

## 1st Editorial Board Meeting of SAAPE Poverty Report 2016 Held



Editorial Board Members during the first Editorial Board Meeting, SAAPE Poverty Report 2016 in Colombo, Sri Lanka

The first meeting of SAAPE Poverty Report 2016 Editorial Board members took place in Colombo, Sri Lanka from 1-4 March 2016.

SAAPE has been producing a regional report on Poverty and Vulnerability every three years as an advocacy tool to help raise the voice of the people for human rights, social justice and democracy in South Asia. These reports can be useful for social movements, CSOs and academics in the region. Four volumes of the Poverty reports have already been published till date, of which the latest report was published in 2013. These reports are available and can be viewed on SAAPE website ([www.saaape.org](http://www.saaape.org)).

Scholars and activists from Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and India presently comprise the editorial board. The members of the editorial board are as follows:

1. Ms Neelam Hussain, Executive Co-ordinator, Simorgh Women's Resource and Publication Centre, Lahore, Pakistan; Editor-in-Chief, SAAPE Poverty Report 2016;
2. Professor Babu Mathew, Founder Member and Advisor, SAAPE;
3. Dr Shobha Raghuram, Founder Member and Advisor, SAAPE;
4. Dr Udan Fernando, Executive Director, Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA), Colombo, Sri Lanka;
5. Mr. K. Romeshun, Team Leader, Facets of Poverty, CEPA, Colombo, Sri Lanka;
6. Dr Netra Prasad Timsina, Regional Coordinator, SAAPE;
7. Ms Prerna Bomzan, Advocacy Co-ordinator, LDC Watch, Kathmandu, Nepal;
8. Ms Amrutha Jose Pampackal, Graduate Student, Masters in Public Policy, National Law School of India University (NLSIU), Bangalore;
9. Ms Deepa KS, Graduate Student, Masters in Public Policy, NLSIU, Bangalore.

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SAAPE has been planning to produce the fifth volume in September 2016 for which the SAAPE Core Committee, comprising of one male and one female representative from each of the eight South Asian countries, held a meeting in September 2015 and decided 'Conflict and Poverty in South Asia' as the title. The first report of its kind, which was published in 2003, was aimed at introducing the status and nature of poverty in South Asian countries. The second one published in 2006 focused on five thematic areas; food sovereignty, gender justice, labour rights, peace, justice and demilitarization and democratic and just governance in the region. The third report of 2010 analysed poverty and vulnerability cycles, capturing the narratives of the survival and struggles of people in the region, while the fourth report

was focused on poverty analysis and also regarding an alternative development paradigm for the region.

This meeting finalised the conceptual framework, developed the contour for the country and regional reports. The Editorial Board Members also organised an interaction programme with intellectuals and committed social activists to examine the critical issues facing the South Asia region. The meeting also discussed issues highlighted on the initial documents received from each country writing process. The meeting, along with the interaction programme was held at the premises of Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA), Colombo, Sri Lanka.

## SAAPE Core Committee Meeting held in Colombo, Sri Lanka



Core Committee Members at the CC Meeting

SAAPE Core Committee (CC) Meeting was held on 6-7 September 2015 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. All CC Members including Secretariat staff participated in the meeting. On the first day of meeting, Mr. Praman Adhikari from the Secretariat presented the Progress Report following the last CC meeting held in Kathmandu; People's SAARC Regional Convergence 2014; SAAPE Publications; Post-2015

Development Agenda; and the Outcome and Impact Orientation (OIO) workshop held in Kathmandu, Nepal. Dr. Netra Timsina, Regional Coordinator of SAAPE shared the current status and challenges of SAAPE to the CC members to get their feedback and suggestions. The regional campaign focal organisations, who are also part of the CC, then presented the overall campaign progress and the challenges currently faced at the national and regional levels. They emphasised on understanding the political role of SAAPE at the national and regional levels and collectively work with new movements and organisations to strengthen on-going SAAPE campaigns. The meeting discussed ways to streamline the fifth poverty report 2016 preparation process. In regard to SAAPE, the meeting also discussed the membership process, developing a broader outline for maintaining accountability, as well as SAAPE's ongoing campaign modalities, among other issues. The two day meeting was followed by a programme organised by National Fisheries Solidarity Movement (NAFSO) on land rights of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and Women-headed Households.



# Land Rights Issues and Movements in South Asia: A Policy Review

Land is one of the most essential assets for people by which they can attempt to overcome poverty, even attain prosperity. Land also ensures health and social security by generating employment, investment, social capital and collateral. In the South Asian context, agricultural land refers to the share of land area that is arable for permanent crops and pastures. Secured access to land is vital for diverse land-based livelihoods like agriculture, for economic growth, for the elimination of poverty and to bring equity. The landless comprise of the poorest segment of the rural population who survive under the poverty line and are often forced to rely on wage labour on a piecemeal, daily, or seasonal basis.

## **Social restructuring is impossible without a land reform process**

South Asia is characterised by feudal and traditional agricultural economies. In the overall land holding pattern, feudal/semi-feudal patterns exist, that is, lands held by absentee owners or corporations. The main peasants, from the time memorable, are in the vast majority throughout the region but are not entitled to the land where they farm. Peasants in the region have been voicing their demands for land reform since a long time. Different commissions were also formed in different South Asian countries and in particular states of India. However, these have been left largely redundant, except for a few places (such as Kerala and West Bengal in India). A large portion of the population is involved mostly in subsistence agriculture in small, family-sized farms. Countries of the region are increasingly exposed to market forces and modernisation. Major land issues of South Asia are connected to inequitable access to productive resources, trade liberalisation, commercialisation of resources, agricultural intensification, and so on. Mostly, the elderly, the women and the youth are increasingly marginalised in the existing agriculture and development processes.

## **Country Specific Land Issues in South Asia**

During the last decade, an increasing share of foreign aid has been especially provided to countries coming out of civil war or those experiencing severe conflicts. Among others, Afghanistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka mostly suffer from a combination of conflict, a state in crisis, underdevelopment, and poverty.

In Afghanistan, a number of interconnected conflicts have global reach as well as occurring at regional, national, and local levels. Efforts by foreign troops to track down remnants of Al-Qaida and Taliban forces have become entangled with localised conflicts. A great challenge, therefore, is to identify which particular types of interventions affect the different levels and dimensions of current conflicts<sup>1</sup>. Over the past decade, land disputes across the country have become increasingly common, reflecting long-term trends, like environmental degradation, increasing competition over

land in both rural and urban areas, a high population growth rate, and the 4.6 million former refugees who have returned from neighbouring countries. The most prominent form of land dispute is land grabbing. "Weak and inconsistent land management, endemic corruption and insecurity have permitted opportunistic land grabs by powerful elites, which local populations refer to as the 'land mafia,'" says a recent UN Environment Programme (UNEP) report<sup>2</sup>. The current Land Management Law creates a fundamental catch-22 to establish ownership a person must already have formal documents proving ownership. Given the pervasive lack of formal documentation, this creates inherent disincentives for citizens to register land which gives rise to an inherent conflict between the state and most landowners in Afghanistan<sup>3</sup>.

In Bangladesh, major issues related to land are access to and distribution of Khasland<sup>4</sup>, land conversion; commercialisation of agriculture and forestry; absentee landownership (most of whom reside in urban areas); and access to and distribution of non-agricultural land. Bangladeshi households own an average of 0.3 hectare of land, which shows scarce land resource versus population pressures. More than half (57.1%) of the people are still compelled to live below the poverty line<sup>5</sup>. The present land tenure system in Bangladesh has emerged from the State Acquisition and Tenancy Act of 1950. It abolished the "Zamindar" or Landlord system, introduced by the British colonial rulers and ensured property rights for farmers and dwellers. However, land reform in 1950 had not been able to ensure equitable land distribution to people of all tiers of the society. The State Acquisition and Tenancy Order introduced in 1972 mandated the government to acquire surplus land and to distribute it to landless peasants. It authorised the government to acquire flooded and accreted land and to treat these as Khasland.

In Bhutan, the roots of the current political crisis and the refugees lie in Bhutan's geopolitics and population politics. The Ngalung/Drukpa dominated government's motive to uproot Nepali speaking Lhotshampa population from Bhutan and reduce their number by all means has caused thousands of refugees, of which most of them are sheltered for decades in Nepal. The Citizenship and Marriage Acts are directed against Lhotshampas, who predominantly reside in the south. It was a long standing and intrinsic ruling elites' security perception that the domestic demand for political change (democracy) would come from the Lhotshampas in the south which is bordered by the democratic India. In order to make the citizens deliberately stateless by grabbing land and giving it to its northern citizens of Tibetan origin, the Bhutanese government devised various strategies to bring about a favourable demographic balance favouring a Drukpa/Ngalung nation by reducing the number of Lhotshampas to around 25% and to prevent the demand for

democracy from southern Bhutan. The failed implementation of the forced assimilation policies reinforced this insecurity. The current political crisis and the refugee problems owe their origin to the enactment of two racist and discriminatory laws, viz., Citizenship Act of 1985 and Marriage Act of 1980 and implementation of a number of racist and discriminatory policies. These laws and policies were designed to reduce the number of Lhotshampa population which has forced their mass eviction<sup>6</sup>.

In India, according to 1971-72 database, large and medium-size holdings owned by the top 10% of landowners covered 54% of total land area. In 1971-1972, the proportion of marginal holdings was estimated to be at 63% and in 2003 at 80%. This shows that over the last decade, the proportion of marginal holdings has increased in all states and 43% of population is still absolutely or near landless, owning less than 0.2 hectare. So far over 21 million people have been displaced with large-scale projects like dams, canals, thermal plants, sanctuaries, industrial facilities, and mining. The draft of the government's National Policy for Rehabilitation states that a figure around 75% of the displaced people since 1951 are still awaiting rehabilitation<sup>7</sup>. Roughly one in ten Indian tribal is a displaced person. Dam projects have displaced close to a million Adivasis, with similar woe for displaced Dalits. There have been a rising number of political and social protests against the acquisition of land by various industrialists. They have ranged from Bengal, Karnataka, and Uttar Pradesh in the recent past.

The Land Acquisition Act of 1894 allowed the government to acquire private lands. It is the only legislation pertaining to land acquisition which, though amended several times, has failed to serve its purpose. Under the 1894 Act, displaced people were only liable for monetary compensation, which was still quite minimal. The Indian Constitution clearly depicts the fact that the basic tenets of the Constitution are equity and social justice. It provides that ownership and control of the material resources of the community should be distributed in such way that the common good is best served and that the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and the means of production to the common detriment.

The Ninth Schedule of the Constitution was introduced in the first amendment in 1951 as a means of immunising certain laws - including the acquisition of private property and compensation payable for such acquisition - against judicial review. Similarly, the Rights Act of 2006 recognises and gives forest rights, including rights to occupy forestland, to Scheduled Tribes and traditional forest dwellers. It also provides the framework for recording forest rights and women's land rights.

In the Maldives, spatial dispersion of population and the absolute scarcity of land due to topography constitute the major challenges to the economic development of the country. A national population of 346,000<sup>8</sup> is dispersed among about 250 inhabited islands spread over a distance of more than 800 km which has no equivalent in other parts of the world. The average population per inhabited island outside the capital Male (74,000 people) is around 800<sup>9</sup>. Sea level rise is likely to worsen existing environmental stresses in the Maldives, such as periodic flooding from storm surge, and a scarcity of freshwater for drinking and other purposes. Given mid-level scenarios for global warming emissions, the

Maldives is projected to experience sea level rise on the order of 1.5 feet (half a meter)—and to lose some 77 per cent of its land area—by around the year 2100. If sea level were instead to rise by 3 feet (1 meter), the Maldives could be almost completely inundated by about 2085<sup>10</sup>. The Maldivian government has though identified many potential strategies for adapting to rising seas; the priority is not for the sake of the most vulnerable people including fisher folks and crop farmers.

Nepal has a centralised land governance system. Of the 5.4 million households according to 2011<sup>11</sup> census, 1.3 million households, that is, 25% are estimated to be landless<sup>12</sup>. Among the landless peoples, the majority are marginalised groups including freed bonded labourers, landless peasants, squatter settlers, indigenous peoples, Haliya, Haruwa/Charuwa, Dalit, Badi/Badini, indigenous and minority groups, Mushahar and internally displaced people. Agriculture is the primary source of livelihood for the majority of Nepal's population where 26.1% of agricultural households do not have land to farm on. There is an uneven distribution of agricultural land in the country.

Class and caste inequality is further aggravated by gender inequality where men predominantly own most productive resources, especially land. Only 19.71% women have ownership of land. About 44% of the Terai Dalits are landless and the remaining own only small plots<sup>13</sup>. Major political parties have been paying lip service to this issue mainly because they either: i) have influential landlords in their party; ii) have divergent positions on land reform; and/or iii) prefer not to take the risk of building political consensus on land reform which can be a thorny issue and take long time to materialize. Thus the political will and commitment to take the final plunge on this issue is lacking<sup>14</sup>. Nepal is challenged by its history of feudalistic land ownership system. Despite 50 years of the government-led land reform programme, a large number of peasants are still landless, tenants are still deprived of their rights to land and women are still deprived of equal rights relative to their male siblings.

The history of Land reform in Pakistan shows that it did not immediately introduce land reforms after independence from British India in 1947. This means it also, like in other South Asian countries, lost the opportunity to abolish feudalism, according to a land rights advocate in Pakistan<sup>15</sup>. The martial law regime of General Ayub Khan first introduced land reform in January 1959.

Under the programme, government put an ownership ceiling of about 200 ha for irrigated lands and 400 ha for rain-fed land. Moreover a number of additional provisions in the 1959 land reform allowed landlords to retain land far in excess of the ceiling even on an individual basis. Cash compensations were paid to the owners for land taken in these reforms. The next wave of land reform came in March 1972 and was enforced in 1973 during the term of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, head of centre left- oriented political party, the Pakistan People's Party. The land ownership ceiling was further lowered to nearly 5 ha of irrigated land and about 12 ha of non-irrigated land.

The Bhutto government introduced the third round of reforms with the Land Reform Act of 1977 which further reduced ceilings on private ownership of farmland to about 4 ha of irrigated land and about 8 ha of non-irrigated. The reform also called for taxes on agricultural income. Small

farmers owning 10 ha or fewer were exempted. But the military regime of Zia ul-Haq, who took over from Bhutto, did not implement these reforms. Governments in the 1980s and early 1990s avoided any significant attempt at strict implementation of the land reform measures, because they got much of their support from the landed aristocracy<sup>16</sup>.

Pakistan has a strong customary law governing land rights. Provinces and tribes have different customary laws enforced by tribunals known as jirgas. Customary laws governing land issues range from marital property rights to principles governing boundaries. Particularly in the tribal (semi-autonomous) areas, people regulate their own affairs in accordance with customary law and the government functions through local tribal intermediaries or political agents. Tribes recognise individual land ownership, by a joint or extended family, and collective landownership by a tribe. The law of inheritance in Pakistan is governed by the Muslim personal law, which assigns women a differential status. The general principle of the Muslim personal law with regard to allocation of shares in both Hanafi and Shia law is that the women receive half the share of a male share.

In Sri Lanka, weak and ineffective property rights pose many problems in post-conflict situations. Secure property rights are needed to revitalise an economy after a volatile period. For many workers, especially farmers and fishermen, their very livelihoods are dependent on secure rights and access to land. In addition, reliable property rights encourage investors to take more financial risks and invest in a post-conflict country. Unfortunately, the impacts of a conflict — including displacement and resettlement of people; secondary occupation of land by state and non-state actors; and loss or invalidation of property and other legal documents, such as death certificates, which affect succession — make land issues difficult to resolve. In the Sri Lankan civil war, particularly, the northern and eastern provinces have been wrecked by the violent conflict, leading to innumerable deaths and displaced people.

The Sri Lankan government's Commission of Inquiry on Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation declared in 2011 that ensuring land rights is a necessary step in the restoration and reconciliation process. However this finding has not been acted upon. Although the government claims that managing the resettlement process has been one of their strengths in the post-war period, there are currently more

than one thousand court cases filed by landowners who lost their land due to formalized land-grabbing policies. These government practices could result in a renewal of grievances and re-emergence of civil unrest if the needs of original landholders are not met soon. Since the civil war, the Sri Lankan military has seized land under the pretences of security and development. A circular released in January 2013 declares that land lost during conflict will be used for security purposes and vaguely-defined "development activities."

The act claims that the original land claimants are not traceable. Inhabitants of the Valikamam North region of the Jaffna Peninsula, a hot bed of conflict during the civil war, have been greatly affected by these policies. The region's Mailiddy Harbor, said to be one of the highest yielding and most important fish harbours in the country, is now under military control as part of the ad-hoc High Security Zone (HSZ): A swath of land that takes up 15 percent of the peninsula was established 24 years ago to secure restricted, strategic military bases and industries. Meanwhile, the harbour's original fishermen have struggled to resettle in areas such as Point Pedro and Valikamam East. The government plans to turn the land it has grabbed into economic zones for the military and navy by constructing coal power stations, factories and hotels, in addition to using the land for typical agricultural and fishing activities, but conducted by government workers instead of by the region's original labour force.

In areas neighboring the HSZ, government surveyors are assessing where military barracks might be constructed. These "land" policies are meant to boost investment, tourism, and production, but in reality they hinder poverty-reduction measures and post-conflict reconstruction. To be sure, the military may have the resources and technology to make more optimal use of the land, but their actions undermine the post-war demilitarisation and recovery process and threaten already unstable livelihoods that depend on restoration of private and public lands. In order for Sri Lanka's development and peace-building process to succeed, property rights must be protected and local populations should be consulted in order to resolve land disputes and move the country forward<sup>17</sup>.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup><http://www.mtnforum.org/content/land-issues-and-poverty-reduction-requirements-lasting-peace-sudan-and-afghanistan>.

<sup>2</sup><http://www.irinnews.org/fr/report/98722/analysis-land-disputes-add-to-afghanistan-s-security-woes>.

<sup>3</sup><http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR372-Addressing-Land-Conflict-in-Afghanistan.pdf>

<sup>4</sup>Khasland or state-owned land is the land which the government is entitled to both lease and give away to citizens of the country who do not own land. Khasland is considered an important livelihood source for the extreme poor and can generate and protect the gains made toward achieving sustainable livelihoods, particularly for those with low quality, under-sized and flood prone land.

<sup>5</sup>Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC). The Prolonged Struggle for Land Rights in Asia. [www.angoc.org](http://www.angoc.org).

<sup>6</sup><http://www.oocities.org/bhutanwomen/nationality.html>.

<sup>7</sup>"NAC's seven-point test for land acquisition bill". The Hindu (Chennai, India). 10 June 2011.

<sup>8</sup><http://www.prb.org/DataFinder/Geography/Data.aspx?loc=384>

<sup>9</sup>[alainbertaud.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/AB\\_Maldives\\_Land.pdf](http://alainbertaud.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/AB_Maldives_Land.pdf)

<sup>10</sup><http://www.climatehotmap.org/global-warming-locations/republic-of-maldives.html>

<sup>11</sup><http://cbs.gov.np/image/data/Population/Population%20Monograph%20of%20Nepal%202014/Population%20Monograph%20of%20Nepal%202014%20Volume%20%20FinalPrintReady1.pdf>

<sup>12</sup>[www.cbs.gov.np](http://www.cbs.gov.np).

<sup>13</sup>[www.csrc.or](http://www.csrc.or)

<sup>14</sup><http://www.csrcnepal.org/pages/details/csrc/issue>

<sup>15</sup>Shah, Z. (2008). Questions on Land Reforms in Pakistan. Daily Dawn. 2 February 2008. Retrieved from: <http://archives.dawn.com/weekly/encounter/20080202/encounter3.htm>.

<sup>16</sup>An abridged version of the paper, "CSO Land Monitoring in Pakistan", prepared by Protection of the Environment (SCOPE) cited in [www.angoc.org/portal/wp...land...in.../Pakistan\\_Country\\_Report.pdf](http://www.angoc.org/portal/wp...land...in.../Pakistan_Country_Report.pdf)

<sup>17</sup><https://www.devex.com/en/news/post-war-land-grabs-in-sri-lanka/81411>.



## People's SAARC Country Meeting held in Colombo, Sri Lanka



People's SAARC Members during country meeting. From Right Mr Balasingham Skanthakuma, Ms Nimalka Fernando, Dr Sarba Raj Khadka and Mr Gauri Pradhan

People's SAARC members in Sri Lanka organised a country meeting in Colombo on 7 September 2015 to share new socio-political developments in Sri Lanka and in the South Asia region and to discuss and share updates on the

preparation for the 2016 People's SAARC regional convergence. People's SAARC members from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Nepal and Pakistan participated in the meeting.

## Major Achievement against Land Grabbing in Sri Lanka

The previous (Rajapaksa regime) government of Sri Lanka violently grabbed the Panama Lands in 2010 supposedly in the name of tourism sector development. The government used military power to burn down the houses of farmers who were living in the area and forcefully occupied their lands and put up barb wire security fences. Praja Abhilasha (PA) and National Fisher Solidarity Movement (NAFSO), a SAAPE Food Sovereignty Campaign Focal Organisation in Sri Lanka, began to work with the Panama community to strengthen the Panama Pattu Protection Organisation (PPPO) in regard to this issue. Later, "People's Alliance for Right to Land" (PARL), a wider network, was formed in order to seek support for communities affected by land acquisitions. Meanwhile the Police, in a vindictive manner, filed a court case against the Panama people stating that they have illegally entered inside the territories of the SL Air Force on 27 of March 2016.

Increasing the atrocities against the people, the Police filed a case against 10 of the victims in fight for their lands on charges of intrusion in to Air-force properties. On 30 March, 2016, magistrate freed the Panama people from charges, stating that they have not violated any of

the rules and thoroughly warned police not to be involved in any of the peaceful acts on those lands, while advising people to act peacefully in the future as well. Furthermore, the magistrate ordered to remove all barriers which, at the time, had been preventing access to the real owners of those lands.

After years of lobbying and advocacy work for supporting the Panama Land rights struggle, finally there was a court clearance given for people to access their lands. This is really a great achievement for the Panama community. The victory was not possible without the continued efforts of community leader Rev. Panama Chandrarathana Thero, NAFSO leaders and Advocate Rabvindra Sumathipala. After getting the judgement, people are finally allowed to access their own land, and community members and NAFSO leaders working for the further process on peaceful and immediate settlement of community members. This is a long awaited victory for the people who were chased away after burning down their houses in 2010. The struggle is still continuing until the government does the demarcations and draws plans of each land plot to be divided among the original owners in a fair manner.

## International Day of Action for People's Food Sovereignty and against Trans-national Corporations observed in Pakistan

Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee (PKRC), SAAPE Food Sovereignty Campaign focal organisation in Pakistan, organised a seminar on the topic of "Land Mafia, Feudalism and Food Sovereignty" on 15 October 2015, the International Day of Peoples' Struggle for Food Sovereignty in the presence of Mr. Balram Banskota, SAAPE Food Sovereignty Campaign Regional Coordinator, in Lahore, Pakistan. The three hour proceeding was one of the rare occasions where representatives of peasants from 16 districts of Pakistan were present and where issues in regards to land reform and ownership rights of slum dwellers were discussed.

Mr. Banskota highlighted the plight of the poor of South Asia in multiple respects especially how the governments of the region were pressing ahead with a neo-liberal agenda, consequently pushing millions down the poverty line, with increased suffering at the hands of multinationals and neo-liberal forces. Highlighting this issue as a common issue in both Nepal and Pakistan, he urged collective action to wage a common struggle against these forces. Mr. Farooq Tariq, General Secretary, PKRC and Mr. Mehr Abdul Sattar, General Secretary Anjuman-i-Mazareen Okara raised the issues of ownership right for tenants. They also mentioned that military farms administration was eager to get the land vacated and about a system of criminal collusion between local authorities and wealthy landowners who seize the



Participants of the Seminar in Lahore, Pakistan

agricultural areas by force. Ms. Badar Nisa, a women's activist at Kulyana Military Estate in Okara presented the case study, explaining the violence against small landowners and how gangsters of the Military Farms Administrations killed the family members who claimed the right of ownership of the land confiscated 15 years earlier by the army officers. The PKRC event in Lahore brought more unity among the representatives of peasants and raised the issue of food sovereignty in a more solid way.

## People's March and Assembly for Agriculture and Fisheries Policies held in Sri Lanka

National Fisheries Solidarity Movement (NAFSO), SAAPE Food Sovereignty Campaign Focal Organisation in Sri Lanka along with other social movements organised an event: People's March and Assembly for Agriculture and Fisheries Policies on 16 October 2015. Prior to this event, various programmes including trainings, signature and poster campaigns as well as a various seminars on the issues of Internally Displaced Persons were organised throughout the country with the active participation of farmers, fisher folks, workers, women, youth, plantation communities and war-affected communities.





## People's SAARC Delegates Handover Declaration to SAARC Secretary General

A team of People's SAARC delegates Ms. Sharmila Karki, Dr. Sarba Raj Khadka, Ms. Shanta Laxmi Shrestha, Mr. Samir Nepal, Mr. Gopal Khanal, Mr. Kedar Khadka, Mr. Bhawani Kharel, Mr. Daya Sagar Shrestha and Mr. Bigyan Sharma handed over the declaration of People's SAARC Regional Convergence 2014 to His Excellency Mr. Arjun Bahadur Thapa, SAARC Secretary General of the SAARC Secretariat in Kathmandu on 8 January 2015. Delegates drew the attention of the SAARC Secretary General to address and implement the regional problem and advocated for development, peace, and prosperity, to provide adequate space to the civil society in the formal SAARC process, similar to one that is being provided by the UN and ASEAN.

His Excellency Mr. Thapa appreciated the efforts of CSOs to identify regional agendas and expressed his commitment that the input of the Declaration will be given to the respective SAARC countries so they could link their priorities to the issues raised by the civil society. He also committed that he is trying his best to find ways to connect civil society to the official SAARC system and process to provide space to them. He also suggested the delegates to keep in touch with People's SAARC and keep the SAARC Secretariat informed about possible new agendas to get entry in the SAARC Declaration in 19th summit. He also said that SAARC would take an initiation to make member states responsible to implement the declaration they signed during past summits.



People's SAARC delegates handover Declaration to SAARC Secretary General at the SAARC Secretariat in Kathmandu, Nepal

The three day People's SAARC Convergence was concluded on 24 November 2014 in Jawalakhel, Lalitpur issuing a Declaration and reaffirming its solemn commitments toward peace, justice, security, human rights, and democracy in the region for equality for all and to eliminate all forms of violence and discrimination.

## Condolence Message to Comrade Ajit's Wife Mercy and Family

14 March 2016

Dear Mercy,

We deeply mourn the untimely loss of our dear Comrade Ajit Muricken who shall remain a source of inspiration, courage, and conviction to us.

Ajit was a visionary and a revolutionary who was with SAAPE from its initial years. As a core committee member, he led the SAAPE's democracy and just governance campaign and played a significant role in contributing to the invaluable resources of SAAPE. We shall always admire and draw strength from his firm position against neo-liberal globalisation and the fight for social justice in the Dalit movement.

We offer our deepest condolences and strength to you who remained his pillar of strength and steadfast love.

On behalf of SAAPE founders, members and the Regional Secretariat,

**Dr. Netra Timsina, Regional Co-ordinator, SAAPE**





## People's SAARC Strategy Meeting Held in Pakistan

People's SAARC Pakistan organised a strategy meeting in Lahore, Punjab on 14 October 2015 at the offices of the Progressive Labour Federation (PLF). Over 40 social and political activists from peasants' organisations, women's organisations, trade unions attended the meeting which was chaired by Nazli Javed, a long standing women rights activist in Pakistan.

The meeting, which brought together People's SAARC members of the Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) regions, mainly focused on ways to effectively organise the People's SAARC Regional Convergence before the 19th official SAARC Summit to be held in Pakistan in November 2016. This meeting collected suggestions regarding a suitable venue as well as the possible themes for the Regional Convergence. The meeting also discussed the possible events/activities that could be organised during the convergence and decided to start preparations for these events/activities.

The meeting was addressed by Farooq Tariq (Regional Steering Committee member of People's SAARC), Jawad Ahmad (International Youth and Workers Movement, Pakistan), Dr Khalid Javed Jan (Poet), Baba Najmi (Poet),



Participants discussing on preparation for the People's SAARC 2016 events

Yousaf Baloch (All Pakistan Workers Confederation), Khalid Mehmood (Labour Education Foundation), Shahnaz Iqbal (Labour Education Foundation), Riaz Fatyana (Parliamentary Commission for Human Rights), Tariq Awan (PILER), Abbas Siddiqui (South Asia Partnership) and others.

### STATEMENT

#### People's SAARC-India congratulates the people of Nepal on adopting 'Constitution of Nepal 2072' and condemns Modi Government's unofficial blockade of Nepal

Nepal promulgated its constitution on 20 September 2015. This historic event was the culmination of nine years of effort, including a failed first Constituent Assembly. The process of drafting the constitution has been frustratingly slow and complicated given divergent interests and views on issues of demarcation of federal provinces, citizenship provisions, secularism, inclusion and the form of governance. In the aftermath of the earthquake that devastated Nepal in April 2015, the people of Nepal needed for the process of constitution writing to be completed at the earliest in order for the country to move towards economic and social revival and rehabilitation allowing for the state to improve the dire conditions in which the people of Nepal were surviving.

While recognizing that there continue to be some weaknesses in safeguarding the rights of marginalised groups including women, dalits, Tharus, Janjatis and Madhesis, People's SAARC-India welcomes the announcement of the Constituent Assembly that amendments can be adopted with relative ease over the remainder of its terms of two years and four months in order to address the Nepali people's demands for recognition of their rights, security and inclusion. People's SAARC-India supports the peaceful protests of the people of Nepal to highlight their felt exclusions, and it is aware of the unevenness of guaranteeing rights for some groups while overlooking demands by other groups. The Government of India, as the biggest South Asian country in the neighbourhood with deep cultural, ethnic and linguistic ties with Nepal, has failed in its duty to support

the democratic transition in Nepal. It has to be reiterated that a Constitution is rarely deemed to be a perfect document when first adopted. The Indian Constitution has been amended numerous times since it was adopted. Thus, by failing to welcome the historic culmination of a democratic process and intervening in the internal affairs of a sovereign country where the people are working towards sorting out their differences, the Indian Government is failing its own vision and promise to move South Asia towards a future of mutual trust and respect. People's SAARC-India condemns the interventionism of the Government of India and its attempts to micromanage by sending a list of clauses to Government of Nepal specifying the amendments that it seeks. This blatant disregard for the autonomy of the people and the Government of Nepal to decide their future for themselves is highly objectionable. Even more objectionable is the unofficial blockade of trade on the Indo-Nepal border which is the lifeline of the Nepali economy and which directly affects the lives of ordinary people of Nepal. People's SAARC-India calls upon the Government of India to immediately ease all blockages at the Indo-Nepal border, give clear and formal instructions to Indian Oil Corporation and customs officials at the border to ensure that border trade resumes to normality at the absolute earliest. By not doing so the Modi Government is violating the recently inked Bhutan, Bangladesh, India and Nepal (BBIN) Motor Vehicle Agreement as well as the UN Convention on Transit Trade of Land-locked States.

*People's SAARC (PSAARC) India Secretariat, New Delhi, India*

## Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue on Climate Justice held in Nepal

Campaign for Climate Justice Nepal (CCJN), as the Nepal arm of the Global Campaign to Demand Climate Justice (GCDJ) in collaboration with Rural Reconstruction Nepal, South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) and LDC Watch organised a program on “Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue on Climate Justice” on 22nd November 2015 in Kathmandu.

Dr. Sarba Raj Khadka, Coordinator of CCJN expressed that at the heart of climate justice is the understanding that urgent action needed to address climate change based on community-led solutions and well-being of local communities, indigenous peoples and the global poor who are at the frontlines of climate catastrophes, despite being the least responsible for climate change. He further said that we will not be able to stop climate change if we don't change the neo-liberal, corporate-based economy which stops us from achieving sustainable societies.

Ms. Prerna Bomzan, Advocacy Coordinator of LDC Watch expressed that we need to demand for a legally binding post-2020 agreement in Paris with a balanced outcome, making the agreement more accountable for developed countries' historical responsibility towards developing countries and especially LDCs.

Mr Raju Pandit Chhetri briefed the participants in regards to the mechanism of the international climate negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and what is at stake at COP 21 in Paris.

The interaction programme was organised in the context of the 21st Conference of Parties (CoP21) of the UNFCCC scheduled from 30 Nov to 11 Dec 2015 in Paris, France. This conference will adopt a new climate agreement which will take effect post-2020 after the end of Kyoto Protocol. The programme was chaired by Dr Sarba Raj Khadka, Coordinator of CCJN and Ms Sharmila Karki, Member of CCJN and President, NGO Federation of Nepal welcomed the participants and facilitated the dialogue.

Earlier the CCJN had organised regional level dialogues and consultations in Dhangadhi and Dhankuta on 18 November 2015 with the participation of different groups including peasants, workers' groups, natural resources user groups, indigenous groups, as well as representatives of different federations and networks working in the field of human rights and people's empowerment.



Speaking as the Chief Guest Mr Bishwendra Paswan, Minister for Science, Technology and Environment (MoSTE) said that, developed countries have the upper hand in the climate change negotiations and as poor countries we have not been treated fairly by developed countries.

Special Guest Dr Krishna Chandra Poudel, Secretary of MoSTE pointed out that although Nepal along with the LDC Group has been strongly demanding for keeping the temperature below 1.5-degree celsius and climate finance, we need to be flexible given tough negotiations with developed countries at the COP 21.

## Convention on “Ending Violence against Women and Girls is Possible”

Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha (BNPS) organised a convention with the tagline “Ending violence against women and girls is possible, if we try it together” on 22 August 2015 in Bangladesh with the participation of 675 participants including civil society, local administration, teachers, students, School Management Committee (SMC) members and community members. Ms. Rokeya Kabir, Executive Director, BNPS, urged for ensuring equal citizenship and security for women in light of the liberation war of Bangladesh. She also mentioned that world is constantly changing with the advancement of

technology and we have to adapt the changes to remain in modern society which embraces gender equality. Mr. Arif Khan Joy, Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Youth and Sports, GOB was present as the Chief Guest, Mr. Anower Hossain Akondo, Additional Deputy Commissioner (Revenue) as a special guest and other distinguished guests, who were present during the occasion, delivered their valuable speeches. Besides this, students read out the declaration which includes recommendations to the government for making the family, schools and the society safe for girls.

Source: [www.bnps.org](http://www.bnps.org)



## Lobby and Advocacy Skills Training to Women Rights Activists

A Lobby and Advocacy Skills training was conducted on 26 January 2016 in Kathmandu, Nepal by SAAPE Women's Rights Campaign Focal Organisation. The main objective of the training programme was to develop the skills of women's rights activists for lobbying in women's equal involvement/participation in government and all levels of state mechanism and women related issues and facilitate meetings and trainings (at district/national level) on women's political participation. Resource Person Mr. Devika Timilsina facilitated the training to around 43 participants from peasant's organisation, women's organisations and trade unions. The training was also attended by Ms. Sharmila Karki- SAAPE Core Committee Member, Ms. Goma Devkota, President of All Nepal Women's Association (ANWA), Ms. Sita Poudel, President of Women Welfare Society (WWS), and Dr. Netra Timsina, SAAPE Coordinator.



Mr. Devika Timilsina facilitating the training programme

## Celebration of International Working Women's Day 2016



Activists participating in the rally on 8 March 2016 in Kathmandu, Nepal

SAAPE Women's Rights Campaign members organised various programmes on the occasion of 106th International Women's Day on 8 March 2016. In Nepal, SAAPE Women's Rights Campaign focal organisation WWS, organised a rally in Kathmandu, Nepal. More than 500 activists marched together demanding gender equity and equality. The main slogan of the rally was 'Planet 50- 50 by 2030: Step it up for Gender Equality'.

In Pakistan, Women Workers' Help Line (WWHL) Pakistan organised a seminar on the theme "Pledge for Parity with Women Equal Political Participation" on 8 March 2016 in Lahore, Pakistan. Speakers of the programme including Social and Political Leaders, Representatives of Civil societies, and members of the WWHL especially home based workers, bhatta mazdoor women, factory workers, domestic workers, sentry workers and youth participated in the seminar to share their views, ideas and



Participants of the Seminar on Women Protection Act in Punjab, Pakistan

efforts for a just, caring, democratic and violence-free nation and also on the newly passed Act, the Women Protection Act in Punjab. The seminar started with a brief information on the newly passed Women Protection Act by Pakistan's largest province of Punjab, which gives legal protection to women from domestic, psychological and sexual violence. Hafsa Mehmood informed about a toll free number published by The Punjab Commission on the status of women to take any type of guidance or details about the property issues of women, harassment and violence related information. WWHL shared its future plans on pressurising the government to effectively implement the Women Protection Act; women's political participation at province and national levels; organising the informal sector where there is high women participation and empowerment of women for the elimination of all forms of discrimination faced by women.

## APMDD Calls for Cancellation of Nepal's External Debt

Asian Peoples' Movement on Debt and Development (APMDD), a regional anti-illegitimate debt campaign network, has started lobbying for the cancellation of Nepal's external debt amounts to Rs 326.03 billion as of 13 April 2015. Of this, Rs 291.58 billion needs to be paid back to multilateral donors and the remaining — Rs 34.45 billion- to bilateral donors and demanding for full cancellation of

all external debt especially in the wake of the quake disaster as the right political moment.

A memorandum was submitted to Constituent Assembly (CA) members of Nepal on 8 June 2015 appealing for unconditional debt cancellation ahead of the International Conference on Nepal's Reconstruction, held on 25 June 2015.

## SAAPE welcomes the promulgation of the new constitution of Nepal and condemns the trade and transport embargo imposed by Indian government on the Indo-Nepal border

South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE), a regional level civil society network encompassing all eight countries of South Asia, welcomes the new constitution of Nepal promulgated on 20 September 2015 by an overwhelming majority (90% votes in favour) of Constituent Assembly members. Although we had witnessed several problems during the constitution making process that the Constituent Assembly of Nepal had encountered, we welcome the result that followed the democratic processes during the constitution drafting and finalisation process. In this context, we express our solidarity with the people of Nepal and the genuine demands of Tharu, Dalit, Women, Janatis and Madhesis, which we urge the government of Nepal, the political parties, and groups that are protesting to settle through peaceful dialogue and by incorporating amendments in the constitution as appropriate.

Nepal has gone through a painful political, socio-economic transition for a genuine change in its society for many years. The 'Comprehensive Peace Accord, 2006' which was held between the state and the then CPN (Maoist) had given a big hope for peace, stability and development in Nepal. We recall our solidarity we extended during Jana-andolan II of Nepal in 2006. The newly promulgated constitution in Nepal has guaranteed a federal, inclusive, secular and republican state and ensured fundamental and human rights including the economic-social and cultural rights of the people. Immediately after the promulgation of the constitution, Nepal's southern neighbour-India imposed an unofficial trade and transport embargo. It 'noted' but did not welcome the adoption of a constitution by

Nepal. This 'Big-brother' and interventionist attitude is highly objectionable and unwelcome. That too when the Nepalese government has agreed to consider the genuine issues being raised by the agitating political parties and social groups, and to democratically revise the constitution.

The undeclared blockade imposed by India on all goods at the Indo-Nepal border has led to severe difficulties for the common people of Nepal to go about their normal lives. This act of collective punishment is deplorable and it is totally against the concept of a South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) 2004; and other agreements such as, Indo-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship-1950; Motor Vehicle Agreement among Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN)- 2015; Convention on Transit Trade of Land-locked States (1965) and United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. We deplore the Government of India's arm-twisting tactics and, we further demand that the Government of India to stop punishing the common people of Nepal and immediately withdraw the blockade and make a public commitment not to repeat such an action in the future. It is incumbent upon the Government of India to respect the sovereignty of Nepal and let the Nepali people and the Government of Nepal handle their internal issues amongst themselves and act to promote peace and harmony in the region instead of harassing its neighbours and interfering in their internal matters.

SAAPE Secretariat, Kathmandu, Nepal

## SAAPE condemns the heinous crime against humanity by religious extremists in Lahore, Pakistan

30 March 2016

South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE), a regional civil society network encompassing all eight countries of South Asia, condemns the heinous killing of 72 civilians and seriously injuring more than 200 people in a suicide blast by religious extremists in Gulshan-i-Iqbalpark, Lahore on 28 March 2016.

We offer our condolences, prayers and strength to the families, friends and people of Pakistan who are grappling with this uncalled-for tragedy which has been a bloody black day for Pakistan and the entire world. This crime against humanity is highly unacceptable and everyone should join hands to condemn this barbaric act.

Crimes of this kind, increasingly warrants the separation of the state

and religion. Fundamentalists of all hues and colours across national boundaries continue to fish in troubled waters and only civil society and people's mobilisation in Pakistan and all over South Asia can restore peace, stability and prosperity. We further demand South Asian governments to take immediate joint actions to address the growing rise of religious fundamentalism in the region.

Fight against religious fundamentalism should not be understood as rise in the military budget. Deepening of democracy and militarisation cannot go in tandem. Therefore, denouncing militarisation and campaigning for mutual trust and cooperation among the South Asian countries is an alternative way to solve these issues in South Asia.

SAAPE Secretariat, Kathmandu, Nepal.

## SAAPE Bulletin

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