat Forge](#), and Godrej & Boyce.

But could all of this be derailed by the events in Japan? Few insiders expect a major shift in Indian nuclear power policy.

“Nuclear energy is inevitable for India,” says nuclear scientist GR Srinivasan who is now advisor, nuclear power business of GMR Energy, pointing to the need for energy security and independence, and the lack of alternative sources of energy.

“The accident in Japan is quite serious and we are in touch with international organisations. But there is no need for a knee-jerk reaction on our programme,” says Sudhinder Thakur, executive director and fellow at Nuclear Power Corporation of India (NPCIL) which operates India’s atomic power stations.

How safe are India’s reactors?

Experts point to the fact that none of the current or proposed nuclear reactors in India falls in zones of high seismic risk. This reduces the chance of witnessing any earthquakes of Japan’s magnitude in any of India’s nuclear plants. Only Narora Atomic Power Station in Uttar Pradesh’s Bulandshahr happens to be in seismic zone IV.

The rest are even in less risky zones. “For us, the challenge is not about aftermath of Japan’s incidents, but India’s indigenous problems including land acquisition and opposition of local people living around these sites,” says VK Sharma, advisor, nuclear

business in Gammon India. The proposed nuclear plant at Jaitapur in Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra, for example, is facing stiff resistance from local residents.

Supporters of the nuclear programme also point to the new generation of reactors, saying they are much safer. The present nuclear power plants across the world are of Generation 1 or 2 designs. This is a tested technology during 14,000 reactor years.

“But India is planning to import Generation 3 or 3 plus designs which should address many safety issues. There is a good probability that these new reactors will address even a Fukushima type of occurrence,” says Srinivasan of GMR Energy. There are concerns that these are yet to be tested anywhere in the world, but analysts argue that tested reactors are similar to those of Fukushima.

Global cues

Despite corporate India’s belief that India’s nuclear story will remain intact, the sharp fall of global prices of Uranium after Japan incidents indicates that the market has begun to factor in a possible global nuclear meltdown.

The uranium industry, which counts heavily on China’s 77 nuclear reactors either planned or under construction reacted, reacted when China indicated a slower pace of its nuclear adventures. The sharp fall of stock prices of major Uranium companies in the first week of the Japanese crisis further established the trend.

If the global markets indicate a possible nuclear meltdown, can India remain insulated?

Economic Times, 21st March 2011

KOODANKULAM NUCLEAR PLANT GIVES SRI LANKS THE JITTERS

P.K. Balachandran

Colombo, March 16

In the wake of the disasters at the Fukushima nuclear power plant in Japan, Dr. Janaka Ratnasiri, a top Sri Lankan physicist, has expressed serious concern over the possibility of radiation striking the island nation in the event of a disaster at the nuclear power plant under construction in Koodankulam.

“Koodankulam is only 240 km. from the west coast of Sri Lanka, in line with Puttalam. If any of the eight nuclear power plant, being constructed or planned at Koodankulam, develops a radiation leak due to some unforeseen reason, its impact would be felt directly by Sri Lanka.” Ratnasiri said in an article in The Island daily on Wednesday.

The scientist, who is chairman of the Sri Lanka National Committee of the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme (IGBP), said that if there was a catastrophe in Koodankulam during the southwest monsoon, the winds would carry the radiation to the western coast of Sri Lanka.

The plants in Koodankulam would be using sea water for cooling, but an earthquake or a tsunami could deprive the plant of the cooling agent, Ratnasiri said.

He recalled that during the December 2004

tsunami, the waves had destroyed the cooling system at the Kalpakkam plant. A disaster was averted only because the plant was fitted with a system to shut down automatically.

The Koodankulam reactors are located on the coast, but the coast is subject to erosion due to the climate change.

Ratnasiri reminded his readers that the plants in Koodankulam were being built with Russian help as per the Russian design, which had come under a cloud after the disaster in Chernobyl. He went on to point out that the Indians themselves had begun looking for other collaborators and were negotiating with the West.

According to the Lankan scientist, the Europe, it takes about 10 years for a nuclear plant to be built, tested and made operational, but the Indians want their plants to come up in five to six years.

“This fast-tracking will naturally be at the expense of reliability”, Ratnasiri argued.

Commenting on the scientist’s remarks The Island said in an editorial that a disaster at Koodankulam could turn out to be Hanuman’s second attack on Sri Lanka.

The dangerous nuclear power program

Press Release

We would like to express our great concern and deep anxiety about the deadly radioactive explosion that has happened at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Japan (some 150 miles north of Tokyo). Both online and television images of the thick white smoke hovering over the exploded nuclear power plant have come to haunt the world public opinion. The Japanese authorities have extended the evacuation zone to 20 kms.

The dangerous explosion is said to have blown the roof off the reactor building, brought down walls and caused a very heavy radiation leak. Even after the plant's chain reaction was stopped, the fuel rods continue to produce heat and must be cooled in order to avoid the meltdown of the fuel. The plant needs a continuous supply of electricity to run the water pumps and the instruments. Since the emergency diesel generators at the Daiichi plant failed, pressure mounted in the reactor, the normal cooling function stopped and resulted in the explosion.

The Tokyo Electric Power Co., who operates the exploded power plant has said that the explosion happened "near" the No. 1 reactor. The Japanese nuclear authorities have claimed that "small amounts of radioactive material were likely to leak out." This is the universal attitude and approach of the nuclear departments of all countries.

We will come to know the full and complete details of this worst nuclear disaster in a few more weeks or months. As the world is gearing up to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the deadly nuclear power plant accident at Chernobyl on April 26, 2011, another calamity has stuck the humanity.

India's Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) and the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd. (NPCIL) will try to reassure the people of India that they are far more superior than everybody else in the world and this kind of accidents would never happen in Indian facilities.

On January 7, 2005, Dr. L. V. Krishnan, the former director, safety research and health physics at the Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research (IGCAR) at Kalpakkam, claimed in an interview with rediff.com that the Kalpakkam reactors escaping the wrath of the 'Big Wave' was a cause of pride for India, as these reactors had been built solely by indigenous effort. Although Dr. Krishnan admitted that tsunami was not taken into consideration when the Kalpakkam reactors were built, the Koodankulam nuclear power plant authorities claimed that they had built the tsunami factor into their project design without giving any proof.

The Indian public have to sit up, think and decide here and now how we want to proceed with the dangerous nuclear power program the Indian government and the nuclear establishment have been scheming with very little transparency, accountability and popular participation. Common sense would instruct us not to tread this path of Three Mile Island, Chernobyl and Fukushima but generate energy from safe and sustainable sources. We demand the Government of India to reverse its nuclear adventurisms immediately and chart out a different course to achieve energy security that also incorporates human security.

***-National Alliance of Anti-nuclear
Movements***

Regional News and Analysis

Afghanistan

Afghanistan: 'The state of women's rights is still a concern'

Dr. Massouda Jalal, former Minister for Women's Affairs in Afghanistan (2004-2006), was in New Delhi recently for an informal interaction with students of the Lady Irwin College, University of Delhi. Dr Jalal, a psychiatrist and paediatrician, emerged as a leading voice for women's emancipation after the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001. She was also the only woman candidate in the Afghan presidential election in 2004. Bula Devi spoke to her. Excerpts.

What is the status of women in Afghanistan?

The status of women in Afghanistan was the worst right after the Taliban regime. But after the power of investment and the energy of the international community and the United Nations, it has become second worse in the world. So it is better than in the Taliban's time but it is still a matter of concern. About 70 per cent of the population in Afghanistan is facing extreme poverty. This extreme poverty in Afghanistan has a female face because of inadequate access to economic opportunities and economic resources for women.

What about education of women?

Afghanistan's population is approximately 30 million as in the nationwide census and half of them are women and girls. About 89 per cent of the vast majority of women in the country is illiterate; of this figure, 80 per cent lives in the rural areas. Illiteracy is mostly in the rural areas. What little literacy and education that we have for women is concentrated particularly in the cities and the capital.

Should women be brought into the peace process?

Sure. They are the real peacemakers; they are the actual messengers of peace.

Why have women been kept away from the peace process?

It's because in Afghanistan, power, locally, most often belongs to the extremist groups. They don't want women to be in the mainstream peace process and be participative, empowered and benefit from the process. They want women to be at home and obey the male members of their families.

In that case should the 'good Taliban' be brought into the mainstream governance?

Well, names and titles are given to help these groups to be engaged in power otherwise we all know the Taliban when they were ruling Afghanistan; we all know their ideology, their vision and their mission, and we all know what they will do once they are again in power; we know they don't want women to participate outside their own life.

Do you think Afghanistan has hit rock-bottom since international humanitarian organisations are also feeling the threat?

Targeting international groups means that the Taliban wants to create fear in international circles in Afghanistan; to frighten them so that they leave Afghanistan because the presence of international organisations helps to make Afghanistan empowered as a whole and come out of the current crises. But the enemies of Afghanistan do not want that and so the international groups are being targeted.

So has it hit the worst situation?

Afghanistan has reached a blind point; it cannot move and that is why the international community is speaking with the Taliban to bribe the Taliban with political power and engage it in the political processes and stop the killings. In a way they are placing

Afghanistan in the hands of criminals. I do not know why the international community or even the U.N. trusts the Taliban.

The Taliban had (ruled) Afghanistan and threatened the security of the world. The international community wants to make the same mistake again.

Do you think donor agencies should change their strategy?

Donor agencies should stop all negotiations with the Taliban. They should be disarmed through other mechanisms and removed from Afghanistan, and that's what was decided in Bonn. The Bonn Agreement should be implemented.

How? Militarily?

There are many different ways (to tackle) things in the Afghanistan context. Why did they remove the Taliban from the capital but leave them to stay on the border and provinces? Why didn't they get rid of this headache from Afghanistan at the beginning? That by itself is a question. Why did they remove the Taliban from the north and central parts of the country but not from the southern part? This is the question.

What about the social movement in Afghanistan?

After the international community came in, a lot of funds poured in and many organisations

were formed to work for human rights, women rights, etc. But these are mostly donor driven to implement the donors' interests, plans and strategies. Besides, corruption was never to this extent in the country, security is getting worse day by day, human rights and women's rights are slipping back, and extremism has been an issue in Afghanistan. All this is affecting the social movement in Afghanistan. Had the Bonn Agreement been implemented successfully and completely on time, it wouldn't have reached this situation.

Who do you hold responsible for this?

I think when the power structure was to be formed in Afghanistan, the U.S.' attention was drawn to the Iraq war and by the time they were settled with the Iraq issue, a power structure had already been established in Afghanistan. So they (the U.S.) left it by itself. So those who were stronger got a better position in Afghanistan. And who was stronger? The extremist groups.

How do you see India's role in Afghanistan?

I think India knows the region very well and in the context of Afghanistan, India can have a greater role than what it had so far. If India can play a role in international politics with its share of assistance for peace and the reconstruction of Afghanistan, it is good for all — India, Afghanistan, the region and the whole world.

Source : *Economic Times* , 21st March 2011



Poetic reflection People on SAARC

By Mohiuddin Ahmad

Who are you?

And who are you?

Har Har Mahadev, Har Har Mahadev!

Har Har Mahadev!

What is the evidence that you are not what you say you are?

Evidence? My name is Dharam Chand, a Hindu name.

That is not evidence.

All right, I know all the sacred Vedas by heart, test me out.

We know nothing about the Vedas. We want evidence.

What?

Lower your trousers.

When his trousers were lowered,
there was pandemonium, 'Kill him, kill him'.

Wait, please wait...I am your brother...

I swear by Bhagwan that I am your brother.

In that case why the circumcision?

The area through which I had to pass was
controlled by our enemies,
therefore, I was forced to take this precaution...
just to save my life...

this is the only mistake,

the rest of me is in order.

Remove the mistake.

The mistake was removed...

and with it Dharam Chand.

In August 1947, India was divided and Pakistan was created. Tens of thousands of Dharam Chands were butchered. Millions were displaced from their ancestral homes for no fault of theirs. The leaders at that time thought that the partition of India would resolve the crisis of Hindu-Muslim conflict. This was a wishful thinking. On 6 December 1992, the Babri mosque was demolished by a section of

fundamentalists. Civil society groups reacted instantly. State-sponsored persecution of the minorities continued. Some examples are Gujarat, Bangladesh (after the election of 2001), Sri Lanka (ethnic cleansing) and so forth. Then Both India and Pakistan went nuclear leaving tens of millions in abject poverty. Afghanistan has been colonized by the USA and is now a member of SAARC.

A civil society initiative titled "People's SAARC" was fostered with an assembly of peoples of the region in Kathmandu in May 1994 and a follow-up convergence in New Delhi in July 1995. Unfortunately, the process did not continue by SAAPE, among others, in the current decade. This needs to be carefully nurtured, expanded and consolidated.

As a process, we feel that the people of South Asia should come together to face the challenge of combating marginalization of the vulnerable groups, degradation of environment, communal divide, involuntary displacement of people in the name of development and fragmentation, through wider sharing of ideas and experiences and forging solidarity alliance across the borders. The pertinent issues that may constitute an action strategy are:

- Promoting communal harmony and combating religious and ethnic violence;
- Environment: sustainable development including conservation of watershed and river water issues;
- Economic issues: resisting neo-liberal terrorism under the hegemony of the global power brokers led by the axis of evils, that is, the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO and possible alternatives;
- Peace: Demilitarisation and denuclearisation;
- Gender: Common charter of civil rights and family laws;
- Vision for future: Overall South Asian perspective for convergence.

While South Asia is considered to be the poorest region of the world according to conventional yardsticks, regional cooperation is becoming an imperative in many respects. It possibly denotes extended interaction in the backdrop of implicit and explicit rivalry. The legacy of the past is a contributing factor, as well as a deterrent, to integration at the regional level.

Regional cooperation is becoming a doctrine used by ideologists and practitioners. One dominant viewpoint is to rationalize the concept of cooperation that involves conflict resolution

and increased human welfare.

The main prerequisite of successful regional cooperation is to open channels of communication between peoples of member countries. This openness tends to contribute to mutual understanding about different ideologies, interests and perceptions of national threats. A system of ideals or ideologies underscoring the needs and benefits of shared perceptions of mutual problems and interests can open channels of regional cooperation. The core issue is to put the people at the center, and the governments.

The South Asian governments established SAARC with high expectations from the people. It has failed to deliver as its member countries under the present systems of governance are not delivering to their own people. This must change. As we live under the dictum of the states, we have to constantly engage with existing institutions to bring a radical change. The issue of political power is central to it and we need to emphasize on it while acting at the regional level.

We have been experiencing a climate of conflict, rivalry and mistrust among the people of the region since we were born. Recently there have been some attempts to facilitate people-to-people interaction. But unfortunately this is still restricted to few privileged groups like the members of the Parliament, judges of the Supreme Court and the leaders of the Chamber of Commerce and Industries who can travel along with their family members in any SAARC country free from any visa restriction. Recently a demand has been made from few quarters to expand the base of the privileged groups to some other categories incorporating white color intellectuals, bureaucrats and business mafia. Why not we open the region for common people? We also demand free flow of labor. If capital can flow, why not labor?

The people want friendship and peace only because these ultimately get translated into prosperity. But some people find prosperity in the opposite and it is these people who decide. They talk more about economic cooperation, trade, SAPTA, etc. and less about people and their concerns. The question is how to turn the balance.

While the need for regional cooperation in South Asia becomes ever more urgent, and its

recognition at the people's level, the states of South Asia continue to persist in their anachronistic conflicts and animosities. The SAARC is yet to bring about any meaningful cooperation between the eight countries of South Asia, and has so far not addressed the real concerns and aspirations of the people of the region.

We therefore urge the South Asian governments to propose in the coming summit that the region be open to common citizens to travel without visa, a visa-free South Asia for all South Asians. Let there be a direct train connecting Dhaka and Lahore (just an example). Let's not undermine this urgent issue in the pretext of 'national security'. In fact, the whole concept of 'national security' is bull sheet. Let's talk about human security.



India

Doha: don't trade off women's rights

The annual World Trade Organisation Public Forum on September 15-17 featured among its topics the role of women in reshaping the global economy as well as trade practices. This discussion did not come a moment too soon. It must now be taken and followed up with the seriousness it deserves in order to correct long-standing inequalities and promote both economic growth and human rights.

Women's work accounts for two thirds of the world's working hours. However, they earn only 10 per cent of the world's income. Women produce half of the world's food, yet they are typically concentrated in small land holdings that they till, but do not own, and that may be their only source of food. Their access to markets may be hampered by social constraints or by fear of sexual violence along unsafe roads.

As gatherers, women — particularly in indigenous communities — have often identified medicinal plants and developed plant-based pharmaceutical remedies. Frequently, these traditional medicines have been appropriated, adapted and patented with little or no compensation to the original knowledge holders and without their prior consent.

Another troubling aspect of women's work in the global market — particularly migrant women's labour — is that it tends to be concentrated in informal sectors which expose them to a heightened risk of abuse, including low wages, long hours, and uncertainty of tenure. Many of these workers in one given country compete with

other women in similar positions in other countries. Such unbridled competition for global market shares among the poor of this world may engender a race to the bottom in terms of wages and working conditions. In export zones it has been reported that women were required to undergo a maternity test before obtaining employment. Child care benefits and parental leave are unavailable.

Human rights law

To level the playing field, human rights law is of great guidance. Specifically, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) sets the legal ground to promote and protect the rights of women in all spheres, including the economic field. To do so human rights law requires States to take positive measures in order to attain substantive and not merely formal equality between women and men. Further, the Human Rights Committee — the body that monitors implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights — indicated that the principle of equality enjoins States to take affirmative action to stem the root causes of discrimination.

These principles and responsibilities also apply to intergovernmental organisations and agreements. In this perspective, the Doha round can and should incorporate all human rights, including the rights of women and accommodate their special needs, as well as take full advantage of their knowledge and skills.

What the world needs is a balanced trade agreement that puts the needs of the hungry — women, men and children — at its centre. Progress must not merely be measured and assessed in terms of economic growth and volume of exchanges of goods and services, but also in terms of the impact such trade has on those who live at the margins of the global market and have no control over the invisible hands that shape their livelihoods.

Moreover, in order to achieve fairer trade liberalisation in agriculture, developed countries must eliminate trade distorting export subsidies, especially given the inability of developing countries to offer similar protection to their farmers. Clearly, a rule-based international trade system must seek to correct these imbalances with specific rights-based and gender-sensitive approaches that empower women. At a minimum, it must ensure that their ability to secure food is not hampered by a bias for export crop production, and that States do not divert

resources to satisfy that bias. Indeed, access to food is a human right.

Apparent short-term profits must be balanced against long-term goals that really benefit women and the communities where they are leading agents of social entrepreneurship. It has been found that when an educated girl earns an income, she reinvests 90 per cent of it in her family, compared to boys who devote 35 per cent of their income to their families.

As a result of the global financial and economic crisis, the need for regulation is now widely acknowledged. When it comes to essential elements of welfare, such as food, health care, and education, the international community and States cannot and should not leave the concerns of human welfare solely to market forces. Such welfare ultimately depends on not trading off women's rights. (Courtesy: U.N. Information Centre, New Delhi. Navi Pillay is United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.)

Source: *The Hindu*, 23rd September, 2010



More than half of adolescent girls in India ***anaemic: UNICEF***

Home to about 20 per cent of the world's adolescent population, India has a dismal track record in their health and education parameters, says a new UNICEF report.

Almost 47 per cent girls in the age group of 11 to 19 years are underweight in India — the highest in the world — says the UNICEF report on the 'State of the World's Children'.

"Adolescent girls also face a greater risk of nutritional problems than adolescent boys, including anaemia and underweight. In addition, over half of girls aged 15-19 (56 per cent) are anaemic," said the report.

India has the largest population of adolescents (243 million) followed by China (207 million) and United States (44 million). The world is home to 1.2 billion individuals aged 10-19 years.

According to the report, the implications for adolescent girls in India are particularly serious, given that in the period 2000-2009, around 47 per cent of Indian women aged 20-24 years were married by age 18.

The report says that around 25 per cent (243 million) of Indians belong to the age group of 11-19 years. Almost 40 per cent of this section is out of school and 43 per cent get married before the age of 18, out of whom 13 per cent become teenage mothers.

Although the legal age for marriage is 18, the majority of Indian women marry as adolescents. Recent data show that 30 per cent of girls aged 15-19 are currently married or in union, compared to only 5 per cent of boys of the same age, it said.

Though the girls who got married before the age of 18 years has decreased from 54 per cent in 1992-93 to 43 per cent in 2007-08, the figure is the eight highest in the world. Pakistan fares better with just 25 per cent. It said school attendance in the 11-13 years age group is 86 per cent and 14-17 years is 64 per cent.

"Certainly, now 74 per cent of adolescents are in school. But there is a high-drop out rate afterwards," Karin Hulshof, country representative for UNICEF said.

Putting the smallest first

Indian Express, 29th September, 2011

VISHAL, the son of a farm labourer in the west Indian state of Maharashtra, is almost four. He should weigh around 16kg (35lb). But scooping him up from the floor costs his nursery teacher, a frail woman in a faded sari, little effort. She slips Vishal's scrawny legs through two holes cut in the corners of a cloth sack, which she hooks to a weighing scale. The needle stops at just over 10kg—what a healthy plump one-year-old should weigh.

The teacher nods and puts Vishal back on the floor, where he sits listlessly before a jigsaw puzzle. That his teacher does not look perturbed is unsurprising. Nearly half of India's small children are malnourished: one of the highest rates of underweight children in the world, higher than most countries in sub-Saharan Africa. More than one-third of the world's 150m malnourished under-fives live in India.

That makes the sight of small, skinny children depressingly routine. Vishal's rural village is not especially impoverished; 120km (75 miles) from Mumbai, India's financial centre, it offers factory-work as well as the farm labour most country people do. But the battered register in Vishal's nursery, a government-run centre known as an *anganwadi* (literally, courtyard), shows that close to half the children are malnourished, a handful chronically so. "It's always been this way," says Sunanda, the *anganwadi* teacher, who has weighed the children in her care every month for 25 years. "Nothing has changed."

Almost as shocking as the prevalence of malnutrition in India is the country's failure to reduce it much, despite rapid growth. Since 1991 GDP has more than doubled, while malnutrition has decreased by only a few percentage points. Meanwhile, the chasm between lucky and unlucky Indian children is growing: under fives in rural areas are more likely to be underweight than urban children, low-caste children than higher-caste children, girls rather than boys. And the disparities are growing. India seems certain to miss one of its key Millennium Development Goals: halving malnutrition by 2015.

Malnutrition places a heavy burden on India. It is linked to half of all child deaths and nearly a quarter of cases of disease. Malnourished children tend not to reach their potential, physically or mentally, and they do worse at school than they otherwise would. This has a direct impact on

productivity: the World Bank reckons that in low-income Asian countries physical impairments caused by malnutrition knock 3% off GDP. Why, then, has India done so little to reduce it?

There are many reasons. Most fundamentally, poor parents find it hard to buy enough food; but that is by no means the only factor. Impoverished and rural families are also less likely to go to a doctor when their children fall sick, which they do a lot, thanks to dirty water and poor hygiene. Inadequate nutrition lowers the immune system, increasing the risk of infectious disease; illness, in turn, depletes a child's nutritional stocks. Tara, a two-year-old in Chandan, a village in the northern state of Rajasthan, has yet to bounce back from a bout of gastroenteritis that put her in hospital a year ago. Since then, any weight gain has been offset by frequent bouts of diarrhoea, says her mother, Maya Devi, as she holds her limp child on her lap. Tara weighs a pitiful seven kilos.

Cow's milk and water

Even the children of wealthier families suffer surprisingly high rates of malnutrition. Government data show that a third of children from the wealthiest fifth of India's population are malnourished. This is because poor feeding practices—foremost among them a failure exclusively to breastfeed in the first six months—play as big a role in India's malnutrition rates as food shortages. Here lies an opportunity: educating parents about how to feed their children should be more quickly achieved than ensuring that the 410m Indians who live below the UN's estimated poverty line of \$1.25 a day have enough to eat.

The government, however, has largely failed in both areas. Two big, expensive schemes designed to reduce malnutrition—a public distribution system (PDS) that provides subsidised food to the poor and a vast midday-meal scheme, to which 120m schoolchildren are signed up—are hampered by inefficiency and corruption. But the government's main effort to tackle child malnutrition, the Integrated Childhood Development Service (ICDS), has failed for rather different reasons.

The ICDS, launched in 1975, is the world's biggest early-childhood scheme. It provides, in theory, an *anganwadi* centre with one teacher and an

assistant for every 1,000 people. Each centre is responsible for providing nutritional care to pregnant women and all children up to six, the age at which Indian children start school. Anganwadi centres also provide daily pre-school child care and education, as well as keeping a dozen-odd registers recording everything from children's weights to financial accounts. Overburdened by this long list of responsibilities, anganwadi workers have tended to focus on the group they see every day: children over the age of two whose mothers take advantage of free child care and daily meals offered by the centres. While these meals—supposedly providing each child with an extra 500 calories a day—are certainly beneficial, they do not replace the nutritional guidance the parents of young children need. More seriously, this emphasis on older children means that the under-twos and pregnant women barely get a turn.

Unfortunately, this is precisely the group the government should be targeting. Most growth retardation occurs by the age of two and is irreversible. Often, it starts during pregnancy. More than half the women of childbearing age in India are anaemic—a condition that can be much improved by fortifying food—and 30% of Indian children are born underweight. In healthy infants, this could be corrected with six months of exclusive breastfeeding. But especially in rural India, where women often go back to the fields mere days after giving birth, babies' diets are often supplemented with cow's milk and water, which exposes them to infection.

That risk increases after six months, with the introduction of solid food. The quality and reach of ICDS centres varies from state to state: the most

impoverished states, with the highest rates of malnutrition, also have the lowest numbers of centres. But countrywide the scheme suffers from the usual ailments of public services in India. Recently the production of daily meals served at anganwadi centres was taken out of the hands of pilfering contractors and given to groups of local women. A complicated system of payments, however, means that even in a state like Maharashtra, which has done more than most to improve ICDS services, centres must wait four months for cash to buy pay food bills. The two meals served at Vishal's anganwadi—a plate of puffed rice dotted with a few nuts and a serving of sprouted moong dal—seem unlikely to give him 500 calories. Vandana Krishna, the state's secretary of Women and Child Development, says the funding gap could be solved by giving village panchayats, or local governments, a special fund to make loans to anganwadis. But this would need a lot of money.

So too would any significant improvement in the government's efforts to fight child malnutrition—with one exception. Fortifying the food handed out by the PDS would be an economical and effective way to lower rates of anaemia and increase nutrition. So far, India has resisted that idea. But most experts agree that the country will make a serious dent in child malnutrition only when it focuses on pregnant women and the very young, perhaps by providing an additional worker in each anganwadi centre to make home visits. "India has missed its big window of opportunity by not giving priority to mothers and the under-threes," says Victor Aguayo, chief of Unicef's nutrition programme in India. "It cannot afford to do so any longer."

Source : *The Indian Express*, 28 February, 2011



Hunger and death in Tamil Nadu, India

'... Thalaikoothal lay in the indefinable space between crime and desperate acts of poverty. It was social custom, a collective family decision, a ritual goodbye to a loved one who had lived a full life. Sometimes, it was the victim's own idea. Shanmugham found that many called it a path to "eternal peace", an escape from the violence of poverty. ...'

Mother, shall I put you to sleep?

Maariyamma is likely to be killed by her children because they cannot afford her. They will give her a loving oil bath. Several glasses of coconut water. A mouthful of mud. Perhaps a poison injection. She is just one of many old parents in Tamil Nadu dying in this way. But no one blinks at these ritual murders. *BY SHAHINA KK*

(Death do us apart After her friend's son turned mercy killer, Maariyamma left her village)

IN TAMIL, it is known as thalaikoothal. A leisurely oil bath. An exercise in love and health when given to newborn children, a ceremonial beginning to festivals, and the universal answer to pitiless summers. In Tamil Nadu's small industry hub of Virudhunagar, however, it is the beginning of slow murder. The marker of the devastating poverty that makes a son kill his own aging mother.

Young family members of this district in southern Tamil Nadu have been pushing their infirm, elderly dependents to death because they cannot afford to take care of them. When 65-year-old Maariyamma suspected this might happen to her too, she moved out of her son's house two years ago. "I'm not well enough to live on my own, but it is better than being killed by them," she says. Amazingly, there is no bitterness in her voice. Or anger. "They're struggling hard to take care of their own children," says Maariyamma, of her sons. She places no blame. Her two sons and two daughters are farm labourers who travel to different villages every sowing and harvesting season. Seeing her children at pains to run their house, and feed and educate her grandchildren, Maariyamma knew she was a burden. She knew how it would end if she didn't leave.

Maariyamma had seen it happen to other men and women of her age. Her neighbour, Parvathy, had been paralysed at the age of 76. "She had only one son," says Maariyamma. "And he was working in Chennai, surviving on some menial job there. How could he afford to look after his bedridden mother?" One day, Maariyamma says, Parvathy's son came, "did it" and went back to Chennai. "What else could he do?" she asks. Again, in place of anger or fear, there is helpless resignation. And a strange empathy for the person who might elaborately plan her murder.

Thalaikoothal works thus: an extensive oil bath is given to an elderly person before the crack of dawn. The rest of the day, he or she is given several glasses of cold tender coconut water. Ironically, this is everything a mother would've

told her child not to do while taking an oil bath. "Tender coconut water taken in excess causes renal failure," says Dr Ashok Kumar, a practicing physician in Madurai. By evening, the body temperature falls sharply. In a day or two, the old man or woman dies of high fever. This method is fail-proof "because the elderly often do not have the immunity to survive the sudden fever," says Dr Kumar.

OVER THE years, other methods have evolved too. The most painful one is when mud dissolved in water is forced down; it causes indigestion and an undignified death. Velayudham of Help age India says the families often take the mud from their own land, if they have any. "It is believed that this makes their souls happy," he says.

Dorairaj, a farmer in Satur, confesses that Muniammal, a distant relative, had been killed four months earlier. She was 78, and too weak to fend for herself. She was given an oil bath, but somehow survived. After a few days, she was given the 'milk treatment'. "When the milk is being poured, the nose is held tight," says Dorairaj. This 'milk treatment' is often preceded by starvation. The household stops serving the parent solid food. "When milk is poured uninterruptedly into the mouth, it goes into the respiratory track. A starving person cannot withstand even a moment's suffocation," says 60-year-old Paul Raj, coordinator of a district elders' welfare association.

(Solitary existence When he suspected his sons saw him as a burden, Kasi moved out)

For those who choose poisoning as their modus operandi, Ganeshan is the man to call. This middle-aged man lives in Paramakkudy village, and introduces himself as a 'medical practitioner'. In reality, he is Doctor Death. Ganeshan sources and administers lethal injections on demand. According to him, it is simply a service. "I am not killing anybody who may have a longer life. It is done only in the last and final stage of one's life. Why should they suffer in poverty?" he justifies. Ganeshan defends his 'profession' but says he'd rather have some other means of livelihood. Azhagappan, a small shop

owner, revealed that Ganeshan is not even a trained nurse. "He had worked in a hospital as the lowest grade attendant for a few months. That's where he learned to give injections." Azhagappan estimates that Ganeshan charges Rs. 300 to Rs. 3,000. Ganeshan refuses to disclose the chemical combination of his poison.

Though everyone seems to be in the know, thalaikoothal officially remained unexposed until the death of 60-year-old Selvaraj, of Ramasamipuram village in Virudhunagar on 18 June this year. Selvaraj, who was bed-ridden due to an accident, died suddenly. Asokan, Selvaraj's nephew in Virudhunagar, raised the alarm on his uncle's death. He registered an FIR, and subsequently a woman named Zeenath was arrested for administering a poisonous injection. Prabhakar, the Virudhunagar Commissioner of Police, admits that it is hard to find any evidence. "The body was cremated and there is no scope for a re-examination of the corpse," he says.

'It's difficult to view it simply in a legal or criminal framework,' says district collector VK Shanmugham

Zeenath has been released on bail and refused to talk to TEHELKA when we met her in her village, Ramasamipuram. Some villagers claimed that Zeenath was a 'professional mercy killer'.

A few days after Selvaraj's death came to light, a newspaper published a report exposing more mysterious deaths in the district. When the district administration of Virudhunagar learnt how widespread the mercy killing was, it ordered an investigation. "It was shocking for all of us," says V K Shanmugham, district collector in Virudhunagar. He soon realised that conventional state responses like arrests, warnings and interrogations would not even scratch the surface.

Thalaikoothal lay in the indefinable space between crime and desperate acts of poverty. It was social custom, a collective family decision, a ritual goodbye to a loved one who had lived a full life. Sometimes, it was the victim's own idea. Shanmugham found that many called it a path to "eternal peace", an escape from the violence of

poverty. "It is difficult to view this simply in a legal or criminal framework," he adds.

If thalaikoothal is seen as a crime, an entire village is accomplice. Community members and relatives not only support the practice, several even arrive a day before the auspicious oil bath to meet the aged parent one last time. Everybody knows the man or woman is going to die.

"Nobody questions or reports it to the police. They don't even see it as a crime. It is a kind of accepted practice," says Dr Lakshmi, a physician in Karyappetti village. Over 75, Dr Lakshmi recalls that she has been hearing of this practice of killing the elderly for 34 years.

(Community pardon In many villages, thalaikoothal is not a crime, but a social custom)

The practice is not confined to a particular caste or community. "The poor do it, whatever their caste," says Chandra Devi, the district Welfare Officer. Most residents are seasonal farm labourers, livestock shepherds or migrant workers in small factories in the nearby industrial hub Sivakasi. Their mobile lives make it virtually impossible for them to stay home to care for their parents.

Killing is indeed a brutal solution to financial burdens, but community members claim there is no alternative. "It does not mean that they do not love their parents," says Chellathorai, the president of Paneerpetty village Panchayat.

Paul Raj, of the district elders welfare association, recently requested the district collector for government protection for the elderly. "The aged in these villages are highly vulnerable. We demand government's immediate action." Raj, however, realises that while police forces can protect an aged woman from her children, what they really need is protection from penury. "If the seniors had some income, they would not be considered so burdensome," says Raj. "For example, if they got more pension, or at least got it regularly, it might give some respite."

'The practice is not confined to any caste,' says district welfare officer Chandra Devi. 'Poverty is the reason'

Kasi, a daily wager, moved out of his son's house after his wife died. He's not sure if he's 65 or 70, but his shock of white hair, equally white handlebar moustache, and soil-black wrinkled skin are testament to his long and arduous life. Kasi had decided to leave when he watched his children grow tired of tending to their father's every need. "I'm very fond of them, and can't imagine they will try to kill me," he says. "But anyway, I didn't want to push them to any extreme step." Whether he too would have been invited for that chilling oil bath some years down, Kasi doesn't know. And he didn't stick around to find out.

ACROSS VIRUDHUNAGAR, even as elderly men and women leave their homes, they make excuses for their children. "My son was struggling with his own life," says Kasi. They put up a brave front. "I'm surviving fine with the ration rice at 2 per kilo," says a reed-thin Maariyamma. They starve, and sigh, but do not complain. Thalaikoothal is to them not cowardly murder, but a brave farewell. Kasi and Maariyamma do not see how extreme it is, how dramatic. For them, it is a sort of practical love that is simply about survival.

http://www.thehelka.com/story_main47.asp?filename=Ne201110Maariyamma.asp



Kisan Swaraj Yatra resounding success in Andhra Pradesh

Draws diverse organizations, political leaders and thousands of people in 8 events in AP;

Strong consensus on need for concerted government action on farmers' incomes;

Different dimensions of agrarian crisis brought to fore;

Concern about ecological crisis in agriculture voiced from all quarters

Hyderabad, November 11th 2010: Continuing its huge nation-wide mobilization around the need for ensuring sustainable livelihoods for farmers, the Kisan Swaraj Yatra received a resounding response in its travel around the state from Nov 3rd to 10th. The events were held in Jangaon (Warangal), Chittoor, Pileru and Madanapalli (Chittoor district), Anantapur, Hyderabad, Vijayawada and Visakhapatnam, and included street demonstrations, slogans, songs, dances, public meetings and meetings with political leaders and officials. Thousands of farmers, agricultural workers, adivasis, and leaders of organizations and movements participated in these events, and brought about the extent and

depth of the crisis being faced by those engaged in agriculture today.

In the centrepiece event at Hyderabad on November 8th, the Kisan Swaraj Yatra held a unique forum on "Future of Farming" where senior political leaders and farmers' leaders like Mr Raghuvveera Reddy, Agriculture Minister; Mr Vadde Sobhanadreeswara Rao, former Agriculture Minister; Mr Harishwar Reddy, TDP; Mr Eetela Rajendar, TRS; Mr Malla Reddy, State Vice President, BJP; Mr Kodand Reddy, Congress Kisan Cell; Mr Jaiprakash Narayan, Lok Satta; Mr Kolli Nageswar Rao, AP Rythu Sangam (CPI); Dr A Prasada Rao, AP Rythu Sangam (CPI-M); Mr Prabhakar Reddy, Federation of Farmers' Association; Mr Y Nagendranath, AP Rythanga Samakhya, spoke at length about the continuing agricultural crisis and responded to the critical issues raised by the Yatra organizers. Dr.Ramanjaneyulu of Centre for Sustainable Agriculture (CSA) and Kavitha Kuruganti of Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture (ASHA) spoke on behalf of the Yatra presenting the demands on the central themes of providing Income Security for farmers; ensuring

Environmental Sustainability to preserve the health of soil, water, farm ecology and humans; and protecting the farmers' rights over their essential resources like seed, water, land and forest.

The remarkable outcome from this special gathering of leaders of all major political parties was that each one of them said that the agricultural crisis is the manifestation of the neglect of agriculture sector and the result of government policies or the lack thereof. All of them spoke in support of the basic premise of the Kisan Swaraj Yatra that this long neglect of farmers and agriculture should be put to an end, and the whole country should rally in support of this cause. The Agriculture Minister congratulated the organizers of the Yatra and said, "I endorse this sincere and honest effort by Dr. Ramanjaneyulu and friends to raise the plight of farmers around the notion and push for solutions for their problems." Sri. Vadde Sobhanadreeswara Rao, former Agriculture Minister, released a booklet titled "Why Kisan Swaraj Yatra" outlining the injustice being done to those dependent on agriculture and the need for a nation-wide mobilization.

There was also a unanimous view that the central concern of policy should be to provide adequate support for farmers and other agricultural communities to stay and derive dignified livelihoods from agriculture. Several measures were proposed by the speakers and the Yatra for ensuring income security in agriculture.

Another significant outcome was that almost all the speakers acknowledged the ecological crisis in agriculture – how the intensive chemical agriculture has led to loss of soil fertility, salinization of lakhs of acres rendering them unfit for cultivation, dramatic depletion of groundwater resources, poisoning of land and water destroying much of the beneficial insect, earthworm and bird populations in the farms, and the increasing impact on health in the form of cancer, birth defects, infertility, kidney and liver problems, premature deliveries, spontaneous abortions and so on. The extent of awareness and

acknowledgment of these problems from leaders across the spectrum shows the breadth and depth of the ecological crisis which also has large impact on the economics of agriculture – in the form of falling productivity and increasing costs of applying more and more fertilizers and pesticides.

The leaders also expressed strong concern about the upcoming Seeds Bill which was to be introduced in the Parliament on Nov 9th, and its failure to incorporate provisions to regulate seed prices and royalties and to give powers to the state governments to protect the interests of their farmers – despite the strong all-party campaign and representations from Andhra Pradesh. The Agriculture Minister as well as leaders from other parties vowed to continue this all-party campaign to ensure that these provisions would be included in the Seeds Bill, and take an all-party delegation to Delhi if needed.

All the above key points were also echoed by participants in the Kisan Swaraj Yatra meetings across the state, showing a strong state-wide consensus. In addition, the events in each location highlighted specific focus areas. The November 3rd meeting at Jangaon, Warangal district, focused on the agricultural crisis in Telangana area marked by the distressing incidence of suicides; speakers including Prof. Kodandram highlighted the specific issues impacting farmers in the region, such as the huge investment on borewells (estimated around Rs.21,000 crores all from the farmers' pockets) and their high failure rate, falling groundwater levels, lack of support for dryland agriculture and dryland crops forcing the farmers to shift to crops unsuitable to the region and the large scale shift to commercial crops like cotton undermining family-level food security. The Jangaon Resolution was adopted unanimously by the various farmer unions of political parties and diverse organizations such as Telangana Vidyavantula Vedika, Jana Vigyana Vedika, Anthra, CROPS and PEACE.

The Nov 6th meetings at Chittoor, Pileru and Madanapalli were organized by a coalition of farmer organizations and agricultural workers'

unions – such as Federation of Farmer Associations, Rashtriya Raitu Seva Samiti, Madanapalli Farmers Association, AP Vyavasaya Vruttidarula Union, Shepherds Federation, and Natural Farmers Association. They highlighted the prices and insurance issues that were the biggest concerns of the medium farmers, and the land rights and high-cost and indebtedness issues being faced by Dalit workers and marginal farmers.

The Nov 7th meeting at Anantapur focused on the issues of drought-prone areas like Anantapur. The meeting was attended by farmers from around the district, and organized by NGOs working on drought-area agriculture and watershed work like Anantha Paryavarana Parirakshana Samiti (APPS), Rural Development Trust and Timbaktu, as well as other people's organizations like Jana Vigyana Vedika and Human Rights Forum. They adopted the Anantapur Declaration with a set of demands for supporting farmers in drought-prone areas and supporting dryland crops such as millets.

The Nov 9th meeting at Vijayawada jointly organized by several farmers' organizations and hundreds of farmers from many coastal districts participated in the events. There was a strong consensus on the issue of better pricing support for all farmers and particularly paddy farmers in this region, in a manner that is scientific, which covers not just the cost of cultivation but provides a dignified standard of living for all farmers – which was estimated to be Rs.1700 per quintal for paddy. Several organisations vowed to continue with the fight to secure better prices for farmers in the state. There was also strong concern expressed by many farmers and farmer leaders that the use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers has led to loss of soil fertility, water pollution and increasing health crisis.

The Vijayawada event had detailed discussions on various issues pertaining to the farming crisis, led by speakers like Yerneni Nagendranath (AP Raitanga Samakhya), Yelamanchili Sivaji (Praja Rajyam), Sitarama Swamy (AP Raitanga Samakhya), Muppalla Bhargavasri (CPIML), Kolli

Nageswara Rao (All India Kisan Sabha), Hanumantha Rao (Kisan Seva Sangham), M.V.S. Nagi Reddy (AP Federation of Farmers' Associations) and Nallamalla Venkateswarlu (Telugu Raitu).

The Nov 10th events in Visakhapatnam focused on tribal agriculture issues and were attended by nearly 800 adivasis and agricultural workers from Visakhapatnam, Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, East Godavari and Khammam districts. The events included a one-hour long rally through the heart of Visakhapatnam followed by a public meeting. The events were jointly organized by several coalitions of adivasi organizations such as Dhimsa, Adivasi Aikya Vedika, Girijan Sanghatita, Natwan Sangham and APVVU.

A unique feature of the Yatra in AP is that a wide variety of organizations have taken active part in organizing the meetings and taking ownership of the Yatra's mission of bringing farmers' issues to the fore. One of the aims of the Yatra is to bring all groups and individuals with concern about agriculture issues on the same platform. The groups involved in organizing various events include independent farmer organizations such as AP Raitanga Samakhya and Federation of Farmers' Associations, farmer unions of political parties, agricultural worker unions such as APVVU, organic farmers' associations, tribal groups like Adivasi Aikya Vedika, citizens groups such as Jana Vigyana Vedika, Human Rights Forum, Telangana Vidyavantula Vedika, non-governmental organizations such as Centre for Sustainable Agriculture, AID-India, Anthra, Caring Citizens Collective, Chetana Organic, RDT, etc, and prominent individuals such as former Agriculture Minister Sri. Vadde Sobhanadreeswara Rao and Prof. K.R.Chowdry.

The Yatra had set off at Sabarmati Ashram on Gandhi Jayanti and is scheduled to meet tens of thousands of farmers in twenty states before ending at Rajghat on December 11th. Organisers explained that the attempt of this Yatra is to put out a message of hope to all farmers in India through the promotion of self-reliant ecological farming even as it seeks to challenge the anti-

farmer policies of the government. More than four hundred organisations are involved in this large outreach effort unfolding across India, which also seeks to draw in urban consumers into its mission of saving our “Food, Farmers and Freedom”. In Andhra Pradesh, the Kisan Swaraj

Yatra took part in events organised in Jangaon, Chittoor, Pileru, Madanapalle, Anantapur, Hyderabad and Vijayawada and will be taking part in a public meeting in Visakhapatnam highlighting issues of tribal agriculture on November 10th, before moving on to Orissa.



In Kashmir, years of unrest take a toll on mental health

At 11am, in a corridor of Shri Maharaja Hari Singh (SMHS) Hospital in Srinagar, eight men and women are waiting to see the psychiatrist.

Since 1989, the number of patients at the psychiatric hospital has increased from 1,800 a year to at least 100,000 a year now, says Dr. Arshad Hussain

Arshad Hussain hurries into his office, holding a sheaf of medical records. He calls the first name and sits at his desk in the bare room. One by one, the patients enter and sit down on a stool at his side of the desk. The doctor works with practised efficiency, touching shoulders, faces and knees, pausing every few minutes to answer his phone. He writes out prescriptions as he calls the next name. There’s little privacy to be had; patients overlap in the room, jostling to be next in line. Each has about 3 minutes of his time.

“These are just follow-up appointments,” explains Hussain. “We are lucky it’s a hartal today; people can’t get here because of the strikes. Usually there will be about 200 people out there in the corridor.”

Stress in the valley

Hussain’s schedule was not always this hectic. He’s been working at SMHS and the nearby Government Psychiatric Diseases Hospital since the early nineties.

Since 1989, the number of patients at the psychiatric hospital has increased from 1,800 a year to at least 100,000 a year now, he says. At SMHS, the number has grown to around 50,000.

Reliable national figures on depression are not available. But while it’s clear that depression is increasing worldwide (the World Health

Organization predicts that depression will be the second most common illness globally by 2020), the rapidity of the rise in Kashmir has been alarming.

Most patients Hussain has seen in the past hour suffer from serious depression or a related ailment.

A man with a black beard and delicate glasses takes his place on the stool. He leans close to the doctor, describing his symptoms in whispers. His wife stands behind him in a burqa and niqab. Hussain asks them a few questions, pausing with a grimace to silence his phone, and writes out another prescription.

“That man was suffering from premature ejaculation,” says Hussain afterwards. “I have started him on treatment but in this case they really need couple’s therapy.”

Many patients are confused, prone to showing physical symptoms for their depression or stress, describing strange aches and pains, insomnia, or a general inability to concentrate. Premature ejaculation, for example, is commonly treated with antidepressants and can be a side effect of depression or anxiety.

Though depression has many triggers, it’s clear that there’s a connection between the rapid deterioration of mental health in the valley and the turmoil that militancy and ongoing military operations have brought to its residents since the late 1980s.

“Depression is a global disorder,” says Hussain, “But this place has been a high-stress environment for 20 years, and people who are prone to depression here will get it.”

In a 2006 paper in medical journal JK Practitioner,

Mushtaq Margoob, a psychiatrist practising in Kashmir, published a study he had made of 1,200 individuals from four districts of the valley. Margoob found the nature of the Kashmiri conflict—sustained, unpredictable violence over a long period—has a particularly bad effect on mental health in the region. Similar issues have been reported in war zones such as Rwanda, Bosnia and Northern Ireland.

“The exposure to traumatic events rises manifold when the fight takes the form of guerilla warfare, which extends for a long time,” said the study. Margoob found a “phenomenal increase in psychiatric morbidity, including stress-related disorders”, since the early 1990s, with 58.69% of respondents reporting some traumatic experience.

The problem doctors in Srinagar face now is not only how to cope with so many patients, but how to evolve long-term treatments that don't rely solely on the prescription of antidepressants and tranquillizers. But alternative treatments, such as counselling or cognitive behavioural therapy, require time and manpower, and there is a tangible lack of both.

The resources of the government hospitals are improving, says Hussain. “When I joined in 2000, there were two psychiatrists in our department and not more than six in the whole of Kashmir,” he says. “There are 18-20 working (across the state) now, but manpower is the most critical factor in psychiatry.”

In November, the Central government identified the Psychiatric Diseases Hospital as a future centre of excellence under the National Institute of Mental Health, which will improve finance and recruitment in the long term. But for now, the pressure isn't letting up.

Journalist and author Justine Hardy runs the Kashmir Lifeline and Health Centre in Srinagar, which offers free counselling, reiki and other therapies. The minimum appointment time is 40 minutes, but this means that the clinic can only see about 15 patients in a day.

“The government hospital is inundated,” Hardy says. “The thing that is most apparent is the lack of time each doctor has. Counselling or the concept of therapy just does not exist here. The government solution has often been blanket medication of sedatives and anti-psychotics, but what do you do with a whole society that is suffering from some form of PTSD (post-traumatic

stress disorder)? “

The market

In the last five years, the demand for antidepressants has created a “mental health industry” in Kashmir, and a number of “store front” practitioners have set up shop to provide them, according to Arif Maghribi, a doctor who works with Hardy.

“You see their boards everywhere,” Maghribi says. “They aren't psychiatrists. They are medical students or grads (graduates) who make arrangements with pharmacists.”

Hasty or inexperienced diagnosis can be dangerous. Says Maghribi: “I've seen patients who have had stomach ulceration or diabetes, but because they were on so much medication for psychiatric disorders, they hadn't realized it.”

Hussain acknowledges this problem. “In a vacuum, people have to come in,” he says. “You get quackery everywhere, but there's a big market for health here. It still sells.”

At SMHS, Mohammad Ismael Reshi, a 27-year-old shopkeeper, is getting a repeat prescription of his antidepressants. Reshi has suffered from depression for 12 years. In that time he's tried many treatments, from visiting holy men to counselling, but he says that only medication really helps. “I don't want to take it,” he says, “but counselling doesn't help and when I'm on medication, I can do my work up to a point.”

Reshi's skin is pale, he has trouble sleeping, can't hold down a job and hates loud noises. “It's not a physical thing, it's my soul that is ill,” he says. “If two men are fighting, I won't get involved. If someone slams the door, I feel anxious. I'm always late for things and everyone tells me that I am a lazy man.”

His hands move nervously as he speaks, clasping and unclasping, feeling for things to prod or pat. “When we were young, we used to go out in the evenings for a walk, a movie, and it used to help us be normal,” Reshi says. “Now it's like we are hens that have to go into the coop at night. Nothing is normal here.”

It's common for people to seek help locally before going to government hospitals, says Reshi. “I think 80% of people suffer from this problem but they

don't know what it is," he says. "So they go to some outside clinic, who will take money from them and give them the wrong drugs."

He gestures at the line of patients waiting to see Hussain.

"Some people take ages to realize," he says.

"Eventually they all wind up here."

Next: Levels of addiction to prescription drugs have surged in Kashmir, as has the suicide rate, prompting the police and other health clinics to set up suicide helplines.

Source : *Mint*, 28th March, 2011



Maldives

Rising sea level may sink Maldives

President Nasheed of Maldives is literally fighting with his back to the wall to ensure that his 1,200-island state does not sink because of the rising sea levels.

A two-day visit to India saw Mr Nasheed stress on how Maldives has been described as "one of the most vulnerable countries due to the impact of climate change" by the prestigious Portugal-based Climate Vulnerable Monitor 2010.

Recognising this vulnerability, Mr Nasheed is determined to make his island state carbon neutral by 2020. "If India can take the lead in building a carbon neutral economy, it would create so much momentum that other major economies would start to follow suit," he said.

Elaborating on this crucial subject, Mr Nasheed explained, "India now has the political and economic power to take the world over a tipping point where the transition to clean energy sources would be unstoppable," he said.

"Low carbon development patterns will have to be followed and I believe it is possible to follow this path for our three lakh population. Relying on fossil fuel is foolish, we can't afford

it. We must find other ways to develop our livelihoods," he said.

Maldives is already spending 20 per cent of its infrastructure costs on adaptation since they are facing coastal erosion and water contamination.

Since it does not fall under the category of the "least-developed country", Maldives is not eligible for grants and has therefore gone in for a slew of cost-effective measures by changing its economic systems and fiscal policies.

Mr Nasheed praised MoEF's positive role in the climate negotiations that took place in Cancun.

"COP 16 was a success because of Jairam Ramesh's positive engagement to get the conference moving," he said.

He could not understand the criticism of several African states who opposed India's role in Cancun. "I find it difficult to understand why we should not have an agreement on carbon emission. We will all die anyway if immediate steps are not taken. We have a historic responsibility to make emission cuts and we should take them immediately," he added.

Source : *Asian Age*, 26 February, 2011



Pakistan

Multi Party Conference

Statement

Calamity – hit Pakistan must refuse foreign debt repayments; divert funds to help out flood – hit victims

Pakistan is facing the worst disaster of its history. About 20 million of its population is badly affected by the recent huge devastation caused by angry floods. Major infrastructure is totally destroyed in major parts of the country. The country has suffered a loss of about Rs250 billion only in the agricultural and livestock sectors and the flood recovery costs may run into billions of dollars. Pakistan is in real and worst human and economic crisis. Though international donors are announcing commitments for relief and rehabilitation, but these are peanuts vis-à-vis the degree of catastrophe.

We think this is the time, instead of begging for much-needed aid for relief and rehabilitation, Pakistan must stand up and announce unilateral suspension of repayment of foreign debts, owed to IFIs, donor countries and clubs. Currently Pakistan is paying about \$ 3 billion on debt servicing every year. As Pakistan present foreign debt of \$ 54 billion is increasing, the debt servicing will be up by the same ratio. Under the prevailing critical circumstances, we have to think about coping with this severe debt domination. Various laws and international protocols favor if Pakistan refuse to pay its debts right now, especially under the prevailing horrible circumstances, Pakistan is passing through. To refuse payment of debts is not a new thing; many poor countries used this just and lawful right in the past.

There are spaces in international law that can be invoked as legal justification to refuse the external debt. One of these justifications is called “State of Necessity”. This rule is characterized by a situation that jeopardizes the economic or its political survival- such as the situations which creates the factor of impossibility of fulfilling the very basic needs of the populations (health, education, food, water, housing etc). The “State of Necessity” justifies the repudiating of debt, since it implies the establishing priorities among different obligations of the state. Therefore, a natural calamity-like the one hitting Pakistan now

creates the very factor of “State of Necessity”. The UN Human Rights Commission has adopted numerous resolutions on the issue of debt and structural adjustment. One such resolution was adopted in 1999, asserts that “The exercise of the basic rights of the people of the debtor countries to food, housing, clothing, employment, education, health services and a healthy environment cannot be subordinated to the implementation of the structural adjustment policies, growth programs and economic reforms”

Right now, state of Pakistan is no longer able to fulfill fundamental human needs of its flood-hit 20 million population. Pakistan is simply unable to repay or service its debt responsibilities. We cannot put our people at the mercy of this natural calamity, that is enormous than Tsunami. The first and foremost thing in such circumstances is the fulfillments of the all fundamental human needs of the populations, hit

by natural calamities and disasters. So this is high time for Pakistan to stand up to its creditors and say a big NO. Pakistan had already lost one such just opportunity in 2005 when devastating quake hit Kashmir, leaving millions of people in misery. This time it is more lethal calamity, and we should no more be silent. Latin American countries including Argentine, Burkina Faso, Peru, Mexico, Paraguay, and Ecuador took such positions in the past. Very recent IMF had to cancel all its debt, US \$ 268 million owed by Haiti, after devastating earthquake hit Haiti in 2009.

The cancellation is given via the newly established Post-Catastrophe Debt Relief Trust Fund, which was set up for this purpose and which can now be accessed by other indebted, low income countries hit by disasters. Another example is Argentine. The country went into serious crisis after 2001 economic crisis. Though Argentine leaders had always implemented unpopular policies dictated by IMF, it was the people of Argentine who come on the roads in 2001 to protest the debt domination. This popular action succeeded in altering the history. As a result country’s president announced the biggest unilateral suspension of foreign debt in

history, a total of more than \$ 80 billion, owed to private creditors, countries and Paris Club. Thus Argentine demonstrated that a country could stop debt repayments for a lengthy period of time. Pakistan's total debt-to-GDP ratio has crossed 61 percent this fiscal year, breaching the 60 percent limit set under the Fiscal Responsibility and Debt Limitation Act. According to World Bank if Debt-to-GDP ratio exceeds the limit of 80%, the default is sure.

The major portion of budget is consumed by two Ds; Debt-servicing and Defense. We have to review allocations against these two Ds. Under the circumstances, there is no denying the fact that Pakistan's single source of economy vulnerability is debt crisis. We do not have any other option to come out of this economic but to refuse repayment of debts.

We demand that this is high time for the State of Pakistan to announce unilateral suspension of the all external debts and divert that amount for the relief and rehabilitation of 20 million flood-hit people. The government should approach the newly created Post-Catastrophe Debt Relief trust Fund to get its foreign debt liabilities cancelled. The Government can also invoke the international protocol of "State of Necessity", introduced by UN Human Rights Commission in 1999, to refuse payment of debts. As government is planning to review economic priorities and budget allocations, it must take steps to reduce military budget, cut non-development expenditures and other unnecessary heads. The amount, thus saved be shifted to social sector. We also demand that International Financial institutions and donor countries must repudiate the debt of Pakistan.



News and Views - General

Popular movement VS theocracy

In recent days, there has been unprecedented political upheaval and mass upsurge in some countries in North Africa and West Asia with predominant Muslim population. This can be interpreted in simple words as democracy movement. People of most of these countries have no background of democratic participation in the post-colonial era. Some of these were once patronized by the Soviet Union as their ally in its "war on imperialist capitalism" and some have been supported by the US. The Soviet Union is now a subject of the past, and the US continuously changing its tactics of global domination and policing.

It is yet to be seen who are actually planning and organizing these movements, what is their goal, what is their perspective on women's participation, ethnicity and democratization. Many of these countries have prospered with the blood and sweat of the migrant labourers who have been subjected to semi-slavery situation. What is their standpoint on these unfortunate labourers is also not clear.

It is also not clear how things will take shape in the coming years. Will the forces of liberal democracy gain ground or the forces of religious extremists will seize the opportunity. Are there enough endogenous 'push' to change the system, or there are exogenous 'pull' by the global power brokers to establish exclusive control over their oil and mineral resources.

There is danger that theocracy may sweep across borders as it may find its expression in the form of anti (US) imperialist protest. This has already happened in Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Theocracy means the rule of the clergy over the people. The natural effect of such a government is despotic oppression, because the clergy believes himself to be the representative of God and the legitimate authority for implementing what he believes to be God's commands on earth. In such a State, people have no or limited right to express themselves. They are not allowed to criticise or disagree and oppose the clergy. A religious scholar self-righteously believes himself

to be a religious authority, just because he belongs to a religious apparatus and not because of the people's view and popular endorsement. Therefore, if such a person attains power, he would be an irresponsible ruler. He does not hold himself accountable to the people.

In Islam, there has never been a distinct separation between the civil and military authorities, whereas the concept of civil-military relations in the western countries has essentially evolved out of secularism and the separation of the civilian functionaries from the military functionaries of government, with the former acting as controllers and the latter as subordinate professionals. Since in Islam there is no background of secularism and no distinction between the military and civilian components, a large number of Muslim States, consequently, are ruled by the military or dominated by the military. The only ideology that seems to be popular and effective in Islamic countries is the Islamic ideology which, if anything, tends to be pro-military and excludes alternative ideologies from gaining ground. Thus, the trend of Islamic politics indicates a permanence of past patterns of military domination and Islamic support for military governments.

Apparently there are only two Muslim countries in the world with "elected democratic governments", Malaysia and Bangladesh. Malaysia's democracy is highly distorted with draconian laws like the internal security act. In Bangladesh there is a dynastic oligarchy legitimized through periodic elections. Some people cite the example of these two countries as oasis of democracy.

Democracy is a long, painstaking process that evolves through centuries. There may not be any dramatic change overnight. But the positive sign is that the people in countries like Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Libya, and Yemen have found a new language of protest. They have to be ready to pay a much higher price later, as the people of Iraq are now paying. Yet I welcome these protests. This is a new wave.

Hunger, by design

Why is every fourth Indian hungry? Why is every third woman in India anaemic and malnourished? Why is every second child underweight and stunted? Why has the hunger and malnutrition crisis deepened even as India has nine per cent growth? Why is “Shining India” a “Starving India”?

In my view, hunger is a structural part of the design of the industrialised, globalised food system. Hunger is an intrinsic part of the design of capital-intensive, chemical-intensive monocultures of industrial agriculture, also called the “Green Revolution”. India’s Green Revolution from 1940s to 1970s was neither green, nor revolutionary. It merely created a market for corporations by transforming war chemicals into agrichemicals and breeding crops to respond to high chemical inputs. It increased production of a few commodities — rice and wheat — at the cost of the production of pulses, oilseeds, vegetables, fruits and millets. It focused on one region, Punjab, and pushed the agriculture of other regions into neglect.

This is a design for scarcity.

Hunger is also designed into a non-sustainable production system in which costs of inputs are higher than the price of outputs. The farmer gets trapped into a negative economy with debt, and suicide is an inevitable consequence. The 2,00,000 farmer suicides since 1997 are part of the genocidal design of corporate-driven high-cost agriculture.

There is now talk of a second Green Revolution in India. This one is based on genetic engineering, which is being introduced into agriculture largely to allow corporations to claim intellectual property rights and patents on seeds. The floodgate of patenting seeds was opened through the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement of World Trade Organisation (WTO).

When seed is transformed from a source of life into “intellectual property” which becomes a source of super profits through royalty collections, both biodiversity and small farmers disappear. We have seen this happen with Bt. Cotton.

The Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) of the WTO was designed to allow Cargill and other agribusiness corporations access to world markets. This was done by forcing countries to remove import restrictions (quantitative restrictions) and using \$400 billion to subsidise and dump artificial cheap food commodities on the Third World. The case of dumping of soya and destruction of India’s domestic edible oil production and distribution is an example of how the global reach of multinational corporations creates hunger, driving down farm prices and destroying local livelihoods. Indian farmers are losing \$25 billion every year to falling prices. While farm prices fall, food prices continue to rise, creating a double burden of hunger for rural communities. This is why half of the hungry people in India and the world are farmers.

Globalised forced trade in food, falsely called free trade, has aggravated the hunger crisis by undermining food sovereignty and food democracy. With the deadlock in the Doha round of WTO, forced trade is being driven by bilateral agreements such as the US-India Knowledge Initiative in Agriculture on the board of which sit corporations like Monsanto, Cargill/ADM and Walmart.

Sadly, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is trying to use the food crisis his trade liberalisation policies have been created to hand over India’s seed supply to Monsanto, food supply to Cargill and other corporations and retail to Walmart, in line with the US-India AoA signed with President Bush in 2005. Speaking at a conference on food crisis and food inflation on February 4, 2011, Dr Singh said, “India needs to shore up farm supply claims by bringing in organised retail players” (read Walmart). Research shows that globalised, industrialised retail is destroying farmers’ livelihoods and leading to wastage of 50 per cent food. This too is hunger by design.

Both the US and Indian governments are supporting US agri-business corporations to expand markets and profits. The common citizen is politically orphaned in a world shaped by corporate rules. Farmers’ rights and people’s right to food are extinguished as corporate rights to limitless profits design “the market”. Instead

of the right to food being sacred, “the market” becomes sacred. When the Supreme Court of India told the government to distribute the food grain that was rotting in godowns, Dr Singh said that giving food away free will kill the farmer’s incentive to produce and adversely affect prices and wages. When the National Advisory Committee (NAC), headed by Sonia Gandhi, drafted a Food Security Act, the Prime Minister-appointed Rangarajan Committee said that stepped-up procurements could “distort” open market food prices. In other words, corporate rights to profit through creation of hunger must be protected even as people die.

Planning Commission vice-chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia invited Gulf countries to farm in India and export food to their countries during a visit to Muscat. A Bahrain firm, Nader and Ebrahim Group, recently tied up with Pune-based Sanghar to grow bananas on 400 acres. Indian laws do not allow foreigners to buy land. So the Planning Commission chief is encouraging foreign corporations to partner with Indian companies for contract farming.

Diverting land from food for local communities to cash crops for the rich in US, Europe and the

Gulf countries is not a solution for hunger; this will aggravate the food crisis. This is not investment in agriculture, it is land grab and food grab. To get rid of hunger we need a paradigm shift in the design of our food systems. We need to shift from monocultures to diversity, from chemical intensive to ecological, biodiversity-intensive, from capital-intensive to low-cost farming systems. We need to shift from centralised, globalised food supply controlled by a handful of corporations to decentralised, localised food systems that are resilient in the context of climate vulnerability and price volatility. Such system could feed India’s population.

Industrial monocultures produce less food and nutrition per acre than biodiverse ecological farms. Biodiversity organic farming, if adopted nationally, could provide enough calories for 2.4 billion, enough protein for 2.5 billion, enough carotene for 1.5 billion, and enough folic acid for 1.7 billion pregnant women. We must end hunger by building food democracy, by reclaiming our seed sovereignty, food sovereignty and land sovereignty.

Source: *Asian Age*, 3rd February, 2011



Decline in media freedom in South Asia: report

A dozen journalists were killed in South Asia — most of them in conflict situations — during the year which also saw the media come under strain due to “over-commercialisation, monopolisation and excessive political clout.”

Taking stock of the circumstances under which the media functioned this year, the South Asia Media Monitor for 2009 — brought out by the South Asia Media Commission (SAMC) and released here on Tuesday — reflects the growing concern within the media over the manner in which the functioning of a free media has rapidly deteriorated as “vested interests outmanoeuvred editorial controls.”

As for violence against journalists, the year saw a rise in conflict situations with the ongoing armed struggles in the frontier regions of Pakistan

and in Afghanistan bringing the media under tremendous pressure. Of the 12 deaths, seven were reported from Pakistan alone. Two journalists were killed in Afghanistan and one each was killed in India, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

Space selling

The India overview reflects not just on the rise in violent incidents in the form of attacks on media by vigilante groups but also on the ongoing debate in the country over ethics of news coverage as the “tendency to sell news space for trivia grew.”

Of the view that “some zealots in the profession [in Pakistan] have used their new freedoms to scandalise and destabilise a fragile democracy, albeit ignoring media norms quite frequently,”

the report takes note of some ruling party leaders using threatening language against some scribes.

But, according to SAMC, journalists in Sri Lanka have suffered the worst adversities by all standards, “considerably more serious than even the travails that counterparts in Pakistan have faced” and many top journalists had to flee the country fearing for their life.

Despite contributing significantly to the restoration of democracy in 2006, the conditions for journalism in Nepal have deteriorated “representing a poor reward for the media.” The

media in Afghanistan, as per the report, has become an arena where armed groups contest fiercely for political space.

While deploring the evident deterioration in media freedom in the region because of violence by state and non-state actors, bureaucratic and legislative efforts to silence dissent, and erosion of editorial control, the Commission has also stressed the need to foster a responsible media culture. “Professional freedom is not a privilege but a responsibility” and media should agree self-regulation.

Source : *The Hindu*, 30th December, 2009



Growth and other concerns

I was awakened early one morning recently by someone who said he was enormously enjoying my on-going debate on economic growth in India. I was very pleased that I had given someone some joy, but I also wondered what on earth he could be talking about, since I have not been involved in any such debate. As it happens, I am getting a steady stream of telephone calls and electronic communication about this alleged debate. Since I could not generate the memory of any such debate, I tried to recollect any solitary remark on economic growth in some other context that I might have made in the last few months. I managed to resurrect the memory of having said in passing, in a meeting of TIE (The Indus Entrepreneurs) in Delhi in December, that it is silly to be obsessed about overtaking China in the rate of growth of Gross National Product (GNP), while not comparing ourselves with China in other respects, like education, basic health, or life expectancy. Since that one-sentence remark seems to have been interpreted in many different ways (my attention to that fact was drawn by friends who are more web-oriented than I am), I guess I should try to explain what that remark was about.

GNP growth can, of course, be very helpful in advancing living standards and in battling poverty (one would have to be quite foolish not to see that), but there is little case for confusing (1) the important role of economic growth as means for achieving good things, and (2) growth of inanimate objects of convenience being taken to be an end in itself. One does not have to “rubbish” economic growth — and I did not do anything like

that — to recognise that it is not our ultimate objective, but a very useful means to achieve things that we ultimately value, including a better quality of life.

Nor should my remark be taken to be a dismissal of the far-reaching relevance of comparing India with China. This is a good perspective in which to assess each of the two countries and a lot of my past work — on my own and jointly with Jean Dreze — has made use of that perspective. It is of some historical interest that comparing India with China has been the subject matter of discussion for a very long time. “Is there anyone, in the five parts of India, who does not admire China?” asked Yi Jing (I-Tsing, in old spelling) in the seventh century, on returning to China after being in India for ten years, studying at the ancient university in Nalanda. He went on to write a book, in 691 AD, about India, which presented, among other things, the first systematic comparative account of medical practices and health care in these two countries (perhaps the first such comparison between any two countries in the world). He investigated what China could learn from India, and what, in turn, India could assimilate from China. Comparisons of that kind — and more — remain very relevant today, and I have discussed elsewhere the illumination we can get from such comparisons in general, and in comparative medical practice and health care in particular (“The Art of Medicine: Learning from Others,” *Lancet*, January 15, 2011).

What goes wrong in the current obsession with India-China comparison is not the relevance of comparing China with India, but the field that is chosen for comparison. Now that the Indian rate of economic growth seems to be hovering around 8 per cent per year, there is a lot of speculation — and breathless discourse — on whether and when India may catch up or surpass China's over-10 per cent growth rate. Despite the interest in this subject, comparable to that in the race course (the betting comes from the West as well as Asia), this is surely a silly focus. This is so not merely because there are so many elements of arbitrariness in any growth estimate (the choice of prices for weighting is only one of the problems, as any serious economist knows), but also because the lives that people are able to lead — what ultimately interest people most — are only indirectly and partially influenced by the rates of overall economic growth.

Let me look at some numbers, drawing from various sources — national as well as international, in particular World Development Reports of the World Bank and Human Development Reports of the United Nations. Life expectancy at birth in China is 73.5 years; in India it is still 64.4 years. Infant mortality rate is 50 per thousand in India, compared with just 17 in China, and the under-5 mortality rate is 66 for Indians and 19 for the Chinese. China's adult literacy rate is 94 per cent, compared with India's 65 per cent, and mean years of schooling in India is 4.4 years, compared with 7.5 years in China. In our effort to reverse the lack of schooling of girls, India's literacy rate for women between the ages of 15 and 24 has certainly risen, but it is still below 80 per cent, whereas in China it is 99 per cent. Almost half of our children are undernourished compared with a very tiny proportion in China. Only 66 per cent of Indian children are immunised with triple vaccine (DPT), as opposed to 97 per cent in China. Comparing ourselves with China in these really important matters would be a very good perspective, and they can both inspire us and give us illumination about what to do — and what not to do, particularly the glib art of doing nothing.

Higher GNP in China has certainly helped it to reduce various indicators of poverty and deprivation, and to expand different aspects of the quality of life. So we have every reason to want to encourage sustainable economic growth, among the other things we can do to augment living standards today and in the future.

Sustainable economic growth is a very good thing in a way that "growth mania" is not. We need some clarity on why we are doing what (including the values we have about our lives and freedoms and about the environment), and getting excited about the horse race on GNP growth with China is not a good way of achieving that clarity.

Further, we have to take note of the fact that GNP per capita is not invariably a good predictor of valuable features of our lives, for they depend also on other things that we do — or fail to do. Compare India with Bangladesh, where, as Jean Dreze pointed out in an article many years ago, "social indicators" are "improving quite rapidly" ("Bangladesh Shows the Way," *The Hindu*, September 17, 2004). In terms of income, India has a huge lead over Bangladesh, with a GNP per capita of Rs.3,250, compared with Rs.1,550 in Bangladesh, in comparable units of purchasing power parity. India was ahead of Bangladesh earlier as well, but thanks to fast economic growth in recent years, India's per-capita income is now comfortably more than double that of Bangladesh. How well is India's income advantage reflected in our lead in those things that really matter? I fear not very well — indeed not well at all.

Life expectancy in Bangladesh is 66.9 years compared with India's 64.4. The proportion of underweight children in Bangladesh (41.3 per cent) is a little lower than in India (43.5), and its fertility rate (2.3) is also lower than India's (2.7). Mean years of schooling amount to 4.8 years in Bangladesh compared with India's 4.4 years. While India is ahead of Bangladesh in male literacy rate in the youthful age-group of 15-24, the female rate in Bangladesh is higher than in India. Interestingly, the female literacy rate among young Bangladeshis is actually higher than the male rate, whereas young females still do much worse than young males in India. There is much evidence to suggest that Bangladesh's current progress has much to do with the role that liberated Bangladeshi women are beginning to play in the country.

What about health, which interests every human being as much as anything else? Under-5 mortality rate is 66 in India compared with 52 in Bangladesh. In infant mortality, Bangladesh has a similar advantage, since the rate is 50 in India and 41 in Bangladesh. Whereas 94 per cent of Bangladeshi children are immunised with DPT vaccine, only 66 per cent of Indian children are. In each of these respects, Bangladesh does better

than India, despite having less than half of India's per-capita income.

This should not, however, be interpreted to entail that Bangladesh's living conditions will not benefit from higher economic growth — they certainly can benefit greatly, particularly if growth is used as a means of doing good things, rather than treating it as an end in itself. It is to the huge credit of Bangladesh that despite the adversity of low income it has been able to do so much so quickly, in which the activism of the NGOs as well as public policies have played their parts. But higher income, including larger public resources, will enhance, rather than reduce, Bangladesh's ability to do good things for its people.

One of the great things about economic growth is that it generates resources for the government to spend according to its priorities. In fact, public resources typically grow faster than the GNP: when the GNP increases at 7 to 9 per cent, public revenue tends to expand at rates between 9 and 12 per cent. The gross tax revenue, for example, of the Government of India now is more than four times what it was in 1990-91, at constant prices — a bigger rise than GNP per head.

Expenditure on what is somewhat misleadingly called the "social sector" (health, education, nutrition, etc) has certainly gone up in India, and that is a reason for cheer. And yet we are still well behind China in many of these fields. For example, government expenditure on health care in China is nearly five times that in India. China does, of course, have a higher per-capita income than we do, but even in relative terms, while China spends nearly two per cent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on health care (1.9 per cent to be exact), the proportion is only a little above one per cent (1.1 per cent) in India.

One result of the relatively low allocation to public health care in India is the development of a remarkable reliance of many poor people across the country on private doctors, many of whom have little medical training, if any. Since health is also a typical case of "asymmetric information," with the patients knowing very little about what the doctors (or "supposed doctors") are giving them, the possibility of fraud and deceit is very large. In a study conducted by the Pratiche Trust, we found cases of exploitation of the poor patients' ignorance of what they are being given to make them part with badly needed money to get treatment that they do not often get (we even found cases in which patients with malaria were charged comparatively large sums of money for being given saline injections). There is

very definitive evidence of a combination of quackery and crookery in the premature privatisation of basic health care. This is the result not only of shameful exploitation, but ultimately of the sheer unavailability of public health care in many localities around India.

The central point to seize is that while economic growth is an important boon for enhancing living conditions, its reach depends greatly on what we do with the fruits of growth. To be sure, there are large numbers of people for whom growth alone does just fine, since they are already privileged and need no social assistance. Economic growth only adds to their economic and social opportunities. Those gains are, of course, good, and there is nothing wrong in celebrating their better lives through economic growth, especially since this group of relatively privileged Indians is quite large in absolute numbers. But the exaggerated concentration on their lives, which the media tend often to display, gives an incomplete picture of what is happening to Indians in general.

And perhaps more worryingly, this group of relatively privileged and increasingly prosperous Indians can easily fall for the temptation to treat economic growth as an end in itself, for it serves directly as the means of their opulence and improving lifestyles without further social efforts. The insularity that this limited perspective generates can even take the form of ridiculing social activists — "jholawalas" is one description I have frequently heard — who keep reminding others about the predicament of the larger masses of people who make up this great country. The fact is, however, that India cannot be seen as doing splendidly if a great many Indians — sometimes most Indians — are having very little improvement in their deprived lives.

Some critics of huge social inequalities might be upset that there is something rather uncouth and crude in the self-centred lives and inward-looking temptations of the prosperous inner sanctum. My main concern, however, is that those temptations may prevent the country from doing the wonderful things it can do for Indians at large. Economic growth, properly supplemented, can be a huge contributor to making things better for people, and it is extremely important to understand the relevance and role of growth with clarity.

(Amartya Sen, who won the Nobel Prize in Economics in 1998 and was awarded the Bharat Ratna in 1999, is Professor of Economics and Philosophy at Harvard University. He is Founder and Chair of the Pratiche Trust, which he started with his Nobel money.)

Global warming can be halved

Hindustan Times, 24 February, 2011

The projected rise in global temperatures could be cut in half in coming years if world governments focused on reducing emissions of two harmful pollutants - black carbon and ground-level ozone, including methane - rather than carbon dioxide alone, according to a U.N. study released Wednesday.

The study, "Integrated Assessment of Black Carbon and Tropospheric Ozone," by the U.N. Environment Programme, shows the impact that the two short-lived pollutants have on the environment, compared with carbon dioxide, which can stay in the atmosphere for decades.

"I think what this study does that hasn't been done in the past is look at the contributions to global warming by gases with short lifetimes," said Steve Seidel, vice president of policy analysis for the Pew Center on Global Climate Change.

Black carbon, a component of soot, is a threat to human health and is known to hasten the melting of snow. Ground-level ozone kills farm crops and also adversely affects health. Reducing the two, the study said, would improve health outcomes in the regions where they are implemented and "slow the rate of climate change within the first half of this century."

The impact from reducing short-lived pollutants such as black carbon and ground-level ozone such as methane is more immediately felt. Carbon

dioxide remains in the atmosphere for years, so the effects of reducing the emissions take longer to register.

To reduce black carbon emissions, the study recommends placing a ban on open-field burning of agricultural waste, replacing industrial coke ovens with modern recovery ovens, introducing clean-burning biomass cook stoves for cooking and heating in developing countries and eliminating high-emitting vehicles.

To reduce ground-level ozone, including methane, the study recommends upgrading wastewater treatment, controlling methane emissions from livestock and reducing gas emissions from long-distance pipelines.

A fairly aggressive strategy to reduce carbon dioxide emissions under current reduction scenarios "does little to mitigate warming over the next 20 to 30 years," the study said. With carbon dioxide reductions alone, global temperatures are still projected to rise by more than 2 degrees Celsius by 2050 over pre-industrial levels.

But reducing black carbon and ground-level ozone reductions would delay the warming for another 20 years, until 2070, according to the study.

Source : *The Hindu, Feb 14, 2011*



FAO warns on oil as world food prices hit record

Global food prices hit a record high in February, the United Nations said Thursday, warning that fresh oil price spikes and stockpiling by importers keen to head off popular unrest would hit already volatile cereal markets.

Rising food prices are a growing global concern, partly fuelling the protests which toppled the rulers of Tunisia and Egypt in January and February, which in turn unleashed unrest in North Africa and the Middle East from Algeria to Yemen.

The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organisation's Food Price Index hit its second straight record last month, driven by rising grain costs and tighter supply to further pass peaks seen in 2008 when prices sparked riots in several countries.

FAO economist Abdolreza Abbassian said global food prices are likely to remain close to record highs until the condition of new crops is known,

adding that jumps in the oil price could have a bigger impact on grain markets, which have seen benchmark U.S. wheat prices surge 60 percent in the year to March.

“Until we know about new crops, that means waiting at least until April, our view is don’t expect any major corrections in these high prices, expect even more volatility now that oil has joined the crowd,” Abbassian said in a telephone interview.

Oil prices recently hit 2-1/2 year highs, nearing records set in 2008, with markets spooked on concern that North African and Middle East unrest would choke key supplies.

Farmers depend on fuel to run agricultural machinery, while dry bulk shippers are heavy oil users, costs which are passed on to food buyers.

Spiralling shipping costs for commodities threaten to drive food inflation even higher as nations from Asia to the Middle East and Africa scramble for supplies, analysts say.

STOCKPILING

Stockpiling by some major grain importers “beyond countries’ normal needs” seeking to head off political unrest and secure supplies on domestic markets, has been adding uncertainty and volatility to the markets, Abbassian said.

“Political instability in the regions and countries affects the markets by adding uncertainty: will a country buy or not buy, why it had bought so much now...those things are disruptive to the normal trade,” he said.

World No.1 commodity trader Glencore, whose assets include mines, refineries and grain silos around the world, saw the benefits of rising agricultural commodities prices in its 40-percent-higher 2010 net profits, announced on Thursday.

Glencore’s agriculture division performed strongly following last year’s Russian drought and Australian rains and was bullish about commodities as a whole expecting last year’s trends based on growth in emerging nations such as China to persist this year.

The FAO, which measures monthly price changes for a food basket composed of cereals, oilseeds, dairy, meat and sugar, averaged 236 points in February, the record in real and nominal terms, up 2.2 percent from January’s record and rising for the eighth month in a row.

Underlining the FAO concern about high prices a Reuters poll found analysts ratcheting up their expectations for food and fuel prices to 2015.

The polled corn (maize) price forecast was \$7 a bushel, still slightly below Thursday’s price but well above a 2015 forecast of \$5.30 in November. Forecasts for oil, wheat and soybeans were all above prices now, in the poll of 16 analysts run earlier this week.

But James Dunsterville, head analyst at Agrinews, pointed to a fall in some grains markets in the second part of February, which traders have ascribed to investors switching into rampant energy prices.

“We have spikes in oil prices because people are worried about supplies in the Middle East but if you look at corn and soybeans, they did not follow,” Dunsterville said.

BIOFUELS

Corn and soybeans usually tend to follow crude oil prices closely as they are used as a commodity to produce biofuels, with demand from that sector fuelling the 2008 spike.

Abbassian said rising oil prices can help biofuels regain soon a major role they played in driving food prices in 2008.

Bigger grain stocks now than in 2007/2008 are serving as a buffer to prevent the rerun of the food crisis, but the FAO has been concerned about the heavy use of stocks, Abbassian said.

FAO said in Thursday’s statement it expected a tightening of the global cereal supply and demand balance in 2010/11.

“In the face of growing demand and a decline in world cereal production in 2010, global cereal stocks this year are expected to fall sharply because of a decline in inventories of wheat and coarse grains, “ the agency said.

Source: Live mint, 4th March, 2011

EU to vote on admitting GM food

After years of political wrangling by European Union policy makers, rising food prices may be putting genetically modified, or GM, food on the menu.

Officials are set to vote Tuesday on whether to allow trace amounts of unauthorized GM material in animal-feed imports, a move campaigners say could herald a shift in the bloc's attitude to biotechnology and would mark a victory for the GM lobby, which has been pushing for a relaxation in the EU's zero-tolerance rules on imports for years.

A sign reading 'Danger: GM contamination' posted by activists on a field of genetically modified corn in northern Italy.

The pro-GM lobby argues current restrictions are hurting the profitability of raising livestock, in some cases making it uneconomic. The lobby says this puts thousands of jobs at risk by contributing to a supply crisis that is likely to raise meat prices for consumers already struggling with food-price inflation.

Anti-GM groups, meanwhile, say the EU measure, should it pass, is the thin end of the wedge toward easing other safety regulations.

"This clearly gives a political sign that the EU is willing to relax its attitude," says Greenpeace's EU agricultural-policy director, Marco Contiero. "You would be talking about a proposal that allows any completely untested GM crop to enter the food chain—it's completely unacceptable."

The use of biotechnology remains controversial. While pro-GM groups argue that GM food is already eaten safely by billions of people in countries including the U.S., opposition bodies say their long-term effects remain unknown and GM research reduces funding for other, safer methods of improving yields.

The EU authorized imports of several biotech crops in November in a bid to avoid a repeat of 2009, when cargos of soybeans from the U.S. were impounded due to traces of unauthorized GM material found in the shipments. The new proposals are meant to provide a longer-term solution to the problem by raising the tolerance margin for GM components in imports to 0.1% for varieties approved in the exporting country and for which EU approval is pending.

In the EU, anti-GM regulations are seen as putting extra pressure on meat prices as they present a potential barrier to the import of less-expensive animal feed from the U.S. and South America. The bloc relies on imports for almost 80% of its feed needs, but with grain prices at current levels, dealers are reluctant to commit to expensive shipments in case they are impounded.

Maintaining absolute purity in feed imports is particularly difficult because GM crops are widely grown in the EU's main suppliers. Around 70 million hectares of U.S. farmland are sown with GM crops, including 85% of the country's corn and 91% of its soybeans. With the use of biotechnology so widespread, critics of the EU rules argue that stopping contamination from traces of unauthorized GM material is virtually impossible.

"If people want to eat GM-free food they should be aware of how much it actually costs," says U.K. farmer Paul Temple, who has grown GM crops as part of a government trial. "When wheat goes up from £100 a ton to £200 a ton you have to be very careful who you criticize."

According to a person familiar with the matter, a show of hands at an EU committee meeting on the proposals earlier this month indicated that 243 votes would be cast in favor, close to the 255 votes—out of a total 345—that would be required to bring in the changes under the EU's qualified-majority voting system.

While several outspoken opponents of GM crops remained firmly against the controls, including agricultural powers France and Poland, the U.K. and Ireland showed their support for the measures for the first time, the person said. Austria, previously an important anti-GM voice, also changed its position, counting for a crucial 10 votes in favor of the measures.

But while some see the proposals as a shift in sentiment, others say they don't go far enough. "If Europe is serious about being able to feed its own population and recognizes that food security is an issue, putting up artificial trade barriers is a very serious issue," says Julian Little, chair of the U.K.'s Agricultural Biotechnology Council, a pro-GM lobbying group.

Dutch officials in January sent a letter requesting that the proposals be widened to include foodstuffs for human consumption. They also argued for the acceptance of imports of GM crops from countries whose risk-assessment procedures for foodstuffs are as rigorous as the EU's own.

"Grain shipments from third countries are indistinguishably used for food and feed purposes in the EU," said a letter sent to the European Commission last year by ambassadors for the U.S., Brazil, Canada and Argentina. "Any attempt to separate into 'food-only' and 'feed-only' would pose insurmountable difficulties for trade operators and EU food and feed processors."

Rising food prices are already causing problems for policy makers around the world. Battered by a succession of natural disasters that have slashed harvests in many key producers, world food prices hit a record high earlier this year, according to the United Nations. U.S. corn prices have surged 88% in the past year and soybean prices are up 43%. Sugar prices have doubled since the end of May.

Driven by surging demand from emerging countries like China, where increasingly wealthy consumers are gaining a taste for meat, many observers argue that GM technology could be a vital part of feeding the world's rapidly expanding population. "We are looking at nine billion people in a very hungry world," U.K. agriculture minister Caroline Spelman said at a conference this month. "It's right to look at all the technology possible."

Mr. Temple says that, so far, much of the EU debate around GM food has been driven by scare-mongering. But as consumers feel growing pressure on their wallets from rising food prices, they are likely to become more open to new technologies. "The moment commodity prices rise, people's perception of what's important change," he says.

Still, most EU consumers remain deeply distrustful of GM technology. According to a survey last year by the EU's public-opinion analysis arm, 58% of more than 26,000 respondents think GM food is unsafe and more than 60% said the development of GM food shouldn't be encouraged.

Source : *Mint*, 23rd February, 2011



Millennium Development Goals: challenges and the way ahead

People often ask me what I consider to be the highlight of my career with the United Nations. While there were many wonderful moments, hosting the largest collection of world leaders ever assembled to sign the Millennium Declaration in New York is certainly among the top. The can-do-spirit in the room was infectious. And, for once, the gulf between rich and poor, between countries often at loggerheads with each other, seemed to be bridged by a genuine partnership among nations and people. Development issues were finally elevated to the highest political level. And, for the first time, developing countries were challenged to translate their development vision into nationally-owned plans.

The eight goals and the results

There is no doubt that the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and their framework of accountability have served the world well.

They have not only provided a much-needed sense of direction to national plans and international cooperation, they have also delivered measurable results. We have seen primary school enrolment rates double in Ethiopia and Tanzania. Countries like Malawi and Algeria transform themselves from food importers to food exporters. We have seen HIV infections fall significantly in Sub-Saharan Africa, and the number of reported malaria cases halve in high-burden countries such as Rwanda and Zambia. All around the world, we have seen efforts to achieve MDG-based targets improve the lives of millions of people.

However, we are still far from achieving what we set out to do. Too many people remain caught in extreme poverty, too many remain hungry and sick, too many mothers die in childbirth, and too many children still do not go to school. We are also not yet doing enough to meet basic needs

and fulfil basic rights, to protect the environment, to build effective international partnerships for development, or to harness private entrepreneurship to deliver public goods and services to those in need.

The challenges are still great and the circumstances have not become any easier since the Millennium Summit. Back then, there was palpable confidence that the world's problems could be addressed collectively and an open acknowledgement that, in a world of plenty and astounding technological progress, the poverty, hunger, and relative deprivation that so many of our fellow human beings still faced was intolerable.

That confidence has now faded, and the international consensus on development is in danger of crumbling under the weight of successive crises and a changing world order — even as the true significance of our growing interdependence is becoming increasingly obvious. The disappointing Climate Change Summit in Copenhagen was an unfortunate example of this paradoxical trend. On the one hand, the appreciation that global problems cannot be solved in one country or continent alone is growing. On the other hand, this is not translated into decisive action and overdue reform of global governance. Lack of concerted leadership and cumbersome institutional arrangements on the international level and a growing array of financial and political pressures on the national level are proving to be formidable obstacles.

Serious investors needed

I am worried that these obstacles risk may have made the September 20-22 MDG Review Summit in New York a futile exercise, characterised by grand speeches and carefully-worded promises, but followed by little meaningful action.

Several important donors have already reneged on their commitments, or at least relaxed their development efforts. They have used a variety of justifications ranging from concerns about aid efficiency to the need for a more comprehensive approach to achieving development objectives. As a result, the latest projections predict an aid shortfall of around \$21 billion against the global targets. While I agree that a more coherent and

results-oriented approach to development is needed, this should not be used as an excuse to cut financial assistance at the first sign of difficulties. The MDGs do not need fair-weather friends, but serious investors in for the long haul.

Political will

Revitalising the political will to achieve the MDGs, and scaling up proven interventions, is the linchpin to success. As instigator and guardian of the MDGs, the U.N. has an important role to play in this process and the High Level Advocacy Group created by Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon is a welcome step in the right direction.

The primary responsibility, however, rests with national leaders. Their challenge is to re-articulate a compelling case for global solidarity and equitable growth. One that embraces but goes beyond aid. One that addresses the growing inequalities between male and female, rural and urban, rich and poor. One that does not measure development and progress purely in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) but also of the quality and sustainability of growth. The message must be that the achievement of the MDGs is not optional, but an essential investment in a fairer, safer and more prosperous world.

But achieving the MDGs is only the first step. For even if we succeed and meet all the eight goals by 2015, almost a billion people will continue to live below the poverty line. Hundreds of millions will remain hungry. Millions will continue to die from preventable diseases or unnecessary complications.

We will certainly need to take the MDGs to the next level after the initial deadline. While there is some scepticism about the utility of naming specific goals as basis for development strategies and institutional arrangements, I remain an advocate. After all, who can argue with an objective as simple and powerful as access to food and clean drinking water, jobs, health care and education for everyone?

(Kofi Annan was U.N. Secretary-General between 1997 and 2006. He now chairs the Africa Progress Panel (www.africaprogresspanel.org) and the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (www.agra-alliance.org), and heads the Kofi Annan Foundation (www.kofiannanfoundation.org.)

Source : The Hindu, 23rd, September, 2011

South Asia presents a depressing paradox. It is among the fastest growing regions in the world, but it is also home to the largest concentration of people living in debilitating poverty, conflict and human misery. While South Asia is far more developed than sub-Saharan Africa, and India (the largest country in the region) has achieved lower middle-income status, South Asia has many more poor people than sub-Saharan Africa.

This raises the big question of whether the best escape from poverty comes from general economic growth or from a direct attack on poverty. The answer depends on where one looks. Stupendous growth hides deep pockets of poverty. For the countries of South Asia, poverty has morphed from a national to a sub-national problem.

Although economic growth has reduced South Asia's poverty rate, it has not fallen fast enough to reduce the total number of poor people. The number of people living on less than US\$1.25 a day increased from 549 million in 1981 to 595 million in 2005. In India, which accounts for almost three-quarters of this population, the numbers increased from 420 million to 455 million during this period. Besides the slow pace of poverty reduction, human development has also failed to keep up with the pace of income growth.

There are more than 250 million children in South Asia who are undernourished, and more than 30 million children who do not go to school. Over one-third of adult women are anemic. The share of female employment relative to total employment is among the lowest in the world.

Indeed, South Asia, with deeper regional disparities than the rest of the world, is really two South Asia's. A lot of attention has been given to the "Shining Asia," while the "Suffering Asia" has been forgotten. The gap between them is so wide that they seem to be anchored in two different centuries. Worse still, it continues to increase.

The leading regions have experienced rapid growth. They have acted as gateways connecting South Asia to the developed world, and have benefited from globalization, education, capital accumulation and technological advancement. This is sustainable as there is huge room for South

Asia to catch up to rich countries' productivity levels.

Indeed, this transformation has become a virtuous circle where initial growth has spiraled into greater growth, leading to more growth. Some leading regions in India are now the envy of other middle income countries and it has been seen that growth can eliminate poverty in leading regions in a generation.

However, those regions that lag behind are doing no better than many sub-Saharan African countries. Indeed, their social and human development indicators are worse than sub-Saharan Africa.

South Asia's worst problems — poverty, conflict, hunger, and gender inequalities — are largely concentrated in its lagging regions, where there are limits to growth, because geography, institutions and globalization will continue to favor the concentration of economic activity in leading regions. With migration to leading regions low, poverty remains concentrated in the lagging regions.

What can be done? There is no universal "fix" in economic development and pluralism of approaches has great value. The challenge is to find what works best in which setting.

While economic growth is critical for poverty reduction, reviving growth in lagging regions will take time. Rather than wait for a rising tide to lift all boats, policymakers should consider direct policy interventions to reduce poverty. A direct attack on poverty can yield a double dividend: by reducing human misery it could spark growth, thereby creating more political space for direct poverty reduction.

A high priority should be given to increasing pro-poor fiscal transfers. Lagging states spend considerably less than leading states on social services, including education and health care. Poor regions have a low base of economic activity to tax, which prevents them from investing in human and physical capital. Achieving equity through fiscal transfers can ensure a level playing field.

However, simply directing financial resources to lagging regions will not be enough to solve their problems. For example, the gains from labor

mobility have not been equally shared between educated and uneducated migrants. The gains are much higher for skilled workers, so the mobility rate increases with education. The mobility of university graduates is much higher than the mobility of unskilled workers.

Removing barriers to human mobility — such as labor laws, state-specific social-welfare programs and housing-market distortions — should be an integral part of development. Human mobility promotes growth and reduces poverty. It also empowers traditionally disadvantaged groups, particularly women.

Regional development policies to promote so-called “equitable growth” are not a solution, for two reasons. First, empirical evidence shows that

convergence of per capita income between lagging and leading regions is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for achieving poverty reduction and social convergence. Second, regional policies that promote “balanced” growth could lower overall growth, thereby impeding poverty reduction.

South Asia is at a critical stage in its historical transformation, when deepening economic disparities could stifle growth itself. If not addressed through direct measures, all of Asia will suffer.

Ejaz Ghani is an economic adviser on South Asia poverty reduction and economic management at the World Bank.

Source : *Daily News Analysis, 24th October, 2010*



The UN's MDGs can work only with a rights-based approach

Last month, leaders from 185 countries met in New York to take stock of progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) — which include, among other things, eradicating poverty and hunger, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health — that were set in 2000 by the United Nations.

The aim was to achieve these goals by 2015. But 10 years down the line, the world is way behind targets in achieving these goals. In an interview with DNA, Prabhat Patnaik, professor at the Centre for Economic Studies and Planning at Jawaharlal Nehru University and vice-chairman of the Planning Board of Kerala, points out that the MDGs will fail because they don't address the root cause of poverty. Excerpts:

What do you think of the approach taken by the MDGs? Is it valid, or is it flawed? For example, Goal No 1 is “Reduce extreme poverty by half”. But is it a realistic goal when policies that generate poverty are not identified and alternatives implemented?

The MDGs would have made more sense if the argument was to make them legally enforceable, universal rights. In the absence of that, no one can be punished if these goals are not fulfilled. So it is left hanging in the air. I am not saying

they (the goals) should be imposed, but at least if they had indicated a philosophy whereby development goals were rights-based or linked to rights, then many countries would follow it up. Or there would have been protests inside countries, and that would be much more effective.

We ourselves are talking about right to education and right to food, but strictly speaking, these are not really rights. The Right to Education does not really define the quality of the education. The Right to Food is not even universal, and confined only to people below poverty line. We are moving towards a notion of rights which is flawed, but it is still better to have a rights-based approach to development than simply to set goals.

Do the MDGs address the problem of poverty at the level of root causes?

No, they don't. For instance, poverty is closely linked to reduction in incomes for substantial segments of self-employed populations in the era of globalisation. Before that, the state had protected the peasants; they were protected from the vicissitudes of world market fluctuations, they were given subsidised credit, subsidised fertilisers, and assured prices.

I am not saying everybody benefited from it, but substantial segments did. Now that is gone.

Secondly, employment generation is nowhere near what the growth rate should dictate. The proportion of the unemployed to the employed has increased. Eight million peasants have come out of agriculture because it is no longer profitable. But what are they doing in the urban areas? It's not as if eight million jobs have been created.

The suppression of the income of the self-employed and the small producers and the absence of enough employment are the two basic parts (that contribute to poverty), and they are both parts of the growth process. So to say let's reduce poverty, but not interfere in the growth process doesn't make much sense.

Given that the initiative for the MDGs came not from the South but from the North, and that these same countries are usually at loggerheads with the poorer nations over terms of trade, how seriously can one take the MDGs?

The MDGs are actually something imposed on the South by some do-gooding persons from the North. But in the process they are not winning any concessions from the North as far as the South is concerned.

We talk of neo-liberalism, but Obama is going protectionist. So the point is that the North changes the rules of the game at the drop of a hat while we tend to follow the rules set by them. And the MDG's idea is that while we follow the rules of the game, we should arrive at some goals for which there is no instrument.

If the macroeconomic causes of poverty were taken into account, what would the real MDGs be?

I think in countries like India you cannot have a situation where the peasantry is destroyed and absorbed into the urban labourer class like it happened during the Industrial Revolution.

There is also a misreading of the history of the industrial revolution. It is not as if European industrialisation absorbed all those displaced.

Fifty million Europeans migrated to the New World. Those possibilities are not open to us.

The only way we can have development is by including peasant agriculture within its ambit. It has to be peasant agriculture-led. Far from the state withdrawing from it, peasant agriculture has to be protected and promoted. Growth has to be generated in the agricultural sector and when the market expands, industry will grow to meet that market.

Some critics say that the MDGs are intended to legitimise the policies implemented by the First World through the World Bank, IMF.

Fundamentally, the MDGs are a bit like a safety net. But the idea of safety net implies that someone is falling. You are trying to put some kind of human face on a process that is going on. You are not tackling the process itself.

The Goal No. 8 is to "develop a global partnership for development." Given the current unequal relationship between first world economic powers and poor countries — how do you see this partnership taking shape?

One of the big processes going on today — this is true in India as well as China — is the dispossession of small producers from their lands by corporates. Now you can't have a partnership between the corporates and the peasants, because after all the corporates are trying to dispossess them from their land. Who is going to monitor the partnership? What is the relative bargaining strength of the small producers and corporates? So any talk of partnership camouflages the process of dispossession. So I think this again tries to put a human face on something that is fundamentally damaging.

Source: *Daily News Analysis*, 17th October, 2010

Women's employment in developing countries after the global crisis

It is now generally recognised that there are usually important differences in the impact of financial and economic crises on men and women, determined largely by the greater significance of women in social reproduction and the care economy as well as their greater involvement in more vulnerable forms of paid work.

The impact of financial crises on women can be considered in terms of their roles as paid and unpaid workers, as well as members of households, and as citizens with rights and individuals with needs, wants and aspirations.

The most immediate direct impact of the crisis is usually on employment. Since more and more women in developing countries are now directly involved in paid employment, this channel for transmission of global crisis has also become more significant.

Where exports are hit and more women are involved in export-oriented production, it is only to be expected that women will be disproportionately affected. But usually the impact extends beyond this. Other sectors tend to be affected by the negative multiplier effects of declines in exports, and so construction and other industries catering to the domestic market are hit, along with services.

First to be laid off

During the Asian financial crisis of 1997-98, women workers were the first to be laid off even in non-exporting sectors, because of the job segregation that put them in the low paying and more "flexible" activities unlike the more diversified and relatively more secure occupations of male workers.

For example, women were laid off at seven times the rate of men in South Korea in 1998-99, and early evidence from the crisis of 2008-09 also pointed to a similar tendency in other Asian countries.

Wages are hit for a number of reasons. The pressure on employers to compete in an increasingly hostile environment gets associated with attempts to reduce labour costs by driving down wages and forcing remaining workers to work for longer hours, often for less pay. This is

made easier by the expansion of open unemployment.

Two other categories of women workers deserve special mention: women cultivators and women working in the informal sector and as home-based workers.

More into farming

In the developing world as a whole, the majority of women workers are in farming, either as cultivators or agricultural workers. The impact of the crisis on agriculture is often much more severe than is recognised, as patterns in capitalist development since the last two decades of the 20 {+t} {+h} century have been associated with more or less continuous agrarian crisis.

The difficulties are heightened in the case of women farmers, because in many if not most countries, especially in the developing world, lack of land titles and other recognition has tended to deprive them of benefits such as access to institutional credit, extension services, subsidised inputs, and so on.

They therefore tend to have higher costs of cultivation than their male counterparts, and less state protection. In turn they are also likely to be deprived of the benefits of any crisis relief packages in the absence of specific measures.

Women in informal work are especially badly affected in periods of crisis. As opportunities for paid employment dwindle, in many countries women workers turn to home-based subcontracting activities, or work in very small units that do not even constitute manufactories, often on piece-rate basis and usually very poorly paid and without any known non-wage benefits, substituted to some extent.

This was evident in all the countries that suffered from the Asian crisis and was repeated during the 2008-09 recession, as the economic downswing tends to be directly reflected in both declining orders or contracts and falling rates of remuneration.

There is typically also a decline in access to credit for self-employed women, as the meagre institutional credit that they could earlier access tends to dry up and non-institutional sources of

credit become more precarious, difficult and expensive. This causes costs to increase even as small producers are forced to reduce prices of their goods and services in order to compete in increasingly adverse market conditions. In fact, financial crises can change gender relations through intra-household adjustments.

In this context, it is worth examining how the recent global crisis has affected the employment of women, and whether there is evidence of differential patterns of response across gender. Current data on labour markets and employment in developing countries are difficult to come by, since very few countries actually monitor employment systematically and with sufficient periodicity. Even so, we do have initial evidence from a few countries that can give us some idea of both the general trends and the diversity of experience.

The following charts, which are based on data from the ILO's Laborsta database, indicate the recent trends in four countries: South Africa, Brazil, South Korea and Thailand. All of these are reasonably large economies with a high degree of global integration, and therefore could be expected to have been affected by the global crisis.

Varied trend

What is immediately clear is that it is difficult if not impossible to generalise, even on the basis of a small handful of countries, since the trends vary quite substantially. South Africa exhibits what might be called the expected pattern, with aggregate employment showing continuous decline, even into the period of output recovery after mid-2009.

Aggregate unemployment rates, which were already extremely high, have increased further since the outbreak of the crisis. Female rates of open unemployment were significantly higher than male rates all along: if anything, the crisis has served to reduce the gap by causing male rates to increase.

Brazil, however, shows a very different picture. After a relatively small and short-lived dip in aggregate employment between the last quarter of 2008 and the first quarter of 2009, employment has continued to increase for both men and women and by the second quarter of 2010 employment levels were around 5 per cent higher for men than in 2007, and 9 per cent more for women.

Open unemployment rates rose immediately after the crisis for both men and women, but have since fallen to pre-crisis levels or even lower.

This is obviously related to the fact the Brazilian economy recovered fairly quickly from the crisis and since then has growth relatively rapidly, especially compared with many other economies.

In Thailand the picture of post-crisis labour market trends that emerges is even more complex.

Aggregate employment of both men and women fell in the first quarter of 2009, recovered slightly over the rest of 2009, but in this year have fallen again. As a result both male and female employment levels are still below the peak achieved in the third quarter of 2008.

However, open unemployment rates (which were remarkably low in the pre-crisis situation) rose relatively little and have since fallen to rates below the pre-crisis ones. Rather than any positive attribute, this may reflect the relative absence of unemployment protection and the high presence of informal and precarious work in the Thai economy.

As is noted in Chart 5, such "vulnerable" workers constitute the majority of Thai workers, and account for nearly 60 per cent of female employment.

Unlike many other developing countries, the Republic of Korea does provide some unemployment benefits and also has proportionately fewer workers in informal and vulnerable activities. Therefore it could be expected that open unemployment rates would rise in the post-crisis situation.

This has indeed occurred, but other than for the first quarter of 2010 the increase in unemployment has been less severe than could be expected. Also, unlike the previous Asian crisis of a decade earlier, women's open unemployment rates have not increased more sharply than those of men. Once again, it is clear that to understand the full picture, further disaggregation is required, for example in terms of the increase in part-time and casual work.

Careful analysis needed

All this suggests that in general, a much more nuanced and careful analysis of the gender-differentiated labour market impacts of the crisis is required, and that facile generalisations may not always be appropriate.

One thing that does emerge from a quick comparative look at these countries is that the extent of informal and vulnerable employment has an impact on the observed outcomes in terms of employment and unemployment.

Chart 5 shows how this varies greatly across even these four countries. Where most paid employment is relatively secure, as in South

Africa, there is a greater tendency for a downturn to be reflected in falling employment levels and increases in open unemployment.

Where informal activities dominate, both male and female workers have no choice but to continue in low paying work for their sheer survival.

Source : *Business Line*, 5th October, 2010



And Democracy for All?

Writing in the New York Times on August 20, 2002, Jeffrey C Goldfarb quoted an Asian activist's conviction that "American democracy requires the repression of democracy in the rest of the world".

This explains why Washington finds itself both behind the curve and on the wrong side of history in struggling to cope with the crisis in Egypt despite the \$1.3 billion annual US stipend since 1979.

The privileging of 'Our' geopolitical and commercial interests over 'Their' freedoms and aspirations is a toxic legacy of wrong-headed western policies for more than half a century. The face of America in the Arab world today is that of ageing autocrats using US-backed and armed security forces to rob and brutalise their own people while presiding over corrupt and rotting political systems.

The post-colonial Arab state was custom-built to serve western interests: strong enough to keep the restive natives in check and maintain 'stability' at home, but too weak to challenge foreign influence and too intimidated to champion the Palestinian cause. The dramatic explosion of pent-up anger in the Arab street means that Washington has to find the right balance among backing popular will, standing by a long-time ally, promoting regional stability, containing the threat to Israel, stopping the spread of Islamist influence, and safeguarding economic interests.

The Egyptian uprising is a paradoxical explanation for the intensity of much anti-American sentiment. For it is a forceful

reminder of just how powerful is the passion for freedom, how strong the loathing for regimes and rulers who tyrannise their own people, how bitter the feelings towards outside powers that prefer to prop up friendly dictators rather than team up to topple them.

In pursuing short-term tactical policies of buttressing the domestic and regional stability of dictators, successive US governments have betrayed not just the people yearning to overthrow their local tyrants, but also their own ideals. Mystifyingly, they fail to grasp the power of the metaphor of the shining city on the hill, the hypnotic pull of the ringing American declaration of independence, the stirring inspiration of Lincoln's Gettysburg address. These are not just American treasures; they are the common heritage of mankind.

Throughout the former Soviet satellite states in Central and Eastern Europe, there remains a residue of popular goodwill towards Americans for the unflagging support for their political aspirations during the dark decades of the Cold War when their destiny was under the Soviet thumb. The world today would have been poorer and sadder if Washington had not helped to bring about an end to their tormentors, from Berlin to Poland, Georgia and Ukraine. Nor can Washington fairly be asked to assume the burden of changing history for the better in all places all alone.

But the world is also today the poorer and sadder for many because Washington so often compromises ideals for stable relations with autocrats. Other people seek what Americans take for granted: political freedoms, civil

liberties, material prosperity, the right to keep legitimately acquired property and wealth rather than have these confiscated by government, and accountability of rulers to the rule of law. They are bewildered and embittered when Washington turns its face away from them so as not to antagonise friendly regimes or strategically important allies. Much of the anti-American sentiment among Arabs arises not because they hate what America stands for but because they aspire to American values and freedoms which have been systematically crushed on the back of US money, arms and training.

The gap between the lofty, soaring rhetoric of liberty and freedom in President George W Bush's second inauguration speech in January 2005 and the reality of his ties to authoritarian regimes was particularly pronounced. In an eloquent passage, Bush affirmed that "as long as whole regions of the world simmer in resentment and tyranny...violence will gather, and multiply in destructive power, and cross the most defended borders, and raise a mortal threat. There is only one force of history that can break the reign of hatred and resentment,

and expose the pretensions of tyrants, and reward the hopes of the decent and tolerant, and that is the force of human freedom... We will persistently clarify the choice before every ruler and every nation: The moral choice between oppression, which is always wrong, and freedom, which is eternally right."

Just so. And yet the passage is at odds with the actual record of the administration. President Barack Obama's record has been no less schizophrenic, with his Cairo speech juxtaposed uneasily alongside reduced support for the freedom agenda in Egypt.

Like Pakistan, Hosni Mubarak's Egypt has extracted handsome rent from Washington by threatening a far worse alternative if it collapses. In both cases, compulsions of short-term expediency have trumped strategies of long-term vision. From Egypt to Pakistan and beyond, Washington's problems will not end unless and until US policy makers recognise, and act on the acknowledgment, that dictatorship and military rule are the problem, not a solution, and that democracy, messy and untidy as it might be, is always preferable.

Source: *The Times of India*, 2nd February, 2011



Egyptian women need to keep the fire burning

When the Prime Minister of Egypt stepped down on Thursday, Shereen Diaa, 32, was cooking lunch for her two young sons in a suburb on Cairo's outskirts. A veiled woman who moulds her life around her children, Diaa had promised herself she would stop attending political protests and focus on her boys, ages 6 and 8. But when she saw on Facebook that the new Prime Minister himself would address the protesters the next day, in an unprecedented act, she could not resist. "I will leave you only two hours," she said she told the children, dropping them off with her mother and then heading downtown to Tahrir Square.

In the raucous crowd, she stepped on a water jug to catch a glimpse of Prime Minister Essam Sharaf, who had stood with the demonstrators before Hosni Mubarak was ousted as President. "I see him! I am really happy!" she exclaimed, beaming, one voice among thousands. "Raise your head high, you are Egyptian!" they chanted.

Egypt's popular revolution was the work of men and women, bringing together housewives and fruit sellers, businesswomen and students. At its height, roughly one-quarter of the million protesters who poured into the square each day were women. Veiled and unveiled women shouted, fought and slept

in the streets alongside men, upending traditional expectations of their behaviour.

The challenge now, activists in Cairo say, is to make sure that women maintain their involvement as the nation lurches forward, so that their contribution to the revolution is not forgotten.

“Things have not changed, they are changing,” said Mozn Hassan, 32, the executive director of the organisation, Nazra for Feminist Studies. She barely returned home during the 18 days it took to topple Mr. Mubarak, but that is not enough, she said. “Revolution is not about 18 days in Tahrir Square and then turning it into a carnival and loving the army,” she said. “We have simply won the first phase.”

It is an indication of the place of women in Egypt that Ms Hassan was referring to the need for political gains and true equality, rather than some more basic rights denied to women in parts of the Arab world. Even as this country has become more devout, experts say roughly 25 per cent of Egyptian women work outside their homes. And they are allowed to mix more freely in public with men than in some other Arab countries.

But a recent report by the World Economic Forum ranked Egypt 125th out of 134 countries when judging the equality between men and women, in good part because so many women do not work, 42 per cent of women cannot read or write and almost no women are political leaders. (In 2010, only eight of the 454 seats in Parliament were held by women.)

Genital cutting of women is still widely practised in Egypt, especially in rural areas. Women also suffer a level of sexual harassment that would not be tolerated in many countries. They are often verbally harassed on the street in Cairo and sometimes groped in crowded spaces whether they are veiled or not, leading many wealthier women to simply abandon walking downtown.

Egypt is a step ahead of other popular uprisings in the region, which have had similar bursts of female participation, accompanied by a recognition from men that their support is vital. In Bahrain, hundreds of women wrapped in traditional black tunics stood up to the authorities in the demonstrations against the government, but in a nod to their conservative culture, they slept and prayed outside during

protests in a roped-off women’s section. In Yemen, only in the past few days have significant numbers of women started to protest in Sanaa, the capital, but their numbers were dwarfed by the crowds of men.

Feminists acknowledge that the battle for equality will not be easy. Still, women in Egypt are energised, and say perhaps the greatest change so far has been internal. They came to be convinced that the traffic-choked streets of downtown Cairo, long a male-dominated space, could be equally theirs despite years of rampant sexual harassment.

A study in 2008 by the Egyptian Center for Women’s Rights found that a vast majority of the women surveyed had been harassed. And the harassers, who are often members of the state security forces, are almost never punished, said Nehad Abu El Komsan, director of the organisation. Ms Komsan placed blame for the problem on the lack of laws protecting women against sexual violence, women’s fear of reporting trouble, and a powerful undercurrent of oppression and frustration in Egyptian society, particularly among the millions of poor, uneducated and unemployed young men. But during the revolution, women faced snipers and tear gas on those same streets, and they interacted with men they had been told to avoid. “The same men they were afraid to talk to in the streets were saying, ‘Bravo, the girls’ revolution’,” Ms Hassan said.

It did not take long, however, before the sense of unity that had grown in Tahrir Square was interrupted. On Feb. 11, just as Mr. Mubarak fell, the crowd suddenly swelled, crushing people against one another. It was shortly afterward that Lara Logan, a CBS news reporter, was sexually assaulted; the details of the attack remain unclear. Several Egyptian women also reported being groped and harassed.

But many women also note progress. On Friday, some of the many young women in Tahrir Square wore unofficial police headbands and held up signs reminding men to respect women. Outside the square, the deep suspicion that had separated secular feminists from Islamic feminists, who believe Islam should be the paradigm for women’s rights, is being bridged, said Fatma Eman, 28, an Islamic feminist who is a co-founder of Nazra. “After

the revolution, I was welcomed in a very decent way," she said.

A coalition including Nawal el-Saadawi, a leading feminist, is planning a million women's march for Tuesday, with no set agenda other than to promote democracy. Diaa said she planned to stay home now to give the new Prime Minister a chance to work and to help her children. But she said she would return to the streets if Sharaf did not quickly make democratic changes.

"I don't see a difference between men and women," she said, talking about her many days of protesting. "The only difference is that men are more able to take the sticks of the thugs. But that doesn't mean we don't have a voice. I believe that I have a voice, so I can't stay at home. I have a responsibility. I can be one of a million."

Source: The Hindu, 7th March, 2011



Book Release

SAAPE Poverty and Vulnerability report

Ajit Muricken, ed., *Poverty & Vulnerability Cycles in South Asia: Narratives of Survival and Struggles*. Kathmandu, Nepal: SAAPE, 2010.

By S. P. Udayakumar

What is worse? Poverty, misery, and vulnerability? Or income inequality and wealth disparity? The neo-liberal preoccupation right now is income disparity and inequality. According to the World Economic Forum, there are two main global risks over the next decade and they are failings in global governance and widening economic disparities. The reason for the recent attention on inequality is its obscene increase both nationally and internationally. Even the economic demigods are embarrassed about it.

The critics and commentators are desperate to explain inequality in the North countries and look for excuses. Some find automation of blue-collar jobs, unskilled jobs moving to poorer and cheaper countries, and erosion of workers' bargaining power because of weakening trade unions as some of the reasons. There are others like Raghuram Rajan who link increased inequality with subprime lending and the financial crisis. According to him, technological progress increased the demand for skilled workers and that led to a widening gap in wages between them and the rest of the workforce. Governments had to support the poor and unskilled labor and gave credit liberally to prop up their living standards. Affordable-housing targets, slacker underwriting guidelines and the creation of "low down-payment" mortgages all became instruments of public policy. As a result, the American home-ownership rates shot so high. When the housing bubble collapsed, the defaults on those subprime mortgages brought about the financial crisis. The argument goes that it was inequality that was the root cause of the financial crisis.¹

Inequality, as mentioned earlier, has obviously increased. In the 1970s, the income of the wealthiest 20 percent of Americans rose 14 percent and the income of the poorest fifth went up 9 percent. But in the 1990s, the income of the richest fifth rose 27 percent while that of the poorest fifth increased only 10 percent. Economic Policy Institute, a Washington DC think-tank, studied the ratio of the average incomes of the rich and the bottom 90 percent of the American population between 1980 and 2006. It has found out that "for the top 0.1% the gain rose from 20 times the earnings of the lower 90% to almost 80-fold." Obviously, the top 0.1 percent of the US citizens do not work 80 times as hard as everyone else. Inequality has increased recently because of status competition, and brands, fashion, and types of houses have all become important for those who have money.² Right-wing entities such as The Economist still try to convince us that the "old Davos consensus of boosting growth and combating poverty is still a better guide to good policy." They take great consolation that "the gap between the rich and the poor has actually been narrowing, as poorer countries are growing faster." Governments have boosted the incomes of the poor with fast growth and an overhaul of public spending to improve the social safety-net. The fact that they did not have to raise the tax rates for the rich is also highlighted for obvious reasons. The remedy handed out to policymakers is not "sweeping assault on inequality itself" but confronting the "market distortions that often lie behind the most galling income gaps, and which also impede economic growth." So the governments are exhorted to differentiate between the causes of inequality and focus on ways to increase social mobility. The "right way" to do is the governments pushing up the bottom and middle rather than dragging down the top, and getting rid of rigged rules and subsidies that favor specific industries or insiders. The goal here is to "allow more people to move upwards" but always remember "in a freer world skill and intellect would still be rewarded." After all, the "global market offers far bigger returns to those at the top of their game."³

Connect the dots, you would get the “right” picture: Don’t meddle with the rich, don’t question the distorted and obscene practices of the globalized market, deal with inequality in a superficial way and leave the injustices in the world order as they are! Even President Obama in his ‘State of the Union’ address in January 2010 did not make a single mention of poverty or the plight of the poor but bragged that “the stock market has come roaring back” and “corporate profits are up.”⁴

The concern of those fair-minded justice-seeking global citizens should be addressing the pernicious poverty, misery and vulnerability of one fifth of humanity. That’s precisely Poverty & Vulnerability Cycles in South Asia does. There are some 1.3 billion absolute poor people in the world. Even in the richest country in the world, the number of people living in poverty has risen by 1.7 million to nearly 47.5 million. Some 15.7 percent of Americans are poor. Almost 14.5 million people are still out of work and more than 6 million of them are jobless for more than six months.⁵ But it is South Asia with 433 million poor people that continues to be a horror story; there are more people mired in poverty in this region than the combined population living in poverty in sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab states, East Asia and the Pacific (excluding China), and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Besides problematizing the afore-mentioned issues, the book focuses on seven areas that induce the poor people’s vulnerability, viz., the extraction of natural resources and food security, climate change, development-induced displacement, gender, caste, ethno-religious conflicts and war on terror, and distress migration and labor. This comprehensive approach to study poverty incorporates every imaginable aspect of it. Analysis of the structures and factors that lead to vulnerability, the socio-political factors that cause its perpetuation and the factors that maintain the deprivation and marginalization forms the foundation of the book. The connection among natural resources, neoliberal exploitation, people’s livelihood, displacement, human rights violations, marginalization is all neatly dissected in manageable chunks and studied carefully. The issue of discrimination which is often overlooked in the analysis of poverty is approached both from the perspectives of women and the Dalits in the book quite powerfully and convincingly. The

ethno-religious conflicts, geopolitics, war on terror, distress migration and all such related turmoil that contribute to poverty, vulnerability are discussed in such depth and clarity. What makes all this analyses and the whole book much more interesting and convincing are the case studies. These human stories take the book from the pedantic theoretical level to the more practical life plane and add much more substance to the analysis and understanding.

Poverty means different things in different places. In Europe it means one’s income falling below 60 percent of the median income. In the United States, the traditional poverty measure is much simpler. The poverty threshold represents the basic cost of food for a household, multiplied by three. A family would be considered to be poor if its pre-tax income falls below this threshold. Critics have argued that food spending has become a flimsy reference point, that the poverty indicator does not account for governmental programs such as earned-income tax credit and that it does not adjust for regional variations in the cost of living. A new poverty measure has been in the making for the past 16 years and is expected to provide a better understanding of the poor in the United States by measuring the families’ needs and the effect of government help. The Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM) estimates the cost of food, clothing, shelter and utilities, and adds a further 20 percent for other expenses. This threshold is adjusted for the cost of living in various regions and for the family’s owning or renting its home. Moreover, in order to assess a household’s ability to pay for basic expenses, the SPM considers cash income, food stamps, tax credits and other government supports, work expenses, and out-of-pocket medical costs. The preliminary results have been just published and some 15.7 percent of Americans were poor in 2009. The most dramatic rise of poverty is for Hispanics, non-US citizens, urban and suburban areas and for the elderly. While some people welcome the SPM as a massive improvement, there are others who argue that it measures inequality rather than poverty.⁶

As the book posits, all these statistical figures, technical interpretations and endless debates tend “to sanitise issues, to take away the human aspect of the situation...hide the agonies and the struggles of living human beings.” Soaking the reader with facts, figures, human stories, regional factors and other relevant details at the backdrop

of the global socioeconomic-political workings, the book accomplishes its task of explaining the causes of poverty and misery and the conditions of eradicating it from South Asia amply well.

The assertion in the book that “the [South Asian] population is divided between the extremely rich, the middle class and the vast masses of rural and urban poor” makes one think of an airplane journey that is driven by a few superrich and super-powerful global actors in the cockpit controlling all our destinies. The airplane houses all the elites in the First Class with all the amenities, luxuries, and opportunities of life, seats the middle class in the Business Class with all the sufficient resources, comforts and

entitlements, and dumps the poor and marginalized into the Economy Class without even the basic necessities of life. The Cabin Crew (or political leaders) do the bidding of the Cockpit masters, serve the privileged, suppress the poor, loot the treasuries for themselves and their families and stack them off in Swiss banks. The consolation for the powerful and the constraint for the powerless is the fact the airplane we are all on is quite large, the Earth, and its cabin is compartmentalized with political boundaries, military muscle and socio-cultural differences. It is high time we all realized that this globalized travel can be safe and enjoyable for all only with democracy, just governance, and human rights.

Press Statement

South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) Released its 3rd Poverty Report entitled ‘Poverty and Vulnerability cycles in South Asia’ organizing a Special program at Kathmandu, Nepal.

The Chief Guest of the flattering gathering of around 80 participants was Honorable Minister of Finance, Mr. Surendra Pandey where as participants representing CSO, Media personnel, members of SAAPE Country Co-ordination Committee, CA member, Economists and HR activists were present in the program.

Reviewing the Report, Hon. Minister said that, the report is certainly different since it has embraced the people’s experiences and struggles and talked of politics of poverty. He shared that without abolition of private property and management of scarce resources, the poverty remains one of the human tragedies, so SAAPE should prioritized the alternatives to eradicate poverty and initiate the process of discussing on those alternatives.

Highlighting the Report, Prem Dangal, General Secretary of ANPFa, focused that, this report is different from other general report as it represent the CSO experiences, reveals the human dimension and lives of those who suffers, and rather than focusing on certain indicator, it has explored the disparity, vulnerability and narratives of survivals and struggles. The report has clearly incorporated the displacement done in the name of development, the violence from the state and marginalization of poor in the name of market expansion.

Similarly Mr. Birendra Adhikari, representatives of SAAPE, welcoming the guest introduced SAAPE as a largest CS loose network working for the eradication of poverty formulating pro-poor policies. The emcee of the program was Deputy General Secretary, ANPFa, Mr. Balram Banskota, who gave the example of Venezuela, Bolivia, Cuba and other countries where people have access to resources and less suffered from the poverty. The increasing suffering of poor and marginalization of lower class people due to climate change and privatization of resources

resulted by neo-liberal profit oriented model showed that neo-liberalism is not the solution.

Secretary and Treasure of ANPFa Mr. Hari Parajuli and Sarada Subedi respectively, Mr. Som Rai (SAAPE), Devendra Adhikari(HR alliance), Nabina Lama (ANNFSU), Bagawati Bista (Youth Federation) were few of the important

representatives from various sectors in the events where as more than half of the participants were Media personnel including almost all television channels .

Pramesh Pokharel

Advocacy and Campaign Co-ordinator, SAAPE



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Website: www.vakindia.org

Typeset, Design & Layout : Bindu Ekka, Mumbai

Printed by : Sudhir Joglekar, Omega Publications,

Emerald Corner, Maratha Colony, Tilakwadi,

Belgaum 590 006 India

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