



SAAPE Newsletter

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EDITORIAL

Poverty Reduction – Making it Happen

Reducing global poverty is now considered to be ‘the’ top priority for the world. The entire aid and development industry, comprising bilateral and multilateral agencies as well as civil society, focuses on reducing global poverty. Yet, overall, the efforts prove to be unsatisfactory.

South Asia is a prime example. Decades of planned development have elapsed without meaningful results for the poorest of the poor. Billions worth of resources either from outside or within these countries have been mobilised but in reality life at the grassroots level has further deteriorated. It is indeed shocking to see that the poor still die due to a lack of food, and the absence of shelter, water and sanitation. As if malnutrition and disease is not enough, the poor of the region continue to face natural and man-made disasters. Moreover, in all South Asian countries, new challenges in development have emerged due to the ever increasing gap between the “have” and the “have-nots”. It is there for all to see that only those who have access to power and politics are the true recipients of development. Hence, if analysed critically, the present development agenda appears to be a farce to the common man.

Through advocacy and lobbying, the South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) has been actively working to change present policy and practices related to economic development, environmental protection, food and water security, democratic governance and human rights, nuclear war and peace, interstate and internal conflicts, and growing pressing issues such as HIV/AIDS.

The SAAPE newsletter is one of the components to promote the campaign and sensitise all stakeholders. This final issue of 2005 provides a summary of the five thematic papers which were presented at the SAAPE AGM in Kandy, Sri Lanka, in June 2004. The newsletter further covers a few SAAPE activities such as the Sri Lankan People’s Caravan for Justice and Sovereignty, the Kathmandu International Conference on Democracy, Peace, Food Sovereignty and Action Plan for Road to Hong Kong, and the 58th Annual DPI/NGO Conference

held in New York where Regional Coordinator, Dr. Arjun Karki, focused on the role of power and politics in combating poverty.

Although not included, SAAPE remembers with sadness the latest disaster affecting mostly the poorest of the poor in South Asia, the devastating earthquake which took place in North Pakistan in October 2005. Our hearts go out to the 3.5 billion affected people in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, Pakistan’s North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), and western and southern parts of the Kashmir valley in the Indian-administered Kashmir.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue. We are always happy to receive your comments and feedback, in order to further improve the SAAPE newsletter.

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PAKISTAN:

Human Security – This Time for Real

By Professor Aijaz A Qureshi and Zulfiqar Halepoto

Introduction

Human security is 'in'. The rapid rise in poverty in Pakistan has given new energy to the traditional debate on the concept of human security. Since the tragedy of September 11, 2001, the concept of human security is back on the public agenda inside and outside Pakistan. The world has indeed changed after September 11th and so has the poverty and human security nexus.

After 2001 the world has realised the need to focus on poverty eradication, by providing space to the broader aspects of human security and the struggle to achieve it according to the peculiar environment of the nations and states. Human poverty is a multidimensional problem; it should not be confined to the economic order, financial crises, onerous debt burden and natural disasters. It is directly linked with policy priority, political will and commitment and conflict and peace.

A host of questions and queries have emerged on issues like security of whom, security from what, security to what extent, security of which values and above all security at what cost.

In the post September 11th world, human security is explained as the protection and safety from unseen forces, inhuman threats and terrorism. Freedom from the fear of being killed, persecuted and abused. Freedom from abject poverty that brings indignity and self-contempt. Freedom to make choices including democracy and an ideal fear-free civil society.

Political Causes behind Poverty Increase

In Pakistan, poverty is not created only by low income growth rates, low per capita income, inflation, economic inequalities, droughts and disasters, short-sightedness of financial managers and non-professional policies of respective governments. More basic causes of poverty include internal conflicts between various ethnic groups and provinces, unjust distribution of economic resources, donor driven mega-projects, dissent of the right of self-determination, absence of small provinces in supreme decision-making bodies, increasing political turmoil and uncertainty and denial of basic and fundamental human rights of indigenous people and minorities.

This shows that poverty is not only the outcome of fallacious, inconceivable and short-term economic policies. Driving forces behind the increase of poverty are an absence of basic human rights, corruption at all levels in institutions, lack of true democracy, lack of honest and fair systems of accountability, a partial judicial system and suspension of the constitution. Various international agencies, policy makers and thinkers working on these issues increasingly support this argument.

Look for instance at the latest picture of poverty in Pakistan and its root causes painted by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in the report "*Poverty in Pakistan: Issues, Causes and Institutional Responses.*" The publication is an eye-opener for policy makers, state think-tanks and above all the rich and main stream political leadership of this very poor nation. The report identifies that more than one third of the country's population is currently living in poverty. The richest province - Sindh - faces 60% poverty in its rural areas.

The report states that **Corruption and bad governance** are the primary causes of poverty in Pakistan, which has seen "three out of the last four civilian governments dismissed prematurely... on charges of corruption." Political instability, law and order and the situation on the borders continue to create obstacles in addressing poverty in Pakistan and so are persistent ethnic and sectarian conflicts. Political certainty will be a key factor to ensure a turnaround in the economy and the creation of sustainable development.

In short, non-availability of resources, corruption, ill governance, lack of leadership, deficiency of long term policies, institutional failure are closely linked with the rapid rise in poverty. Land hunger, homelessness, unemployment, illiteracy and ill-health are the worst kinds of poverty caused by political inefficiency. Environmental degradation is a close runner-up.

The level and strength of civil liberties, peoples' access to basic livelihood materials and human rights are the barometers to measure the level of real security. Freedom of speech, freedom of thought and free flow of information have to play an exclusive role in defending these basic values.

An interesting example is Sindh province. People generally consider Punjab as de facto in charge of the political and socio-economic powers in the country. This impression is the outcome of the hegemonic and monopolised attitude of the big province. 'Big brother' Punjab under the semblance of national security, protection of geographical boundaries and external threats consumes a large piece of the financial cake by spending 80% of the total budget on debt retirement and defence. Little is left for health, education and other social sector development.

The growth policies and strategies of the Nineties were never composed on realistic ground. They fail to be pro-poor and did not reflect peoples' choices. According to the ADB report about 47 million people in Pakistan are living below the poverty line. During the period 1993 to 1999, the percentage of people living below the poverty line increased from 26 per cent in 1993 to 32 per cent in 1999. "Pakistan's education indicators are the worst in South Asia," the ADB report says, adding that Pakistan's public sector spending on education and health, at barely 2.1 per cent of the GDP, is significantly lower than that of other countries in the region. The report finds that 70 per cent of adult Pakistani women are illiterate, the highest rate in South Asia.

Poverty in Pakistan increases despite the availability of substantial local and foreign funds to be spent at the grass roots level, through micro credit schemes and other initiatives.

ADB itself offers \$2.5 billion during the period 2004-2006 to support various development initiatives including measures to alleviate poverty in Pakistan. Since 2002, ADB has assisted the government in the implementation of various poverty alleviation initiatives, offering a \$300 million devolution support programme in the first year. Also, a loan of \$350 million was being processed as part of the Access to Justice Programme, and \$150 million for a police reform plan. How come the poverty indicators keep dropping despite the substantial financial inputs?

Political Institutions and Governance

In forming a government to be administrated by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself -James Madison, 1788

A country cannot implement economic policies to foster pro-poor growth and meet targeted poverty alleviation

programmes unless the country is governed by accountable, pro-people and democratically elected institutions. If the governments are corrupt, unaccountable, undemocratic, authoritarian and bureaucratic, the poor people have no access to basic human rights and public and social services.

In such a hostile environment good governance and transparent political leadership can be considered as the missing link between government and poverty reduction. As Dr Mehboob-ul-Haq points out:

“Effective governance is often the missing link between anti-poverty efforts and poverty reduction.”

The World Development Report 2005, UNDP Human Development Report 2005, Global Monitoring Report 2005 by the World Bank and a number of other Pakistan based research reports and annual documents on human development have discussed the role of political institutions in the same context.

In Pakistan, we can defeat the poisonous virus of poverty; we can hold governments accountable to people; and a good and pro-people system of government can be achieved if the state allows some bottom line requirements like:

- Devolution of federal government powers to the grass roots level
- Empower local governments with financial liberty, including control over the local taxation network
- Building local community based capacity building networks for Poverty Reduction through local government
- Inter-Provincial tax sharing system
- Pro poor reforms in local governance and making decentralisation pro poor through community involvement in the decision-making process
- Press freedom and civil liberties
- Equal distribution of resources and opportunities including international aid and donation among all the stakeholders of the country
- Equal share of all the provinces in all decision making bodies, including Foreign Policy through gender lens.

Conclusion

Civilians are the most vulnerable to the ravages of all conflicts and crises. Today we are the citizens of an increasingly interconnected world; the insecurity of others

is becoming our own insecurity. Protecting people in our global community, and building a sustainable foundation for peace and a poverty free environment should be our prime and pressing priority. For us, human security is a political approach through which we educate people to stand up for their rights and their lives-first. It is a state's prime duty to strengthen the abilities of people to respond to threats to human security and support peaceful governance. Poverty can only be eradicated with this approach that people should be made decision-makers of their fate. Government has to draw conclusions about what is needed by both the people and the world to achieve a greater state of human security and a poverty free society.

To ensure sustainable Human Security, the state should encourage greater public dialogue among various stake holders of civil society including human development experts, government agents and think tanks, NGOs, academics and established practitioners outside of government, as well as within government departments.

Today the globe is seeking to identify definite and concrete areas for collective action against threats to human security calling poverty as the core reason of all conflicts and disputes. Our state should work to strengthen people's ability to respond to threats to human security to help build a world where people can live in freedom from fear of being poor, hungry and deprived.

The supreme objective of our governments is to construct an environment where universal humanitarian standards should be followed by the state machinery; rule of law should protect all people, indigenous communities, ethnic and religious minorities. Where those who break the laws, breach the trust, violate the constitution, transgress the limits and above all temper the mandate, are held accountable; and where our institutions are equipped to defend these standards. We should remember that poverty cannot be eradicated or alleviated just through launching micro credit concepts, donor driven policies and plans, and boost ups in foreign exchange reserves. But it can be illuminated through a political will in which peoples share in the decision making process, revival of democracy, alleviation of corruption, freedom of expression and free judiciary, and in which education, health, physical infrastructure and social justice are considered to be first priorities. ✍

INDIA:

Democracy and governance: Searching for a people-friendly state

By: Suhas Palshikar

In most of South Asia, 'democracy' invokes images that are much more than mere governance structures. Apart from rule of law and formal principles of open governance (franchise, elections, and accountability), democracy in this part of the world unashamedly refers to equality, resultant redistribution of resources, dignity and provision of minimum insurance of livelihood. Democracy also refers to struggles for more participation and participation by underprivileged sections of society. These meanings of democracy inform the ideological basis of the democratic institutions in India. The Indian discourse on democracy is thus awe-inspiring. It invests agency in the 'people' - something that is a legacy of anti-colonial struggle - and also locates the 'people' as the central purpose of all governance activity.

The same meanings of democracy are translated into institutional frameworks in a more pragmatic and less ambitious manner. Therefore, the structures of governance are complex; they are a mix of democratic norms and law and order concerns. In this sphere of institutions, governance suddenly slips onto the concern for order, the poetry is dispensed with and practical concerns of retaining a system of governance produce the prose called the constitutional edifice. Thus, the constitution is a compromise, a constant search for a 'golden mean' as one Supreme Court judge described it once (Justice Sawant in Mandal judgment). Perhaps, the constitution could not have been anything more than this and much of its success so far is the result of this rule of 'golden mean'.

Promise of democracy

The institutional framework that has evolved in India may be summarised in the following manner: it ensures the minimum of democracy: procedures, intentions of the law and remedial measures; then it strives to expand the scope of democracy by bringing in issues of social justice, equality, dignity and better material conditions for the underprivileged. But at the same time, it is concerned with consolidation of state apparatus as the repository of coercive power in the society. This has led to the overemphasis on the discourse of power in the institutional

framework. This framework also believes in formal power as the essential instrument of all welfare in the nation-state. In other words, the framework vacillates between the famous dyads of liberty and order, equality and private interest, dispersal of power and consolidation of a post-colonial state. The slippage between the promise of democracy and the institutional framework can be treated as inevitable and acceptable for putting in place a workable system of governance (though democrats would as well critique this as unacceptable compromise).

The institutions of the state that have been created by the constitution and the conception of state that informs all governance is essentially Nehruvian in character. In fact, the two most important influences on the institutional framework in India are Dr. Ambedkar and Nehru. The former was involved only in the formulation of these institutions, while the latter apart from being the architect, was also the one who presided over the implementation of this framework for a long time.

Multiple existences

The Indian state has multiple existences. If one goes by the professed objectives and nature of the state, it may perhaps lead to a mistaken assessment of the state. However, the state has been a terrain of contestations and that the state has allowed itself to become such a contested terrain indicates the democratic potentials. Secondly, the Indian state has never been 'socialist,' but always remained a welfare oriented state that vacillated between the interests of the dominant sections and the welfare of the ordinary. This vacillation facilitated some measures for the welfare of the disadvantaged sections.

Given this situation, the discussion of the structural aspects of the political system in India would easily pass the test of minimum democratic provisions. In the specific context of poverty and the disadvantaged sections, the real challenges lie in the field of what has been described as 'deepening of democracy' or 'democratising democracy.'

Discussion of structures and the areas of tension

Fundamental rights: State is privileged, nineteenth century idea of individual liberty dominates, right to work and education are the most crucial gaps (whereas, the contemporary emphasis has been on right to information);

Parliamentary form of government: No provision for accountability of the representatives or the parties, central debate about the meaning of representation—Dalits, women, etc; inability of the legislatures to make policies or scrutinize the policies made by the ruling elites;

Elections: Worthwhile experience, growing entry of underprivileged sections in the electoral arena as voters, campaigners, and as decisive force;

Judiciary: A structure that has shaped and has also been the consequence of the existing consensus (refer to rulings on secularism, economic policies, development mode); much celebrated but limited potential;

Federalism: Issue of autonomy dominated in the sixties and the seventies, share in resources as the main issue today; ironically, new economic policy has brought about more federalisation of the polity;

Panchayat Raj: Decentralisation as the darling of everyone; rise at the time of erosion of state autonomy; radical social engineering in terms of reservations for even office holders;

Implementing machinery: Bureaucracy as the most anti-people institution, police as the repository of

unlawful violence, both are very effective in enforcing rules on behalf of the dominant classes and both are inefficient in protecting the people's interests;

Law and Order: Web of regulations, exaggerated security concerns and accretion of coercive power to the institutions of the state that are essentially non-representative in nature (police, judiciary, election commission, experts) and

Development Trajectory: Data can be culled from HDRs, Social Watch, etc. But difficult to debunk merely as a story of failures, a complex picture.

Process Dimension:

Elections and Participation: High enthusiasm, no participation in non-electoral or non-party activities; very little development of community level participation, participation biased in favour of the dominant;

Caste question: Democracy has dented caste considerably—caste group replaces the jati, verticality of caste getting transformed into horizontality in many respects, caste politics as pursuit of material interests or as aspiration for share in power; and

Political economy: Liberalisation and neo-classical political economy as the main issue; consensus among political parties and the elite; growing tension between elite and the masses, tension between democracy and elite consensus.

In other words, there is a need to consolidate the gains accruing from the 'democratic upsurge' of the recent past and to protect democracy from the challenges thrown up by the new discourse of neo-classicist ideas of restricted democracy.

Unfortunately, the governance discourse, though well-intentioned in many respects, is oblivious to this possibility of shrinking of democracy. Besides, the governance discourse helps the neo-classicist argument and focuses on issues that obfuscate the core issues relating to democracy in contemporary India.

People-friendly state

In order to be able to frame the research question, two issues may be highlighted. In the first place, what is the relationship between democracy and governance? Governance refers to law and order, implementation of rules, and invokes the principles of transparency, accountability and grassroots participation as the bases of law and order and rule implementation. While this is *consistent with* democracy, this is less than what democracy actually constitutes. Democracy constitutes redistribution of power among social sections and particularly the incorporation of the disadvantaged sections in the scheme of power; it constitutes contestations over what is the public interest; it constitutes contestation over the exercise of public authority; in other words, democracy is that activity, which leads to the shaping of public reason.

The second question is: what is the relationship between civil society activity and the activity of the state? In circles that are interested in the governance question, there is a tendency to privilege civil society activity over state activity in terms of being people-friendly. The state represents the repressive and universalising agency while the civil society is the agency of promoting public interest. However, is this the reality? Do people really reject the *central* or *primal* role of the state? Who do people look up to for the protection of public interest and for the furtherance of interests of the disadvantaged sections? It can be suggested with some justification that people expect the state to do these things and seldom look upon the civil society initiatives as being replacements for the state in this respect. At best, civil society organisations are seen as intermediaries between people and the administration. On the other hand, the administration looks upon the civil society organisations as supplements to its own role as a dispenser of social welfare.

The common thread running through the above two issues is the de-politicisation of the process of public policy making and the consequent narrowing of the scope and

relevance of politics. Should that happen, democracy would be reduced to formal procedures, legal principles and transparency in bureaucratic implementation.

It may be possible to evolve a research framework around these questions and design studies (adopting different methodologies) that would try and address this issue. These can include case studies of policy making, of the workings of various civil society organisations, performance appraisal of the work related to transparency etc. and how that helps the poor. The focus will not be merely on service and delivery (supply side) but on how disadvantaged groups are mobilised (or not mobilised), what do the disadvantaged sections expect from the 'public authority', etc. (the demand side).

In one sentence, the theme would be to position and explore the dichotomy or disjunction between democracy and governance.

Free the Mind, Free Mankind

Mohiuddin Ahmad

*When I was born
Birds didn't sing
They were in chain
When I was born
Flowers didn't bloom
There was no rain.*

*When I was born
Plants didn't grow
There was no grain*

*When I was born
Rivers didn't flow
There was no crane*

*As I roam around
I see no home to rest
I see no one to love
Birds don't find a nest*

*O sister....O brother
Free the land, free the river
Free the sky, free the flower
Free the birds, free the mind
Free our children, free mankind.*

The Gender Dimension of Poverty in Bangladesh

By: *Dr. Gitiara Nasreen*

The prevailing socio-economic and political conditions in Bangladesh, the general violation of human rights, rising extremism in the name of religion, widespread corruption coupled with criminalisation of politics, an entrenched culture of violence, as well as increasing economic inequalities have a direct and adverse impact on the vulnerable sections of society, especially women.

On the other hand, from increased enrolment figures in schools to increased participation in the local government, women and girls now inhabit spaces once restricted to them. Women have mobilised themselves in struggles against the negative forces that affect their private and public lives. Yet such resistance has been accompanied by an increasing feeling of powerlessness or futility in the face of the state's inability or unwillingness to ensure justice.

The commitment to alleviate gender disparity has been the main thrust of many policies formulated and programmes undertaken by government and non-government bodies alike. Bangladesh is a signatory/party to milestone documents/conventions like CEDAW, International Conference for Population and Development, World Declaration on Education for All etc. and is committed to implementing those at the national level. Major hindrances prevent these from being implemented fully, including the absence of a strong political will to realise the goals, the contemptuous politics of the incumbent ruling parties of discarding the promises and achievements made by previous governments, lack of good governance and democratic practice, as well as minimum accountability and transparency.

Opposing the spirit of the convention itself, and differing from the provisions for equal rights granted in the Constitution, the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) has not yet fully ratified CEDAW. The imposition of reservations on Article 2 (complete elimination of discrimination through all possible constitutional, legislative and legal provisions), and Article 16-1(c) (equal rights in marriage and at its dissolution) still remains as they are considered to be contradicting the *Sharia* law (Islamic legal jurisdiction).

Recently the Bangladesh Government has published a modified version of the National Policy for the Advancement of Women (NAP) that differs from the original version (formulated in 1997 on the basis of 1995 Beijing PFA) on several important aspects. Not only has this unsolicited move further curtailed women's rights, it has also called into question the Government's sincerity in ensuring equality for all citizens.

The feminine face of poverty

Although according to the UNDP's Human Development Index, Bangladesh has graduated from a 'low' to a 'medium' human development country, half of its population still lives under the inescapable clutch of poverty. Its grip on women is especially tenacious, supported as it is by a socio-cultural system that deprives women of access to opportunities and benefits. Women face greater obstacles in overcoming poverty because of their deficient capabilities and remain the poorest of the poor:

- Poverty is perpetuated because women are deprived of equal rights to property, inheritance and shares; to food, nutrition, health care, education, legal-aid, and employment; and to equal opportunities to function without fear of violence.
- At the level of absolute poverty women outnumber men, particularly in female-headed households.
- Women have less access to the resources to alleviate poverty, i.e. education, health, natural resources, micro-credit, etc.
- Women are usually deprived of the minimum wage and get 30-50% less than men in the informal sector.
- The discriminatory personal laws regarding inheritance curb women's access to property.
- A majority of victims of trafficking are poor, uneducated women; women abandoned by their husbands; women facing domestic violence; women with large families; and women affected by natural disasters that leaved them widowed and homeless.

Micro-credit disbursement has become a common poverty reduction intervention in Bangladesh led both by the Government and NGOs. However, without parallel interventions such as improving productive skills, access to technology and the market micro credits programmes have minimal outcomes. In most cases women do not retain control over the loan and its usage, and are used as mere intermediaries to collect the loan for male family members. Although poverty alleviation has received special attention from the GOB, the budgetary measures to direct resources to women is meagre.

Violence against women

It is evident that poverty exposes women to large-scale sexual violence and trafficking. In Bangladesh, violence in everyday life is more apparent in the lives of women and girls from different communities and classes, in public and private spheres. Especially acid attack, sexual abuse and assault, rape and gang rape, murder, trafficking and forced prostitution become matters of grave concern. Although VAW cuts across all classes, women from the religious and ethnic minority communities, and lower socio-economic strata are more exposed to all forms of violence.

Even with the limited gender-progressive legislation, there is a vast gap between the law and its implementation. A number of factors constrain women from exercising their legal rights, including the social stigma attached to victims, lack of economic alternatives and social support, legal ignorance, and the frustrations imposed by a non-responsive and biased legal system.

Women's health

Contrary to the large part of the world where women outlive men, in Bangladesh there are fewer women than men, and women are less likely than men to reach old age due to their higher death rates and differential access to food and health care. The maternal mortality rate is one of the highest in the world. Additionally, women have greater vulnerability towards STDs, HIV/AIDS and mental disorders.

The GOB has created provisions of essential health packages for mother and child health care, and immunisation programmes for children are successfully being carried out. However, population control through reproductive health care is primarily emphasised, while general health care for women does not receive due recognition.

Women's education

In the past decade, Bangladesh has attained several milestones in education. The adult literacy rate has jumped

from 35.3 percent in 1991 to a 62 percent in 2003. There is a significant increase in primary and secondary school enrolment for girls; however the gender gap still remains. The number of women in higher education is also increasing albeit at a slow pace. Participation of women in technical education is still tiny. Discrimination in women and girls' access to education is caused by parents' unwillingness to invest in daughters' education, heavy domestic work of girls at an early age, early marriage and pregnancies, sexual harassments of women in public places, and gender-biased education administration, teaching and materials.

Women and the environment

Natural and manmade disasters such as floods, cyclones, droughts, deforestation, soil and riverbank erosion, drying of wetlands, contamination from agro-chemical and industrial waste, commercial shrimp cultivation, inappropriate use of cultivable land, and shrinking biological diversity, have resulted in deprivation of traditional livelihoods. The principal victims of environmental degradation are women.

What is to be done?

Engendering equality calls for substantive transformation in law, policy and institutional interventions. Such a transformation needs to be based on a framework of rights and security to make women's participation in their family, community and the state meaningful. It calls for an equitable distribution of resources and access to opportunities to enable women to exercise their autonomy and agency in making life choices. Civil society activists have consistently worked for the equal rights of citizens in general and women's causes in particular. The ground reality shows that much more efforts are needed than are now being expended. Collective and persistent voices must be raised. Recommendations must be turned into actions.

Attitude and practice

To overcome the challenges civil society should address systemic gender inequalities embedded in customary practices and patriarchal ideologies:

- Media and civil society groups should work together towards attitudinal change, greater social awareness and conscientisation on women's issues to build up a gender-neutral culture.
- Include gender dimension into all collective social action.
- A zero tolerance policy and movement must be enforced regarding violence against women and girls.

Knowledge, Education and Training

- Gender-sensitisation should be an intrinsic part of education and training at all levels.
- The formulation and implementation of gender-sensitive, secular and action-orientated curricula remains one of the most important responsibilities.
- Wider dissemination of information pertaining to women's rights and international treaties/agreement through media, advocacy programmes, and information, education and communication materials (IEC)

Building Gender Balanced Culture

- Full Ratification of CEDAW is urgent. In this context national laws need to be amended and a Uniform Family Code be adopted to ensure effective implementation of CEDAW.
- International labour standards relating to specific rights in terms of wages, social security, occupational safety, health and insurance must be explicitly ratified.
- In order to promote women-friendly working atmosphere gender sensitive service rule and code of conduct should be adopted in every institution.

Government and the Civil Society

- Persistently press the Government to live up to its commitments, implement the National Policy for the Advancement of Women and to assign a task force to monitor the measures taken.

- The civil society and NGOs should follow up and monitor the measures undertaken

Political Actors

- Advocacy measures of all relevant actors should aim at obtaining firm commitments from political leaders to remove disparity and discrimination against women on a priority basis.
- Political parties should include protection and promotion of women's rights as an important agenda in the respective manifesto.
- Political parties should introduce direct election to an increased number of reserved seats in the Parliament in compliance with the National Policy and the election pledges made.
- Political parties should be encouraged to give 30 percent of total nominations to women in general seats and facilitate women's upward mobility within party hierarchy.

Media and Communication

- Media organisations should establish self-regulatory mechanisms and formulate codes of conduct towards gender sensitivity in their policies and programmes.
- All barriers to building free, interactive, demand driven communication networks for women should be lifted. Cost-effective communication means such as amateur radio and ICT should be made available to women to promote development, poverty eradication, empowerment and participation.

For more information

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Country Focal Organisations and Contact Details

The SAAPE has Country Focal Organisations (CFOs) in each country of the region to co-ordinate

and expedite the country-based processes. The CFOs are also responsible for providing the necessary inputs and feedback to the SAAPE Secretariat, based at Rural Reconstruction Nepal (RRN). They are chosen from among the member organisations of the respective countries.

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Labour in Contemporary Nepal

Umesh Upadhaya

Background

Many Nepalese fail to find a job. In a total population of 23.1 million, the total workforce consists of 14 million, of which nearly 20% is unemployed. Underemployment is as high as 45% of the total work days. The nature of our poverty is rural centred as only 16% of the population live in urban areas. Rural poverty is aggravated by violent conflict and heavy displacement of working families.

An overwhelming majority of the workforce is engaged in various economic activities of informal sectors. A considerable number is forced to obtain a subsistence livelihood from agriculture and land-based employment with traditional technology and negligible modernisation.

The formal sector in Nepal refers to enterprises with more than 10 regular employees. The informal sector refers to:

- Micro enterprises with less than 10 workers
- Non-enterprise workers mainly agricultural and construction workers
- Casual workers and seasonal migrant workers
- Home based and street based workers
- Bonded workers and attached workers
- Self employed peasants and craft based workers
- Unpaid family workers mainly women and children

Labour: Statistics and discussion

If we consider the entire agricultural sector as an informal sector, the formal sector covers merely 6.4% of the total labour force. If we exclude the market agricultural workforce from the total agri-workforce and add it to formal sector, the picture looks as follows:

Table 1. Broad Categorisation of Formal and Informal Sector in Nepal (in '000)

Sector	Broad Formal	Broad informal
Male	655(13.8%)	4082(86.2%)
Female	224(4.7%)	4502(95.3%)
Total	879(9.3%)	8584(90.7%)

Source: Calculation based on National Labour Force Survey, 1999

If we compare the outcomes of the National Labour Force Survey (NLFS) 1999 with the census of 1991 and the census of 2001, the statistics indicate a changing pattern in the distribution of workforce. Most alarming is the gender distribution. More than 85% of the female workforce can be found in agriculture; over 95% is employed in the informal sector. Only 4.7% of the broad formal sector consists of female workers. The number of child labourers estimated by NLFS is 19,87,000 of which only 64,000 are in regular wage jobs.

In 1992, the average number of workers per enterprise was 134.82, which sharply declined in succeeding years. Bankruptcy and closure of enterprises is increasing. The number of women employed in government service is declining, with the exception of the armed force in which female employment has increased temporarily due to Maoist terrorist activities. SOEs are being privatised resulting in a job loss as high as 39.5%.

As a result of declining labour intensity in enterprises, labour flow towards the informal sector and towards foreign employment is on the increase. It is estimated that the actual percentage may be much higher. Foreign employment shows a sharp increase, with 105,055 and 106,660 Nepalese working abroad in 2003 and 2004 respectively, according to official statistics. The number of Nepalese labourers working in India is estimated to be as large as 2 million.

Given this situation, the negative impact of globalisation can be felt most in the informal sector. The unemployment and victimisation of formal sector workforce pushes workers into the informal sector, resulting in even more hardships. Adverse effects of globalisation are further aggravated by terrorist activities in Nepal affecting an ailing tourism industry and the general economy. Displacement of farmer families and migration towards urban areas in Nepal and India has now become common. Foreign employment has become both attractive and compulsive to new entrants in the labour market.

The National Living Standard Survey 2003/04 has shown a sharp decline in the poverty level from 42% in 1995/96 to 30.8% in 2003/04. This considerably high and unexpected reduction results mainly from remittances sent from abroad which is not a permanent measure for poverty reduction. Moreover, the remittance, due to the conflict,

Table 2. Foreign Employment trends of Nepalese Workers

Year	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Workers gone abroad	3605	2159	2134	3259	7745	27,796	35,543	55,025	104,739

Source: Department of Labour and Employment Promotion

does not flow towards rural areas and revolves within urban areas. Thus a larger gap between a large rural population (84%) and a small urban population (16%) is being created.

Issues of employment, rights and equality are not strictly confined to economics, but at present largely rely on political factors. In order to improve the situation and bring an end to the violent conflict, institutional reforms, good governance, strengthening democracy and democratisation of society need to be implemented.

Problems and issues of employment in Nepal can be analysed and addressed in two broad categories - Labour Market related and Conflict and Rights related - and include:

- Increased unemployment due to factory closures and decreasing economic activities
- Non implementation of minimum wages both in the formal and informal sectors
- Poor enforcement mechanisms and weak implementation of labour laws
- Negligible social protection – almost zero in the informal sectors of employment
- Changing patterns of employment including a curtailed permanent workforce based on casualisation and piece rate work.
- Exploitative labour practices in various forms including bondage and the use of child labour
- Discrimination based on gender, caste-ethnicity, property and location
- Sexual harassment and commercial exploitation
- Exploitation of Dalit and various groups of indigenous workers
- Less effective unionisation and low level of awareness among workers
- Displacement and internal and international migration of working families
- Poor working conditions and problems of OSH and increasing accidents
- Feudal mentality of employers lacking modern entrepreneurial/managerial norms

- Frequent violations of agreements and negotiations by management

Effective solutions to these labour market issues depend on the political situation and hence conflict, democracy and rights have become the issues of prime concern for trade unions and working masses in Nepal. In the absence of a representative government, the autocratic government aims at erasing control and limiting the exercise of trade union rights. Democratic institutions continue to suffer. Government employees and teachers are being terrorised by the government. The press suffers from dictatorial amendments to the Press Act. Labour laws are at risk of amendments through ordinances. Academic freedom is restricted and university teachers, lawyers and intellectuals are being watched closely by the government. The government has adopted a policy of divide and rule to increase its control over workers, professionals and intellectuals.

Arrests and surveillance of union leaders

After the royal takeover of February 1, 2005, three dozen trade union leaders and activists were arrested. Some were released after a few days while others were kept in detention for 90 days. Even after lifting the state of emergency, surveillance of trade union offices by the regime continues.

Trade union activities have been restricted heavily by the administration. On Democracy Day 2005 (February 18), the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT) office was gheraoed and searched by the police. When the police could not find anything suspicious, they compelled union activists and staff to leave and locked the office for the day. On March 8th, the government banned a rally for which it had given prior permission. The government further creates obstacles towards organising regular union events like meetings, conferences and seminars.

Ban on strikes

In the new ordinance strikes in some 14 essential services and all forms of legal strikes have been banned. Previously when the Act was imposed and unions filed a case, the ILO committee for Freedom of Association said that including hotel tourism in the category of essential services is against international conventions and norms.

This time, ignoring all norms and ratifications, the government included the following services in the essential ones: hotel, tourism, communication, electricity, petroleum import and distribution, medicines manufacturing and distribution, post and telephone, water-air-railway-road transport, airport maintenance, government storage, defence related, government printing press, hospitals, health posts and garbage management.

Tightening control on press and media

On February 1st when the Royal Proclamation was being broadcast by the media, armed forces captured all radio FM stations and internet service providers. Land line and mobile services were discontinued; telephone lines were cut for two weeks while mobile connections were restored only six months later. 1,000 press workers lost their job directly and more than 9,000 journalists are indirectly affected.

Attack on government employees and public sector unions

After the Royal Proclamation of February 1, the government issued an order that union formation and operation in government enterprises is prohibited. The amendment to the Civil Service Act has banned the Nepal Government Employees Organisation.

Ban against teachers' union in the making

The Government is preparing a ban on the Nepal Teachers Union, the single umbrella of teachers' unions. A public speech by the education minister has revealed that the government plans to establish a single puppet union and ban the five existing teachers union along with their umbrella organisation.

Workplace examples of adverse actions by the Government:

- Denial of union registration by labour offices regarding a number of enterprises
- Direct order to stop CBA election in various enterprises
- Order of local authority against the submission of charter of demand
- Threatening workers not to be involved in union activity
- Police and security forces victimising workers
- Barracks in various school compounds causing injuries and deaths of students in encounters
- Armed force travelling frequently by public buses

Workplace examples of adverse actions by Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)

- Forcing industries, schools, colleges, transport and market to close frequently
- Tourism industry adversely affected by Maoist actions causing heavy job loss
- Widespread factory closures aggravating unemployment
- Explosions in public places including schools, hotels, enterprises and offices
- Kidnapping, abuse, torture and murder of individuals
- Forced donations to the Maoist party and forced resignation from unions
- Effort to deunionise the workplaces and to destabilise trade unions at grassroots level

Fake union registration

In order to push aside the recognised Federations and Confederations, the present autocratic regime has registered 12 fake Unions and one fake confederation by violating all legal procedures and norms. The authorities do not respond to attempts to renew the registration of genuine trade unions in spite of pressure from civil society. Likewise, the authorities have delayed CBA elections in order to destabilise existing unions at enterprise/workplace level. The government even creates obstacles in the collection of union dues mostly in the transport sector.

Trade unions in action

The trade union movement of Nepal has joined hands to address the present Labour Market related and Conflict and Rights related problems. To address Labour Market related issues, the three confederations GEFONT, NTUC and DECONT have developed a close working relationship. The Second National Labour Conference, held from January 12-15, 2005, was highly significant and successful. The tripartite declaration of the conference which covers all labour market issues can be considered as a major achievement. Unfortunately, due to the royal takeover, the action programme matrix could not be implemented.

Other actions which were taken by the joint confederations are moves for labour law amendment, extension of social protection systems and a campaign against exploitative labour practices and discriminations. Other areas of interventions are:

Report

- Developing a broad resistance movement against adversities of globalisation
- Extension of Social Security, Social Protection and Social Insurance System
- Democratisation of workplace and involvement of workers in every layer of decision making to ensure pro-worker flexibility instead of autocratic flexibility
- Organising workers through massive unionisation approach with heavy emphasis on informal sectors of employment including agricultural workers
- Research and highlight realities on the ground in the present political context
- Successful international lobbying and solidarity among international centres, GUFs, labour friendly organisations and national centres of a number of countries
- Joint activities for GCAP

Regarding issues related to Conflict, Democracy and Rights, trade unions have conducted joint activities from the year 2003 onwards, when retrogression in national politics first started. The activities have intensified after the February 1 takeover and include:

- Commonalisation of positions on conflict resolution, peace and democracy
- Fighting against suppressive activities of the Maoist party at enterprise/workplace level and ideologically at national/policy level
- Joint May Day Rally and programmes involving all trade unions and professional organisations of lawyers, university teachers, journalists and engineers, which proved to be the first and largest demonstration against autocracy after February 1 takeover

During the past months international support and solidarity has been crucial and much appreciated. GEFONT's determination and commitment is to continue the journey towards social justice and for change in the existing unfair social and economic system designed by an autocratic regime.

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For more information

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Labour: Pakistan Institute of Labour, Education and Research (PILER), Pakistan
Governance, Accountability, Democracy and the Rule of Law: Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, India
Food Sovereignty: Movement for National Land and Agricultural Reform (MONLAR), Sri Lanka
Peace and Demilitarisation: Rural Reconstruction Nepal (RRN), Kathmandu.

SRI LANKA

Food sovereignty for all

By: *Sarath Fernando*

Lessons for Sri Lanka and the rest of South Asia

At the World Food Summit 1996, it was said that 800 million people went to bed hungry every day. It was agreed that all people should have enough food to have an active life, and the concept of 'food security' was first introduced.

The US proposed to achieve food security for all by opening markets throughout the world so that food produced in the US and other countries with surpluses could become available to people everywhere. However, this proposal presented several problems. First, it required people to agree to consume what was produced by the big agri-businesses of the North. Secondly, it assumed that people were able to purchase it in the market.

As a result, the concept of 'food sovereignty' emerged. This says that all people have the right to enough healthy food of their choice, and the possibility of producing this food themselves in ways that are economically, socially, culturally and ecologically appropriate.

In most countries in South Asia, it is possible to achieve this, but it requires a completely different approach. In this paper, we present ideas for achieving food sovereignty within the context of an alternative economic development strategy, based on experiences in Sri Lanka.

Hunger and poverty are emergencies

At the summit, world leaders agreed to try to reduce hunger by half within twenty years. This was later incorporated into the United Nations Millennium Development Goals adopted in the year 2000, where a commitment was made to reduce hunger by half by 2015. This is in line with the strategy being pushed worldwide by the World Bank, IMF etc., of promoting faster economic growth that is expected to trickle down and reduce poverty.

For the 800 million people going to bed hungry in 1996, these intentions, commitments and strategies are irrelevant. For them, hunger and poverty are disasters requiring the kind of urgent response seen after the tsunami. The approach that we propose here starts with

the recognition that hunger and poverty are emergencies that must be dealt with immediately and directly.

Let people plan instead of international institutions

The leaders talked of building a global partnership of all to achieve the agreed goals. This included international financial institutions, rich country governments and multinational companies, with the support of civil society.

These institutions are the creators of poverty and in the last half century have proved that they are not capable of planning for the reduction of hunger and poverty, because they are unwilling or unable to restructure the global economy, offering only slight changes in their current operations. We suggest here that the poor and hungry must set their own agenda and take over the role of planning for the reduction of their poverty and hunger.

There are campaigns within civil society, such as the Global Call to Action against Poverty and Make Poverty History, dominated by NGOs such as Oxfam, which in effect undermine these two key principles – that hunger and poverty are emergencies and that it is the hungry and poor who have the right to plan how to deal with them – and reinforce the status quo. It is important for a movement such as SAAPE to challenge these campaigns as well.

Some principles to be applied in Sri Lanka

Abandon the present strategy

In Sri Lanka, all governments since 1977 have adopted the strategy of reducing poverty by targeting economic growth by attracting foreign investment in export businesses. This has failed. In the process, people have been deprived of access to their natural resources, and prevented from utilising their creative potential, while they have accumulated huge debt burdens.

The priority in economic development of the country should be to meet the domestic requirements for food, ahead of promoting exports in agriculture, industry and services.

The driver of economic development cannot be the private

sector, motivated by profit. It cannot be led by the 'market'. Nearly 40% (30% according to the figures given in the PRSP) receive an income of less than Rs. 950 per month. The Samurdhi Movement¹ says that 2.1 million families receive less than Rs. 1,500 per month, i.e. half a dollar a day. They cannot be effective producers or consumers, so they are excluded from the market. They must therefore find ways of meeting their essential requirements of food, health, education, etc. outside at practically no cost.

Rebuild the earth's regenerative capacity

The natural resources base in Sri Lanka is its ecology of land, water, biodiversity, medicinal plants, etc. This is sufficient to sustain the people, if they have access to it and if the damage that has been done can be reversed.

Mobilise people's full potential

The other most valuable asset of Sri Lanka is its human potential, its 'wealth' of traditional knowledge in ecological agriculture, irrigation, the use of its biological diversity in food and medicine, and the interrelationship between nature and life, and its 'wealth' of culture and philosophy in values such as 'simple life' and 'non-attachment'. This can provide the means for the reversal.

The poor, namely the rural farmers, fishing communities, women, plantation workers, industrial workers and so on, should be the designers and decision-makers in the process. This could be done by considering the proposals being made by organisations of people from these sectors as the starting point in the process of formulating strategies.

Some practical proposals to be implemented in Sri Lanka

Improving and expanding home gardens

In most villages in Sri Lanka, most people have access to small plots of land, either as their own home garden or in the neighbourhood, even if they do not always legally own the land.

There are numerous examples showing how a home garden of between an eighth and a quarter of an acre can grow a wide variety of plants, fruits, vegetables, yams, trees and so on, for food, medicines, fuel, timber, fodder and fertiliser, growing together at different heights, in marshy places and relatively dry areas.

Such a home garden is much more productive than any large field of mono-cropping. If the principles of

sustainable agriculture are applied, such as the conservation of the soil through prevention of erosion, mulching, recycling of organic matter, allowing natural biological pest control, avoiding chemical inputs, and maintaining maximum biodiversity, such a home garden is not only completely sustainable, it also contributes to rebuilding the regenerative capacity of the earth. It improves the soil and increases its capacity to absorb and retain water, contributing to the enhancement of groundwater. Furthermore, it would immediately reduce the major illnesses amongst the poor that result from malnutrition.

An extensive programme of re-education and reorientation in our agriculture could result in villages in all ecological zones of the country where all households adopt this approach.

Promoting ecological paddy farming

A large proportion of the population depend on paddy farming for their main livelihood, although the sector is in crisis, as the cost of production has now risen above the price farmers can get in the market for their produce.

There are tried and tested ecological methods such as Integrated Pest Management (IPM), System of Rice Intensification (SRI) and Nava Kekulama, which contribute to the rebuilding of the natural processes of sustaining soil fertility and controlling pests, and generally require much less water. They also significantly reduce the use of expensive inputs. Of course they also vastly reduce the current serious contamination of water sources with chemicals, and that of people's food, which would reduce some of the major illnesses.

Giving land to plantation workers

For 150 years, plantation workers have been living in conditions of semi-slavery, without access to land or other natural resources and in extremely poor housing with very few services. At the same time, at Rs. 130 per day, or just over a dollar a day, they earn considerably less than labourers in other sectors.

We propose to give ownership of land to communities in the plantation areas to use for their own agriculture, which would both humanise the conditions of the workers, recognising them as full and equal citizens, and release their creative potential in reviving the environment in the hill country, which has been destroyed by erosion as a result of deforestation. This would lessen the incidence of droughts and floods in the plains as well.

Protecting fish stocks for small-scale fishers

Fishing communities are finding their livelihoods under

1. The official poverty alleviation programme

threat as fish stocks are diminished by big companies that are invited for deep sea fishing, coastal areas are taken over for prawn farming and beaches are annexed for tourism.

There are traditional methods of fishing in small craft from beaches that provide livelihoods for many when protected from incursion from competing industries that employ and benefit few. These also do not overexploit fish stocks or upset the coastal environment.

Involving young people as agents of change

In Sri Lanka about 4 million children attend school, of which about 250,000 sit for A levels each year. About 75,000 pass with sufficient qualifications for a university education, while there are only 12,000 university places, so over 60,000 intelligent, hard-working young people are rejected every year. Up to now, no solution has been found to provide these people and many thousands of others with a stable future and a respected and attractive livelihood or means of making a meaningful contribution to society. The consequences are well known.

We propose to give these young people the opportunity of being agents of change in the process of transforming the use of our natural resources and agriculture, as described above. They should be given a proper background to the needed transformation and its implications. An initial training in the theoretical and practical aspects of ecological agriculture could be given. They should then be linked to villages as instructors or facilitators to serve a manageable group of communities, while at the same time being offered opportunities to upgrade their skills with further studies in this area or in connected subjects such as ayurvedic medicine.

An initial payment would be given for about a year, then those who successfully implement the programme could be sustained by asking the communities for small contributions out of the savings they would generate, which would amount to about Rs. 5,000 per month. For example, a home garden of about a quarter or an eighth of an acre could provide a saving of about Rs. 2,000 per

month, and if 50 families each contributed Rs. 100 from this, it would amount to Rs. 5,000 per month. Similarly, IPM has been shown to save about Rs. 4,000 per acre each season, and if 2 farmer field schools of 25 farmers each are conducted each week, and each farmer contributed Rs. 500 from their savings, it would amount to Rs. 25,000 per season, or about Rs. 5,000 per month.

Releasing the people from the cycle of dependence

As shown above, the approach proposed can be implemented at very little cost. This must be accompanied by a renunciation of costly infrastructure projects such as motorways, airports, harbours and so on, which do not benefit the poor, while leaving governments with massive budget deficits.

At the same time, it will be necessary for the government to declare a moratorium on repayment of its foreign debt and concurrently resolve not to seek any further foreign loans.

Testing the applicability of the approach in South Asia

The ideas presented here represent the views of the Alliance for the Protection of National Resources and Human Rights, a coalition of people's organisations and trade unions representing industrial workers, workers in services in the public and private sector, garment workers, plantation workers, farmers, women, fisheries sector, people affected by the proposed motorways, environmentalists, human rights activists and intellectuals.

Extensive dialogue, studies and practical implementation of some of the proposed methodologies have been conducted in the past decade. More details could be provided through subsequent dialogue.

These suggestions are presented as an illustration and guideline for discussion within SAAPE in developing its strategy on food sovereignty in South Asia.

Governance, Accountability and the Rule of Law

By: *Mariyam Waheeda*

Background

The Republic of Maldives located in the south of the Indian subcontinent consists of 1,190 coral islands in 26 natural atolls that together form a chain of 820 km in length and 130 km at its widest point, set in an area of more than 90,000 sq.km. Only about 199 of the islands are inhabited and most of them are small both in terms of land area and population. For instance only about a third of the islands have a land area of one sq km or more, and more than two thirds have less than 1,000 inhabitants.

Good governance, including efficient public administration, sound administration of justice and an up-to-date constitution were identified as national objectives. The commitment by the government to realise these objectives has resulted in several noteworthy achievements. They include the adoption of a new constitution, which is in tune with the contemporary needs of the public; the establishment of a public service division (PSD) within the president's office to make the public services more efficient and effective; the establishment of a higher level Advisory Committee on public sector reform and modernisation to advise the PSD; the setting up of a network of Senior Government Officials (NSGO) to mobilise officials for the implementation of reforms at the sectoral and departmental levels; the enactment of the Anti-Corruption Act; the establishment of the public enterprises monitoring and evaluation board (PEMEB); and efforts to develop and upgrade the audit office and its services.

Participation of non governmental and community based organisations

The Maldives enjoys a strong tradition of community participation. In island communities, the municipal functions such as cleaning and maintenance of public property and communal resources including public space are the responsibility of all. Work such as mending roads, dredging harbours, building jetties or beaching boats are carried out by the community. This community togetherness is reflected in the peace, stability and economic progress that Maldivians enjoy.

NGOs play a crucial role in the development process. With their specialised skills and knowledge NGOs can provide

considerable economies of scale and efficiency in programme delivery. NGOs also possess social networks that are highly effective in mobilising community support and participation. In these ways NGOs in the Maldives participate in the development by initiating development projects and working alongside the government by complementing and building upon national efforts.

As of May 2001, 283 private organisations are registered. They are largely localised to the islands, with each island having an average of two. These organisations tend to be sufficiently broad in their mission to allow them to undertake a wide range of activities including development, sports and recreation, arts, drama/film, cultural and religious awareness, alumni friendship associations and professional associations.

The few organisations with a demonstrated capacity for carrying out development work, which have emerged over the last five to ten years, operate mostly at the national level. These include the Society for Health Education (SHE), Foundation of the Advancement of Self-Help and Needs (FASHAN), Blue Peace, Care Society and Voluntary Effort for Social Harmony and Improvement (VESHI).

Issues

The government is in the process of setting up operational development cells in each of the Atoll Administrations, under the authority of the Ministry of Atolls Development (MAD), to oversee development activities and to encourage greater local participation. Therefore, the 7th National Development Plan (NDP) will need to address the issue of institutionalisation of responsibilities between the MAD and the atoll based communities.

The Noonu project supported by UNDP has shown that social mobilisation projects can be successfully undertaken in the Maldives. The NAP was initiated in 1996 in all the 13 islands of Noonu Atoll. The IDCs and the WDC's were used as the institutional mechanism for mobilising the entire local populations to participate in project formulation and implementation. NAP in collaboration with the Bank of Maldives, encouraged the IDCs and WDCs to mobilise the savings of its members to underwrite island based credit programmes targeted at household income generation activities as well as

community investments. The government provided support for training selected numbers of the IDCs and WDCs to equip them to take lead in the development programmes.

Many national level NGOs do not have access to sufficient resources to overcome transportation difficulties which makes it difficult for them to reach their target populations.

Most NGOs do not have formal organisational structures or administrative procedures. Except for a few national NGOs, many NGOs especially at the island level, do not have offices and staff to coordinate activities. The stated objectives of the organisations are often too broad and as such, their vision and direction are not focused. Most NGOs also lack adequate mechanisms to handle accounting and financial control, making them unable to submit annual reports and financial statements. Many national NGOs with focused areas of development require high levels of technical skill and knowledge. They need trained people at managerial and programming levels to design, implement and monitor projects and programmes. While some of the larger NGOs provide training opportunities for their staff, only one such organisation, SHE has a human resources development strategy.

The main sources of finance for NGOs include membership fees, external assistance, fund raising activities and donations by well wishers. None of the organisations have sustainable regular income generating activities.

The absence of a clearly defined role for the NGOs and coordinating mechanisms leads to some overlap in NGO activity with public programmes.

There is no institutional framework for monitoring the NGOs' activities or the nature of their involvement in the development process. There are no mechanisms to ensure accountability and transparency especially at a time when they are increasingly looking for ways to mobilise domestic resources and external assistance to run their programmes.

Recommendations to strengthen the involvement of community based organisations

- Decentralise planning and implementation of development projects to involve atolls and islands.
- Devolve administrative authority and resources to the atolls for purposes of planning and administration development activities.

- Empower atoll based development cells to plan and implement development activities in conjunction with community based organisations.
- Activate IDCs/WDC's in every island.
- Invite all islands to produce a holistic 10 year plan for the development of the island.
- Use the instrument of social mobilisation to eradicate poverty and to ensure more equitable distribution in the benefits of development at the island level.

Recommendations to enhance NGOs' and CBOs' role in development planning and provision of social services

- Involve NGOs and CBOs in development planning and monitoring.
- Develop the legal and institutional framework to guide CBO NGO activities.
- Develop a fund to support NGO CBO activities.
- Identify a government body to assist the promotion of NGOs/CBOs.
- Clearly define NGOs' roles to minimise overlap of NGO activities and public programmes.
- Develop a comprehensive guideline for NGOs and CBOs to follow in soliciting foreign assistance.
- Ensure the accountability and transparency of NGOs.
- Provide financial and non financial assistance to NGOs in the private sector engaged in activities such as poverty alleviation, health care, improving the situation of disadvantaged persons, working with island communities and those in environmental protection.
- Appropriate and feasible provision of social services currently being provided by the government may be assigned to NGOs which have the capacity to assume such responsibilities.

Present Status/Summary

The aftermath of the Tsunami has offered NGOs many opportunities to participate in the development process. At present reconstruction and recovery efforts are ongoing and NGOs are actively participating in these efforts.

As the new political reforms are ongoing NGOs too have a role to play. Organisations may not be directly involved in the reform process but they should be encouraged to give inputs in order to pave the way for increased participation of NGOs in enhancing people's lives.

SAAPE ACTIVITIES

58th Annual DPI/NGO Conference

7-9 September 2005, UN Headquarters, New York



58th Annual DPI/NGO Conference, 7-9 September 2005, UN Headquarters, New York

The 58th Annual DPI/NGO Conference with the theme of “Our Challenge: Voices for Peace, Partnerships and Renewal,” took place on 7-9 September 2005, at the UN Headquarters in New York. South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) in partnership with International Volunteer Organisation for Women, Education and Development (VIDES International), an Italian NGO working on Peace and Security, jointly organised a Mid-day NGO Interactive Workshop on “Challenges and Opportunities in Combating Poverty” on 8 September 2005.

Dr. Arjun Karki, SAAPE Regional Coordinator, participated on behalf of the alliance, and focused on the

role of power and politics in perpetuating and combating poverty. He underscored the fact that poverty is a political issue, hence needs a political solution to replace the technical quick fixes often used in addressing the problem. Good governance and political will are key to achieving results. The case of Nepal was highlighted where, despite huge borrowings from the World Bank, IMF and the ADB in the name of poverty reduction, no visible impact has been seen except huge debts for the already debt ridden country. Poverty is also a human rights issue. Gross violations of basic human rights will continue until the poor themselves are empowered to participate in political decision-making in order to bring about workable, sustainable changes in their lives.

People's Caravan 2005 for Justice and Sovereignty



International Conference on Democracy, Peace, Food Sovereignty and Action Plan for 'Road to Hong Kong'

People's Caravan 2005 for Justice and Sovereignty – the Sri Lankan chapter of mobilisation against the scheduled 6th WTO Ministerial Conference in Hong Kong on 13-18 December 2005 - was launched on 26 November 2005 in Colombo. The Caravan, with awareness campaigns and mass mobilisation on its agenda, aimed at reaching out to agricultural and plantation workers, fisher folks, trade unionists and people's movements all over the country

including the Tamil communities in the sensitive North and East.

The first arm of the Caravan, coordinated by the National Fisheries Solidarity Organisation (NAFSO), travelled through the coastal belt until the 10th of December covering the Tsunami affected areas and the fisher communities, organising key campaigns in places such as Negambo, Galle, and Kaluthara. The second arm was launched in Kiribathgoda on the 1st of December, which travelled through places including Ganemulla, Nuwara Eliya and Malabe, until the 9th of December. This phase of the Caravan was jointly coordinated by the Movement for Land and Agricultural Reform (MONLAR) in collaboration with National Farmers Assembly, Janawabodaya Centre, Peoples Planning Commission and the Alliance for the Protection of National Resources and Human Rights (ANRHR).

Street drama, puppet shows, song and dance all proved to be powerful cultural media to address and sensitise the public. Distribution of posters and leaflets also helped in raising awareness and achieving the desired outcomes.

International Conference on Democracy, Peace, Food Sovereignty and Action Plan for 'Road to Hong Kong'

An international conference on Democracy, Peace, Food Sovereignty and Action Plan for 'Road to Hong Kong' was jointly organised by the All Nepal Peasants Association (ANPA) and the South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) on 3-4 December 2005, Kathmandu, Nepal. The conference was held prior to the 6th WTO Ministerial Conference held on 13-18 December 2005, Hong Kong.

Given the trade distorting policies of the WTO and its negative impact primarily on the livelihoods of countless peasants, small farmers, workers and other vulnerable and marginalised sections of society, this meeting focused on bringing together peasant activists from the region and beyond with the aims of:

- Providing an impetus to the already existing global resistance movement against the neoliberal policies of the WTO;

- Further strengthening people's strategies in the struggle;
- and extending solidarity to fellow friends mutually fighting against the anti-people agenda of the WTO.

The conference was also an ideal people's forum to highlight Nepal's present political crisis featuring absolute autocracy against the backdrop of a decade-long Maoist conflict. The key message of the meeting was that an inclusive people's democracy is a prerequisite to achieving peace, food sovereignty and every other basic human right.

The meeting was attended by 1200 peasant activists from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Philippines, Indonesia and Europe. A declaration was adopted in closing wherein the international participants and friends also added their voice to the ongoing struggle for the restoration of democracy and peace in Nepal.

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