



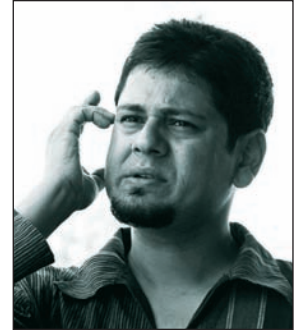
SAAPE Bulletin

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Alternative Regionalism: Building South Asia from below

- Sushovan Dhar

Member, SAAPE Core Committee
Progressive Plantation Workers' Union, India



A recent World Bank report projects South Asia as the second the fastest growing region after East Asia and Pacific. As Martin Rama, Chief Economist for South Asia at the World Bank, puts it, "The outlook over the next years for South Asia indicates broad economic stability and a pick-up in growth with potential risks concentrated on the fiscal and structural reform side." The bank, in its half-yearly report 'South Asia Economic Focus' forecasts that the region's economy will grow by a real 6 % in 2015 and by 6.4 % in 2016 vis-a-vis 5.4 % in 2014. If we put aside, for the time-being, the debates on the World Bank – IMF induced development path and its impact on peoples lives and livelihoods, the figures are simply enough to paint a rosy picture of the region. South Asia looks primed to reap enormous economic gains. The bullish picture presented by the Bank is enough to raise our expectations for the next two years and leave us contented in abstraction.

However, this upbeat picture of the regional economy presented by the Bank, hides certain cardinal and key issues of the region. We face a herculean task in the wake of the fact that South Asia can be described as a conflict-ridden zone that is turning into a very dangerous place to live in. Witness to four wars, in the past, between two powerful neighbors - India and Pakistan, the recent border skirmish between them, reminds us that a low intensity conflict is ever in progress. Hub of militant fundamentalism, majoritarianism and acute democratic deficit, our region is the vortex of endemic poverty, chronic hunger, mass undernourishment, abyssal illiteracy and ill health; the scenario is replete with social deprivation and marginalisation resulting in systemic exclusion. South Asian youths discover themselves 'well' placed in overwhelming underemployment and rising unemployment.

We also face rampant environmental degradation caused by the 'development' efforts in the interest of the regional elites and the ruling classes. Their interests are further mortgaged to capital and the capitalists – both local and overseas. Home to around half of the world's poor, perhaps no other location encounter more acute threats from global warming than South Asia. Consequently, it is already embattled by unpredicted levels of internal security threats from food, water and energy crisis; livelihood and unemployment crisis, etc. With its closer integration into the global capitalist economy the informal and family-provided social security and safety nets have collapsed without any formal arrangement to replace it. South Asia exists on the fault lines of a fragile internal security threats that can potentially compound with the existing external security threats and apprehensions for each state with its own internal dynamics and complications.

It was assumed that a regional forum created to foster regional goodwill and reduce intra-regional

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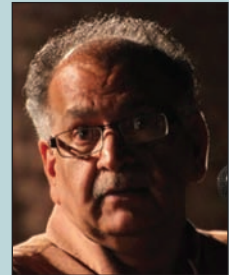
disagreements and discords could steer the region away from this embroilment and the impasse. The official forum of the South Asian states, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation or SAARC, created in 1985 for the advancement of peoples' welfare and collective self reliance has miserably failed in this account. This 29 years old entity has so little to demonstrate in terms of political consolidation, conflict mitigation, regional harmony, free movement of citizens, intra-regional trade and economic cooperation, financial and monetary integration, etc. To be more precise, the progress or a progressive evolution of SAARC is dependent on the settlement of the Kashmir issue. A genuine settlement of this question and the Kashmiri interest of self-determination is nowhere in sight in the near future. Sandwiched between two powerful states that only look at the valley as a strategic 'real-estate' which has to be retained at any cost or human sacrifice. Therefore, SAARC appear as an entity held to ransom by its founders.

It is in this context that peoples movements of the region in collaboration with the global ones, need to play an immense role for the future of South Asia. It is only they who can compel SAARC to put more importance to human security in lieu of "national" security and trade agreement which follow the neoliberal paradigm. An organic alliance and unity of people's movements and organisations, while retaining their autonomy can bring changes through a sustained movement for a just, sustainable and egalitarian society. They would be able to confront all anti-democratic forces like the corporates, the communal and the religious fundamentalists, patriarchy, caste system, and discrimination of all kinds. A unity of movements through shared ideology and strategies has the potential to give rise to a strong political force that can alter the current regionalism of the ruling class. It can also create conditions for developing an alternate regionalism and building South Asia from below.

People's SAARC

- **Farooq Tariq**

Member, SAAPE Core Committee
Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee (PKRC), Pakistan



At a time when majority of all eight governments of SAARC countries are pursuing similar economic policies based on the philosophy of new liberalism, it becomes increasingly important that people's voices from these countries are heard loud and clear against anti-people economic activities. People's SAARC can and has been playing this role to some extent.

As a result of implementation of policies like free market, privatisation, free flow of the capital and imposing more restrictions on people's movements through visa regime, poverty in all SAARC countries has been increasing more than ever. Women and religious minorities continue to bear the consequences of capitalist and feudal system.

Almost all SAARC countries are becoming more religious and dictatorial in nature. Flourishing faith based organisations and political parties are galvanising the poor through false and fake promises of better life. Communal and sectarian fanaticism is also on the rise of becoming elements of daily life in several countries.

The ruling elites of SAARC countries have failed miserably to solve basic problems faced by the working class population of the region. In terms of social indicators, most SAARC countries are on the lowest edge of the

world arena. Similarly, indicators of education in the region except for Sri Lanka are bleak. Most government spends less than 2 percent of their national budgets on education.

During their meetings, head of states of SAARC countries have always emphasised the importance of education. For instance, at the Ninth SAARC summit held at Male in 1997, they acknowledged that illiteracy was one of the major hindrances in achieving development goals and one of the reasons behind economic backwardness and social imbalance in the region. Yet, 17 years from the ninth

SAARC summit, the situation of education in South Asia continues to remain the same if not worse. Improvement in the

field of education is unlikely until the governments of these countries increase their education budget to at least 10 per cent of their national budget.

Given this background, alternative voices and organisations with people's perspective like People's SAARC is absolutely vital to ignite an enthusiasm needed among the masses to demand a decent life. People's SAARC symbolises unity among people and as a movement it provides a platform for people of this region to question the governments and make demands for a better life.



Civil Society's Perspective on SAARC



-Dr. Netra Timsina
Coordinator, SAAPE

Introduction

While some regional association such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) have set themselves as paradigms of promoting regional integrity and economic development, SAARC, after 28 years of inception has not been able to achieve the success similar to that of its counterparts in creating a prosperous regional economic union. Although different bodies of SAARC have made various commitments to address issues of unequal socio-economic relationships inherent in the South Asian society, implementation of these commitments into action have been rather sluggish. This is mainly due to aspects such as socio-economic development of the region, quality of life, democratic governments, creation of opportunities, fostering economic growth of the region that lay a foundation for creating a regional union have not been addressed. This article analyses SAARC's declarations and charter, activities conducted so far and areas of cooperation while highlighting some desirable future course of actions for the association to be effective in the context of 18th SAARC summit in 2014.

Areas of Cooperation: From Positions to Actions

SAARC has yet to make a successful attempt in envisaging a comprehensive economic and social development in South Asia. This section analyses the core issues of SAARC, namely people to people contact, cooperation in social development, economic development and emerging issue of climate change from Civil Societies' perspective.

People to People Contact

While the SAARC charter emphasises the need for joint action and cooperation from all member nations and all scopes within a member nation, respective political leaders continue to ignore the commitments they made during the establishment of SAARC. For instance, the inconsistent visa-regimes among member states and cumbersome procedures to obtain visas have led to restriction in mobility, lack of dissemination of information, economic activities and investment within



South Asia. However, these restrictions seldom affect the mobility of politicians and the elites.

Social Development

SAARC member states, often characterised by low literacy rates, prevalence of poverty, unequal access to income, wealth and distribution, gender inequality, must garner immediate attention to improving their social sector. Unfortunately, instead of addressing social issues, the policies implemented by political leaders in this region have exacerbated the pre-existing inequalities, marginalisation and, denied access to rights, justice, and democratic freedom to the majority of people in this region (People's SAARC, 2007). As shown below in Table 1, despite having similar geographical topography, South Asia is lagging behind in all key indicators of social development in comparison to that of East Asia and Pacific.

Table 1: Comparison of Social Development Indicators in 2013

Indicators	South Asia	East Asia and Pacific
Human Development Index	0.558	0.683
Life Expectancy	66.2	71
Expected Years of Schooling	10.2	-
Mean Years of Schooling	4.7	7.2

Source: UNDP Human Development Report 2013 and World Bank Indicators 2013

Poverty and Hunger

The leaders of SAARC member states agreed on various action plans for development and uplifting the livelihoods of the downtrodden, but the plans are seldom realised and as such the impacts on the ground are almost non-existent. Although South Asia has witnessed high food consumption rates attributed by rapid population growth in the last two decades, the region comprises of highest concentration of malnourished people in the world, with 304 million people in 2010-

2012. This accounted for around one third of the total number of undernourished people in the world. Likewise, more than 250 million children are undernourished in the region (The World Bank, 2013).

Education

Education plays a vital role in improving quality of life. In the past few years, South Asia has witnessed some improvement in the education sector. For example, the number of drop out of school children of primary age has declined from 43 to 26 million - 11.5 million in India; 3 million in Afghanistan; 2 million in Pakistan and 1 million in Bangladesh, respectively. However, according to the World Bank Report of 2013, more than 30 million children do not have access to education in South Asia. One of the biggest challenges concerning the education sector in South Asia is gender inequality. Women account for majority of the adult population (ages 15 and up) who cannot read and write, reflecting decades old bias against women and their education. The single greatest factor keeping girls out of school is gender discrimination, compounded by the caste, class, religious and ethnic divisions that is prevalent the region.

Human Rights, Equality and Social Justice

The situation of human rights in South Asia is very challenging, particularly among the marginalised and disadvantaged communities. SAARC countries have signed several conventions on trafficking of women and children for prostitution, promotion of child welfare, agreements on food security and other various social issues. However, the majority of SAARC member states still have to ratify the optional protocols to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Even where treaties have been ratified, implementation has been restricted by the reservations of some countries that follow a narrow interpretation of treaties relating to civil and political rights, and by a limited political commitment to implement economic, social and cultural rights (Basnet, 2013). These areas are to be well taken care of and should be the limelight for SAARC's future plan. If SAARC fails in addressing these issues, the future of the South Asia then will be bleak.

Food Security

To combat food crisis, SAARC formed the Food Bank in 2007 that would serve as a regional food security reserve for the SAARC member states, and provide regional support to nation food shortages through collective action (SAARC Secretariat, 2007). However, the bank has not been able to effectively manage the food crisis rampant in the region. As of 2010-2012, South Asia alone had 304 million populations that were malnourished which accounted for one third of the total

undernourished population of the world.

Economic Sector and Trade Regime

Although SAARC has established South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) with the objective to promote and enhance mutual trade, its rational implementation is yet to be materialised. SAARC accounts for less than 2 per cent of the world's total trade and the intra-region trade is less than 5 percent (World Bank, 2008). Compared with other trading blocs such as EU, and ASEAN which have 60 per cent and 20 per cent bilateral trade within the regions, respectively, intra SAARC trade is negligible. SAARC should remove the tariff and non-tariff barriers in trade and promote small and medium entrepreneurs (SME) in the region.

Climate Change and Environmental Vulnerability

Since South Asia inhabits one-fifth of the world's population, due attention should be given to the adverse effects of climate change on the livelihood, sustainable development and economy. Due to the rise in sea-level the low-lying areas, long coastlines, island regions and flood plains of South Asia are in serious threat. The Himalayan region is likely to face catastrophic consequences of glacier melt, including Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOF). Leaders of South Asia should take the issue of climate change seriously by reaffirming their commitment to address the challenge in the upcoming SAARC summit.

Conclusion

From analysing the prevailing contexts of SAARC, there are several areas requiring immediate actions from the leaders. SAARC can learn from policies implemented by successful regional associations such as the Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). ASEAN encourages interaction between people in the region by making travel easier through visa-free arrangements. This has boomed tourism industry, thus, uplifting both economic and social development of the member nations (UNDP, 2013). Similarly, to ensure a better future of SAARC, it should incorporate Human Rights Policy in its Social Charter. Furthermore, SAARC should ensure food security, right to food and food sovereignty for all but with greater focus on nutrition. As production and consumption is rapidly increasing, SAARC should move towards a customs union by gradually eliminating the tariffs and non-tariff barriers and discriminatory practices in the region. An emphasis should be given on coordination in the production activities among the member countries so that greater complementarity in trade cooperation could be generated in due course of time. Adverse effects of climate change acts as an obstacle in achieving sustainable development. Therefore, combating climate change requires urgent and ambitious action, in accordance with the principles and provisions of the

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Finally, SAARC should emphasise on achieving gender equality and women empowerment as gender inequality is a great barrier in tackling poverty.

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Regional Co-operation to Defeat Terrorism

- Raz Mohammad Dalili

Member, SAAPE Core Committee

Sanayee Development Organisation (SDO), Afghanistan



The conflict in Afghanistan which initially started at the height of cold war has been raging for more than three decades. The prolonged conflict devastated the socio-economic and political landscape of the country and resulted in one of the largest refugee populations in the world. In the post-cold war era (the forgotten war) Afghanistan turned into a battleground for regional powers and eventually became one of the largest poppy production countries in the world and a hub for terrorist organisation that threatened both regional and global security. Unfortunately both poppy production and terrorism still threatens our nascent democracy and its institutions. However the impact of this menace is not limited to Afghanistan only rather the region and international community at large is getting affected by these threats today. Afghanistan being at the forefront of war on terror and extremism has paid the highest price in the region and in the world. The international community in general, SAARC community in particular should recognise the fact that the destructive impacts of terrorism is not limited to Afghanistan, it is a global phenomenon. It threatens, not only the safety and security of each country in SAARC community and in the world, it will threaten the existence of the whole SAARC community.

It is fair to point out that among SAARC members concerns over terrorism have been shown and realisation for collective

regional mechanism has been highlighted in its agenda. Given terrorism is threatening political stability and mutual understanding in the region. For instance, terrorism was high on agenda during the 3rd summit of SAARC at Kathmandu in 1987. All the seven members signed 'SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism' and agreed to take effective measures. The Convention correctly warned member countries against this menace and its dangerous effects towards regional security. However, the SAARC is still far away from evolving a common counter-terrorism strategy and all members are equally responsible for it.

It is imperative that all SAARC members recognise the existential threats caused by extremism and fundamentalist groups and work together for a common cause to promote peace and stability across the region. Unless there is a comprehensive joint strategy among SARRC to fight terrorism wherever it is happening in the region, there is no guarantee that this dangerous virus would not infect the whole SAARC community and cause threats to the safety and security of each individual in member countries. Therefore, it is the responsibility of all involved parties, individuals, organisations, civil societies and governments in SAARC community to support Afghanistan at the forefront of war on terrorism, to defeat our common enemy, the enemy of humanity.

People's SAARC Regional Convergence: Revitalizing the bond of togetherness



- **Sharmila Karki**

*Member, SAAPE Core Committee
All Nepal Women's Association (ANWA), Nepal*

People's SAARC, in the capacity of a common regional platform of the South Asian people, has been continuously involved in multiple consultations on numerous common regional issues ahead of each SAARC summit. The aim is to relay the problems concerning the people to formal regional bodies in order to get them addressed in a timely, objective, realistic, and equitable manner. As we prepare to host People's SAARC Regional convergence in Kathmandu on 22-24 November which is ahead of 18th SAARC summit, we feel privileged to be able to play a part in strengthening the bond of the South Asian community as we continue to take initiative to successfully accomplish the mandate of People's SAARC of March 2007.

People's SAARC Convergence is entirely a citizen-driven initiative where independent people from different aspects of life- professionals, intellectuals, rights activists, development activists, peasants, marginalised community, women and everyone concerned come together to voice their opinions and sensitise SAARC member states. As such, People's SAARC is demanding that SAARC should be able to take proper initiative to address country-specific problems in view of the inter-linkage of several aspects among South Asian countries.

People's SAARC regional convergence, indeed, is an initiative to bring diverse situation of each country into the limelight. The convergence will be attended by various organisations including trade unions, peasant associations, human rights organisations, social activists, campaigners, and women's associations amongst others. On this occasion, a paper on the present situation, regional issues and challenges of South Asian nations will be presented on behalf of the civil society. The civil society demand charter will be drafted after discussions among the participants and will be submitted to the government of Nepal as well as to the SAARC summit itself. We believe that this document will help sensitise regional actors to address common regional issues. The 18th SAARC summit is expected to be different, in that it will be people-oriented and progressive since the government of Nepal is led by political parties who have emerged from the struggle with anti-democratic forces. They have continuously raised voices in favor of revolutionary changes with a resolution to promulgate new constitution.

SAARC is not only a geographical regional alliance but the people of SAARC nations share a bond of togetherness and similar history, tradition and lifestyle. Similarly, throughout history, the nations of South Asia are interdependent in terms of the region's ecological system and natural resources.

Our cultural similarities and interrelatedness is what brings us together as South Asian countries.

While interdependence, interaction and intimacy of people remain exemplary, ties among the rulers seems rather formal and are marked with doubt, distrust and dearth of common efforts. The hostility among the rulers does not reflect the cordial relation prevailing among the people of the region. The fundamental characteristic of the government to hold onto power segregates them from the general public. Their self-interest precedes the interest and welfare of the people leading to people having very less control in the decision making process. Despite having plenty of potentials in agricultural and natural resources, south Asia is always recognised as poverty inflicted zone in the global map. This is mainly due to the reluctance of governments of the region to resolve problems to maintain a respectful status in the world. Therefore, the people of South Asia need to be united so that common regional issues such as hunger, poverty, lack of education, gender and cultural discrimination and degrading ecological system are addressed by the concerned states.

SAARC in its last 17 summits has endorsed several decisions and expressed many commitments. In principle, these commitments have advocated for change and transformation on several aspects of rights, development and regional ties. However, what is concerning about these decisions and commitment is whether they have transformed into action. On the other hand, ruling elites have created a rift between the "haves" and "have nots", the privileged and the marginalised. They have been posing obstacles against rights, justice, freedom and the fundamental practice of democracy which has dragged sovereign human rights into the crossroads of danger. Not only political and civil rights, people's economic, social and cultural rights seem to have been undermined. Alongside the impact of globalisation, competition of South Asian nations to establish themselves as regional power center has, to a greater extent, contributed towards eroding inter-country harmony among the nations. Religious and communal resentment and unchanged mindset of ruling elites along with their power centric ruling culture are impeding regional efforts to fight against exploitation, inequality and discrimination.

Amidst these realities, the concept of People's SAARC was formed with the aim to unite independent civil society and civil society organisations as common platform to strengthen people to people relations and exert pressure on

the states to address the problems facing South Asians. Though its need was felt since the inception of SAARC, People's SAARC managed to form in its entirety in 2007 and since then such gatherings of people have been taking place in different nations. People's SAARC aims to contribute to put religious, social, gender, cultural, regional and ethnicity based discrimination to an end and to establish pro-people political, economic, social and cultural system in the South Asian region along with taking the initiation to make states accountable and answerable to serious contemporary issues like climate change to poverty, development and justice. People's SAARC is getting more institutionalised as an organised civil society driven regional initiative by breaking the restrictions posed by the state to vitalise relations among South Asians marked with dignity, goodwill, interdependent and brotherhood.

Furthermore, People's SAARC aims to move forward adopting a common vision and integrating plans by developing a common charter to stand against inequitable distribution of income and wealth, neo liberalism, militarisation- an obstacle of peace, competition of arms and ammunition, communal resentment, violence; and galvanise entire regional efforts from the level of citizen to strengthen human rights, democracy, justice and social harmony, and gender equality. People's SAARC Nepal is organizing regional convergence in association with south Asian civil society organisations in Nepal ahead of 18th SAARC summit in Kathmandu which is expected to be a milestone to consolidate the common efforts of the South Asian people. The motto of this the People's SAARC Regional Convergence 2014 is *People's Movements Uniting South Asia for Democracy, Social Justice and Peace* and NGO Federation of Nepal, the national platform of NGOs in Nepal, is working as People's SAARC Secretariat for Nepal.

Access to Land and Livelihood of Dalits in SAARC

- Ganesh BK

Member, SAAPE Core Committee

National Alliance for Human Rights and Social Justice- Nepal



South Asia has been a witness to major geo-political transformations over many decades. It has been persistently struggling for better livelihood opportunities. The poor population of this region accounts for more than 40 percent of the world's poor population. As of 2011, in terms of population size; of a total of 1593 million people, India had the dominant share of around 75 percent followed by Pakistan (11.1 percent), Bangladesh (9 percent), Afghanistan (1.7 percent), Nepal (1.7 percent), Bhutan (0.05 percent) and the Maldives (0.02 percent).

In South Asia, land and livelihood opportunities are closely interlinked with social indicators of caste, religion, language, gender and age. Dalits and similarly affected groups elsewhere, are generally much poorer in South Asia than the average population; their rights are not protected and respected; and the universal principles of non-discrimination, dignity and equality are a far cry from reality. Thus, in this region one's social and economic statuses are coterminous. Caste-based discrimination (CBD) affects 260 million people globally. The largest number of affected people is located in South Asia and the most affected countries are India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Those facing CBD routinely are commonly known as Dalits. Due to certain limitations as well as lopsided census data, government(s) fail to give them due recognition.

Economic Rights of Dalits: Access to Land and Livelihood

If one is to understand the overall situation of CBD in the aforementioned South Asian countries, its manifestation is evident mainly at the social level, while government

intervention in terms of policy formulation and legislative procedures is at a poor level and people suffering from CBD are barely recognised. As far as the question of land and livelihood is concerned, a large number of marginalised and vulnerable people reside in rural areas. Here, their dominant means of livelihood and sustenance is agricultural land, where they work either as tenant farmers, land labourers or sharecroppers. Upon migrating to urban centres, people from the marginalised sections are engaged in the informal labour sector, and do not even own homestead land. Even within these communities as well, women come under the most marginalised of populations.

When we talk about economic rights it is evident that the Dalits are struggling for their minimum basic needs in these countries. In India when we talk about the economic and budget rights we have noticed that there are separate policies for Dalit and Adivasi communities; even for women there are separate gender budgeting under specific statements. For Dalits and Adivasis there are provisions of Scheduled Caste Sub-Plan (SCSP) and Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) which need to be allocated according to the population proportion of Dalits and Adivasis in the country. Every year, the Indian government, in the name of availing economic rights to these communities, allocates a separate dedicated budget and yet, widespread discrimination still persists.

The economic rights for Dalits have always remained a challenge in every South Asian country. Most governments are not working towards specific provisions dedicated to their economic well-being. Like India, where there are dedicated budgetary provisions for these communities or there are specific schemes directed towards these communities, other

governments of the region should also initiate similar policies to help ensure better livelihood of Dalits.

The government of Bangladesh, under their poverty eradication programme has allocated some budget but there are no separate provisions for the marginalised people except for the social security net where the government has willed to provide special allowances for the employment generation of socially excluded communities like Dalits, hizras, harijans (horizons) etc. The government has said that land will be provided to the ultra-poor and there will be separate women's advancement rights in which government will provide them the 50 percent of share in land and ownership along with men. They have made promises for employment generation of women and protection against violence in Bangladesh but not specifically for Dalit women who face large-scale discrimination and violence in the country.

Most governments, apart from India and Nepal do not even recognise CBD. They claim to be pro-poor, but their government documents do not reveal any specific provision for these communities. In Pakistan, even though the category 'Scheduled Caste' continues to be used, the state does not have any special development schemes or programmes for its Dalit population. On the contrary, some of the legal provisions, such as the law against blasphemy is often used against members of the religious minorities, Christians and Hindus, by the locally dominant individuals in events of conflict. The finance department of these South Asian countries do not have any separate department or scheme(s) which will look into the budgetary rights of the SCs of the state.

In Sri Lanka, under the department of Agrarian Livelihood and Irrigation Development, the government has allocated 170 Cr. for livelihood activities and 1400 Cr. for irrigation of agriculture. Rs 30 Cr. has been allocated for the prevention of child abuse and protection of women against violence. Even though the government is trying to provide development opportunities for women, youth and children and other groups, the challenge is that these provisions are not inclusive in terms of marginalised community as there is no separate ministerial department dedicated to the welfare of the marginalised communities.

Therefore the SAARC should address the issues of land and livelihoods towards the eradication of poverty, and try its best to allocate CBD and other kinds of discriminations faced by Dalit communities in south Asia. The Summit tends to deal with various objectives which need to be understood in terms of removal of all kinds inequalities- social, cultural and economic, against which the Dalit communities are persistently struggling.

Recommendations

- Dalit identity must be recognised by each country and policies must be formulated towards the socio-economic inclusion of the marginalised communities.

- No goals towards the elimination of poverty specifically in this region can be achieved without taking into consideration the multiple vulnerabilities of the Dalits.
- Post-2015 SDGs must work in close association with the nation-states and recognise multidimensional CBD as the root cause of poverty and inequality in South Asia.
- Wider land reform and livelihood opportunities must be made available to the underdeveloped communities, where issues of Dalit rights must be addressed.
- At the international level, to ensure any success with reference to poverty alleviation and hunger eradication, multidimensionality of poverty must be understood in terms of interactions on the basis of caste, gender, and religion.
- With the invisibility of many forms of discrimination, especially caste-based and gender-based discrimination, the socio-economic rights and needs of Dalits must be pressed for much more stringently.
- It is significant to recognise the domestic labour of women in these countries to ensure a decent living standard; more stress must be placed on vocational training and related employment of women.
- Stringent and effective measures must be taken to eradicate bonded labour (Haliya, Haruwa Charuwa and other forms).
- SDGs must work towards advocating rightful budgetary allocation to the needs of the marginalised by each and every South Asian country.
- More focussed attention must be paid towards generating employment among the marginalised community as per the international employment standards, especially among marginalised Dalits.
- SDGs should also address the Dalit community's concern regarding income inequality between the high-income groups, middle-income groups and low-income groups in each country.
- SAARC countries and the region put in place mechanisms and collaborate to address specific caste based discriminations preventing Dalit people from enjoying their right to survival, development, protection and participation.
- Adequate and population proportion budget allocation be made to Dalit children and young people's development in all countries.
- SAARC countries should identify and declare the Dalit Rights Decade and take caste based discrimination as a form of human rights violation and commit to address the same at national and regional levels.
- The SAARC region should be declared as untouchability free region and all the member countries must work together to make this a reality.

Contact Address:

Secretariat

South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE)

P.O. Box: 8130, 288, Gairidhara, Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel: +977-1-4004985/4004976, Fax: +977-1-400 4508
Email: saape@saape.org, Website: www.saape.org