

Regional Co-operation among SAARC States: An Assessment of the Integrated Program of Action

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ABSTRACT

This study provides a general overview of region's human development status, economic and trade structure, and sets a context for regional development challenges. Regional co-operation among SAARC States through an assessment of the Integrated Program of Action (IPA) recognizes 12 agreed areas of cooperation, each being covered by a designated Technical Committee (TC). These areas include Agriculture, Communications, Education, Culture and Sports, Environment, Health and Population Activities, Meteorology, Prevention of Drug Trafficking and Drug Abuse, Rural Development, Science and Technology, Tourism, Transport and Women in Development.

Key Words: Regional Co-operation, SAARC States, Integrated Program of Action, Technical Committee

Introduction

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is an economic and political organization of eight¹ countries in Southern Asia. "In terms of population, its sphere of influence is the largest of any regional organization: almost 1.5 billion people, the combined population of its member states" (Singh, 2012:1). Meetings of heads of state are usually scheduled annually; meetings of foreign secretaries, twice annually. It is headquartered in Kathmandu, Nepal. The objectives as mentioned in the SAARC Charter are as follows:

Objectives

- To promote the welfare of the peoples of South Asia and to improve their quality of life;

¹ SAARC was founded in December 1985. Its seven founding members are Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Afghanistan joined the organization in 2005.

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- to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region and to provide all individuals the opportunity to live in dignity and to realize their full potentials;
- to promote and strengthen collective self-reliance among the countries of South Asia;
- to contribute to mutual trust, understanding and appreciation of one another's problems;
- to promote active collaboration and mutual assistance in the economic, social, cultural, technical and scientific fields;
- to strengthen cooperation with other developing countries;
- to strengthen cooperation among themselves in international forums on matters of common interests; and
- to cooperate with international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes" (Kher, 2012: 12).

Literature Review

This part of the study reviews the available literature on the political and economic aspects of SAARC, twin deficits in South Asian economies: observations and empirical evidence, and foreign public capital and economic growth of developing countries.

On India and South Asia, the economic developments in the age of globalization, India's economic growth in a global economy: past and future, and emergence, severity, and contours of the fiscal deficit in India and South Asia have been discussed.

The review also includes human capital investment and development in South Asia, poverty in Pakistan and South Asia: concept, measurement, and analysis and, South Asia's trade and commercial relations with Canada.

Regional economic cooperation under SAARC: possibilities and constraints, repositioning SAFTA in the regionalism debate, market-oriented policy reforms and export-led industrialization.

Decentralization of governance and development, corruption in South Asia: causes and consequences, and military expenditure in South Asia: a case study of economic irrationality, and SAARC at crossroads: the fate of regional cooperation in South Asia.

SAARC Political & Economic Aspects

Kher's (2012) publication on "*SAARC Political & Economic Aspects*" introduces with the beginning and development, scope and sphere, significance and importance of SAARC, and also discuss in details about its organizational setup and functioning process. "Although, SAARC is a cultural, economic and commercial association, aimed at creating a free zone, which may ultimately turn into a unified geographical entity, like European Union, yet it has its political

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shades and aspects.” Hence, this study discusses political factors also.

The first chapter in Part 1, “*South Asia at a Glance: A Taxonomy of Growth Challenges*,” by the editor of the book, Anjum Siddiqui (2008) provides a general overview of South Asia’s political economy and compares its performance to other regions. Using comparative data, the work briefly examines the region’s history, human development status, economic and trade structure, and sets a context for regional development challenges. The stylized facts of this study highlight an immediate need for action by respective South Asian governments and a call to move beyond lip service, rhetoric, and dressed-up statistics to address both literacy and health along with improving the investment climate, and, most important, substantially improving governance indicators.

A key issue in South Asia has always been the growth of the twin deficits: current account deficits and trade deficits. Khalid (2008) examines this issue in “*Twin Deficits in South Asian Economies: Observations and Empirical Evidence*,” to determine whether fiscal deficits have led to external imbalances. He uses econometric tests to investigate any causal relationship between the two deficits as well as to identify the direction of causality. He concludes “that due to the absence of developed domestic capital markets, fiscal deficits have to be financed from capital inflows (current account deficits). Evidence also indicates that current account deficits have caused fiscal deficits in some South Asian countries.”

Focusing solely on public capital and ignoring private capital flows in his work, Abdul Waheed (2008) studies the interrelationship of “*Foreign Public Capital and Economic Growth of Developing Countries: A Selected Survey*.” He examines “various theoretical approaches addressing the impact of foreign public capital (concessional and non-concessional) on the economic progress of a developing country. The review shows that no single theory or perspective has emerged with anything nearing a consensus regarding the macroeconomic effects of foreign public capital.”

India and South Asia

Siddiqui (2008) in his edited work on “*India and South Asia: Economic Developments in the Age of Globalization*” presents an introduction to South Asia, the macroeconomic issues focusing on the twin budgetary and trade deficits, foreign direct investment, investment in human capital, capital flows and their effects on domestic saving, and the consequent impact on economic growth. The work examines the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and whether globalization has improved economic development in the region. The study also examines poverty in South Asia and assesses whether structural adjustment has adjusted anything and what has been achieved by IMF World Bank programs in the region. The work examines governance and corruption and also looks at the ‘wisdom’ of military spending in the region.

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In “*India’s Economic Growth Miracle in a Global Economy: Past and Future*,” Baldev Raj (2008) examines India’s economic growth in historical context and observes that “India’s performance since the 1980s is the direct result of investments in human capital and the accumulation of physical capital and infrastructure.” The past high level of savings in the country and some development loans have helped to finance these investments. India is no longer afraid of international competition and is a worthy regional challenger to China.

Focusing on India and South Asia, in “*Emergence, Severity, and Contours of the Fiscal Deficit in India and South Asia*”, Jha (2008) concludes that “fiscal deficits in most South Asian countries are unsustainable.” The high levels of fiscal deficits are exacting a toll on these economies and immediate corrective action needs to be taken to prevent further negative consequences on the region.

Human Capital Investment and Development in South Asia

In “*Human Capital Investment and Development in South Asia*,” Siddiqi (2008) examines some statistics on the state of education and human development and concludes that among South Asian countries, India have taken lead in developing human capital, due to its educational policies. He further observes that the causes of low literacy are not high dropout rates and gender inequality in access to education, “but a response to the poor socioeconomic policies of the regional governments which includes inadequate spending on education. A key finding is that poverty and illiteracy are interrelated in a long term vicious circle, and the fight against illiteracy is facilitated by economic development.” Moreover, service delivery in social services and education rests crucially on governance and community empowerment.

Umer Khalid (2008) looks at measuring poverty in South Asia in “*Poverty in Pakistan and South Asia: Concept, Measurement, and Analysis*.” The comparison of South Asia with other world regions reveals that “the proportion of the world’s poor living in South Asia increased between 1987 and 1998.” The author concludes that “globalization as manifested by the increasing integration of South Asian economies into the global economy has brought about an increase in South Asian poverty levels relative to other regions of the world.”

In order to study the impact of globalization and international trade on the countries of the region and the impact of the WTO and the Doha Round of trade negotiations is examined. An article by Ann Weston (2008), “*South Asia’s Trade and Commercial Relations with Canada*”, reviews the direction and magnitude of South Asian trade. The author notes that “India rose to the rank of tenth largest exporter of services in the world and used those earnings to finance its growing trade deficits. However, trade within the South Asian region is less than 5 percent of the total trade of South Asia, which is much lower than that of any other regional grouping in the world. The region remains one of the most protected, whether in terms of tariffs or other types of policies restraining imports.” The author comments that “East and Southeast Asia, which are included in the Asia-

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Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) grouping, provide benefits to their economies through various types of cooperation within the Asia-Pacific region and with the European Union and the United States. The same benefits of cooperation are not available to major South Asian countries because they do not have any special bilateral or regional preferential trade arrangements in either the EU or U.S. markets.”

Regional Economic Cooperation under SAARC: Possibilities and Constraints

Dusuni Weerakoon’s (2008) work on “*Regional Economic Cooperation under SAARC: Possibilities and Constraints*,” is timely and most relevant to the current relations between India and Pakistan. SAARC has experienced many roadblocks and received much lip service from politicians and bureaucrats across the divide. Stumbling blocks in implementing a free trade agreement (FTA) in the region were the Indo-Pakistani conflicts and periodic wars. In the event that current peace initiatives are formalized in confidence-building measures, one can expect SAARC to make progress. One is tempted to conclude that SAARC will remain a failure with endless ifs and buts unless India and Pakistan move beyond their current confidence-building measures and sign a peace pact. A general comment applies that the proliferation of regional trade blocs is the consequence of slow progress on WTO recommendations for free trade. Some trade blocs were inspired by political motives (e.g., ASEAN), though that was not the motivation for forming SAARC.

In “*Repositioning SAFTA in the Regionalism Debate*” Saman Kelegama and Ratnakar Adhikari (2008) discuss the literature on regional trade agreements and conclude that SAFTA should move beyond borders and strive for pan-Asian cooperation.

Using data on Sri Lanka’s exports in his chapter, “*Market-Oriented Policy Reforms and Export-Led Industrialization: The Sri Lankan Experience*,” Premachandra Athukorala (2008) observes that “Sri Lanka has improved its economic performance despite local insurgency. This happened as Sri Lanka followed export-oriented policies in its labor surplus economy and gained a comparative cost advantage among trading partners.”

Part 4 of the book studies the role of governance and institutions in economic development - factors for which there is a growing body of evidence indicating that these are key enabling factors for the success of any economic programs. Currently, the World Bank actively supports devolution programs for political governance in South Asia. Following recent elections to local bodies in Pakistan, municipal governance has come under the jurisdiction of the local *nazim* (administrator), representing a radical move away from the colonial structure in which the government’s deputy commissioner was the all-powerful ruling bureaucrat. Whether this devolution structure will work to enhance social and

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human development and improvement in the administration of municipalities is dependent on the accountability of the *nazims* and the various checks and balances in place. It is too early to gauge whether the new system is an improvement or old wine in new bottles.

Chaudhury (2006) in his study “*SAARC at Crossroads: The Fate of Regional Cooperation in South Asia*” attempts to identify such issue-areas in which the SAARC has tried to formulate certain common strategies and implement policies for achieving cooperation in those fields. He identifies major differences in those issue-areas and sees how the SAARC has tried to cope in the tensions in the areas identified. The study examines that how far the major theoretical approaches to regional cooperation can explain the politico-economic realities within the SAARC and whether they need to be modified in the South Asian context.

The study deals with the major theoretical approaches to multilateral cooperation. A representative cross-section of these theoretical approaches has been selected, which have left lasting impact on the experiments of regional cooperation in different parts of the world, in general, and those in Western Europe, in particular. The work tries to show how the decisions are taken within SAARC. Do the decision-makers of the states in South Asia also take the decisions by themselves, or have they evolved a somewhat independent decision-making mechanism for SAARC itself? It also looks at the contradiction, if any, between supra-nationality and the predominant concept of sovereignty. The study takes up trade and energy respectively as prospective issue-areas within SAARC, where regimes could be formed. The work indicates the major problems and prospects of SAARC, and tries to relate them with the nature of state and histories of state formation in South Asia.

Decentralization of Governance and Development

In the opening chapter, “*Decentralization of Governance and Development*” Pranab Bardhan (2008) identifies “problems of monitoring and enforcement in a decentralized governance structure,” such as that being currently legislated in Pakistan. Another issue involves inferring the wrong causation due to the problem of simultaneity. For example, better beneficiary participation due to decentralization “may cause improved project performance, but improved project performance often also encourages higher participation.” In addition, Bardhan suggests that governments should not jump to quick conclusions regarding gains from decentralization. The gains themselves may be the result of other policies that were in place prior to decentralization.

Elaborating further in “*Governance Issues in India*,” Desh Gupta and Bhagwan Dahiya (2008) observe that India, which recognizes the independence of the judiciary from the executive and parliament, is much more successful than China in terms of rule of law. While the regulatory quality of both countries is poor, China, with its stronger commitment to reforms since 1979, has better indicators of government effectiveness.

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“Corruption is the consequence of poor governance and hence a discussion of corruption issues is an integral part of the explanation for poor socioeconomic development and the growth of poverty in South Asia.” In his chapter, “*Corruption in South Asia: Causes and Consequences*,” Johann Graf Lambsdorff (2008) points out that while attracting foreign capital is important for South Asia, the corrupt bureaucratic structure is an impediment to attracting FDI. He observes that South Asian countries have a poor record with respect to law and order and is a promising avenue for reform. He suggests that attracting foreign capital would be possible only if the politicians’ hands are tied by the rule of law so as to avoid corruption.

Military Expenditure in South Asia

Finally in “*Military Expenditure in South Asia: A Case Study of Economic Irrationality*”, Geoff Harris (2008) concludes that the military is not particularly effective in providing a number of noncore activities such as running businesses or corporations for which it is a high-cost provider. It might be argued that while the military is waiting for an external threat it should be gainfully employed in “socially useful activities.” Harris argues that the role of the government is only useful if it is cost effective and that is the only way that their usefulness should be ascertained. Harris agrees with Dumas (2002, 16-17) that military expenditures have a zero social rate of return. While military expenditure may offer other value such as providing security in times of external threat, it has no economic value because it does not affect the “material standard of living.” Regarding South Asia the author concludes clearly that “countries that engage in arms races do not become more secure, but they do become poorer.”

The chapters in this book arrive at many conclusions. Emphasizing the fundamentals of economic growth and demonstrating the dependency of economic progress on fiscal prudence, saving, and human capital, we reaffirm the importance of these traditional factors in economic growth. Emphasizing governance, we warn against the harmful effects on the region of fiscal deficits and military spending. While there is much to be disillusioned about, the book reveals optimism concerning South Asia’s future provided the region seriously starts being attentive to, and improving, its core fundamentals. Globalization of financial and goods markets leave South Asia no choice but to compete and innovate (Siddiqui 2005). Membership in the WTO and the end of the Multifiber Arrangement now call for strategic local and global partnerships as have been successfully practiced by Korean and Japanese firms in their quest to capture a share of the lucrative EU and U.S. markets.

The “South Asian free Media Association (SAFMA) and South Asian Journal initiated a research programme for South Asian scholars to address the region’s key policy issues, under the banner of the South Asian Policy Analysis (SAPANA) Network.” Volume XIII of the South Asian Studies series examines the role of

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SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) in the region, against the backdrop of the economic and social challenges it faces (Alam, 2006).

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Discussion

The Integrated Program of Action (IPA) is “a key component of the SAARC process and includes following agreed areas of cooperation, each being covered by a designated Technical Committee (TC).”

1. Agriculture

Agriculture was among the original five areas identified for fostering regional cooperation. “The first meeting of TC was held in 1983. Subsequently, Forestry was also included in the functions of the Committee. TC was instrumental in the setting up of SAARC Agricultural Information Centre (SAIC) at Dhaka in 1988 - the first SAARC regional institution of its kind. Under the work of this Technical Committee, Member States have been exchanging germ-plasmas, breeding materials on livestock and fishery in accordance with the quarantine regulations in force in their respective countries. Prototypes of farm tools and equipment have been exchanged for trial and adaptation. Activities for improved livestock through exchange of animals, frozen semen and vaccine have also been undertaken” (Kher, 2012).

2. Communications

With a view to bringing about “an over-all improvement in the postal services in the region, the work programme in this sector included training, seminars, workshops study tours etc. Seminars/Workshops were organized on Postal Operation and future challenges, Mechanization of Postal Operations, Agency functions, Financial Services, Caring for Customer, Expedited Mail Service (EMS), Circulation System of EMS and Postal Marketing. Study tours on Agency Services, Safety and Security of Postal Articles, Postal Services in Hilly or Rural Areas and New Mail and Financial Service in Pakistan were undertaken to gain first-hand knowledge of problems and plans for improvement of postal services” (Singh, 2012: 18).

3. Education, Culture and Sports

The priority themes identified for cooperation in the field of education are “Women and Education; Universal Primary Education; Literacy, Post Literacy and Continuing Education; Educational Research; Science and Technical Education, Education for the Underserved Areas and Distance Education. The nominations of Nodal Agencies for each of the priority themes have been completed and appropriate Action Plans are being prepared.”

Short-term activities in the field of education include, “Expert Group Meetings; Workshops/Seminars on the priority themes; Modernization of Curriculum; Environmental Education including Population Education; Planning and Management of Education, Teacher Training, Higher Education and Book Production and Marketing” (Kher, 2012:20).

“As part of the regional cooperation activities in Sports, Coaching Camps Clinics have been conducted in Table Tennis, Squash, Hockey, Basketball, Swimming, Athletics and Volleyball. Training of Experts in Spark aid has been conducted. Basketball and Football Tournaments and SAARC Marathons have been organized” (Singh, 2012: 19).

4. Environment

Environment was identified as “an area that called for the urgent attention of SAARC in 1987, during which year the Heads of State or Government decided to commission a Study on “Causes and Consequences of Natural Disasters and the Protection and Preservation of the Environment”. Following this decision at the Third SAARC Summit in Kathmandu in 1987, “National Studies were undertaken and subsequently consolidated into a Regional Study, which was approved by the Sixth SAARC Summit (Colombo, 1991). The other Regional Study conducted by SAARC relates to the Greenhouse Effect and its Impact on the Region” (Kher, 2012:21).

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TC has identified measures for immediate action from among the recommendations and decided on a number of modalities for their implementation. These include, “improving climate monitoring capability through networking arrangement and through SAARC Meteorological Research Centre (SMRC); developing climate change and sea-level rise scenario through country specific studies and sharing of information data in this respect; making available to member states expertise on climate research and monitoring Greenhouse Gases emission; identification of training and research institutions and ongoing programmes; exchange of information and data; exchange of experience on strategies for developing, mitigating and adaptive responses to climate change” (Singh, 2012:20).

TC also covers topics such as “Approaches to Environmental Legislations, Regulations and Standards in SAARC countries; Rehabilitation of Degraded Lands; Training Course on Wetlands Assessment and Management; Workshop on Alternate/Renewable Energy and Workshop of SAARC National Experts on Climate Change. The urgent need to establish a networking approach, through identified nodal points/institutions has also been stressed” (Singh, 2012:20).

5. Health and Population Activities

Health and Population Activities was one of the original five areas of cooperation identified by member States. The primary focus of the Committee has been on “children, population welfare and policy, maternal and child health, primary health care, disabled and handicapped persons, control and eradication of major diseases in the region such as malaria, leprosy, tuberculosis, diarrhea diseases, rabies, AIDS, and iodine deficiency disorder” (Kher, 12:23).

Important activities undertaken by TC include “the setting up of the SAARC Tuberculosis Centre (STC), in Kathmandu in 1992, devising a standard Format for preparing the Annual Review of the Situation of Children in the SAARC region; establishment of networking arrangements for training, research and eradication of malaria and regional approach for combating major diseases in the region. A Directory of training programmes in six priority areas, i.e. malaria, tuberculosis, leprosy, diarrheal diseases, human rabies and maternal and child health have been prepared and circulated” (Singh, 2012:21).

6. Meteorology

Since its inception, the Committee has been involved in organizing seminars/workshops in areas such as “Joint Inter-Comparison of Barometers, Meteorological Instruments, Agricultural Meteorology, Numerical Weather Prediction, Crop-Weather relationship and Crop-Yield Forecast, Long Range Weather Forecasting, Radar Meteorology etc. Training programmes have been conducted on Meteorological Telecommunications, Management and Establishment of National Data Centres, Monsoon Forecasting etc. State-of-the-art

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Reports on Western Disturbances, Tropical Cyclones including Prediction of Recurvature, Thunder Storms, Long Range Forecasting of Monsoon Rain, Short Range Prediction of Monsoon and Norwesters, Tornadoes and Water Sprouts, have been completed. Expert panels have been convened on specialized fields such as Agro-meteorology; Climatology and Data Exchange; and Instrumentation (Singh, 2012:21).

TC has also identified long-term measures, such as “creation of a Regional Data Bank, Organization of Research Flight Facilities for probing cyclones, networking for Drifting and Anchored Buoys in Oceanic Regions, Environmental Pollution Monitoring stations, Preparation of Atlases of Meteorological Parameters and Familiarization with Computer Technology as needed for meteorological research, including visits to computer centres and cost of consumable” (Singh, 2012:22).

7. Prevention of Drug Trafficking and Drug Abuse

Since its establishment in 1987, the committee has implemented a number of programmes in “law enforcement, prevention, treatment and rehabilitation as essential elements of a coordinated regional strategy in combating drug trafficking and drug abuse. Nodal Agencies in member States have been nominated to exchange information and intelligence on drug offences.” The SAARC Drug Offences Monitoring Desk (SDOMD) has been established in Colombo to collate, analyse and disseminate information on drug offences (Kher, 2012:25).

In the field of demand reduction, short-term activities such as “workshops seminars held so far have focused on the role of media in drug abuse prevention, community mobilization against drug abuse, preventive education, school curriculum development, treatment and relapse prevention and exchange of information on indigenous and innovative methods of treatment” (Singh, 2012:22).

“Efforts have been directed at promoting SAARC member states’ accession to the relevant UN Conventions, conclusion of Regional and Drug Convention and harmonization and consolidation of national drug laws. A Memorandum of Understanding for cooperation between SAARC and the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) has been signed” (Singh, 2012:23).

8. Rural Development

Specific activities taken up by the Technical Committee include, “exchange of information and literature among member states on issues relating to rural development, preparation of research studies on selected topics, compilation of lists of experts, training institutes, and institutions involved in transfer of appropriate technology in member States, with a view to exchanging expertise and sharing training facilities within the region” (Kher, 2012:26).

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Several workshops/seminars and training courses covering practically all aspects of rural development including “regional planning, poverty focused development, rural energy; design of agricultural projects, local level planning, inter-country comparisons, appropriate technology, disaster management, rural child development, rural sociology, peoples participation, rural water supply, employment generation, social forestry; rural communication and development of agricultural markets have been conducted in member States under the committee” (Kher, 2012:26).

9. Science and Technology

Since its establishment in 1983, TC has undertaken a wide variety of programmes which include “short-term activities such as Seminars/Workshops, Training Programmes, Joint Research Projects, preparation of State-of-the-art Reports and compilation of Directories” (Singh, 2012:23).

Training Programmes have also been held for Scientists and Technologists on “Tannery Waste Management, Low Cost Housing, Development of Prawn Hatcheries, Electronics and Molecular Biology. In addition, Joint Research Projects on Design and Manufacture of Food Processing Equipment and Appropriate Post Harvest Food Technology for Perishable Items have been carried out” (Singh, 2012:24).

Directories are being prepared on “Specialized Analytical Instrumentation Facilities and Techniques; and Process Engineering/Pilot Plant Facilities in Agro Food Processing. Networking Arrangements are being established in the fields of Bio-technology and Genetic Engineering, Energy Modeling Techniques, Technology Information and Low Cost Housing and Building Technologies” (Singh, 2012:24).

10. Tourism

The Committee was established in 1991, “to promote cooperation in the field of tourism in the region. At its first meeting held in Colombo in October 1991, the Committee decided on an Action Plan on Tourism to promote cooperation in the areas such as training programmes, exchange of information, joint promotion, joint venture investment, intraregional tourism etc.” (Kher, 2012:28).

Among others, activities of the Committee include “training facilities by the member states in the field of tourism and hotel management, production of SAARC Travel Guide and SAARC tourism promotional film on the theme *A Unique Holiday with Diversity: From Top of the World to the Sunny beaches*” (Kher, 2012:29). Activities such as familiarization tours and Food Festival in member states were also identified. Steps were also taken to coordinate the participation of SAARC member states in international tourism fairs. Emphasis is also being placed on the importance of early launching of the SAARC Scheme for Promotion of Organized Tourism” (Singh, 2012:25).

11. Transport

The work of the Technical Committee covers “three major segments of transport, i.e. land transport, divided into roadways and railways; sea transport sub-divided into inland waterways and shipping; and air transport” (Singh, 2012:25). The activities of TC cover “exchange of data and information, preparation of status papers, compilation of data-base and directories of consultancy centres for transport sector. Seminars and Workshops have covered areas such as Material and Cost of Road Construction, Maintenance of Roads, Rural Roads, Road transportation and safety; Containerization for Railways, Urban transportation, Inland Water Transport, Maritime Transport etc.”

The work programme for the 1990s covers “a wide range of issues related to sea and air transportation. Recently, four new areas of cooperation in the Transport Sector have been identified by the Committee: Transport Safety; Rural Transport, Environmental Aspects, and Energy Conservation.”

“Transport is a vital area in providing access to products to markets and opening up new areas of productivity. Especially with the signing of Agreement on SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) this sector has even a more crucial role to play in intra-SAARC trade” (Singh, 2012:26).

12. Women in Development

Women in Development were included as “an area of cooperation under the IPA in 1986. Specific issues taken up by TC include preparation of a Regional Plan of Action for Women, effective dissemination of technical information relating to women in development generated by member States, preparation of Guide Books on Women in Development by member States etc. SAARC Women’s Journals on specific themes relating to women in development have been published to coincide with important events like SAARC Summits” (Singh, 2012:26).

Several short-term activities like “seminars, workshops and training courses have been held in the areas of women in law, women and environment, women’s education and training, women’s employment, women in agriculture and extension etc. Several activities related to different aspects of the Girl-Child have also been held under the Committee. Exhibitions on Handicrafts and Design by Women have also been organized by member states. A Women’s Cell has been established in the SAARC Secretariat to act as a Data Bank and a store house of information on Women in Development in the region” (Singh, 2012:26).

Conclusion

This study provides a general overview of region’s human development status, economic and trade structure, and sets a context for regional development challenges. Regional co-operation among SAARC States through an assessment of

the Integrated Program of Action (IPA) recognizes 12 agreed areas of cooperation, each being covered by a designated Technical Committee (TC). These areas include Agriculture, Communications, Education, Culture and Sports, Environment, Health and Population Activities, Meteorology, Prevention of Drug Trafficking and Drug Abuse, Rural Development, Science and Technology, Tourism, Transport and Women in Development. The facts of this study highlight an immediate need for action by respective South Asian governments and a call to move beyond lip service, rhetoric, and dressed-up statistics to address both literacy and health along with improving the investment climate, and, most important, substantially improving governance indicators.

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