

# SAARC Programs and Activities

## Assessment, Monitoring, and Evaluation

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**T**he South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) established in 1985 includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Since its inception, a range of activities has been carried out by the SAARC, which can be broadly categorized as follows:

- Creation of the SAARC Integrated Programme of Action (SIPA), including Agriculture and Rural Development; Communications and Transport; Social Development; Environment, Meteorology, and Forestry; Science and Technology; Human Resources Development; and Energy.
- Signing agreements and conventions, including an Agreement on Establishing the SAARC Food Security Reserve; Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism; Regional Convention on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances; SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution; SAARC Convention on Regional Arrangements for the Promotion of Child Welfare in South Asia; Coordination of Positions on Multilateral Legal Issues; Agreement for Establishment of South Asian University.

- Initiation of SAARC programs, including poverty eradication; agreement on SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) and Transition from SAPTA to South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA); social charter; SAARC Development Fund (SDF); and regional connectivity program.
- Establishment of SAARC regional centers, including Agricultural Information Centre (Dhaka); Tuberculosis Centre (Kathmandu); Documentation Center (New Delhi); Meteorological Research Centre (Dhaka); Human Resources Development Centre (Islamabad); Energy Centre (Islamabad); Disaster Management Centre (New Delhi).
- Organization of People to People contact programs, including SAARC Audio-Visual Exchange (SAVE) Programme; SAARC Documentation Centre (SDC); SAARC Scheme for Promotion of Organized Tourism; SAARC Chairs, Fellowships, and Scholarships Scheme; SAARC Youth Volunteers Programme (SYVOP); SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme; South Asian Festivals; SAARC Consortium of Open and Distance Learning (SACODiL) and SAARC Awards.

Visible progress has been made in all these major spheres of activities. For instance, numerous regional institutions have been established and are functioning, and SAFTA has come into effect. A number of activities have been initiated under the rubric of the regional agreements and conventions, regional centers, and the broad framework of people-to-people contact. However, none of these activities and initiatives has had any major direct impact on strengthening the regional cooperation and integration process in South Asia. The heads of the states and the governments have had 15 summit meetings to date. A large number of meetings have taken place among the Council of Ministers (that is, the foreign ministers of these countries) and at the foreign secretary and various official levels. A series of special meetings have included home ministers, agriculture ministers, and finance ministers of the region.

There have been no institutionalized responses to the enthusiasm created by some of these activities in the region. The euphoria with which these activities are launched dies down in no time both in the absence of a proper monitoring and evaluation mechanism and because of the lack of involvement of people and nongovernmental institutions in the exercise. There is an increasing feeling that many of these activities are just initiated as summit rituals by the heads of states and governments. An array of literature calls SAARC “ritualistic,” describes it as “suffocatingly slow,” and

criticizes it as a “magnificent paper tiger,” “political white elephant,” “talk shop of no consequence,” “military convoy in a mountainous region,” “a regional pastime,” “a club of tongues,” “bureaucratic den,” and so on.

This chapter provides specific instances in which the SAARC process has failed in fulfilling its objectives and in meeting peoples’ aspirations as the only regional body for almost 24 years.

## 1. POVERTY AND TERRORISM VERSUS RHETORIC AND ACTION

### 1.1 Poverty Alleviation

The 6th SAARC Summit (Colombo, 1991) for the first time accorded the highest priority to the alleviation of poverty in South Asia and established an Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation (ISACPA), including eminent persons from member states. The commission conducted an in-depth study of the diverse experiences of member states and reported their recommendations on the alleviation of poverty to the 7th Summit. The 1992 Commission on Poverty Alleviation set rather formidable macroeconomic targets for the eradication of poverty in South Asia by 2002 (SAARC Secretariat 1992). The Commission provided a radical conceptual framework for poverty alleviation through social mobilization and empowerment in South Asia. To achieve this goal, it recommended that the region would require the following:

- An annual growth rate of 9.1 percent.
- Doubling of per capita income from US\$300 to US\$600.
- Lowering of incremental capital-output ratio from 4:1 to 3:1.
- Increasing the marginal savings rate from the current level to 27 percent or more.

The report elaborately discussed various micro-level interventions and lessons learned from the tedious delivery systems of the state mechanism. In most of the South Asian countries the delivery of services is carried out overwhelmingly by state agencies. Two very striking aspects of this delivery mechanism are found in this region. Firstly, the service delivery mechanism in critical areas like health, food supplies, education, drinking water, electricity etc., has several layers of sub-institutions and

sub-authorities and the actual delivery remains slow, tardy and cumbersome. And secondly, there is literal absence of monitoring and evaluation of the services delivered and poor accountability of the agencies and institutions involved in it. More seriously the leakages and corruption has become both rampant and deep rooted making the issues of transparency and accountability farfetched. This Report also mentioned the emergence of new trends at the grassroots level and discussed the shifting focus from macro interventions to participatory micro development organizations. On the basis of this report, the 7th SAARC Summit (Dhaka, 1993) for the first time committed to eradicate poverty in South Asia by 2002. The declaration stated that “the Heads of State or Government committed their Governments unequivocally to the eradication of poverty in South Asia, preferably by the year 2002 AD through an Agenda of Action” (SAARC Secretariat 1993) which would, among other things, embody the following:

- A strategy of social mobilization involving the building of organizations of the poor and their empowerment through appropriate national support mechanisms, with the assistance of respective governments.
- A policy of decentralized agricultural development and sharply focused household-level food security through the universal provision of *daal-bhaat* or basic nutritional needs.
- A policy of decentralized small-scale labor-intensive industrialization, with the choice of efficient and cost-effective technology.
- A policy of human development, including the enhancement of the social role and status of poor women, the provision of universal primary education, skill development, primary health care, shelter for the poor, and protection of children.
- A policy to support the above initiatives with adequate financial resources.

The Summit stressed that within the overall conceptual approach of *daal-bhaat*, the right to work and the right to primary education should receive priority. This 7th Summit also urged major actors in the world economic scene to create an enabling atmosphere supportive of poverty alleviation programs and expressed the need for a new dialogue with donors.

Despite this lofty and rather challenging declaration of poverty eradication in South Asia by 2002, the SAARC as a regional body undertook

a meager number of inconsequential initiatives during the critical period from 1993 to 2002. These included calling for a new dialogue with donors, SAARC/World Bank Informal Workshop on Poverty Reduction in South Asia (Annapolis, Maryland, October 1993), United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) proposals for cooperation with SAARC in poverty reduction, establishment of a three-tier mechanism for exchanging information on poverty eradication (8th SAARC Summit, New Delhi, 1995), and two rounds of meetings. The social mobilization strategy as envisaged by the first ISACPA has been put into practice across South Asia (except Bhutan) through the UNDP-sponsored South Asia Poverty Alleviation Program (SAPAP), which was launched in early 1996 and completed in March 2003. The Secretariat has been preparing a SAARC *Regional Poverty Profile* since 2003. The most recent profile was published in 2005, which highlighted regional dimensions based on the country-level profiles (SAARC Secretariat 2006b). However, the only concrete action has been the establishment of Three-tier Committees. Although these committees have met, nothing substantive has happened in terms of implementing the recommendations of both the Poverty Commission report and of the Three-tier Committees.

For many years, however, all the SAARC Summit declarations reiterated their stand of 1993 to eradicate poverty from the region by 2002. When it finally reached the year 2002, a new Poverty Commission was appointed. The goal of poverty eradication then shifted to the achievement of the SAARC Development Goals (SDGs), which would be done in the next five years starting from year 2007 (Table 17.1). Interestingly in the 13th Summit (Dhaka, 2005), the Heads of State or Government decided to declare the decade of 2006–2015 as the SAARC Decade of Poverty Alleviation. During this decade, endeavors—both at the national and regional level—will continue to be made with a sense of commitment and urgency to free South Asia from poverty.

The 11th SAARC Summit (Kathmandu, 2002) appointed another ISACPA to review the progress made on poverty alleviation and to suggest appropriate and effective measures for implementation. The Summit mandated a review of the Commission's report and suggested measures and strategies to downscale the incidence of poverty in the region. The second ISACPA submitted its report *Our Future Our Responsibility: A Road Map towards a Poverty Free South Asia* in 2004 (SAARC Secretariat 2004a).

TABLE 17.1 Poverty Alleviation-related Declarations in SAARC Summits since 1993

<b>7th Summit, 1993, Dhaka</b>	“The Heads of State or Government committed their Governments unequivocally to the eradication of poverty in South Asia, preferably by the year 2002 A.D. through an Agenda of Action.” <sup>a</sup>
<b>8th Summit, 1995, Delhi</b>	“The Heads of State or Government reaffirmed their commitment to the eradication of poverty in South Asia, preferably by the year 2002 A.D. through on Agenda of Action. In this context, they decided to declare 1995 as the SAARC Year of Poverty Eradication.” <sup>b</sup>
<b>9th Summit, 1997, Male</b>	“The Heads of State or Government were unequivocal in their commitment to the eradication of poverty in South Asia at the earliest, preferably by the year 2002 A.D. through an Agenda of Action. They noted with satisfaction the establishment of a Three-tier Mechanism on Poverty Eradication and endorsed the recommendations of the two rounds of meetings under this mechanism hosted by India and Pakistan, respectively. They desired that the Ministers of Finance/Planning should meet again in the near future to give further impetus to this process.” <sup>c</sup>
<b>10th Summit, 1998, Colombo</b>	“The Heads of State or Government reiterated the commitment of SAARC to the eradication of poverty in the Region at the earliest possible, preferably by the year 2002. They emphasized the need to encourage maximum participation by target groups in the formulation and implementation of poverty eradication programmes. The Heads of State or Government were of the view that such participation is essential for success of efforts in this field. They stressed the need for effective utilization of the SAARC Three-tier Mechanism on Poverty Eradication and in that context welcomed the offer of the Government of Pakistan to host the next meeting of the SAARC Finance/Planning Ministers under the Mechanism in October 1998.” <sup>d</sup>
<b>11th Summit, 2002, Kathmandu</b>	“The Heads of State or Government acknowledged that investment in poverty alleviation programs contributes to social stability, economic progress, and overall prosperity. They were of the view that widespread and debilitating poverty continued to be the most formidable developmental challenge for the region. Conscious of the magnitude of poverty in the region, and recalling also the decision of the UN Millennium Summit 2000 to reduce world poverty in half by 2015, and also recalling the commitments made at the five-year review of the World Summit for Social Development

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to reduce poverty through enhanced social mobilization, the Heads of State or Government made a review of the SAARC activities aimed at poverty alleviation and decided to reinvigorate them in the context of the regional and global commitments to poverty reduction.

The Heads of State or Government expressed their firm resolve to combat the problem of poverty with a new sense of urgency by actively promoting the synergetic partnership among national governments, international agencies, the private sector, and the civil society. They reaffirmed their pledge to undertake effective and sustained poverty alleviation programs through pro-poor growth strategies and social as well as other policy interventions with specific sectoral targets. The leaders also agreed to take immediate steps for the effective implementation of the programs for social mobilization and decentralization, and for strengthening institution building and support mechanisms to ensure participation of the poor, both as stakeholder and beneficiary, in governance and the development process.

The Leaders directed the Council of Ministers to coordinate efforts to integrate poverty alleviation programs into the development strategies of Member States. In this context, they agreed to reconstitute the Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation, with Nepal as its Convener and Bangladesh as Co-convener, for reviewing the progress made in cooperation on poverty alleviation and for suggesting appropriate and effective measures.”<sup>e</sup>

**12th Summit, 2004,  
Islamabad**

“We recognize poverty alleviation as the greatest challenge facing the peoples of South Asia and declare poverty alleviation as the overarching goal of all SAARC activities. It is imperative to relate regional co-operation to the actual needs of the people.

Provision of basic needs, promotion of literacy, and better health care are a regional priority. It is important to undertake effective and sustained poverty reduction programmes through pro-poor growth strategies and other policy interventions with specific sectoral targets.

The Plan of Action on Poverty Alleviation, prepared by the meeting of Finance and Planning Ministers in Islamabad in 2002, is hereby approved.

The reconstituted Independent South Asian Commission for Poverty alleviation (ISACPA) has done commendable work. An effective strategy should be devised to implement suggestions made in its Report *Our Responsibility*.”<sup>f</sup>

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<b>13th Summit, 2005, Dhaka</b>	<p>“The Heads of State or Government decided to declare the decade of 2006–2015 as the SAARC Decade of Poverty Alleviation. During the Decade, endeavors—both at the national and regional level—will continue to be made with a sense of commitment and urgency to free South Asia from poverty... They entrusted the ISACPA to continue its advisory and advocacy role in this regard... They decided to focus on formulation and implementation of concrete regional programmes and projects as well as forging partnerships among all stakeholders.”<sup>g</sup></p>
<b>14th Summit, 2007, New Delhi</b>	<p>“The Heads of State or Government appreciated the Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation (ISACPA) for its elaboration of the SAARC Development Goals (SDGs), which reflect the regional determination to make faster progress toward attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). They agreed that the national plans for poverty alleviation should appropriately mirror the regional consensus reached in the form of the SDGs and the Plan of Action on Poverty Alleviation.</p> <p>Deciding that resource mobilization for achieving the SDGs would remain a high priority in the Decade of Poverty Alleviation, the Leaders directed translation of the highest regional level political commitment into action for creating opportunities for productive employment and greater access to resources for the poor that are essential for them to enhance their livelihood and realize their potentials. They entrusted the Two-tier Mechanism on Poverty Alleviation to monitor the progress and fine-tune the approaches toward pro-poor growth process.”<sup>h</sup></p>
<b>The New Goal</b>	<p>The Twenty-Seventh Session of the Council (Dhaka, 1–2 August, 2006) endorsed its recommendations that (a) SDGs would be achieved in the next five years starting from year 2007 and (b) a mid-term review on the attainment of SDGs would be undertaken toward the end of the third year.</p>
<b>15th Summit, 2008, Colombo</b>	<p>“The Heads of State or Government ... resolved to continue to combat poverty through all available means, including especially through people’s empowerment. They committed themselves to continuing to share each other’s experiences and success stories of pro-poor poverty reduction strategies such as micro-credit systems, community-driven initiatives and the raising of the consciousness of the poor on their right to resources and development ... They emphasized undertaking sustained efforts, including developing and implementing regional and sub-regional projects toward the attainment of</p>

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	SAARC Development Goals (SDGs). They noted the decision by the Ministers on Poverty Alleviation to obtain an inter-governmental mid-term review of the attainment of the SDGs to be completed by 2009. <sup>vi</sup>
<b>Source</b>	SAARC Secretariat 1993–2008.
<b>Notes</b>	<sup>a</sup> SAARC Secretariat 2005a. <sup>b</sup> Ibid., 96. <sup>c</sup> Ibid., 113. <sup>d</sup> Ibid., 138–39. <sup>e</sup> Ibid., 53–154. <sup>f</sup> Ibid., 169. <sup>g</sup> SAARC Secretariat 2005b. <sup>h</sup> SAARC Secretariat 2007a. <sup>i</sup> Available at <a href="http://www.news.lk/index2.php?option=com_content&amp;task=view&amp;id=6621&amp;Itemid=44&amp;pop=1&amp;page=0">http://www.news.lk/index2.php?option=com_content&amp;task=view&amp;id=6621&amp;Itemid=44&amp;pop=1&amp;page=0</a> , 'win2' <sup>j</sup> (accessed on 6 October 2009).

While providing a “Road Map towards a Poverty Free South Asia,” the report highlighted the following strategic priorities:

- Mobilizing the Power of the Poor
- Prudent Macroeconomics
- Mainstreaming the Informal Economy
- Enhancing Gender and Other Equities
- Sustainable Development
- Effective, Harmonious, and All-round Cooperation among the Countries of the Region

The 12th Summit (Islamabad, 2004) provided continuity to ISACPA, giving it a special advocacy role to enable it to guide follow-up actions on its report. The Commission was given the task preparing the SDGs (SAARC Secretariat. For the first time, a SAARC Poverty Alleviation Fund (SPAF) was established with contributions to be voluntary or assessed, as may be agreed. India has already offered US\$100 million (2005) for poverty alleviation projects with a regional dimension. The SPAF shall function within the SADF, which has been reconstituted, as the SAARC Development Fund (SDF). The three-tier mechanism on poverty alleviation has been replaced by a two-tier mechanism, comprising ministers and the secretaries dealing with poverty alleviation at the national level. In addition, the Secretariat published three regional poverty profiles.<sup>1</sup>

The 27th Session of the Council (Dhaka, 1–2 August 2006) endorsed its recommendations that (a) SDGs would be achieved in the next five years starting from year 2007 and (b) a mid-term review on the attainment of SDGs would be undertaken toward the end of the third year. ISACPA

could play an overall oversight role on the SDG regional reporting process. However, how far these recommendations will be internalized by the member countries, what institutions they will involve, and in what way the SAARC process will be involved are of significant interest (SAARC Secretariat 2007b).

## 1.2 Suppression of Terrorism

Large-scale terrorist violence continues to beset South Asia today (Khatri and Kueck 2003; Lama 2006). The inclusion of Afghanistan as the eighth member of the SAARC adds a new dimension to this violence. The SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism was signed during the 3rd SAARC Summit (Kathmandu, November 1987). It came into force on 22 August 1988. This Convention provides for a regional approach to well-established principles of international law in respect of terrorist offenses. It includes such provisions as sharing of information on terrorist activities and extraditions. Article VIII of the Convention emphatically states that “contracting States shall cooperate among themselves, to the extent permitted by their national laws, through consultations between appropriate agencies, exchange of information, intelligence and expertise and such other cooperative measures as may be appropriate, with a view to preventing terroristic activities through precautionary measures” (SAARC 1988). This Convention led to the establishment of a SAARC Terrorist Offences Monitoring Desk (STOMD) in Colombo in 1990 primarily to collate, analyze, and disseminate information about the terrorist incidences, tactics, strategies, and methods.

Recognizing the distinct ominous link between terrorism, drug trafficking, money laundering, and other transnational crimes, the 12th SAARC Summit held in Islamabad in 2004 signed an Additional Protocol to the Convention to deal effectively with financing of terrorism. The additional protocol takes into account obligations falling on member states in terms of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1373 of 28 September 2001, and the International Convention for Suppression of Financing Terrorism in 1999.

It was 11 years since the first Summit before legal experts met in 1999 to formulate future guidelines and identify three key elements in the Convention as prerequisites for its successful implementation—namely, (a) creation of offenses listed in the Convention as extraditable offenses under the domestic laws of SAARC member states; (b) treatment of such offenses as “nonpolitical offences” for purposes of extradition; and (c) vesting of extraterritorial criminal jurisdiction in the event of extradition not

being granted. The second meeting of legal advisers in 2002 emphasized the importance of the following to give practical effect to this Convention: (a) adoption of comprehensive domestic legislation by member states and (b) harmonization of the national legal regimes in the region. Following this second meeting, the SAARC Interior/Home Ministers met in 2007 in New Delhi.

Like any other SAARC activity, because of the sensitivity of this issue, the Convention on terrorism has been totally marginalized and made in redundant. Year after year since 1988 the SAARC Summits have passed the same resolution asking the member countries to make enabling laws compatible with the Convention (Table 17.2). Some member countries have consistently failed to enact enabling domestic legislation that is compatible with the Convention. The absence of this most fundamental action toward implementing the Convention has made it ineffective.

TABLE 17.2 Prevention and Combating Terrorism-related Declarations in SAARC Summits since 1988

4th Summit, 1988, Islamabad	“Thus reflecting the sincere desire on the part of the Member States to enter into meaningful cooperation to eliminate the scourge of terrorism from the South Asian region. They called for the adoption of <b>enabling measures</b> by Member States to implement the Convention at the earliest.”
5th Summit, 1990, Male	“They called for expeditious enactment of <b>enabling measures</b> for the implementation of the SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism. They also urged Member States to continue to cooperate in accordance with the Convention.”
6th Summit, 1991, Colombo	“They stressed in particular, the urgent need for the expeditious enactment of <b>enabling legislation</b> by those Member States which had not yet done so, for the implementation of the Convention and the need for a constant dialogue and interaction among the concerned agencies of Member States, including submission of periodic recommendations to the Council of Ministers.”
7th Summit, 1993, Dhaka	“The Leaders reiterated the need to give high priority to the enactment of <b>enabling legislation</b> at the national level to give effect to the SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism, while urging the Member States which had not yet done so, to make every effort to finalize this matter before the Eighth SAARC Summit.”

(Table 17.2 Continued)

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<b>8th Summit, 1995, New Delhi</b>	“The Heads of State or Government once again emphasised that highest priority should be accorded to the enactment of <b>enabling legislation</b> at the national level to give effect to the SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism. They urged Member States, which had not yet done so, to enact expeditiously enabling legislation at the national level to implement the convention.”
<b>9th Summit, 1997, Male</b>	“They emphasised the urgent need to complete <b>enabling legislation</b> in order to implement the SAARC Regional Conventions on Suppression of Terrorism and on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances.”
<b>10th Summit, 1998, Colombo</b>	“They emphasized the urgent need to complete <b>enabling legislation</b> in order to implement the SAARC Regional Conventions on Suppression of Terrorism and on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances.”
<b>11th Summit, 2002, Kathmandu</b>	“They also reiterated their firm resolve to accelerate the enactment of <b>enabling legislation</b> within a definite time-frame for the full implementation of the Convention, together with strengthening of SAARC Terrorist Offences Monitoring Desk and the SAARC Drug Offences Monitoring Desk in an effective manner.”
<b>12th Summit, 2004, Islamabad</b>	“We reaffirm our commitment to SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism, which, among others, recognizes the seriousness of the problem of terrorism as it affects the security, stability, and development of the region.”
<b>13th Summit, 2005, Dhaka</b>	“The Heads of State or Government directed that <b>concrete measures</b> be taken to enforce the provisions of the Regional Convention on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances through an appropriate regional mechanism.”
<b>14th Summit, 2007, New Delhi</b>	“They reaffirmed their commitment to <b>implement</b> the SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism and the Additional Protocol to the SAARC Regional Convention dealing with the prevention and suppression of financing of terrorism.”
<b>15th Summit, 2008, Colombo</b>	“The Heads of State or Government further emphasized the importance of completing all legislative and other relevant measures to implement within Member States, the provisions of the Regional Convention on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances.”

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Source SAARC Secretariat 1988–2008.

Despite their determination to prevent and suppress terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, member countries have not been able to share even the basic information.

Terrorist activities both within a country and on a cross-border basis have sharply gone up despite the existence of this Convention.<sup>2</sup> Despite several reiterations and reaffirmation of their commitment to the Convention on Suppression of Terrorism by the heads of state or government, not a single action has been taken under this Convention. In almost every Summit the member states expressed

... serious concern on the spread of terrorism in and outside the region and reiterated their unequivocal condemnation of all acts, methods and practices of terrorism as criminal. They deplored all such acts for their ruinous impact on life, property, socio-economic development and political stability as well as on regional and international peace and cooperation. (SAARC 11th Summit Declaration, Kathmandu 2002)

The blatant absence of this most fundamental action toward implementing the Convention has made it ineffective. For instance, the Male Summit held in 1990 “called for expeditious enactment of enabling measures for the implementation of the Convention” and the Kathmandu Summit held 12 years later in 2002 “reiterated their firm resolve to accelerate the enactment of enabling legislation within a definite time-frame” (SAARC 11th Summit Declaration, Kathmandu 2002). The “enabling laws” are still not enacted by some member countries, thereby making implementation of the Convention impossible. Interestingly since 2004, this appeal has been dropped and the Summits held in New Delhi in 2007 instead asked the member states to implement this Convention. This is making SAARC “a talk shop of no consequence” (Mahendra P. Lama, “Cut the Rhetoric: Get Together,” *Hardnews*, New Delhi, May 2007).

There is no harmonization of domestic legislation, including the sanction regime of the Convention. There is absence of bilateral agreement on extradition. There are differences on the very definition of terrorism. Except for some meetings, the STOMD has remained largely ineffective. Most of the information and knowledge base of terrorism in South Asia that are available in the public domain are generated by academic research, and civil society organizations spread over the subcontinent. The STOMD, which was supposed to be the fountainhead of such information, remains largely defunct and inaccessible.

After almost 20 years since the signing of the Convention, the 14th SAARC Summit (New Delhi, 2007) still talked about “working on the modalities to implement the provisions of the existing SAARC Conventions to combat terrorism; narcotics and psychotropic substances; trafficking of women, children and other crimes” (available at <http://www.saarc-sec.org/data/summit14/ss14declaration.htm> [accessed on 6 October 2009]). This has rather become a ritualistic practice. The increasing ineffectiveness and uselessness of this Convention is reflected in the attempts by various member states to pursue bilateral negotiations, the most recent being the “joint mechanism” framework being established between India and Pakistan.

The only way to come out of this rigmarole is to generate public pressure on the member states to seriously implement the Convention. Unfortunately, the overwhelming majority of South Asians do not even know that such convention exists. This is one of those many conventions that the SAARC member countries signed without consulting the diverse stakeholders in and outside the region. As a result, despite the serious need to regionally combat terrorism, literally no civil society action is conducted under this Convention. At the same time, given the size of the SAARC Secretariat in Kathmandu, the limited human resources, constricted mandate, and narrow autonomy given to it, not too much really can be expected from the already exasperated and overworked Secretariat.

Today, the South Asia region faces a formidable challenge. The region needs to focus on key actions—for example, domestic legislation to implement the regional conventions should be mandatory and should be completed within an established time frame. As an accountability measure, the inability to implement these conventions within a time frame should have the provision of dropping the defaulting concerned member from the convention or the convention should be abrogated within a stipulated time frame. The tendency of the member states to keep most of the conventions at the sublime level of a signed document only and their hesitation to implement any of them have become common practice in the SAARC process. This is an ominous trend for the future scope and for the confidence of obtaining regional cooperation.

A visible contradiction is evident on the essential SAARC provision that “no bilateral contentious issues will be discussed in the SAARC forum”

and conventions such as the Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism. The very nature of terrorism in South Asia has a strong cross-border context and content. The cross-border facets have been the core debate and key tenor of discourse on terrorism in the subcontinent. In such a situation, not discussing terrorism from a bilateral perspective in the name of dislocating a regional forum like SAARC would mean sweeping core issues under the carpet. Additionally, signing an agreement without understanding and accepting the realities of its provisions would further mean pretension, hypocrisy, and public consumption. The option is to drop such provisions from the SAARC process and discuss the issues as openly and as candidly as possible and to sign an appropriate and realistic convention to address these issues.

## 2. DELIBERATE INACTION AND POOR ACCOUNTABILITY

### 2.1 Integrated Programme of Action

One can cite several instances of deliberate inaction. The Integrated Programme of Action (IPA) includes nine areas of cooperation that form the core of the SAARC process. The IPA provided the firm foundation from which regional cooperation could take off. Each IPA is conducted by a Technical Committee, which helps member states build up or reinforce their national capabilities and undertake coordinated programs and activities at national and regional levels. The Technical Committee could examine broad relationships at the policy level between IPA activities and economic and social development in a catalytic, promotional, and advisory capacity with a view toward incorporating various recommended programs into mainstream development.

Over the years, IPA has undergone several changes, including in the number of its activities. Under the reconstituted SAARC Integrated Programme of Action (SIPA) in 2000, the number of Technical Committees was reduced from 11 to 7 (that is, Agriculture and Rural Development; Communications and Transport; Social Development; Environment, Meteorology, and Forestry; Science and Technology; Human Resources Development; and Energy). As a whole, the SIPA activities have broadly led to personal contact among the experts of the region in their specific fields of specialization. It has facilitated the exchange of data and information and the creation of seminars, workshops, and training courses.

The nature, extent, and level of activities carried out under the IPA have been beneficial from the regional perspective only to a limited extent. SIPA activities have never converged toward the real critical priority areas and have failed to engage and involve the nongovernmental organization, experts, professionals, and real beneficiaries in the interactive game. No two member countries have initiated concrete cooperative ventures. The three major critical drawbacks are as follows: (a) resource crunch, (b) lack of intersectoral coordination and non-implementation of decisions taken that have stunted growth, and (c) effective performance of IPA activities.

The non-implementation of decisions generally can be seen at three different levels. First, within the Technical Committees, there has been a tendency not to follow up the decisions taken in the previous meeting. As a result, a particular issue like a "SAARC weather bulletin" has been discussed year after year, and fresh decisions are taken on the same issue as reminders or reiteration. This becomes particularly serious because in most cases a Technical Committee Meeting takes place after a one-year gap. Second, the non-implementation of decisions and recommendations can be seen at the workshop and seminar levels. Third, the decisions taken by the First Special Session of the Standing Committee and the First MCTC often are not implemented. For instance, the First MCTC had made broad suggestions and had recommended, *inter alia*, Universalization of Primary Education by AD 2000, Universal Immunization of Infants by 1995, Provision of Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation by AD 2000. All these targets have been missed one by one. Some of these targets do not figure in the various TC's documents. Fourth, region-wide attractive projects that go well with the recommendations made at the global level were defined, identified, and given shapes. These projects and programs also went slowly into oblivion and never appeared again. Fifth, even the plans and projects specifically recommended by various specific Ministerial group meetings have not been implemented.

The non-implementation of decisions in a prolonged manner leads to the repetition of the same activity. For instance, on the initiative of Transport (TC10), a study entitled "Transport Infrastructure and Transit Facilities in the SAARC Region" was completed by an independent agency in Nepal in 1993. For a long time, the report remained under the consideration of the Committee on Economic Cooperation (CEC), which requested member states to complete their examination of the report and send their comments. This process has run into so many official

processes and grindings that even almost 14 years after its completion nothing has come out of it. This is appalling given the urgent need to improve the connectivity-related infrastructures in the region in the wake of massive economic liberalization. Instead, a new project, SAARC Regional Multimodal Transport Study (SRMTS), was carried out by the Asian Development Bank for the SAARC in 2006 (SAARC Secretariat 2006a). This study was the result of a decision at the 12th SAARC Summit (Islamabad, 2004) to strengthen transport, transit, and communication links across the region.

## 2.2 SAARC Food Security Reserve

The SAARC Food Security Reserve is another example of how inaction could lead to the erosion of confidence on the SAARC system. This reserve was established in 1988 primarily to provide for a reserve of food grains to meet emergencies in member countries. Reserves stood at 241,580 tons as of January 2002. In 2002, 14 years after its implementation, the 9th Meeting of the Board (Islamabad, December 2002) for the first time identified institutions and organizations in member states that could be contacted in case of emergency requirements for withdrawal from the reserve. Again after 20 years of sheer non-implementation of the SAARC Food Reserves, this program has been “revamped and renamed” into an “Agreement on Establishing the SAARC Food Bank” in 2007. This renamed institution discusses the establishment of a permanent headquarters of the food bank with a dedicated staff.

This food reserve has remained notional to date. No one knows its location. So far, the food reserves have never been used despite pressing demands in several disaster situations, including the wheat crisis in Pakistan, a cyclone hit in Orissa, a flood in Bangladesh, the tsunami in Sri Lanka, and Maoist violence leading to food insecurity in certain districts of Nepal. Even in the recent cyclone (Sidr) disaster in Bangladesh in November 2007, despite the unprecedented food insecurity in the affected areas, the SAARC Food Reserve was never invoked and utilized. There is no existence of a clear-cut transportation mechanism, border formalities, institutional mechanisms, and appropriate delivery method of the food grains to the recipient countries. The terms and conditions of operationalizing the reserves (that is, prices, mode of payment, conditions of payment, and so on) that remained undecided have now been broadly worked out. However, in the absence of the actual implementation, the efficacy of these guidelines is yet to be tested.

### 3. CONCLUSION

A serious criticism of the SAARC process has been on the issue of non-implementation and the dismal performance of action. The SAARC as a regional body has little to show in terms of matching with its foundational objectives and in terms of reaching its benefits to the people and institutions in the region. It started with avowed objectives like (a) promotion of the welfare of the people; (b) acceleration of economic growth, social progress, and cultural development; (c) strengthening of collective self-reliance; (d) contribution to mutual trust and understanding; and (e) collaboration and mutual cooperation in the economic, social, cultural, and technical front.

The SAARC process started facing such criticism in the early 1990s. The then leaders had started reacting to such public criticism of nonperformance by voicing such concerns in various SAARC meetings. For example, the 7th SAARC Summit (Dhaka, 1993) had stated in its declaration that:

The Heads of State or Government approved the recommendations of the Eleventh Session of the Council of Ministers for adopting a more business-like and functional approach in the conduct of Summit meetings. They also noted with satisfaction the guidelines and procedures approved by the Eleventh Session of the Council in this respect relating to other SAARC meetings. They decided to meet informally whenever necessary, between Summits. (SAARC, Declarations of SAARC Summits 1985–1998, Kathmandu, 1999)

In fact, the 13th Summit (Dhaka, November 2005) “directed all SAARC institutions and mechanisms to work collectively towards a decade dedicated to implementation so that a visible and discernible impact can be felt across South Asia” (available at <http://www.saarc-sec.org/?id=159&t=7.1> [accessed on 6 October 2009]). The secretary general’s analytical report mentioned that “in view of the foregoing directive of the Thirteenth Summit, it is timely for the Technical Committees/Working Groups, their equivalents and other SAARC processes, including the sectoral Ministerial Meetings, to focus on identification of tangible projects” (SAARC, Secretary General’s “Periodic Analytical Report,” SAARC/SUMMIT.14/SC.33/3 April 2007). It recommended measures as to how SAARC should devote its third decade to implementation.

The SAARC process, notwithstanding its serious nonperformance at the regional level, has not only generated significant interest and enthusiasm in intergovernmental consultation on many areas of common relevance, but also has built confidence among the member states. It is the only forum in the region that brings together the leaders on an annual basis.

This has helped members build confidence, move ahead on many of the bilateral projects, and resolve a range of problems directly and indirectly. More important, the official SAARC process has triggered a large number of nonofficial interactions and contacts among various sets of people and institutions. Many do believe that today the nonofficial SAARC process is far more active and robust than the official process. They also believe that ultimately it is the nonofficial SAARC that will lead to a people's SAARC and the official process will be forced to be active and operational.

Given the current situations, if drastic measures are not taken to both enhance the capacity of the Secretariat to operationalize the announced projects and also ensure strong monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to verify implementation of the decisions taken at various SAARC meetings, a situation may emerge in which leaders will year after year talk about the need to have effective implementation, while progress remains stunted. However, a new pattern of introducing programs and implementing them is emerging. The key to this new trend is a member country taking a lead role. For instance, India has taken the lead in a number of concrete activities. The latest examples include the South Asian University, a Tele-medicine Network, and a SAARC Textiles and Handicrafts Museum. These three programs and projects were proposed by India in the 13th SAARC Summit (Dhaka, 2005). India, while taking up the lead role, prepared concept papers for all three projects in a short time and brought them to the SAARC forum for discussion and approval (Council of Ministers 2006). All three projects are located in India, where implementation has begun (SAARC Secretariat 2006c).

## NOTES

1. SAARC/CM.27/19 for consideration.
2. For more details on the steady increase in terrorist activities and their impact on the societies and economies of South Asia, read Khatri and Kueck 2003 and Muni 2006.

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