

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“The Heads of State or Government reaffirmed that their fundamental goal was to accelerate the process of economic and social development in their respective countries through the optimum utilization of their human and material resources, so as to promote the welfare and prosperity of their peoples and to improve their quality of life. They were conscious that peace and security was an essential prerequisite for the realization of this objective”.

The Dhaka Declaration 1985 (SAARC 2008d:3).

The increasing level of inter-dependence among the countries of a particular region has been the key factor in promoting regionalism. Countries across the world have joined regional mechanisms due to either regional security vis-à-vis any perceived external military threats or human security and economic integration. South Asia is a case in point where many human security challenges, such as poverty alleviation, food, energy, and water security, demand regional cooperation. In the late 1970s, General Ziaur Rahman, then President of Bangladesh, proposed the idea of a South Asian forum and shared that with his counterparts in the region. In 1985, the leaders of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka established the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to work together for the realisation of several goals, economic cooperation being one of them. In 2007, Afghanistan became a permanent member of the Association. SAARC was a latecomer in following the growing trend of regionalism. For example, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established in 1967. The initial process of regionalism began after World War II, with the main focus on trade liberalisation among member states (Langenhove 2004:7). Since then, regionalism has flourished in different parts of the world, albeit with different intentions. The end of the Cold War added a new dimension to regionalism, now labelled as ‘new regionalism’. In the 1990s regional organisations strengthened their commitment to greater economic cooperation through free trade agreements, such as in the European Union (EU), the Arab Maghreb Union, ASEAN, the Caribbean Community, the Common Southern Market (MERCOSUR), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) (Hettne & Söderbaum 2004:194).

Following the example of the EU, there has been a rise in the number of regional organisations. However, a variety of reasons has been responsible for the emergence of regional organisations. For example, the protectionist trend was dominant in the initial decades of European regionalism. By contrast, ASEAN was set up as a collective security

mechanism against communism and for addressing common human security concerns, such as poverty alleviation, health security, and environmental protection.

Global and national institutions are well-developed compared with regional organisations, but they have not been able to fully address the severity of some issues which have cross-border implications, such as climate change, natural disasters, environmental degradation, domestic conflicts (insurgencies), transnational crimes (drug smuggling, human trafficking, etc.) and so on (Hettne & Söderbaum 2004:189). Regional forums are therefore seen suitable by all the countries for addressing common issues among member states through intra-regional policy reforms and actions, and engaging in advocacy for mutual concerns at global forums. According to Rajan (2005:1), regionalism has been identified as the “fastest route to prosperity, for promoting collective interests, ensuring protection against the negative”. However, collective development, both financial and human, is a key incentive in the growth of regionalism in the developing world.

Human security challenges, such as poverty, hunger, water scarcity, disease (HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, and hepatitis), natural disasters, environmental degradation, droughts and famine, are not only common in the SAARC member states but also have profound implications for social and economic development. Human security has proved to be the greatest impediment to peace and development in South Asia, and states can only overcome this massive challenge by committing themselves to joint ventures to address common threats. Due to the transnational and interconnected nature of human security concerns, states in South Asia depend on each other to tackle these problems effectively. For instance in 2008, a dam breaking in Nepal caused flooding of the Koshi River in Bihar, India. The landlocked states – Afghanistan, Bhutan and Nepal – depend not only on water and food from neighbouring states but also on access to seaports. For India to sustain its current level of economic development and to grow further, it needs continued sources of energy and for that it is reliant on its neighbours. Bhutan has been the biggest exporter of hydropower electricity to India, and New Delhi has shown interest in natural gas from Bangladesh and via Pakistan from Iran and Central Asia. Thus, the level of inter-dependence among the SAARC countries is on the rise.

Among other human security threats, climate change is seen to be a serious challenge faced by most SAARC members. Projected impacts of climate change show that melting glaciers

are likely to cause heavy floods in Bangladesh and Pakistan, and a severe shortage of water in South Asia, and may result in damage to agricultural economies in the region, thereby adding more people to the vicious cycle of poverty. Hussain (2008:157) emphasises that concurrent traditional and human insecurities in South Asia are making this region severely underdeveloped, placing a premium on rethinking the regional security model. The inter-dependent nature of various human security threats in South Asia demands a regional vision and action.

South Asian regionalism has been suffering from the bilateral tensions and differences between SAARC member states. The history of the region is filled with conflict such as that between India and Pakistan, which fought four wars between 1948 and 1999. It is therefore not surprising that South Asia is one of the most militarised regions of the world and home to millions of the poorest people in the world (Hussain 2006:236). According to data compiled by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), between 2005 and 2009, India ranked number two and Pakistan number ten in the list of the top-20 importers of arms in the world (SIPRI 2009 online). Consequently, the threat of a nuclear holocaust in South Asia is an everyday reality due to unstable Indo-Pak relations.

South Asian countries suffer from both bilateral and domestic disputes; however, the nature of security challenges has been changing. Security threats have also increased, from bilateral rivalry to nuclear proliferation, arms smuggling, drug and human trafficking, and terrorism (Richter & Wagner 1998:12). In addition, cross-border and domestic migration have created security challenges for some countries, especially India. Ghosh (1998:131) indicates that in South Asia people relocate mainly to protect their life or property, to avoid religious persecution, or to achieve ethnic and religious homogenisation. Ghosh did not mention the economic and environmental drivers of migration, which have been motivations in forcing tens of thousands of people to move from Nepal and Bangladesh to India. The cross-border migration of people in South Asia has often triggered bilateral tensions, such as between Bhutan and Nepal, and India and Bangladesh, and human security threats continue to be push-and-pull factors in increasing the displacement and migration of people.

The South Asian approach to regional security focuses on collective efforts addressing common human security challenges, but this process is not disconnected from the geo-politics of the region and traditional security threats. Thus SAARC, willingly or unwillingly, had to

address the controversial issue of terrorism. Initially the consensus to combat terrorism was confined only to certain regional agreements, but constant accusations of cross-border terrorism, primarily between India and Pakistan, forced the Association to implement anti-terrorism measures. SAARC, even though often faced with bilateral political hindrances, has since 2005 managed to move beyond consensus-building engagements through project implementation in certain areas. In this regard, it is significant to share the words of Sheel Kant Sharma (2010 online), Former Secretary General of SAARC :

The fundamental premise of regionalism among South Asian countries lies in the recognition that challenges confronting the region cannot be resolved through action in national domains alone. It is imperative to develop and forge regional cooperation in different areas, even though implementation would primarily have to be done nationally.

To external observers, SAARC is a tenuous creation. This is because most of them have focused their analysis of SAARC predominantly on the pre-implementation phase of the regional project, that is, on consensus-building. To make it clear, consensus-building is an ongoing process but initially, from 1985 to 2004/2005, the work of the body was limited only to the agenda-setting phase. In this thesis, the period after 2005 is labelled as the ‘SAARC implementation phase’ because the Association has been able to realise some of its action plans.

In a colloquial manner, many researchers and journalists continue to label SAARC as a ‘regional drama’, as was affirmed during the fieldwork undertaken for this study. Also, for some South Asian scholars, there is an unreal character about SAARC which is underlined by its inability to implement action plans by going beyond the regular round of summit meetings (Sharma 2007:x). Such views are not only misleading but also unfair because SAARC has not been seen through a framework measuring its performance vis-à-vis its very purpose, intentions and attempted actions. Mostly, a cost-benefit analysis has been applied to assess the progress of SAARC. What is needed is a comprehensive reappraisal of the Association’s progress to date. This thesis seeks to provide that.

1.1 Research questions and objectives

The central hypothesis of this thesis is that regional cooperation through both agreements and actions in areas of human security strengthens regionalism. As a result such collaborations have the potential to not only address pertinent human security issues, but also common

traditional security threats. Here, a case study of SAARC is conducted to argue this hypothesis.

It aims to present big-picture trends in economic, environmental, food, water and energy insecurities, as well as transnational crimes in South Asia. In response to recent debates on climate change in the SAARC region and outside, this thesis presents an account of major human security issues in connection to the likely implications of climate change for South Asia.

The thesis explores the inter-reliant nature of human security threats at the South Asian regional level – demanding greater cooperation through SAARC. It engages in critical analyses of regional initiatives that promote cooperation in human security areas in order to gain a better understanding of the Association, and to discover what the implications of regional cooperation in uncontroversial areas (the functionalist approach) are for regionalism in South Asia.

This study aims to work beyond the implications of the India-Pakistan conflict for regionalism in South Asia and attempts to arrive at a more realistic and balanced approach to studying regionalism through the window of SAARC's structure, actions and challenges.

The specific goals of this study are defined by the following key research questions:

- What has SAARC been doing to promote human and traditional security in the region?
- What have been the outcomes of the SAARC's implementation phase? To what extent have the external players, such as inter-governmental organisations and SAARC Observers, influenced the implementation phase?
- What are the implications of SAARC's expansion in terms of Afghanistan's membership and extra-regional observers?
- How have the policies of big and small members towards SAARC been transformed since its establishment?
- How does the functionalist approach of regionalism work in SAARC? Has this approach helped SAARC progress over the period of 25 years? Is functionalism by nature a slow process?
- Is regional cooperation on uncontroversial areas helping to reduce bilateral tensions?

- What are the constraints and opportunities for SAARC?
- What lessons can be drawn for SAARC from ASEAN?

1.2 Significance

The literature presents two extreme views on SAARC, one criticising the Association for its inability to tackle bilateral disputes and the other appreciating its limited progress (Rodrigo 2004:279). Overall, the majority of studies present a dismal picture of SAARC by labelling it a dysfunctional organisation (Bailes 2007b:1; Reed 1997:235). However, there are examples of studies finding some encouraging developments in SAARC with reference to cooperation in human security areas while finding the Association at an embryonic stage (Basrur 2005; Dash 2008:198).

To think of the SAARC's future in the area of regional security, it is important to evaluate its ongoing cooperation in several important areas to test a basic assumption of the Association. SAARC, like some other regional organisations, such as the Organisation of African Unity (present day African Union), decided to refrain from getting into the geopolitics of the region and adopted the functionalist approach to regionalism. Functionalism is based on an assumption that cooperation in low politics can provide space for engagement in high politics towards regional security (Reed 1997:244; Brar 2003:31; Morin 2008:4). This approach has been found unsuitable in the South Asian context because the implications of India-Pakistan rivalry for regionalism in this region cannot be ignored (Ahmed & Bhatnagar 2008; Brar 2003; Reed 1997). These studies have not investigated the pros and cons of functionalism in South Asia, especially with reference to other methods of cooperation, such as neo-functionalism, and through comparison with similar organisations.

There is a plethora of literature available on SAARC, but most of that has limitations. Firstly, there has been too much focus on economic cooperation in South Asia and its implications for SAARC (Burki 2005; De 2005; Lamberte 2005; Rana, S.S. 1997; Yasin & Khan 2006). This could be because after the EU, economic integration is often seen as the backbone of regionalism. Secondly, the literature has been limited to the analysis of the policies and issues of big players, such as Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan; thus a balanced approach has not been adopted to understand the role of each member state in the Association (Ahmed & Bhatnagar 2008; Jorgensen 2001:126; Kanesalingam 1993a:46; Thornton 1991:136). For

example, due to the India-Pakistan rivalry it is believed that SAARC has failed to promote regional cooperation (Basrur 2005:9; Misra 2004:30). Thirdly, the work of SAARC in a whole range of other areas, such as health, education, poverty alleviation, environmental security, et cetera, has not been analysed thoroughly. Fourthly, a compressive critique of the SAARC's programmes has not been conducted to understand its role vis-à-vis regional security, though in studies a correlation between cooperation in the areas of human security and regional peace has been identified (Balies 2007a:1; Bhargava, Bongartz & Sobhan 1995:12). Lastly, to date, a study has not presented a balanced analysis of SAARC by taking into consideration the views of both SAARC officials and outside experts.

The contemporary literature contains no discussion on whether or not cooperation in areas, such as terrorism, drug trafficking and human smuggling, along with free trade in the region are likely to provide South Asia with the much awaited first steps in regionalism. According to Bhargava et al. (1995:17), "Cooperation should be on what is feasible and practical" under existing circumstances in South Asia. Bailes (2007b:9) argues that regional security in South Asia does not have to be achieved through conventional ways and that "it is theoretically possible that new life might be breathed into SAARC itself by using it to pursue human security or functional security issues". This point will be closely examined.

With South Asian scholars and policymakers becoming increasingly apprehensive over the role of SAARC in creating a South Asian political and security community, insufficient attention is given to the work of the Association in addressing human security challenges. Not only for SAARC but also for many similar organisations, such as ASEAN, it has been relatively easier to reach a consensus on the uncontroversial areas of cooperation. In South Asia, through this scheme, it has been easier for SAARC to engage India and Pakistan in regional cooperation.

Politically, South Asia is not a permanently defined geographical entity because in 2007 Afghanistan became a member of SAARC. This suggests that as an organisation it is open to new members. The membership of Afghanistan offers some opportunities and challenges in relation to regional security in South Asia. So far, studies of SAARC have not diverted their attention from big players in the region to analysing the implications of including Afghanistan in the Association. This thesis attempts to fill an existing gap in the literature by

encompassing issues of regionalism and regional security in South Asia, and by underlining the role and concerns of the smaller South Asian countries.

SAARC conventions, declarations and policies are evidence of the fact that the Association has managed to not only develop a consensus in the uncontroversial areas but has also implemented worthwhile initiatives, such as the SAARC Development Fund, and the South Asian University. Often SAARC countries have united to raise their collective voice at international forums on issues endangering the human security of their people. For example, the SAARC members adopted a common position at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (SAARC 2007b:1). This thesis contends that issues of human security are equally crucial to state security.

Since SAARC has been in existence for over 26 years, it is opportune to evaluate its impact and take a fresh look at some of the challenges and prospects involved in South Asia's journey from "conflict to cooperation" (Sharma 2007:ix). This dissertation attempts to provide a first-hand and value-neutral perspective on SAARC and its role in promoting human security in South Asia. Therefore, it is hoped that it will prove useful for policymakers and researchers from the SAARC region and outside, as there has been a growing interest in SAARC and the economic potential of the region. This fact is also evident from the ever increasing number of SAARC Observers, namely from Australia, China, Myanmar (Burma), the EU, Japan, Iran, Mauritius, South Korea and the United States. Iran and China have also shown a keen interest in becoming permanent members of the Association.

1.3 Methodology

To address the key questions underpinning this thesis, it was deemed vital to directly engage with the SAARC Secretariat and its institutions. To achieve this, the researcher underwent an internship at the SAARC Secretariat based in Kathmandu during August-September 2009. During the stay there, all (eight) country directors/representatives and the Secretary General of the Association were interviewed.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the help of a semi-structured questionnaire (see Appendix 1). The list mentions only those respondents who have been attributed to in this thesis. The duration of interviews varied from 15 minutes to two hours, depending on the time

afforded by the interviewees. Prior to the interviews, research participants were provided with an information sheet outlining the project. A consent form was also provided to the interviewees in case they wanted to remain anonymous or preferred not to be recorded. Only those respondents who had given prior permission to be named in this thesis are listed (Appendix 2). In other cases only their affiliations are mentioned.

Other than the high-ranking officials at the SAARC Secretariat, a few members of the support staff were also interviewed, mostly informally. These people were considered worthwhile for the research because of their long affiliation with SAARC and because they were in a better position than rotational, bureaucrats were to sketch the developments in that organisation.

It was considered important also to visit some of the diplomatic missions of South Asian countries in Nepal, and in this regard, interviews were conducted with the members of Bangladeshi and Pakistani embassies in Kathmandu. In addition, the researcher interviewed a number of prominent academics, journalists and researchers with an eye to expanding the understanding of the Association and to finding out what civil society thought about South Asian regionalism. In total, 40 interviews were conducted during the fieldwork.

In Pakistan, during October-November 2009, the investigator interviewed representatives of SAARC agencies, namely the SAARC Human Resources Development Centre (SHRDC) and the SAARC Energy Centre, to explore how the vision of the Association in these areas is being implemented through specialised centres. The researcher also met the director of the SAARC Desk at Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to gain an insight into Pakistan's foreign policy towards SAARC.

Other than interviews of a select group of people, the fieldwork involved the collection of relevant primary data, such as the publications of SAARC, produced by either the SAARC Secretariat or SAARC regional centres. Over 50 original publications of SAARC, including SAARC declarations, conventions, meeting reports, research reports and evaluation reports, were collected. This is in addition to gathering some unpublished material on SAARC funding, projects in the pipeline, and project concept papers, much of which is not available through websites or university libraries.

1.4 Research limitations and challenges

The fieldwork preparations and execution were not free from hiccups. Initially, a visit to India was included in the fieldwork plan, but this idea had to be dropped after three successive abortive attempts to obtain an Indian visa. The fieldwork was also supposed to be conducted in Sri Lanka, but its security situation prevented this. Due to some unavoidable circumstances, the researcher was also unable to visit Bangladesh for the fieldwork.

The security situation was alarming in Pakistan during the fieldwork due to political instability, terrorism and the war against terrorism. It took unduly long to commute within the city due to the presence of numerous checkpoints. After the terrorist attack on the International Islamic University in Islamabad on 20 October 2009, all academic institutions were closed for about a week in the last quarter of October 2009. This also posed a great challenge to the plan as the researcher could not interact with academics as per schedule and had to either reschedule or cancel some of the appointments.

During the fieldwork, persistent attempts were made to obtain maximum possible information from the participants, but some interviewees were guarded. This was the case with certain diplomats from SAARC countries. To solve the problem, the researcher arranged a number of informal meetings with the officials at the SAARC Secretariat, particularly prior to the longer interviews.

1.5 Scope

It is not an easy task to define South Asia. According to Hewitt (1992:2), “the territorial dimension” of this region is controversial. For different purposes, different countries, historians and organisations have perceived South Asia differently depending on the context in question. However, due to the existence of SAARC, South Asia is identified by its membership in international relations, and this, too, is the case with this thesis.

It is important to emphasise that the focus of this thesis is regionalism, and not the process of regionalisation, which is led by non-state actors. There is a plethora of literature on regionalisation led by the non-government sector, often labelled as the ‘unofficial SAARC’ in South Asia, particularly with reference to the role of civil society organisations towards regionalism in South Asia.

Although in SAARC the spectrum of cooperation is very wide, it needs to be stressed that throughout this thesis the primary focus will be on areas where SAARC has taken action or where its agenda looks promising for meaningful regional cooperation, such as economic security, environmental security, human welfare, terrorism, and transnational crime. This underscores the reason some issues are prioritised over others.

In this thesis, a multidisciplinary approach has been used to present a comprehensive study of SAARC. Two overarching themes of national-regional significance (economic security and human welfare) and two areas of national-regional-global prominence (environmental security and transnational crime) have been selected for in-depth analyses of the steps taken by SAARC in these areas. The issues of climate change vis-à-vis environmental degradation and the international war against terrorism in Afghanistan and to some extent in Pakistan have made these problems global, as far as causes and remedies are concerned.

1.6 Thesis structure

This thesis highlights the significance of economic, food, water and energy insecurities in South Asia, especially in relation to climate change which is an emerging phenomenon and demands the attention of policymakers. Therefore, this issue will be an interwoven theme in the analysis of human security issues and will be covered in various chapters to follow.

There is an abundance of opinions on region, regional integration, regionalism, and regionalisation. There is no commonly adopted and understood definition of these concepts. The same can be said of ongoing debates on state security versus human security – the latter being seen as a comprehensive approach to protective and developmental aspects of human wellbeing. Proponents of this concept believe that human security threats, such as hunger, disease, unemployment, environmental degradation, water security, et cetera, are as crucial to state security as any external security challenges. Chapter 2 presents a critique of key concepts and trends in relation to the issues under discussion, particularly regionalism and regional security. This chapter aims to present a review of the literature on regionalism and regional security in South Asia to identify shortcomings in the existing body of knowledge.

Prior to an appraisal of regional cooperation in South Asia, it is vital to be acquainted with the political and security landscape of the region. Both intra-state security challenges and bilateral

disputes have implications for regional security. Increasing defence expenditure has been the by-product of domestic and bilateral tensions in South Asia. Chapter 3 aims to introduce South Asia from some major perspectives, particularly the security challenges at intra and inter-state levels. Considering the focus of the study, this chapter explores the definitional issues relating to the region called 'South Asia' because there are complexities in various circles, mainly academic, on the demarcation of this region.

For any discussion of regionalism in South Asia, it is imperative to trace the motives of individual states and their early attitudes and reactions towards SAARC to find out how such intentions have been transformed over the course of roughly 26 years. Chapter 4 focuses on these aspects. Understanding the organisation is crucial for an investigation into the role of SAARC in promoting cooperation amongst the countries of South Asia. This chapter aims to construct a basic framework for the following chapters, and thus, the Association is comprehensively explored. Hence, beyond the evolution of SAARC, this chapter focuses on SAARC's agenda and institutional framework. There is a critical analysis of SAARC's informal approach to dealing with bilateral issues, especially via sideline or informal discussions. This chapter also presents analysis of the political, economic and organisational challenges facing SAARC.

Economic development is vital for all SAARC countries to both individually and collectively address their human security challenges, such as poverty and unemployment. SAARC realised this, which is why the Association has been vigorously promoting its agenda on economic cooperation in South Asia. By promoting intra-regional trade, South Asia is likely to enjoy the fortunes of free trade, an increase in productive capacity, employment generating opportunities, and, most importantly, development. Chapter 5 comprehensively looks into the dynamics of regional economic cooperation and SAARC's free trade agenda vis-à-vis political economy in South Asia. It also presents a critique of the way SAARC has been promoting free trade in South Asia through trade facilitating measures, such as infrastructural development and transport connectivity, and by expanding the scope of cooperation through trade in energy and services.

It has already been pointed out that to address common human security threats, SAARC members are reliant on each other – a fact which has been borne out repeatedly by natural disasters, such as floods. When it comes to environmental issues, such as water supply,

natural disasters, environmental degradation and climate change, the SAARC countries are inter-dependent. Chapter 6 presents an analysis of environmental security in South Asia to illustrate the regional implications of certain environmental issues. A critique of the Association's frameworks and actions, both at regional and global levels, has been presented to explore the level of cooperation and its direction.

Since its inception, the issue of human welfare has been central to the work of SAARC. The body has organised many conventions and in almost all of the SAARC summit declarations the urgent need for addressing the needs of marginalised segments has been stressed. SAARC has been implementing projects in these areas mainly through collaboration with non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Regional cooperation has progressed through initiatives in these areas, particularly through projects on poverty alleviation, hunger relief, education and health. Chapter 7 sketches the threats to human welfare in South Asia to present an understanding of how well SAARC has tackled those issues. The scope of this chapter is limited to SAARC's work in addressing the grave challenges of poverty alleviation, food security, health security, and education.

Transnational crime, particularly drug smuggling, human trafficking and terrorism have collectively created instability in South Asia. It has been a massive task dealing with terrorists in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Since 2007, terrorist groups have stretched their influence to areas outside the tribal belt of Pakistan – bordering Afghanistan – into the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Chapter 8 presents an overview of transnational crimes in South Asia. The analysis incorporates SAARC's agenda and programmes in security matters. In terms of transnational crimes, the critique is limited to regional cooperation against terrorism, drug smuggling and human trafficking.

Apart from studying trends in South Asia, this thesis explores lessons for SAARC from ASEAN. A case study of ASEAN is the central theme of Chapter 9, to provide a comparison with the progress of SAARC. It is deemed that ASEAN provides lessons for SAARC. The ASEAN members have collectively managed to address not only issues such as the economic crisis and other challenges posed by globalisation, but have also been progressing towards becoming a stronger political and economic community. SAARC can learn from ASEAN's projects in both human and traditional security spheres. Accordingly, in this chapter, both organisations are compared with reference to commonalities and differences vis-à-vis

achievements and challenges in the areas of political and security community, economic cooperation, conflict management, and organisational development.

This study concludes with a discussion of the achievements of SAARC to date, in both human and traditional security areas, and the challenges facing the organisation. In this regard, a comprehensive argument is presented on the functionalist approach to regionalism in South Asia via SAARC. This is done with the purpose of contributing to an understanding of the political future of regionalism in South Asia. The conclusion presents a number of general recommendations to enhance the progress of SAARC.

CHAPTER TWO

REGIONALISM, SECURITY AND REGIONAL SECURITY: KEY TRENDS AND CONCEPTS

2.1 Introduction

In the aftermath of World War I, to develop a collective security apparatus, countries from across the world embarked on the endeavour of multilateralism that led to the creation of the League of Nations in 1919, which later became the United Nations (UN) in 1945. Since then both global and regional institution building has progressed on parallel paths. Initially considered a phenomenon exclusive to the developed world, since the early 1960s, a rise in regionalism has been observed in the developing regions. This is considered to be the result of enhanced economic development via free trade deals. There has been a proliferation of regional organisations, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

The literature is vast on subjects covered in this thesis, especially on regionalism and regional security. Therefore, in this chapter, discussion of some areas has been limited to literature directly relevant to this dissertation. The major themes under discussion are regionalism, security, human security, and regional security. There is a greater focus on regionalism, human security, and regional security in South Asia. Each theme is looked at from global and regional perspectives, with particular reference to South Asia. This chapter examines some of the relevant classical theories and contemporary literature, but also some studies conducted by South Asian scholars that further aid in the understanding of the issues related to this thesis. The chapter is structured as a series of generic themes along with analyses in the South Asian context. Significant to this thesis is a generic understanding of ‘security’ and some of the related themes, such as human security, and regional security.

2.2 Regionalism

To understand regionalism, it is crucial to understand the process of multilateralism, especially from the historical perspective. The term ‘multilateralism’ was introduced in 1928 in the aftermath of World War I and its first definition was provided in a 1945 US foreign

policy in which it described this phenomenon as the “governance of many countries” (Powell 2003:5). In contrast, Keohane (1999:731) provides a comprehensive understanding of multilateralism as “the practice of co-ordinating national policies in groups of three or more states, through ad hoc arrangements or by means of institutions.” Multilateralism, therefore, has many facets depending on its level and objectives, as there are both similarities and differences between multilateralism at global and regional levels.

A milestone in multilateralism was the creation of the UN in 1945 – the time when the world needed a multilateral forum for peace and security. The UN has been at the centre stage of multilateralism in the world. The process of multilateralism is seen as the *modus operandi* of global politics (Powell 2003:3). Due to the bipolarity of the world, the evolution of the UN during the Cold War period faced hurdles. After the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, however, the ideals of global order through multilateralism gained momentum (Thakur 1995:22). Consequently, the UN member states started to believe more in the power of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) due to its strong reaction against the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq in 1990. In contrast, since the hegemonic role played by the US has been disturbing the global order due to its unilateral operations, for example in Iraq (2003), faith in the power of the UN to maintain global order has been in decline. Scholars are of the view that if major powers do not abide by the principles of multilateralism in their use of force, many other countries will follow the same precedent – leading to further deterioration of confidence in the ability of international institutions to maintain global order (Newman, Thakur & Tirman 2006:2). Irrespective of the criticism of the UN, the Libya episode has proved that, as of now, it is the UNSC which has the power to intervene in its member states to stop violation of human rights. On the other hand, it has been difficult and often impossible for regional organisations to react against their member state, for example, in situations of severe human rights violations by a government.

According to the history of multilateralism, it first emerged as regionalism. The initial waves of regionalism surfaced with the protectionist trend in the 1930s. In the Americas, during the 1930s and 1940s, because of the US interventions through the Pan American Union, some agreements were reached in the areas of peace and security. In 1948, the Pan American Union became the Organisation of American States (OAS) and this gave a boost to regionalism in the Americas through institutions, such as the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, and the Inter-American Development Bank (Best & Christiansen 2008:438). In Europe, regionalism

has progressed more than in any other region of the world. The process was initiated through the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951. However, since 1945 the gradual process of integration has created the EU – the grouping which has strengthened cooperation in economic, social, political, foreign policy and security sectors. In Africa, the earlier traces of regional agreement are found in the form of the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), founded in 1889 through the Customs Union Convention between the British Colony of Cape of Good Hope and the Orange Free State Boer Republic. However, SACU was transformed in 1910 through an agreement among Basutoland (Lesotho), Bechuanaland (Botswana), and Swaziland.¹ In contrast, the Asian countries were slow to react to the trend of regional arrangements and it was only in 1961 that the forum of Southeast Asia was formed by Malaya, the Philippines and Indonesia. The association was transformed into Maphilindo in 1963, but the scope of cooperation remained dormant until the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was set up in 1967.

In the late 1950s, regionalism focused on trade liberalisation between the neighbouring countries with the intention of enhancing benefits from intra-regional trade and reducing the risk of inter-state conflicts (Langenhove 2004:7). For two decades after World War II, through the 1950s and the 1960s, regionalism was perceived by major powers as an important alliance for achieving their security, peace and development objectives – particularly in Europe. For example, the European Common Market (1950s–1970s) was clearly a product of economic liberalisation, promoting free trade among the members (Molchanov 2005:431). Thus, regionalism has different forms, from loose to strong alliances, such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), a flexible body, and NATO, a strong military and political alliance (Haas 1956:239). Up until the 1960s, regionalism is considered to have had a steady evolution. It was in the 1960s and the 1970s that due to lack of progress in terms of regional integration in many regions, such as Africa and Asia, scholars began to focus mainly on European integration (Lombaerde et al. 2009:5). In the late 1960s, the enthusiasm for regionalism waned in many regions, for example in Southeast Asia, partly due to limited or no impact, and also because of theorists preferring interdependence and cooperation at the global level (Schulz, Soderbaum & Ojendal 2001b:3).

¹ Then, South West Africa (Namibia) was a de facto member of SACU because of being administered by South Africa.

In the post-Cold War era, the study of regionalism started to receive greater attention in the fields of international relations and economics due to the emergence of numerous new regional organisations, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), and revitalisation of existing ones, for example ASEAN. The revival of regionalism occurred as a result of a decline in the effects of global systems, in particular the UN and the North-South Dialogue, on regional and national levels (Vayrynen 2003:28). This was the time when developing countries began to realise that their concerns would be better addressed through regional forums rather than solely through global bodies, such as the UN or WTO. The following excerpt from Ahmad (2002:187) provides a clear picture of motivations behind the moves for multilateralism in the developing world:

In the present-day unipolar world, an individual developing country acting alone cannot but be at the mercy of the international power structure. The policies and programmes of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and regional banks are derived essentially from the dictates of the only superpower (i.e. USA) and its allies (the other developed countries), which provide the major share of the funds of those agencies and, hence, control the larger voting power in their management.

The creation, expansion and deepening of the European Union (EU) in the 1990s, attracted the attention of researchers and policymakers in other parts of the world. Consequently, all countries of the world are members of at least one regional organisation (Lamberte 2005:3). According to Fawcett (2004:230), it is also because “geographically, ideationally and functionally” the process of regionalism is suitable to address the issues of “regional governance”. Also, through regional forums, member states promote a collective agenda at the regional level through agreements covering different combinations of economic, social, political, environmental, and security concerns (Best & Christiansen 2008:436). European regionalism has managed to breathe new life into many existing regional organisations, such as the Mercado Común del Sur (MERCOSUR) or the Common Southern Market in South America, ASEAN, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Previously, excluded members got the opportunity to join existing regional organisations, such as South Africa in SADC, and Vietnam, Laos, Burma and Cambodia in ASEAN (Schulz, Soderbaum & Ojendal 2001b:1). Since then, regional organisations have grown in scope by either expanding membership or by establishing working relationships with extra-regional countries and organisations.

This wave of regionalism is often referred as the ‘new regionalism’, the process that is still evolving and is different from the regionalism of the first half of the twentieth century. The new regionalism is a response to global structural changes or globalisation and thus is happening in more regions of the world than ever before. Developing countries have been enthusiastically participating in the current movement of regionalism (Fortin 2005:iii), liberalisation and expansion, which is complementing global trade regulations (Low 2003:66). This process is defined as a “heterogeneous, comprehensive, multidimensional phenomenon, which involves state, market and society actors and covers economic, cultural, political, security and environmental aspects” (Schulz, Soderbaum & Ojendal 2001b:4). Therefore, new regionalism has moved far beyond the confines of old regionalism, which was limited to free trade agreements and certain collective security mechanisms (Langenhove 2004:8). Before this discussion on regionalism focuses its attention on new regionalism, it is pertinent to understand the generic idea of regionalism through the following definition by Frost (2008:15):

Regionalism connotes a political movement based on awareness of and loyalty to a region, combined with dedication to a regionwide agenda of some kind. It provides a way of filtering knowledge and grouping perspectives on the rest of the world. The suffix (“-ism”) suggests a conscious set of related intellectual ideas or ideology capable of forming the basis of a political movement or an intellectual trend. It implies top-down, coordinated action on the part of governments based on some vision or set of ideas.

There are different interpretations of regionalism provided by theorists and actors, which makes it an elusive term. The above definition by Frost captures the essence of regionalism; it does not tell us why this process evolves because for him regionalism is more of an ideology than a process, even though he does refer to “coordinated action” towards reaching collective objectives. According to Ethier (1998b:1216), regionalism is a process comprised of three possibilities. Firstly, it is a response to perceived failings of the multilateral trading system at the global level. Secondly, the primary goal is to adapt to multilateral developments. Lastly, regionalism promotes the successful entry of member states into global trading arrangements. Ethier’s understanding of the process of regionalism is incomplete due to its focus merely on economic cooperation; however, regionalism can be considered much more than that, since it promotes cooperation in social, cultural, political and security areas. In a traditional view, regionalism is limited to organised forms of cooperation between neighbouring countries of a particular region, and is solely driven by the ambitions of political leaders.

Today's new regionalism differs because of the involvement of multiple actors, both public and private, and due to its multidimensional focus comprising trade and economic integration, environment, social policy, security, and democracy (Lama 2008b:109; Vayrynen 2003:41). According to Ethier (1998a), new regionalism has the following characteristics which are neither exclusive nor universal in application, as they vary from region to region: The new regionalism typically involves one or more small countries cooperating with a bigger country or a regional power; dramatic moves to free trade in the region are not featured; the liberalisations are generally achieved by smaller countries with intentions to enhance regional cooperation; the agreements tend to be one-sided; regional arrangements often lead to deep integration in the region; and the participants of a regional bloc are neighbours. An ideal example of the new regionalism is the EU, which has managed to invent a model that incorporates both political and economic integration. Present day Europe is comprised of multi-level governance, which has led to a devolution of power across the region by virtue of international legal institutions of the EU (Langenhove 2004:8). The EU, being at an advanced stage of institutionalisation, has supra-national bodies. However, according to Fawcett (2004:433), regionalism "can operate both above and below the level of the state." The process of regionalism depends on the nature of regional organisations because in some cases, members do not aim for a supra-national regional body by limiting cooperation to certain areas, such as trade.

Free trade agreements (FTAs), either at bilateral or multilateral levels, are aimed at increasing the flow of investments between and among the stakeholders (Dubey 2005:22). Presently, all countries of the world are parties to at least one regional trade agreement (RTA), but to maximise the benefits of trade, many countries have signed multiple RTAs at sub-regional, regional and extra-regional levels. With the fresh wave of regionalism in the 1990s, RTAs have become a common feature of international trade. According to the WTO's online database on RTAs, there are currently 210 RTAs in force and another 39 waiting to be launched (WTO 2011). Due to a widespread web of RTAs and an increase in the volume of trade through RTAs, countries that previously favoured a global approach to trade agreements, namely Australia, India, Japan, Singapore, New Zealand and South Korea, have also joined the trend of signing RTAs. According to an estimate, trade through RTAs

accounted for half of the world trade in 2005 (Mashayekhi, Puri & Ito 2005:3).² In many cases, the scope of RTAs has advanced to cover other areas, such as services, investments, and so on. Hence, Fortin (2005:iii) believes that “regionalism has gained a renewed dynamism and is no doubt here to stay as an element of the broader trading system.”

In most parts of the world, regionalism has been embraced as the fastest and most viable route to prosperity; for promoting collective interests; ensuring protection against negative impacts of globalisation; and enhancing security through greater interdependence among the member states (Rajan 2005:1). Currently, intra-regional trade is on an upward trend in ASEAN and MERCOSUR, but in the EU and NAFTA the volume of trade within the regions has been declining. According to a publication of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), intra-regional trade among the EU members decreased to 25 percent in 2010 after fluctuations experienced between 1999 and 2003. Similar is the case of NAFTA where intra-regional trade has declined to less than seven percent in 2007 (OECD 2010:80).

Certain developments at global multilateral levels have also increased the interest in regionalism and regional economic cooperation in the developing world. There is an increasing understanding in the under-developed world that they need to work collectively to have their voices heard at global multilateral forums. In 2001, the WTO’s Doha Round was stalled due to major disagreements between the developed and the under-developed world. The reason for this deadlock on trade negotiations was that the world’s major trading powers, such as the US, the EU, Australia, Canada and Japan, have been refusing to make big cuts to their farm subsidies. On the other hand, these countries have been demanding the developing countries to open up their services sector, particularly banking, education, telecommunication, and healthcare (Jacques 2006 online). Most of the developing countries have been cautiously progressing on the path to development by refusing to expose their services sector to measures taken at the global multilateral level. The post-Doha discussions have given more prominence to free trade agreements in many regions across the world. It is therefore expected that RTAs will play a crucial role in promoting trade liberalisation at global levels.

² The following are some of the examples of implemented RTAs: ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA), Asia Pacific Trade Agreement (APTA), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), European Economic Area (EEA), North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA).

In today's world, numerous states find it challenging to individually address some urgent issues (such as traditional and human security), hence, they tend to pool their national sovereignty, fully or partially, to address global, regional and national challenges. Paradoxically, this helps to protect the role of the state and the power of the government in an increasingly interdependent world. Free trade agreements are normally seen as a key building block to economic integration at regional levels; however, there are other stages from a preferential trade area onwards, such as preferential trade, free trade area, customs union, common market, and economic union (Lamberte 2005:5). It is believed by Schulz, Soderbaum and Ojendal in their joint work (2001b:10) that economic integration does lead to political integration in the region and ideally this happens when a pure supranational body is created to produce and control policies at regional levels, such as those relating to economic, political and security issues, among other things. Lamberte (2005:4) defines economic integration as a condition whereby "goods, services, and factors of production can flow freely and financial markets are unified among countries within a region."

There are both economic and political determinants of regionalism. As far as the economic indicators are concerned, as identified by Lama (2008:109), the level of economic development and asymmetry among the member states is crucial because better-off countries in a regional arrangement have more to offer to and gain from a regional organisation. The level of interdependence in the region is another very important factor. Greater interdependence tends to increase the scope of regionalism; therefore, often regional organisations promote cooperation in areas that strengthen interdependence among the member states. The political determinants are: firstly, the level of homogeneity among the member states and political will. It is important to identify the level of political commitment to regional cooperation in order to measure the success of a regional organisation since the response of political leadership to regional policies is a reflection of national interests. The second determinant is the relations of member states with global powers; and the final determinant is the efficiency of regional institutions with reference to collective benefits (Lama 2008b:109). As states become more integrated on the basis of cooperation addressing mutual challenges, the cost of breaking away from such collaboration grows (Dunne 2005:193).

Now, it is important to distinguish regional cooperation from regional integration. Regional cooperation refers to policy measures that are jointly undertaken by a group of countries

under the umbrella of a regional organisation to achieve returns that are higher in comparison to pursuing such goals unilaterally. Regional integration, on the other hand, is the integration of the economies of countries participating in a regional organisation (Lamberte 2005:4). However, there can be different stages of integration that are practically achieved. In simple terms, regional integration has been viewed as a process of “social transformation” initiated by high-level cooperation between member states (Langenhove 2004:7). Therefore, regional integration involves much more than the mere integration of economies through greater intra-regional trade or a customs union because the process also aims at transforming all relevant policies to remove obstacles to development at the regional level. Such a transformation would require a political union so as to address all socio-economic and global matters – jointly through a regional forum.

It is pertinent to expand on the notion of integration. There are two central arguments on functionalism as presented by Mitrany (1966:134-135). First of all, political differences are a source of conflict among nations, and states can address their contentious issues by setting up international “functional” organisations to promote dialogue, CBMs and cooperation in other areas. Secondly, he believes that economic integrations will pave the way for political unity. According to Mitrany (1966:134-135), the organisation should be managed by technical experts and not just by diplomats and bureaucrats. Functionalism refers to a limited arrangement of cooperation among the states and it is restricted to certain areas because member states only agree to cooperate in those supposedly workable areas (Best & Christiansen 2008:436). According to Dash (2008:7), functionalism suggests cooperation beginning in the areas of “low politics” (technical, social and economic areas) has potential to bring about a greater level of political cooperation which could in the long run pave the way for a supranational organisation among the nation-states (stakeholders).

Functionalism, though practised widely by regional institutions, such as ASEAN and SAARC, is not free from criticism because of its deterministic solution or the major assumption of cooperation in low politics providing space for collaboration in high politics, such as regional security. On the other hand, this approach to cooperation is seen as a realistic way of engaging traditional rivals at multilateral levels. Particularly, in regions faced with bilateral disputes, functionalism was seen as the most viable route for regionalism. In the case of Africa, Nweke (1987:133) writes that states made compromises through the Lagos Plan of Action in 1980 to restore their commitment to “functionalism”. In addition, developing

countries engage in regional trading pacts to “build strategic and political alliances”, which is a reflection of functionalism (Morin 2008:4).

Theories on regional integration take us to the next phase called ‘neo-functionalism’. According to Haas (1970:610), the chief exponent of neo-functionalism, in the light of this theory integration, is defined as “the process whereby political actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations, and political activities toward a new and larger centre, whose institutions ... demand jurisdiction over the pre-existing states.” Neo-functionalism tends to give answers to questions, such as why nations are prepared to limit their sovereignty, and what the conditions and reasons are for states to enter partnerships with neighbouring states. In the light of neo-functionalist theory, the key actors in regional integration are national and regional elites, political parties, pressure groups and supranational institutions (Dash 2008:8). The theory of neo-functionalism attempts to address deficiencies of functionalist theory by pointing out the key actors in the process of integration.

An influential school of integration theory is intergovernmentalism that stems from structural realism and postulates that unitary states are the central actors in an international system, aiming to maximise their national interests. The individual states tend to collaborate with other states only when their national interests are compatible with that of other states. According to Dash (2008:11), as per intergovernmentalism, regional integration involves “a series of bargains” among the heads of state in a region. As intergovernmentalism is about national interests of countries involved, policymakers tend to carefully negotiate with other stakeholders to find a common ground for cooperation with countries in their region, and at no point do member states agree to decisions against their national interests. According to Haas (1956:241), “participation in international organisations is regarded by policy-makers as a means for the achievement of national policy aims.” Therefore, the nature of the external relations, either bilateral or multilateral, does not matter, as states focus on the benefits of cooperation for their country.

In addition, increased interaction and integration can also give rise to conflicts, dominance of a particular regional power, exploitation and misallocation of resources (Schulz, Soderbaum & Ojendal 2001b:7). However, at the same time, supremacy of a big country can be benign, which is the case of Indonesia in ASEAN. Regionalism has to be a very carefully designed

and implemented process. With reference to regional conflicts, a study of regional blocs has found the following two patterns: rivalry between two larger states under regional umbrellas (Germany and the UK in the EU; India and Pakistan in SAARC), or one dominant country in the region (the USA in North America and Australia in the Pacific Islands Forum) (Schulz, Soderbaum & Ojendal 2001a:257). It is a debatable point because big players are not always exploitative in regional organisations as they also offer economic and human resources, and leadership to promote regionalism. Some examples of this are the leading role being played by Indonesia in ASEAN, and by Australia in the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF).

Liberal IR theory, as discussed by Dunne (2005:193), points out that in the post-war period liberals were mainly concerned about the individual states' inability to cope with the process of "modernisation". According to Mitrany (1966:76), multilateral cooperation is required in order to address common financial and security challenges of states. It seems this has mostly been well understood by smaller states, as more of them show deep commitment to regionalism. According to Tin (2006:304), "No small country can prosper outside the framework of regional cooperation and integration. Small countries cannot make their voice heard unless they band together." The Cairns Group is an interesting example of a mixed group of countries – developed and developing; and bigger and smaller – such as, Australia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Pakistan and Indonesia.³

Though for different reasons, rich or poor, big or small, all countries have found regionalism beneficial for their socio-economic development, and peace and security in their regions (Tin 2006:305). In general, countries have realised that they cannot act in isolation, and that the best way to cope with the challenges posed by globalisation is through membership of regional organisations, such as the EU, the African Union, the Arab League, OAS, NAFTA, ASEAN, SAARC, et cetera. With reference to ASEAN, the member states had a common threat perception – the fear of China – and wanted to have a joint policy of collaboration with the US to balance their intra-regional affairs. For the ASEAN member states, it has been about maintaining balance between their relationships with the extra-regional powers, and with this aim they joined the South East Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO), the Asia and the Pacific Council, and now they have their own mechanism in the form of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) (Rathus 2010:18). As Rathus (2010:18) argued, with the increase in

³ The Cairns Group is an organisation of 19 agricultural exporting countries accounting for one-fourth of the world's agricultural exports.

the influence of China in the 1990s, the countries in the Southeast Asian region were forced to readjust their extra-regional balance. In this context, the importance of Asia's trans-regional institutions, such as the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), established in 1996, is likely to grow.

There are, however, a range of challenges, both state and human security, that could well be tackled through regionalism; therefore, it deserves a high priority in national-level policymaking (ADB 2008:13). This is related to the functional viewpoint of regionalism, which holds that regional cooperation should concentrate on technical and basic functional areas of cooperation in mutually defined sectors. This approach may reduce costs, avoid conflicts regarding distribution of benefits among the member states, and generate visible gains in sectors such as transport and communication, water, energy, agriculture, education and training, environmental security and so on (Schulz, Soderbaum & Ojendal 2001b:9). Vayrynen (2003:27) argues that the driving force for functionalist regionalism comes from cooperation on the economy, environment and social welfare. In effect, the functionalist approach provides greater space for cooperation in human security areas. An example of the success of functionalism is of the improvement in relations between Argentina and Brazil through economic cooperation via MERCOSUR (Burki 2005:204). The bilateral ties improved to the extent, mainly via free trade, that both countries abandoned their nuclear ambitions through the Brazilian-Argentine Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials – the initiative much appreciated by the United Nations (UN 2011a online). There is a similar hope, albeit rather vague, that South Asian regionalism will diffuse tensions among its members while promoting human security.

Addressing common problems has been the backbone of regional multilateralism because in most cases member organisations of regional institutions face similar challenges, such as poverty, food security, and certain transnational crimes. The impacts of regionalism are visible than ever before, as Fawcett (2004:431) presents:

The regional momentum has proved unstoppable, constantly extending into new and diverse domains. Whether in reaching out to AIDS victims in Africa, launching free trade areas, building democracy in Central America, providing post-conflict services and support in war and disaster zones, shaping responses to terrorism or fashioning new institutions in Central Asia, regional initiatives – from civil society networks and NGOs at one level, to trade alliances and formal state-based institutions at another – play out roles that have a daily impact upon peoples and states, softening the contours of globalisation and state power.

Nonetheless, the above expression of Fawcett presents a rather rosy picture of regionalism because in many cases the fruits of regional cooperation are yet to be tasted, especially in the developing regions. He further argues that, regionalism in developing countries lacks capacity and resources, especially institutional. For example, there are limitations in the mandate of the organisations because of “high priority to principles like sovereignty and non-interference” (Fawcett 2004:443). It could be because regionalism in developing regions suffers from states being in the process of nation-state building, especially in the post-colonial era, and due to bilateral disputes or tensions. Therefore, there are many parallels among the charters of regional organisations in developing regions, particularly in the case of ASEAN, OAU, and SAARC. In the case of OAU, Ghana has been pushing for supra-nationalism through defence cooperation but others have deemed that premature for the organisation by preferring the ongoing incremental approach of functionalism (Nweke 1987:135).

As presented in the above discussion, regional organisations are established due to a variety of reasons, such as common external threat perceptions or traditional security concerns, collective human security problems, and for forming a united front against the negative implications of globalisation, and economic cooperation. In terms of the benefits of regionalism, regional organisations have been in a better position to particularly address human security threats. With limited membership, it has been easier for most of the regional bodies to reach consensus on both contentious and uncontroversial issues because smaller groups are relatively easier to manage. Nonetheless, regional institutions are less developed in comparison to national and global institutions; however, they have flourished by virtue of a common regional identity and a collective agenda. In addition, some regional institutions are immature and have not moved beyond the consensus-building stage.

2.3 Regional security

A generic understanding of the term ‘security’ is crucial for understanding regional security. The definition of ‘security’ is highly contested but there is a general understanding that it implies ‘freedom from threats’. However, there remains contention on the focus of security – whether it should be on individual, national or global security (Baylis 2005:300). In addition, there remains a security dilemma for many countries, especially with reference to external security threats: Should any threats be tackled before they reach our country or after? This is

again linked to diverse ways in which the concept of 'security' is defined and understood at state levels.

With increasing debate involving different schools of thought, the concept of security has been divided into various types, such as traditional and non-traditional. The concept of traditional security has been defined by Hussain (2008:158) as exclusively aiming to safeguard national identity and border security. Thus, security of this nature is the prime obligation of states or governments (Baylis 2005:302). State security concerns can take other forms apart from military aggression, such as the inflow of refugees causing a burden not only on the state economy but also on internal security including law and order. In addition, there is the issue of environmental pollution ignoring natural boundaries, and the shortage of natural resources (water, food, etc.) causing prices to go up thus leading to conflicts (Walpuski 1999:25). It has also been suggested that traditional or military security is being given priority in the state security agenda because states tend to consider external threats more dangerous compared to internal security challenges (Najam 2004). This conception has changed somewhat in different parts of the world where states depend on their armed forces to counter internal security threats, such as terrorism and secessionist movements. In addition, even if the states are concerned about human security, these do not feature in overall state security policies where the focus remains on armed threats, including terrorism.

Scholars from across the world have attempted to expand the limited scope of state security by extending attention from external security threats to intra-state challenges. This endeavour has introduced many new concepts into debates on state security, such as that of comprehensive security and the evolving concept of non-traditional security (Caballero-Anthony 2009; Evans 1994). The concept of comprehensive security is a response to the notion of state security. It covers a range of issues falling under both state and human security, such as terrorism, religious fundamentalism, dependence on oil and gas (energy security), nationalism, proliferation of nuclear weapons, rogue states, poverty, over population, environmental degradation, transnational crime and violation of human rights (Haack 2004:2). The meaning of 'security' has been expanded by including political, economic, social, and environmental issues, in addition to the traditional or military aspect of security (Baylis 2005).

The fundamental notion of security has been continuously evolving and extending from local to national, to regional and global security, as well as from traditional to non-traditional and human security issues (Caballero-Anthony 2009; Hussain 2008:158). However, the meaning and scope of security have been contested at all levels (Bhardwaj & Hossain 2001:25). In the last five to six decades, the concept of 'security' has been expanded due to the intensity of internal security threats faced by states, in particular human security challenges. Human security issues of economic, food, water and environmental security are becoming more severe in terms of human cost (Caballero-Anthony 2009:306).

Security debates, at least in the scholarly literature, are not limited to the protection of borders of any country or region. However, in military terms, the key goal has always been to secure borders, national or regional, with the purpose of defending the state from external threats (Najam 2003:59). Conversely, the notion of human security demands attention to non-traditional security challenges thus diverting focus from traditional security. Commonly, now, security is viewed as a multidimensional and multilevel concept that addresses a range of state security and human security issues (Bhardwaj & Hossain 2001:26). Thus states should focus on security that liberates citizens "from the state of nature and guarantees their survival, freedom and identity" (Dahal & Pandey 2005:III). This more recent conception adds new dimensions to the security debate.

At this juncture, it is important to highlight that in this thesis there is greater emphasis on notions of human security, which is different from non-traditional security. However, being an under-developed concept, non-traditional security has some parallels with human security, for example its emphasis on human welfare related issues of poverty, energy security, water security, food security and so on. For Yun (2007), other than the transnational crime of illegal drugs, human security seems to have amalgamated into non-traditional security. Caballero-Anthony (2009:306) broadly defines non-traditional security as non-military sources of threats to the well-being and survival of people, such as climate change, infectious diseases, human trafficking, drug smuggling, and terrorism. Despite its merits, this definition of non-traditional security is debatable in the South Asian context due to the ongoing war against terrorist groups in Afghanistan and the bordering tribal areas of Pakistan, where militaries from 43 countries are engaged in what they call a "war on terror". Apart from civilian casualties, the war has caused millions to suffer as refugees and internally displaced persons. Also in Afghanistan and Pakistan, operations against terrorist groups have resulted in

havoc. Since military forces are engaged in these operations, it is very much a war-like situation in both countries.

For the purpose of this thesis, it is better to deal with terrorism under the overarching theme of state security, as it is a state prioritised problem tackled with military means. In addition, the use of the term “non-state actor” for the Taliban is questionable because they were in power from the mid-1990s to 2002. Therefore, it is better to differentiate between terrorism and transnational crime. In this thesis, the term “human security” refers to issues relating to human welfare, such as economic development, poverty, food security, energy security, education and health. Basically it is used where the focus is on the people and not only weapons, as Haq understood human security (MHHDC 2005:7). As mentioned before, terrorism is considered to be a traditional state security matter, at least in the South Asian context, thus for this thesis transnational crime (human trafficking, drug smuggling) are referred to as non-traditional security issues.

As this thesis focuses on the role of SAARC and human security in South Asia, there is a need for an in-depth analysis of the term ‘human security’ vis-à-vis its origin and contemporary understandings. In 1980, Willy Brandt, Ex-Chancellor of West Germany (1969-1974), issued the *North-South Report*, which not only raised concerns over traditional security issues, but also about the scale of global hunger and the alarming disparities between the living conditions of rich and poor. This significant publication represented a milestone because of its inclusion of the human security concept in the scholarship on ‘security’. Several years later a renowned Pakistani development practitioner, Mahbub ul Haq, masterminded a report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 1994), which specifically talked about human development in relation to human security. In the UNDP report, a comprehensive conception of human security emerged globally with the following seven categories: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security. In the post-Cold War world, UNDP felt it was important to underline that the undue focus on state security during the Cold War era had led to ignorance or neglect of threats to millions of people from disease, hunger, crime, social conflict, et cetera. UNDP’s advocacy for human security can be seen as an attempt to expand the perception of security by highlighting the overall importance of development (Dannreuther 2007:47). The essence of Haq’s understanding of human security was eloquently defined as:

Human security, in the last analysis, is a child who did not die, a disease that did not spread, an ethnic tension that did not explode in violence, a woman who was not raped, a poor person who did not starve, a dissident who was not silenced, a human spirit that was not crushed. Human security is not a concern with weapons. It is a concern with human dignity (MHHDC 2005:7).

Human security is about the basic rights of individuals. According to Langenhove (2004:2-3), it is about creating conducive conditions for individuals to live in ‘freedom from want’, such as protection against hunger, natural disasters, torture and disease. The other freedom that Langenhove points out is comprised of the opportunities for individuals to fully develop and benefit from their potential. Langenhove has restricted human security to two out of the four freedoms talked about by US President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1941. In an address, now recalled as the Four Freedoms speech (Roosevelt 1941), Roosevelt proposed the following freedoms that each and every individual should enjoy: freedom of speech and expression, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. These principles, even though not directly or solely attributed to Roosevelt have been central to arguments on human security.

International law continues to be challenged because countries of the world remain divided over the issue of protecting civilians. According to Cousins (2010:28), human security is under threat because governments and the international community have not yet developed the capacity and desire to protect civilians at risk, in particular in situations of intra-state armed conflicts. She argues that human insecurity is on the rise due to the cumulative impact of international neglect, armed conflicts and poverty. Cousins further points out the complex nature of the present day conflicts involving both state and non-state actors, which is the case with terrorism. She also notes that 90 percent of the victims of armed conflict are innocent civilians, mostly women and children (Cousins 2010:28-29). At the international level, there seems to be an understanding that states have both sovereignty rights and responsibilities; therefore, it is the duty of states to address human security threats faced by their people. If states are incapable then the international community should act to empower individuals by enabling them to meet their basic needs, such as food, shelter and clothing.

The idea behind human security is long-term development (Feigenblatt 2010:63). However, in simple terms, the traditional goal of ‘national security’ has been the defence of the state. The developing world has greatly suffered due to the age-old understanding of state security, involving military force to protect the country against external threats (Bhardwaj & Hossain

2001:25). “The focus of human security, by contrast, is the protection of individuals” (HSC 2005:VIII). If border security leads to protecting the territorial sovereignty of any particular country, then human security leads to not only protecting lives but also to avoiding various internal threats posing challenges to the stability of the government, as discussed before. Therefore, in the development sector, scholars (Elliott 2001; Najam 2003; Upreti 2004) are referring to the “securitisation of development” (Langenhove 2004:3). “Without human security, territorial security becomes [irrelevant] and, ultimately, self-defeating” (MHHDC 2005:7). According to Haq (MHHDC 2005:7), military approaches do not provide the masses with shelter, food, medication and employment; therefore, a balance between traditional and human security is essential to ensuring stability at the national and regional levels.

Since the early 1980s, human security featuring human, social, political and economic issues has become an important aspect of academic debates (Hussain 2008:157). However, in most of the human security debates the emphasis has been on economic and environmental security challenges (Najam 2004:226). The massive human insecurities, mainly resulting from “deprivation and intolerance” are causing instability in individual states and collectively in South Asia (MHHDC 2005:7). In fact, the blame for terrorism has sometimes been put on the failure of governments to adequately address the socio-economic needs of their people (Rajan 2005:6). However, this is a contested point because terrorism has been used as a method by secessionists and religiously motivated groups. Furthermore, the fact that Al-Qaeda’s leadership comes from rich Arab countries suggests that there are terrorists from rich backgrounds and relatively stable countries.

There is now an increasing understanding that security is a multifaceted phenomenon, and that in addition to military threats state security can be impacted by a whole range of non-traditional and human security issues, such as economic welfare, political stability, citizens’ health, environmental degradation, food and water security, inter-religious harmony, terrorism and so on (Evans 1993:6). Most such internal threats are widely prevalent in the Global South. In the developing world, considering it has challenges of its own, there is an understanding that traditional concepts of security emphasising external threats do not mesh with the realities facing people living there (Johnson 2006). Ironically, many regimes in developing regions continue to focus on a narrow state security agenda (Manzur 2008:12).

Considering the nature of some human security threats, multilateralism becomes another important layer of mechanisms for peoples' welfare. According to Langenhove (2004:7), the international nature of human security requires cooperation at multilateral levels. Hence, regionalism has been acknowledged as the "fastest route to prosperity, for promoting collective interests, ensuring protection against the negative" (Rajan 2005:1) impacts of globalisation, thus enhancing regional security through inter-reliance. In a region faced with inter-state conflicts, the language of human security allows a focus on regional security by putting on the back burner endless debates on traditional security hurdles to cooperation, such as bilateral conflicts (Ahmed & Bhatnagar 2008; Najam 2004; Naseem 2007). According to an Asian Development Bank study (ADB 2008:13), regionalism in Asia can manage human security threats through cross-border collaboration in the areas of health, safety and environmental security. Due to the transnational nature of human security challenges, there is a need for greater focus on human wellbeing through regional organisations (Mohsin 2003:150). And if, on one hand, states gradually expand their traditional security notions to include non-military threats, then at regional levels human security should be given greater attention in debates on overall regional security, because 'security' is a multifaceted concept.

The emergence of regional security architecture can be understood as a response to perceived and actual deficiencies in global inter-governmental organisations. Cooperative and collective security were the *raison d'être* of the League of Nations in 1919-1920 and ultimately of the UN. However, the UN has been criticised for playing an ineffective role with reference to its interventions in Bosnia, Somalia, Rwanda and other conflicts, and this is one of the reasons that Evans (1994:16) claims that regional blocs may be in a better position to secure their regions and even to resolve bilateral disputes. The UN Charter itself permits regional organisations to work in the spheres of peace and security within their regions, and the Charter supports regional measures for conflict resolution before raising such issues at the Security Council (Evans 1993:29).

In many ways this understanding of regional security has increased the significance of regional organisations and their collective measures across a range of issues. There are generally four kinds of regional security mechanisms: military alliances; coordination among powers; cooperative security; and collective security (Xiaoshua 2005:26). Cooperative security is called common security in some contexts, particularly in Europe. According to Banerjee (1999:308), the term "common security" originated in Europe due to East-West

rivalry in the 1970s. He argues, “the concept was based on the idea that in an interdependent world, security for one could not be achieved at the cost of another” (Banerjee 1999:308). Even currently, the EU has the Common Security and Defence Policy.

Regional organisations, depending on their limitations vis-à-vis institution development, address security through different ways. For example, ASEAN, PIF, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and ECOWAS, and some others have been discussing regional security challenges. ASEAN has moved ahead by initiating dialogue and cooperation in security matters through the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), which has a wider membership beyond the membership of the Association.⁴ Similarly, the EU has the Organisation for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Perhaps the oldest regional security arrangement is the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), an intergovernmental military alliance established in 1949.

Overall, both cooperative and collective security mechanisms address the security needs of all stakeholders (Xiaoshua 2005:26). This encourages dialogues to prevent violent confrontation, fosters understanding of interdependence and enhances cooperation. Bhardwaj and Hossain (2001:i) are of the view that, in the present global environment, security is no longer a zero-sum game of mine against yours, but it is rather our security, and this encourages cooperation at regional levels for the achievement of both national and regional objectives. In the study of regionalism, researchers have turned their attention to the importance of regional security, and the neorealist approach perceives regionalism as a response to external threats (Vayrynen 2003:35). Buzan (1991:190) belongs to the neorealist school of thought and defines regional security as “a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national security cannot realistically be considered apart from one another.”

There has been an expansion in the understanding of security with the inclusion of human security issues. According to Xiaoshua (2005:23), globalisation has caused several changes in the overall perspective of regional security where economic and political securities have assumed greater importance in security affairs. A shift has occurred in the strategic approach of states with more value placed on the security of individuals, regions and the whole world.

⁴ ARF dialogue partners are: Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, China, the EU, India, Japan, North Korea, South Korea, Mongolia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Russia, Timor-Leste, the US, and Sri Lanka.

An increase in awareness of interdependence in security matters means that countries tend to adjust their security policies in accordance with priorities for cooperation.

Due to the intellectual work on the comprehensive understanding of ‘security’ and ‘state security’, there has been a penetration of many ideas into regional security, such as comprehensive regional security. The benefit of using this term is that it encourages an “open and contrastive mindset”, one likely to deviate from the philosophy of traditional state-centred security (Evans 1994:7). According to Banerjee (1999:310), the concept of “comprehensive security” was developed in Japan in the early 1970s and is based on the argument that security cannot be limited to military threats. He also argues that comprehensive security includes major concerns, such as energy and food security, and protection against natural disasters. Therefore, regional security could be comprehensive, especially in the developing regions.

2.4 Regionalism and regional security in South Asia

The initial moves for regional cooperation among the countries began in the early 1980s and with keen interest scholars and policymakers regularly started to debate and investigate the phenomenon in South Asia. According to Rodrigo (2004:279), there are two extreme views on the role of SAARC with reference to regionalism in South Asia. One criticises the Association for being ineffective and the other appreciates the achievements and potential of SAARC. Overall, the literature presents a dismal picture of regional cooperation in South Asia based on the argument that SAARC has been unable to play a significant role in promoting the collective agenda. Because it is considered unproductive, the Association is viewed as a “problem case” and a “defunct political organisation” by scholars (Bailes 2007b:1; Reed 1997:235). With some politeness, Basrur (2005 online) argued that the SAARC procedure has not been “very encouraging”. This viewpoint reflects some progress but in the words of Dash (2008:198), “one cannot say with confidence that regionalism is firmly rooted in South Asia.”

The literature portraying SAARC as a failed or a weak institution could be a reason that outside South Asia, the Association has not been considered significant in literature focused on regionalism in Asia (Acharya 2009; Frost 2008; Park, Pempel & Kim 2011). In such studies, the focus has been ASEAN, perceived as the only successful example of regionalism

in Asia; therefore, other examples such as SAARC and SCO are ignored. Asian regionalism thus is synonymous with ASEAN.

Nonetheless, mostly South Asian scholars, drawing lessons for SAARC from other regional organisations, reflect the optimism for SAARC through the growing number of studies. There has been much literature comparing SAARC with other regional blocs, such as the EU, ASEAN, and SCO for lessons to enhance regionalism in South Asia (Bhargava, Bongartz & Sobhan 1995:52; Bhargava & Hussain 1994; Jetly 2003a; Kanesalingam 1993b; Walpuski 1999). Often SAARC is compared with other regional organisations to measure its progress, especially in the area of economic cooperation, but some of the ground realities, such as the level of economic asymmetry among the member states, trust deficit, and the economic potential of countries are ignored. Dash (2008) presents a somewhat comprehensive analysis of regional cooperation in South Asia by examining its differences with the EU – a supra-national organisation. In an attempt to look at the challenges to SAARC, he analyses the member states' policies towards regional cooperation. It is crucial to understand the policies of member states to evaluate regionalism, but equally there is a need to review cooperation in a wide range of areas at SAARC – an aspect neglected by Dash.

Even in the rich availability of literature on SAARC, there are still gaps to be filled. For example, the literature on South Asian regionalism is largely limited to perspectives from India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh (Kanesalingam 1990; Khosla 1999; SIPRI 2007; Sobhan 1990). There have also been studies on the role of India and Pakistan in other regional forums, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and SCO, and its implications for SAARC (Jetly 2003a; Naik 2004). Consequently, there is a shortage of balanced approaches to analyse regionalism in South Asia, especially by discussing the policies of smaller countries, such as Afghanistan, Bhutan, and the Maldives. There is less in terms of literature on Afghanistan vis-à-vis SAARC because it only joined the Association in 2007. Consequently, the expansion of SAARC through the membership of Afghanistan and induction of observers has received very limited attention from scholars. Studies in this area with reference to observers and Afghanistan have not looked into the way they have performed within SAARC since their inclusion in the Association; therefore, it cannot be said with confidence that the expansion of SAARC has been productive (Khan 2009:15; Saradgi, Sahni & Srivastava 2007:127).

There is limited literature with in-depth appraisals of SAARC programmes. However, there have been attempts to look at various aspects of SAARC, but mostly in isolation from their overall contribution to the process of regionalism. Among a few studies directly addressing the topic of regionalism in South Asia, is the publication entitled *Regionalism in South Asia* of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI 2007). This study is a collection of papers analysing regional and regional security in the region with perspectives from India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The publication presented a limited understanding of the phenomenon but lacked analysis of the policies of other South Asian countries and a detailed evaluation of SAARC.

In functionalism, economic cooperation is the key area in regionalism, having a potential to bring intangible benefits by promoting better political understanding. Hossain and Duncan (1998) have suggested that the politico-economic imperatives of regional trade through SAARC would bring the countries of South Asia closer to resolving their disputes. Many scholars of South Asia continue to be optimistic about the process of economic integration in South Asia and trust that regionalism in South Asia can be designed to increase capital flow, and create greater market access and enhanced technology transfer for mutual benefit (Bhargava, Kant Kishore, Bongartz & Sobhan 1995:10). In developing South Asia, economic cooperation, by increasing exports of the SAARC members, has a potential to improve the levels of development and human welfare in the region (Islam et al. 2010). Economic cooperation, a perceived first step to greater cooperation among the members, is not free of constraints in South Asia. Kanesalingam (1993a:45) argues that “the divergences of economic interests among the member countries of SAARC are as basic and wide as are the differences in their security perceptions.” This relates to the fact that the South Asian countries are predominantly agro-based economies dependent on markets in the developed world; therefore, more of the flow of trade is with countries outside the region.

Considering intra-regional trade measures crucial for economic integration, there has been much more interest from researchers on trade agreements of SAARC. Since the initiation of the South Asia Preferential Trading Agreement (SAPTA) in 1995 and SAFTA in 2006, many scholars have shifted their attention to prospects for regional integration through free trade in South Asia (Burki 2005; De 2005; Lamberte 2005; Rana, S.S. 1997; Yasin & Khan 2006). It was after the implementation of SAPTA that some level of economic interaction was seen as a positive development in South Asia, but its progress was seen as negligible due to

painstakingly slow processes at SAARC (Banerjee 1999:305). That is why Mohan (2009:131) labelled South Asia as one of the “least-integrated” regions of the world. Nonetheless, there is a point of view that the dream of a South Asian Economic Union might be realised because India, one of the biggest emerging economies of the world, has joined the regional free trade project in South Asia (Morin 2008:4). According to Reed (1997:235), the SAARC process gained some momentum in the 1990s due to economic liberalisation in some member states as a result of globalisation. The studies of trade in South Asia have predominantly focused on the trade of goods, and less on the trade in services and energy resources (electricity, natural gas, etc.). Also, the literature has presented a limited analysis of trade facilitation vis-à-vis the role of SAARC.

The realists are of the view that the South Asian countries have no other choice but to cooperate in response to the challenges posed by globalisation (Raihan 2000:1). Basrur (2005:10) is of the view that in the current global dynamics, states cannot prioritise politics over economic cooperation because the costs are high. He also argues that “not maximising the opportunities available in the dynamic global economy could leave a state behind.” The very fact that SAARC has survived over the course of over 25 years shows that its members find it relevant and beneficial in some ways. Consequently, Amin (2008:9) argued that the SAARC countries would not like to bear the costs of exclusion from regional cooperation because it could negatively influence their interests at regional and global levels.

There has been an understanding that problems faced by individual countries, including India and Pakistan, can better be solved if the SAARC members cooperate with each other. This realisation has received the attention of policymakers in the region as the shared problems have become increasingly intractable (Naseem 2007:285). Considering the fact that all South Asian countries are developing,⁵ greater regional cooperation is likely to address the prominent human security and developmental challenges, and thus has a greater potential of building an environment of peace (Bhargava, Bongartz & Sobhan 1995:12). Manzur (2008:12) stresses that, “security and development, in whatever way they are understood, are two fundamental goals of any society.” According to Bailes (2007a:1), evidence suggests that in its over 20 years’ existence, SAARC has managed to make progress in less contentious areas of cooperation, such as economic and social fields. That is why scholars like Naseem

⁵ There is no single definition available to define a developing country but commonly they are understood as countries with a low level of material welfare.

(2007:286) are of the view that the future of SAARC should not be assessed solely in reference to the troublesome past as the underlying conditions are changing.

SAARC was created with the agenda of regional development through greater cooperation among the members. Considering the nature of bilateral tensions in the region, a decision was made to adapt to functionalism to allow cooperation to progress in uncontroversial areas. According to Brar (2003:32), “given the fact that the region has an inordinately high share of disputed boundaries, divisive politics and chequered democracy, no one ever expected that regional cooperation in South Asia would be a runaway success.” The Association was created with an underlying assumption that “cooperation can be achieved through SAARC without addressing the political problems of the region” (Reed 1997:244). However, there has been another assumption that through functionalism, particularly through economic cooperation, the political challenges of the region, especially between India and Pakistan, could be addressed (Brar 2003:31; Morin 2008:4).

In years, when SAARC meetings among the heads of state were stalled due to bilateral conflicts, such as after the summits in 1988 and 1998, studies on SAARC severely criticised the Association’s inability to resolve bilateral disputes. In 1989, from 1999 to 2001, and in 2003 there was no SAARC summit held due to bilateral tensions. As summits are the highest decision-making authority at SAARC, the organisation’s failure to hold those meetings led to much scepticism of regional cooperation in South Asia (Ahmed & Bhatnagar 2008; Bhargava, Bongartz & Sobhan 1995:13; Zimba 2002:3). Due to political tensions between SAARC member states, scepticism towards regionalism has continued since the late 1980s, as reflected in the literature produced since then.

SAARC and its functionalist approach have been doubted by many and have received much criticism, mostly from South Asian scholars Ahmed & Bhatnagar 2008; Brar 2003; Reed 1997). Nonetheless, some writers believe that South Asian regionalism is slow because SAARC is at the embryonic stage (Schulz, Soderbaum & Ojendal 2001a:264). The sluggish progress of SAARC has led to increasing doubts over the functionalist approach which in the words of Brar (2003:31) “has failed to raise the level and scope of regional cooperation beyond a very limited point.” Considering the growing scepticism of SAARC, Amin (2008:2) argues that there is a need to increase the pace of regional cooperation in South Asia. However, the basic questions are: *How can the speed of regionalism in South Asia be*

increased? and Should this be achieved by modifying the current approach of functionalism or by completely abandoning it?

Over the years, due to the India-Pakistan size and rivalry, South Asia continued to be India-Pakistan-centric. This is a main reason for the predominant literature being focused on animosity between the two countries and its implications for regionalism and regional security Ahmed & Bhatnagar 2008; Jorgensen 2001:126; Kanasingam 1993a:46; Thornton 1991:136). SAARC has failed to focus on regional cooperation and develop as an institution due to bilateral disputes, particularly between India and Pakistan (Basrur 2005:9; Misra 2004:30). Often the literature on South Asian regionalism has measured the success or effectiveness of the Association based on the state of bilateral relations, especially between India and Pakistan (Ahmed & Bhatnagar 2008; Bhargava, Bongartz & Sobhan 1995; Hossain & Duncan 1998; Pattanaik 2004; Shulz, Soderbaum & Ojendal 2001a:257). Even on economic cooperation it is believed that the South Asian countries will gain enormously by resolving their political disputes because political consensus is a basic requirement for cooperation through the Association (Hossain & Duncan 1998:9; Yasin & Khan 2006:171). Therefore, Gordon (2010:7) believes that, “for India and Pakistan, a political breakthrough has to precede an economic breakthrough.”

There is a plethora of literature criticising SAARC for being sluggish, and India and Pakistan, two big players, for being insincere about regionalism in South Asia. However, as discussed in some studies, bilateral disputes are not the only challenges faced by regional cooperation. Jorgensen (2001:125) argues that the lack of progress in South Asian regionalism is not merely due to the existence of inter-state conflicts in the region but because the countries in the region have given up “their decision-making power in favour of the global economy, neighbouring regions, and sub-national forces.” In one of the recent empirical studies, Dash (2008) presented an analysis of regionalism in South Asia with reference to domestic actors of states in South Asia. He argues that the preferences of domestic actors, both political and social, determine their countries’ policies towards regional cooperation by even defining the terms of multilateralism (Dash 2008:4). Therefore, policymakers at any international forum, in particular at SAARC, firstly think of agreements that will be accepted by key players in their domestic constituencies, and due to this imperative South Asian regional cooperation policy falls under the category of community policy because it is influenced by both traditional domestic and foreign policies (Dash 2008:40). In his valuable work, Dash goes on

to discuss the failure of SAARC to date vis-à-vis the domestic politics of its member states. The emergence of competing domestic (political) coalitions in India and Pakistan, such as liberalising coalition and nationalist, and fundamentalist coalition are the major obstacles in the way of regional economic cooperation measures in South Asia (Dash 2008:168).

While, on the one hand, bilateral disputes, mainly between India and Pakistan, have led to a large volume of literature expressing discontentment with the factionalist approach to regionalism in South Asia, on the other hand there have been studies showing a great enthusiasm for the SAARC process. The Association has received much intellectual interest in the era after the Twelfth SAARC Summit held in Islamabad in 2004.⁶ The meeting of the heads of state not only led to some improvement in Indo-Pak relations but also provided the Association with much needed momentum towards the implementation of its agenda. The summit declaration is labelled as “the upbeat rhetoric” by Fawcett (2004:441). An important decision was made to make another attempt to progress SAFTA towards economic integration in the region; therefore, there have been some studies providing an evaluation of economic cooperation in South Asia. However, the literature produced soon after the summit, in particular focused on the prospects of economic cooperation rather than providing an evaluation of the ongoing process vis-à-vis opportunities and lessons (Dubey 2005; Raipuria 2001; Sami 2005; Sobhan 2005). This could be because SAFTA was implemented in 2006. The most recent literature shows a shift in the trend with comprehensive evaluations of SAFTA (Weerakoon 2010).

To date, due to the level of political commitment expressed by the heads of state at the Twelfth SAARC Summit, the period starting from 2004 is seen as an ‘implementation phase’ of SAARC. Thus, a critique of the consensus-building stage cannot be considered a true picture of regional cooperation because an evaluation needs to see the achievements in terms of the execution of projects, and, with reference to cooperation in a wide range of issues on the SAARC agenda, this is lacking. Nonetheless, the analysis of commitments among the member states is of great significance. According to Baral (1999:249), “politicians in South Asia make commitments to South Asian regionalism without the full backing of all-powerful state functionaries who often turn a blind eye to the decisions of political actors.” Baral made

⁶ The meeting of the heads of state was held against the backdrop of tense Indo-Pak relations which even led to the postponement of the summit in 2003.

this assessment in the period of political crisis between India and Pakistan, and when SAARC was far behind in terms of implementing its agenda.

As far as the so-called implementation phase is concerned, except for a lot of studies of free trade/economic cooperation in the region, there have been few attempts made by scholars to study the progress of SAARC in other areas, such as environmental security (natural disasters, forestry, climate change, etc.), human welfare (poverty alleviation, food security, health, and education), and security (terrorism and transnational crime) (Chaturvedi 2004; Kelkar & Bhadwal 2007). For example, Sharma (2011), in his analysis of climate change and SAARC, limited analysis only to the joint position of the member states at global forums and certain regional studies and action plans. The author did not include a critique of some regional institutions established by SAARC to address issues of environmental security vis-à-vis climate change, such as the regional centres on forestry, a meteorological researcher, coastal zone management, and disaster management, among others. Similar to the case of Sharma, other literature has also limited the appraisal of SAARC by considering the SAARC Secretariat as “the only regional institution” (Amin 2008:17). Like many other regional organisations, such as ASEAN, the work of SAARC is distributed through the SAARC Secretariat to its regional centres and therefore should be examined to present a realistic picture of regional measures being taken in any area.

Scholarly pessimism towards SAARC is seen in a transition in the literature on the issues of peace and security, regional cooperation and regionalism in South Asia. In the period of 1985-1995 there were numerous studies available on these issues with reference to SAARC (Bhargava, Bongartz & Sobhan 1995; Bhargava & Hussain 1994; Kanesalingam 1993a, 1990; Sobhan 1990), but since the mid 1990s several studies have ignored SAARC and its role in regionalism, peace and security in South Asia (Dossani & Rowen 2006; Kennedy 2006; Nasr 2006). The emphasis has been on challenges to regionalism and regional security in South Asia but not much on the way SAARC has been promoting CBMs and enhancing the scope of regionalism through initiatives in human security areas, as per its mandate.

Since the inception of SAARC, its member states have no collective traditional security threat from the outside region. Buzan (1991:190) as a crucial factor towards a regional security mechanism in South Asia identifies a convergence of “national security concerns” among the member states. According to Inayat (2007:17), differences in national security policies among

the South Asian countries led to a slow initiation of regional cooperation in comparison to such moves in Southeast Asia. However, ASEAN was just as much prompted by prospects of conflict among its members. Irrespective of divergences in national security perspectives and motives, Evans (1993:33) is hopeful of the potential of SAARC to play a role in security affairs by drawing lessons from the case of ASEAN.

However, in relation to regional security it is crucial to keep in mind the power balance between the states involved and nature of the patterns of enmity and amity between the actors (Schulz, Soderbaum & Ojendal 2001b:8). By looking at South Asia, it is not difficult to view patterns of enmity and amity due to the persistent India-Pakistan rivalry in the Kashmir dispute and the dominance of India in relation to its six smaller neighbours. That is why, according to Buzan (1991:190), the security concerns of the SAARC member states link them together to such an extent that the region is faced with a security complex – a situation where the individual security problems of regional nations cannot be analysed alone as they are so much linked to the security problems of neighbouring countries.

With regard to prospects for a regional security mechanism in South Asia, Bailes (2007a:iv) predicts that neither the common and urgent human security problems (poverty, diseases and environmental security), nor motivation from examples of successful regionalism in the periphery region of Southeast Asia, nor concern about the strategic rise of China seem to put South Asian countries on a track towards a security community. The researcher disagrees with Bailes because, except for India and the Himalayan states, China is not perceived as a threat to any other nation in South Asia and an example of that is the long lasting friendship between Pakistan and China. According to Basrur (2005:9), the biggest challenge constraining the SAARC process has been structural – “the hegemonic position of India among SAARC nations”. Indian hegemony has prompted the smaller states in South Asia to forge relations with the former European colonial powers (UK and France) and other developed countries (USA and Russia), and also with Asian states (China and Japan) (Jorgensen 2001:131).

The role of India in South Asian regional security, as a hegemon, has been a subject of study of regional security. According to Mitra (2003:405), India’s nuclear test in 1998 gave an indication of its intentions of supremacy in South Asia. In the view of Pardesi (2005:ii), one aspect of India’s grand strategy in South Asia includes “a realist drive towards power

maximisation due to structural reasons, including the use of force when necessary, under the veneer of morality.” Considering the implications of the growing fear of India in the region and occasionally its interference in the internal affairs of other SAARC members, scholars are of the view that New Delhi needs to practice “strategic altruism” in South Asia (Gordon 2010:7; Hanif 2009:18).

A way to regionalism and regional security in South Asia is through the promotion of confidence-building measures (CBMs), and regional cooperation in itself acts as one such measure. Conflicts may not be resolved easily or quickly, but can be contained and reduced through regional cooperation, and also resolved later on (Bhargava, Kant Kishore, Bongartz & Sobhan 1995:14). Scholars are of the opinion that the SAARC members have to come to the view that the region is likely to benefit significantly from regional cooperation in functional fields of security, including anti-terrorism, anti-crime, anti-smuggling, infrastructural development, health and food security, and economic cooperation (Mahajan 2007:15; Singh 2007:29). It is believed by Dahal and Pandey (2005:III) that this type of understanding of comprehensive security has already established roots in South Asia with the practice of existing socio-economic interdependencies among the SAARC member states. Banerjee (2002:X) agrees by saying that the intention of regional cooperation in South Asia is to pool resources and ideas to collectively develop, and also to ensure an end to the escalation of conflicts. It is still a challenge in itself to think of ways in which regional security will evolve in South Asia, and Rajan (2005:6) envisions it in the following way:

Regional security will ultimately flow not from treaties or military pacts or the ideological complexion of governments, but improvement in governance standards and collective responses to the common social and economic challenges confronting the people.

From the perspective of states, regional security is still considered to be the military services’ affair where countries from the region pool their military resources for collective border security, to control terrorism and other transnational crimes along with any perceived threats from outside the region (Bailes 2007b:2). Rajan (2005:6) confidently expects that collective measures against terrorism will bring countries together in South Asia as they have in Central Asia. In contrast, Jorgensen (2001:146) does not foresee the possibility of functionalist cooperation through SAARC creating better bilateral relations between the member states. To date studies of regionalism and regional security have not explored in any detail the links between cooperation in the areas of human security and regional security, or considered that

the cooperation in addressing common human security challenges can pave the way for regional security.

Criticism of the level of regional cooperation in South Asia has not stopped South Asian scholars from thinking ahead, keeping in mind the success stories of the EU and ASEAN. On the political front there have also been efforts to envision a SAARC Regional Forum (SRF) that addresses both security and economic issues (Pokharel 2001:51). There have also been some over optimistic ideas floating around the region, such as the creation of a Security Organisation for South Asia (SOSA) on the lines of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) to act as a conflict resolution mechanism (Naik 2004), to create a South Asian Parliament (Pandey 2005) and a South Asian Union (political integration) (Kumar 2005).

As this thesis focuses on regional security in relation to regionalism, it is important to discuss SOSA in more detail. Naik's proposal is based on his greater understanding of SAARC and regional dynamics, especially considering the fact that he was a key Pakistani official during the foundational years of the Association. He was the foreign secretary of Pakistan from 1982 to 1986. The idea of a security organisation seems to be a solution Naik found for the problems faced by the member states and the Association. He based the argument on the report of the Group of Eminent Persons (GEP),⁷ which suggested the 'institutionalisation' of the process of informal political consultations among the member states. Similarly, an ex-foreign secretary of India, I. P. Khosla (1999:10), is of the view that SAARC needs a much stronger mechanism than "informal political consultations" to promote better bilateral relations in the region. Similarly, Reed (1997:238) is of the view that a regional security institution or a body is essential in South Asia to address the issue of power play in the region, particularly with reference to India and its small neighbours, and without that SAARC "can only play a marginal role in promoting regional growth."

Because SAARC was not created as a forum by its member states to deal with security issues, the studies of regionalism in South Asia have ignored the analysis of regional security regarding South Asian regionalism. According to Rana (2003:26), "the path to genuine,

⁷ The Group of Eminent Persons (GEP) comprising of 12 representatives of the member states, including Niaz A. Naik of Pakistan, was a product of the Ninth SAARC Summit (1997) to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the SAARC process and define the future course of action (SAARC 2008d:110). The group met during 1997 and 1998, and shared its report entitled "SAARC Vision Beyond the Year 2000".

fruitful community-building lies through security” in the developing world. Therefore, by considering the dynamics of South Asia, Banerjee (1999:318) is of the opinion that “issues of security and development, two sides of the same coin”, are “inseparable”. A key promoter of regional security cooperation in South Asia, Naik (1999:342), is of the view that SAARC needs to include political and security issues on its agenda for realistic moves towards a “South Asian Community”. Considering security cooperation is crucial to regional integration, a lack of focus has led to a complete disregard of an important aspect of cooperation in South Asia which could provide SAARC with intellectual support for a regional security mechanism, albeit in the distant future.

As the operation of SAARC is a political process, cooperation in human security areas has the potential to initiate CBMs towards regional security in South Asia. For example, ASEAN has been promoting economic cooperation which, with the passage of time, has resulted in meaningful steps towards a political and security community (Haack 2004:9). There are also other examples of regional organisations’ transition from cooperation in the economic sector to the political sector, such as the EU, and the Asia Pacific Economic Community (APEC). The most recent example is of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), which was established in 2008 because of the amalgamation of two existing customs unions at sub-regional levels, namely MERCOSUR and the Andean Community of Nations. Irrespective of the criticism of SAARC, there are still high hopes attached to the potential of the Association. Therefore, the proponents of functionalism, like Zimba (2002:5), believe that, “if regional cooperation elsewhere, and indeed everywhere, is a certain path to peace, security, stability and wealth, then surely SAARC will be profitable for us.”

Irrespective of a plethora of literature labelling SAARC as an ineffective forum to promote regionalism, there have been studies predicting its future. Scholars have written about the realisation of a South Asian Community/Union, especially by comparing SAARC with the EU. Most of these studies have suggested supra-national institutions in SAARC to pave the way for free trade, a political and security community, and other institutions. According to Amin (2008:17-19), SAARC needs to learn from the EU by launching institutions for parliamentarians and by giving autonomy to the SAARC Secretariat. Kumar (2005) in his book entitled *South Asian Union: problems, possibilities and prospects* presents a very rosy picture of ‘merely’ trade agreements at SAARC by ignoring the progress made by the Association in economic cooperation. He presents a limited analysis of the functionalist

approach of SAARC, which he thinks might create a political union in the region. In political circles, there has not been a discussion on a South Asian Union, perhaps because it is perceived as premature at this stage. In contrast, civil society has been enthusiastic over the idea of a South Asian Union and in this regard Bangladeshi Nobel laureate, Dr Muhammad Yunus, in his address to the Indian Parliament, shared the idea of having a South Asian Union by 2030 (*Daily Star*, 9 December 2009).

2.5 Conclusion

The end of World War I triggered the initial wave of regionalism in different parts of the world. Later, after the Cold War, many existing regional organisations were revitalised in the hope of multilateralism in a unipolar world. In the 1990s, the interest in regionalism grew in different parts of the world mainly due to the creation of the European Union. In particular, the developing countries have been enthusiastically participating in the present wave of regionalism through regional platforms/institutions, such as SADC, SAARC, ECOWAS and others. Developing countries have found in regionalism a venue to raise their voice, both at regional and global multilateral forums, since they realise that collectively their shared regional concerns will be better heard at global forums, such as the UN and WTO.

State security has been limited mainly to protection against external threats, and partly to internal threats such as the overthrow of a regime. The welfare of communities with the central focus on the needs of individuals has been the core value of human security. This concept covers a much broader spectrum than just internal state security and has an emphasis on the quality of life of the people; this includes food, water, health, and environmental security (climate change, natural disasters etc.). In many regions, including South Asia, some non-traditional challenges spill over state borders and create regional-level threats, such as those posed by refugees, human trafficking, and drug smuggling, necessitating the need for multilateralism. Perhaps their agenda is not labelled 'human security', but regional organisations in developing regions have been promoting cooperation in human security areas. Therefore, the marriage of regionalism and human security has been relevant to the needs of the developing world.

A review of literature on regionalism and regional security in South Asia shows that there is no shortage of work in these areas. Even though many scholars have agreed that regional

cooperation in uncontroversial areas has the potential to pave the way for not only better relations but also meaningful cooperation in sensitive areas, such as anti-terrorism, to date no empirical and comprehensive study has been produced to evaluate this basic assumption. The studies have also failed to dig deeper into the challenges faced by SAARC because the researchers have been overwhelmingly influenced by the political constraints to regionalism in South Asia. Little work has been done to present a detailed analysis of SAARC's role in promoting cooperation in human security areas, such as food security, environmental security, poverty alleviation, health, education and so on; therefore, the progress of SAARC through consensus-building and the formation of regional institutions in these areas remains unevaluated. In addition, a whole new chapter to regionalism in South Asia, the expansion of SAARC through the inclusion of a new member Afghanistan and nine observers, remains neglected in the critique of the Association. This new development is crucial to evaluate the ongoing projects of SAARC and future directions.

CHAPTER THREE

AN INTRODUCTION TO SOUTH ASIA

3.1 Introduction

It is imperative for any area-focused study to deal with the complexities of defining the boundaries of a particular region under review. There are divergences and contested spaces in relation to geographical, political and cultural boundaries of South Asia. In this chapter, an attempt is made to discuss the perplexity in defining South Asia with reference to history and contemporary realities.

The case of South Asia is complex when it comes to the nature of security problems, both intra-state and inter-state. Since their independence from the British Empire in 1947, India and Pakistan have been unable to resolve their disputes, notably the conflict over Jammu and Kashmir. Even though the India-Pakistan relationship defines the security of South Asia, other states have also been faced with either bilateral or domestic security challenges. For example, Sri Lanka for over a decade suffered from a violent ethnic conflict involving the Tamil Tigers and the state security forces. Therefore, the chapter aims to present an overview of both intra-state and inter-state conflicts in South Asia.

A measure of the costs, both human and fiscal, of security challenges provides a better understanding of the severity of those threats. In particular, an analysis of the defence expenditure of any two rivals could be a better way of evaluating the level of enmity. As it is relevant to the later discussion on human security, this chapter concludes with an analysis of the costs of conflicts and militarisation in South Asia. Here, emphasis is not only on constantly rising defence expenditure in countries faced with conflicts, but also on human suffering because of conflicts.

3.2 The region

It is a vast, roughly triangular patch of the world's surface which has always held the imaginations of kings, soldiers, empire-builders, traders and adventurers. Here live people of different races, religions, customs and habits; of widely different environments from the icy Himalayas to the suffocating jungles of Kerala (Hill 1963:vi).

The above description of the Indian sub-continent by Hill highlights succinctly the dynamic history and diversity of the region. It is crucial to distinguish the states given the regional identity of 'South Asia'. The 'South Asian' identity was formally endorsed by the heads of state of seven founding members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 1985. Before that, the term South Asia or Southern Asia was limited to informal circles (Dahal et al. 2003:3). Through SAARC, the member states – Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka –identified themselves as belonging to South Asia. SAARC was in part created based on the region having natural contiguous borders. In the north, the high Himalayas separate South Asia from rest of Asia and southwards the Indian Ocean defines the geographical boundary of the region. According to Thapa (2011:7), "geographical cohesion of South Asia has been an important factor in the evolution of SAARC." Hence, the geographical scope of the region has been a major factor in South Asian regionalism.

Since the creation of the Association, 'South Asia' has referred to the membership of SAARC, especially in official, academic, media, and development circles (Najam 2004:233). Since 2007, Afghanistan has also been a permanent member of SAARC. Therefore, the region, by virtue of SAARC, now consists of eight countries. Although culturally Afghanistan might also be counted as a part of Central Asia (Sanjeev 2010:65), it does have cultural and geographical connections with South Asia. It is important to highlight that during the fieldwork none of the respondents expressed reservations on the inclusion of Afghanistan in SAARC. Currently, SAARC's extended definition of South Asia is adopted by many international organisations, such as the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and others. Here, it is also important to recall that Afghanistan had earlier identified itself with South Asia by being a founding member of the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP), an inter-governmental organisation founded by the current SAARC members in 1982.

Due to the geographic scope of South Asia, often China and Myanmar are also counted in this region. Both countries are SAARC observers, but China has been a long-time contender for full membership of the Association. According to Banerjee (1999:318), Myanmar is sometime included by scholars in South Asia, but mostly it is now considered a part of Southeast Asia (Mittal & Thursby 2006:7), especially by virtue of its membership in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Using the SAARC definition of South Asia, India's centrality in the region is an important factor. South Asia is unique, because India shares international borders with all of the countries with the exception only of Afghanistan. Except for the case of Afghanistan and Pakistan, other countries depend on India for land transit to other countries in the region, such as Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal. Considering the controversies over border demarcations in South Asia, a UN map (Figure 3.1) has been presented below to show South Asia's position in Asia.

Figure 3.1: United Nations' map of South Asia and neighbouring countries



Source: (UN 2004 online)

Even after the formation of SAARC, there has been a lack of a coherent definition of South Asia, and this has greatly undermined the understanding and scope of South Asian Studies. It has been argued that the majority in South Asia do not identify themselves as 'South Asians' (Dash 2008:172-175). In addition, because South Asia refers to a different group of countries in many diverse definitions, there continue to be variations in programmes on South Asian Studies. For example, the South Asian Studies program at the University of Edinburgh indentifies the region as the Indian sub-continent comprising of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. This leads to another contested issue, the definition of the 'Indian sub-continent' which often includes or excludes Afghanistan and the Maldives from the list of the abovementioned countries at the core (Hill 1963:vi; McLeod 2002:1; Meyer 1976:2). Therefore, habitually the term 'Indian sub-continent' is used synonymously with 'South Asia' because extended definitions of both include the same countries. However, the use of the term 'Indian sub-continent' in the post-partition period could be offensive, especially for people in Bangladesh and Pakistan; therefore, writers prefer to use the label 'South Asia' (Mittal & Thursby 2006:3). The researcher agrees with Farmer (1983:1) that the use of the term "South Asia ... may be unfamiliar and not unambiguous, but it is neutral and inoffensive."

Most of the South Asian countries share a common colonial heritage. Almost all countries of the region, either completely or partially, were colonies under the British Raj. Present day Bangladesh, India, the Maldives, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka were directly under the administrative control of the Raj, and even though Afghanistan and Nepal, both buffer and landlocked states, enjoyed some amount of autonomy, they were still heavily dependent on the Raj for survival (Mishra 1984:2). The case of Bhutan was in some ways similar, though the monarchs enjoyed a great deal of freedom through an agreement with the British Empire. Bhutan's foreign policy was completely under British control (Choden 2004:113).

Considering ethnic and religious factors, the South Asian states are home to a diverse population; however, a major portion of people in some countries are connected through cultural, ethnic and linguistic similarities and ties to other neighbouring countries. For example, Urdu is the national language of Pakistan but is spoken by a large number of North and South Indians. Bengali is the national language of Bangladesh but is also the state language of West Bengal in India. Nepali, the official language of Nepal, is widely spoken in the Darjeeling district of India. Tamil, the second official language of Sri Lanka, is a state

language of Tamil Nadu in India (Naqash 1994:16). With Afghanistan in South Asia, the region has more ethnic linkages due to a significant number of Pashtuns living in Afghanistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa of Pakistan. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, the Maldives, and Pakistan are Muslim-majority countries in the region, but a significant number of Muslims (estimated to be 177 million in 2010) live in India (PRRPL 2010 online). India is a Hindu majority state and Hindus comprise a religious minority in other countries, such as Bangladesh and Pakistan. According the Population Census Organisation of Pakistan, 1.6 percent of the country's total population is Hindu (PCO 1998 online).

Regional asymmetry is visible through various indicators, such as population, economic growth, area, and even military strength of the South Asian countries. Imbalance of power among the member states poses a challenge to regional cooperation (Ahmed & Bhatnagar 2008:6), as will be discussed in forthcoming chapters. As the data shows in Table 3.1, India completely dominates the region due to its mounting economic strength and population growth. In addition, the size of the country is another indicator showing how big India is in comparison to other South Asian states, and nowhere else in the world is disparity of this scale found. For example, in South America, a similar regional setting to South Asia, Brazil with an area of 3.3 million square kilometres is three times bigger than the second biggest country, Argentina, having a land mass of 1.1 million square kilometres (WB 2011b online). In South Asia, as shown in Table 3.1, India is four times the territorial size of the second biggest country in the region, Pakistan. There are also vast population differences, for example, the Maldives – the smallest SAARC member – has roughly 300,000 and India has over a billion people. As shown in Table 3.1, India alone accounts for 73 percent of South Asia's population. However, the most significant dissimilarity is the gap between India's four trillion dollar GDP – roughly 81 percent of the total GDP of South Asia – and the rest of the region.

Table 3.1: Overview of the SAARC member states

Country	Population (2006)	Area (Square Km)	GDP Purchasing Power Parity (Int\$ ⁸ billions) 2010
Afghanistan	33,609,937 ^a	647,500	27.44
Bangladesh	155,990,777	144,000	260.53
Bhutan	648,766	47,000	3.88
India	1,109,811,147	3,287,260	4,057.79
Maldives	300,292	300	2.51
Nepal	27,641,362	147,180	35.75
Pakistan	159,002,039	796,100	467.19
Sri Lanka	19,886,000	65,610	105.46

Note: ^a = data from 2009. Data sources: (Bank 2011 online; IMF 2011 online)

3.3 Security challenges in South Asia

This section aims at presenting an overview of both intra-state and inter-state conflicts in South Asia. The focus of analysis is on social and political reasons for conflicts, along with inter-state rivalries. The intention is not to ‘reinvent the wheel’; therefore, the analysis of conflicts is kept brief.

3.3.1 Intra-state security challenges

All of the South Asian countries with the exceptions of Bhutan and the Maldives have been faced with domestic disputes and security problems, such as insurgencies and terrorism. Ganguly and Bajpai (1994:401) are of the view that intra-state conflicts are a product of “regional distribution of power but also animosities rooted in ethnic, religious, territorial, and irredentist contestation.” Often domestic conflicts have not been resolved permanently because of states’ seeking military solutions to internal security problems, for example in India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka (Baral 2006:68).

Since the 1980s, some conflicts have permanently or temporarily ended but others have surfaced in South Asia. For example, a few revolts have ended, such as the Khalistan movement (Punjab, India), Jharkand (India), the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Conflict

⁸ International dollar (Int\$) is a hypothetical currency used in the international financial system and it has the same purchasing power as that of the US dollar.

(Bangladesh)⁹, Maoists insurgency (Nepal), and the Tamils' insurgency (Sri Lanka). In India alone there are ongoing insurgencies in the northeast region, particularly in Manipur and Tripura. Since the late 1980s, India has also been faced with insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir. Some internal conflicts are temporarily calm. For example, the Bangladesh government has managed to stop the insurgency in CHT but the issue of the autonomy of the area is still to be resolved. Since the 9/11 incident, the intensity of terrorism and the war on terror has been on the rise in both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

There are very few examples like the peace deal between the government of Bangladesh and the Shanti Bahini, an insurgent group in CHT. Through the Hill Peace Accord, the fighters surrendered their weapons in return for jobs from the government. According to Sheikh Hasina (2003:8), ex-Prime Minister of Bangladesh, "We provided the ethnic people who surrendered arms with jobs. They were even recruited into the law-enforcing agency." This provides an example to others of how internal security challenges can be resolved peacefully.

Being the biggest and the most diverse in terms of religion and ethnicity in the region, India has been faced with security challenges of various forms, in particular, insurgences in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), and the Northeast region. The insurgency in Northeast India is as diverse as the seven states (Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Arunachal, Pradesh, Mizoram, Manipur, and Nagaland) of the region. Some want a separate state and others regional autonomy. According to an assessment of the India-based Centre for Development and Peace Studies, Manipur continues to be a "serious insurgency-hit state even though the number of casualties in insurgency-related incidents has gone down" (CDPS 2011 online).

In terms of internal security problems in India, the Kashmir insurgency has been the most researched and publicised due to the multidimensional nature of the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan. The history of struggle in J&K is as long as the existence of India and Pakistan, but the struggle intensified in 1989 due to both internal and external factors. Since then, there have been various phases of violence and relevant calmness in the valley. According to Bose (2011 online), between 1999 and 2002, there were 55 attacks causing the death of 161 military personnel and 90 militants. According to New Delhi, a Pakistan-based militant group called Lashkar-e-Taiba has been a key perpetrator of the militancy in Kashmir

⁹ The *Jumma* people in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh were fighting for autonomy for well over two decades until the signing of a peace accord in 1997 (SAFHR 2000:1).

(Bose 2011 online; Nasr 2005:19). Islamabad has often been accused of either causing or supporting violent attacks in the Indian-Administered Kashmir (IAK), especially by facilitating the transit of *Mujahideen* (people doing Jihad) from Afghanistan (Silva 2006:91; Sridharan 2005:103; Tavares 2008: 278). According to Husain Haqqani (2005:18)¹⁰, Pakistan's former ambassador to the United States, there is some validity for the Indians blaming Pakistan. He asserts that from 1989, Islamabad, through its military intelligence, - Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), has been supporting groups, such as the Jamaat-e-Islami and its military offshoots (Al-Badr and Al-Shams), to back insurgency in Kashmir. Since its beginning, the insurgency in Kashmir has attracted the attention of several local terrorist groups from Pakistan, such Lashkar-e-Taiba, Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan, Hizb-ul-Muhahideen, and Jaish-e-Muhammad, and these groups cooperate with the Kashmir-based Harkat-ul-Ansar (Haleem 2004: 19; Khan 2005:26).

The ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka is a case of minority Tamils fighting for a separate homeland from the Buddhist Sinhalese majority. From the 1950s and through the 1960s it was nonviolent agitation, which, over the course of a few decades, turned into a violent struggle for autonomy (Silva 2006:92). For about a quarter of a century, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) demanded a separate homeland and fought against the government. Faced with enormous internal pressure, mainly coming from the Southern state of Tamil Nadu, India was pushed to play a more effective role towards resolving the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. Therefore, in June 1987, India offered relief supplies to the people of Jaffna but this was rejected by Sri Lanka. However, the next day Indian fighter jets entered Sri Lankan airspace and dropped relief supplies in and around the Jaffna region. As expected, Sri Lanka strongly objected to India's violation of their airspace and sovereignty (Rao 1988:433). The bilateral tension decreased once an agreement between the two sides was signed on 29th July 1987, after which the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) comprising of 15,000 soldiers was sent to Sri Lanka to enforce the ceasefire.¹¹ However, IPKF could not ensure the ceasefire because LTTE refused to surrender (Johnson 2006:55). Consequently in 1989, Sri Lanka demanded

¹⁰ From 2008 to November 2011, Hussain Haqqani was the Pakistani Ambassador to the United States.

¹¹ Through the 1980s, India played a significant role in Sri Lanka's domestic conflict. To find out more about this, read the following well-written paper: P. Venkateshwar Rao 1988, 'Ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka: India's role and perception', *Asian Survey*, vol. 28, no. 4, pp. 419-436.

the withdrawal of IPKF. New Delhi initially hesitated to withdraw its troops but on Colombo's insistence IPKF left during 1989 and 1990 (Kanesalingam 1993a:43).¹²

The conflict in Sri Lanka has caused thousands to suffer (Figure 3.2). Apparently, the LTTE-led insurgency in Sri Lanka ended due to the Sri Lankan military operations in 2009. The recent fights between the security forces and LTTE were extreme due to the high human cost. This conflict ended with the defeat of LTTE in 2009. In 2011, a UN report found both the Sri Lankan security forces and LTTE responsible for the deaths of innocent civilians and hence guilty of committing war crimes. The report could only estimate the number of people killed but disclosed that the government forces intentionally attacked, with heavy shelling, 330,000 civilians trapped in an area called the Vanni (UN 2011c:ii). The issue of providing justice to the victims is an ongoing problem in Sri Lanka and for a sustainable solution to the ethnic conflict, it is crucial that this is dealt with.

Nepal long suffered from the Maoist insurgency. The conflict ended in 2006 with a Comprehensive Peace Accord, which is monitored by the UN mission in Nepal. However, the country suffered greatly from the movement of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists) against the monarchy. The civil war, which was a conflict between the government forces and Maoist rebels, lasted for a decade from 1996 to 2006. It is reported that in the clashes at least 13,000 people were killed and most of the country's infrastructure, valued at 92.5 billion Nepalese rupees was destroyed (C 2011 online). In 2008, the Maoists achieved their goal of ending the reign of King Gyanendra by eliminating the institution of monarchy in Nepal. However, the country is still experiencing the troublesome task of state building. For the government of the Maoist party's Baburam Bhattari (Prime Minister), there are a few major issues to be resolved, particularly the status of the Maoist fighters and the finalisation of the constitution (BBC 2011a online).

Pakistan has been faced with several internal security threats of different degrees, such as religious extremism, ethnic violence, sectarianism, and terrorism. There have been ethnic conflicts in the country and most recently in the financial capital of Pakistan, Karachi. Because of the nature of economic activities and the job market in the city, Karachi is home to an ethnically diverse population. In competition for political dominance, there have been

¹² Owing to the India's involvement in Sri Lanka's internal dispute, LTTE assassinated Rajiv Gandhi of India in 1991. Gandhi being the prime minister of India from 1984 to 1989 had deployed IPKF (Silva, K.M.D. 1999:278).

clashes between the political factions of two ethnic groups, namely Urdu-speakers (Muhajirs or migrants), and Pashtuns. In April 2009, there was a gun fight between the political factions of Mujahirs (Muttahida Quami Movement) and Pashtuns (Awami National Party) which killed 33 and wounded about 50 people (Bhatti 2009 online). The country has also been exposed to different phases of Baloch insurgency, for example in 1948, 1954, 1961, 1977, and the ongoing one since 2004. The current insurgency has been severe and by June 2008 had claimed more than 800 lives (Iqbal 2008:3). Islamabad has been concerned over the perceived Indian involvement in igniting the Baloch insurgency (Iqbal 2008:5). In addition, sectarian violence has intensified over the course of the past two decades due to an increasing number of attacks by Shia and Sunni extremist groups on each other. According to an estimate, more than 4,000 people have been killed in sectarian violence in Pakistan (Yusuf 2010 online).

Since 2001, terrorist attacks have grown to become a major threat to the state security. Pakistan has often paid a heavy price for fighting against the local and foreign terrorists in the tribal areas. Since 2006, Pakistan has had roughly 80,000 soldiers fighting in the tribal areas, and the economic costs of keeping such a huge deployment are high (Zeb 2006:71). This is in addition to an increasing number of civilian and non-civilian casualties in the tribal areas, either because of the Pakistani security operations or due to frequent drone attacks. The poorly executed drone attacks have often resulted in civilians deaths, and as reported by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 957 civilians were killed in 134 US drone attacks during 2010 (HRCP 2011:75). According to an estimate, between 2003 and February 2011, the war against terrorists in Pakistan claimed the lives of 9,620 civilians, 3,443 soldiers and over 20 thousand terrorists (SAIR 2011 online). Moreover, the economic costs of the war against terrorism are acutely disturbing for Pakistan.¹³ In 2009, the cost of anti-terrorism operations was measured at over PKR 678 billion (Ahmed 2001 online).

The war against the Taliban and Al-Qaida has been challenging for the US-led NATO troops over the past ten years. The Taliban, the ones in power from 1996 until defeated by the US-led NATO troops in 2001, have been somewhat successful due to the failing strategies of the allied forces.¹⁴ Therefore, in 2008, the US demanded its allies to increase the strength of international troops and the Afghan National Army (Rubin & Rashid 2008:34). Accordingly,

¹³ In 2002, soon after Pakistan joined the US coalition against terrorism, the head of Pakistan's Tourism Development Corporation, Masood Ali Khan, predicted an enormous decline in tourism of 80-90 percent (Hayes 2002online).

¹⁴ In 2011, the Taliban were controlling 13 of the 26 provinces (Siddiqui 2011:49).

with several regular additions from the contributors from July 2008 onwards, as of December 2011, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) has been comprised of 130,313 troops from 49 countries, including all 28 members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) (NATO 2011:1).¹⁵ With this increasing deployment of international troops in Afghanistan, the war has been intensified as evident from the growing number of casualties, particularly of coalition military. Since the beginning of the war, over 2,800 ISAF soldiers have died (Walsh 2011 online). The Afghan Army and Police have also suffered the loss of roughly 4,000 members (Caldwell 2011 online). Due to growing NATO-led ISAF security operations, civilian casualties have also been on the rise and 2,080 civilians were killed in 2010, an increase of 28 percent from 2009 (Rogers & Sedghi 2011 online). The increasing security operations are in response to the policy of President Barack Obama to withdraw from Afghanistan beginning with at least 30,000 troops by November 2012 (Rogers & Evans 2011 online). However, the war seems to be far from over and for any chance of stability, Afghanistan will need the support of the international community for years to come.

3.3.2 Bilateral conflicts

In terms of the nature of bilateral disputes, there are diverse issues, such as cross-border terrorism, conflict over river waters, illegal migrants and refugees, and disagreements over territorial and maritime boundaries. In terms of territorial disputes, there is the well-known case of the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan. Even though the issue of equitable distribution of river waters has been managed well between India and Pakistan, there has been tension over the construction of the Baglihar Dam on the Chenab River. The relationship between Bangladesh and India has often faced difficulties due to the problem of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants in India. Afghanistan and Pakistan, especially at times when bilateral relations are at their lowest ebb, have faced problems over Afghan refugees in Pakistan. There has also been a conflict between Bhutan and Nepal over the issue of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal (Ahmed & Bhatnagar 2008:8). Although terrorism is not a new phenomenon in South Asia, it has become one of the serious issues disturbing bilateral relations, mainly between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and India and Pakistan.

¹⁵ ISAF was initially established by the UNSC in December 2001 to secure Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan. NATO assumed control of ISAF in 2003. The US is the biggest contributor to ISAF with 90,000 troops, followed by 4,818 from Germany and 3,916 from France (NATO 2011:2). The number of ISAF troops increased from 64,498 in July 2008 to 132,457 in June 2011, an increase of 51 percent (Rogers & Evans 2011 online).

Considering India and Pakistan are the biggest and most powerful countries in South Asia, the security of the region is defined by the level of animosity between these rivals. There has been less progress on conflict resolution between India and Pakistan, and often bilateral meetings have been stalled by incidents of cross-border terrorism. Therefore, a detailed account of the rivalry between India and Pakistan is required to completely understand the security-related regional dynamics.

India and Pakistan achieved their freedom in the shadow of a traumatic partition in 1947. The rather hasty and unplanned partition gave way to mass-level migration, communal riots and “slaughter” (Meyer 2003:95). According to some estimates, Partition was said to have caused the migration of 10 to 12 million people. It was the biggest human migration in history (Brass 2003:75; Meyer 2003:95). As Punjab was divided between India and Pakistan, most of the migration occurred in this region, with one caravan alone comprising of 800,000 people (Champan 2009:195). Therefore, there were greater risks of riots in this area. In Punjab, trains, buses, trucks and homes were burnt along with the migrants inside. Sikhs and Hindus attacked Muslims while Muslims in revenge killed Hindus and Sikhs, resulting in mass bloodshed (Pennebaker 2000:1). A Punjab Boundary Force of 50,000 men had been set up by the British to handle the expected violence during migration, but the Force itself divided into pro-Indian and pro-Pakistani groups (Champan 2009:195). It is estimated that between 200,000 and a million were killed because of migration massacres (Brass 2003:75; Champan 2009:195; Meyer 2003:95). According to Baral (2006:73), “the exodus of people from India to Pakistan and vice versa during and after Partition was not just an appalling situation; it also sowed seeds of endemic conflict and animosity between the two countries.” Thus, the partition changed any semblance of religious harmony in the region for the near future. Also, the newly independent states were left with tensions over the issue of political status of and demarcation of princely states, such as Jammu and Kashmir, as these were not dealt with by the British plan (Johnson 2006:42). The countries have fought three wars (1948, 1965 and 1999) over the Kashmir dispute and still there has been no resolution to the dispute.¹⁶ Other than the dispute over Kashmir, India and Pakistan, have other bilateral problems, such as a territorial dispute over Siachen and a maritime dispute over Sir Creek. Most recently,

¹⁶ The following useful papers are suggested for a better understanding of the Kashmir dispute: Isiaka Alani Badmus 2006, 'The vale of tears: Kashmir, the source of Indo-Pakistani conflict since 1947', *Anthropologist*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 103-109; & Sumantra Bose 1999, 'Kashmir: sources of conflict, dimensions of peace', *Survival*, vol. 41, no. 3, pp. 149-171.

accusations of cross-border terrorism and the construction of the Baglihar Dam in India have disturbed relations between the countries.¹⁷

There have been difficulties in India-Pakistan relations. By the end of 1990s, both India and Pakistan had tested their nuclear warheads due to which tension between the two rivals skyrocketed. This followed a small-scale Kargil war in 1999. Soon after India and Pakistan became nuclear powers, and after the Kargil war, President Bill Clinton labelled the region as the “most dangerous” place in the world (Marcu 2000 online). However, according to Hussain (2005:151), nuclear deterrence between India and Pakistan is fairly successful because the Kargil war and the 2001-2002 heavy mobilisation of troops along the borders did not lead to a nuclear war. Nevertheless, there is increasing investment by both countries to further strengthen their nuclear capabilities. According to an estimate, India has 60–70 nuclear warheads, while Pakistan has 60 (SIPRI 2008:16). Increasing militarisation reflects the nature of conflict between the two neighbours.

In recent times, the accusations of cross-border terrorism have become a cause of disagreement in India-Pakistan relations. In 2001, another period of high tension began between India and Pakistan after a terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament in 2001, which New Delhi suspected, was orchestrated by Islamabad. New Delhi demanded that Islamabad take appropriate action against two militant groups based in Pakistan, namely Jaish-e-Mohammad and Lashkar-e-Taiba. The bilateral tensions were so high after the incident in New Delhi that India banned Pakistani aircraft from flying over its airspace and in reaction Pakistan banned Indian aircraft (Ahmad 2002:190). Another recent example is that of the attacks on India’s financial capital, Mumbai, from 26 – 29 November 2008. Not only were these attacks devastating but they also destroyed hopes for peace between India and Pakistan (Ahmed 2009:2-3). In the aftermath of the Mumbai attacks, tensions escalated again, alarming the international community regarding the possibility of a nuclear war in South Asia.

The Indo-Pak enmity has spilled over to other parts of the region. Since the collapse of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, the country has become a clandestine battlefield for India and

¹⁷ Some readings are suggested for detailed discussion on the implications of terrorism for India-Pakistan relations: Fahmida Ashraf 2009, India Pakistan relations-post Mumbai attacks: chronology of Indian statements. Islamabad: Institute of Regional Studies; & Kingsley de Silva 2006, 'Terrorism and political agitation in post-colonial South Asia: Jammu-Kashmir and Sri Lanka', in *South Asia in the World: Problem Solving Perspective on Security, Sustainable Development, and Good Governance*, R. Thakur & O. Wiggen (eds), United Nations University Press, Tokyo, pp. 84-103.

Pakistan, especially with the latter feeling insecure with the growing Indian relations with Kabul and the presence of Indian intelligence and military agencies in Afghanistan (Ahmed & Bhatnagar 2007). With these concerns about India's increasing diplomatic presence in Afghanistan, Pakistan came under direct blame for orchestrating the July 2008 attack on the Indian embassy based in Kabul via its Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). It should be mentioned that 24 people were killed in this attack, including an Indian defence attaché (Mazzetti & Schmitt 2008 online). At times, New Delhi has been disgruntled with Kathmandu over the issue of perceived anti-India activities, such as the distribution of counterfeit Indian currency, carried out from Nepal by Pakistan (Baral 2006:75).¹⁸

The bilateral 'peace' dialogue process between India and Pakistan, which has currently stalled, did make some progress in promoting confidence-building measures (CBMs). The Indo-Pak Composite Dialogue was initiated in 2004 to explore solutions to their territorial disputes (Kashmir and Siachen), maritime dispute (Sir Creek) and organise topical discussions on the following: peace and security including CBMs; the Wullar Barrage Project/Tulbul Navigation Project; terrorism and drug trafficking; economic and commercial cooperation; and promotion of friendly exchanges in various fields. These regular meetings produced some worthwhile results in the form of CBMs, such as the 2005 agreement putting an obligation on each side to inform the other at least three days before testing ballistic missiles within 40 kilometres of the international boundary and the Line of Control. Also, both countries signed an accord to reduce the risks of accidental or unauthorised use of nuclear weapons, and for this purpose a 'nuclear hotline' at the foreign secretaries' level was set up in 2004 (Patil 2008:3).

Irrespective of the failure of dialogue on several disputes, both countries have managed their water disputes and have opened several transport links. In the first decade of this century, India and Pakistan had numerous dialogues to diffuse tension over the construction of the Baglihar Dam on the Chenab River, which Islamabad viewed as a violation of the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty.¹⁹ Since a bilateral meeting in 2010, the conflict has temporarily been stopped due to the assurance of New Delhi that the rules of the Indus Water Treaty would be followed

¹⁸ According to a report in the *Economic Times* (24 August 2003), an official of the Pakistan High Commission in Kathmandu was expelled by Nepal for carrying fake Indian currency of roughly Rs.45,000 in 2003.

¹⁹ As per the Indus Waters Treaty of 1960, India has the right to exclusively use water from the Eastern Rivers (the Sutlej, Beas and Ravi) and Pakistan has the right to benefit from water from the Western Rivers (the Indus, Jhelum and Chenab).

(*Nation*, 2 June 2010). While the visa regime is tough, there has been an increase in the number of travel routes. For example, the bus service was limited to Delhi-Lahore from 1999 to 2005, until the following new services were launched Srinagar-Muzaffarabad, Poonch-Rawalakot, Amritsar-Nankana Sahib, and Amritsar-Lahore.²⁰ Irrespective of the significance of these developments, the Indo-Pak rivalry is still very serious because no permanent solution has been reached to the host of disputes mentioned above.

Relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan were tense after the independence of Pakistan in 1947, when Afghanistan, due to a border dispute over the Durand Line demarcation, became the only country to oppose the inclusion of Pakistan in the UN (Ahmed & Bhatnagar 2007:159). There have been ups and down in Afghan-Pak relations. Pakistan was a key player during the decade-long Afghan-Soviet war, and supported the Taliban government from 1996 to 2001 (Siddiqui 2011:49). Currently, the tension between them is very apparent considering the ongoing wars against terrorism in Afghanistan and the neighbouring tribal areas of Pakistan, and there is a longstanding dispute over the Durand line demarcation (Zeb 2006). However, there has not been bilateral dialogue to either discuss or resolve this territorial dispute.

Ties between Bangladesh and India have been sour from time to time due to disputes over river water sharing, illegal Bangladeshi immigrants in India, and demarcation of territories. Even though the India-Bangladesh Treaty on Sharing the Ganges in 1996 resolved the major dispute over the sharing of the Ganges water, there is an ongoing tension over New Delhi's decision to construct the Farrakha Barrage on the Ganges. In late 1996, the Prime Ministers of India and Bangladesh agreed to sign a 25-year long treaty on sharing the Ganges water. In the beginning the treaty made no mention of sharing the Ganges waters when the flow at the Farrakha Barrage falls below 50,000 cusecs (cubic feet per second); therefore, this issue was raised in 1997 (Crow & Singh 2000:1918).²¹ Relations between Bangladesh and India were at their lowest point during 2001 when soldiers of India's Border Security Force were killed in a clash with the Bangladesh Rifles in an area (Pyrdiwah village border) under Indian control but claimed by Bangladesh (Khan et al. 2007:10; Swamy 2001:172). From 2010 onwards, there

²⁰ There are two available train links between Amritsar and Lahore (the Samjhauta Express), and Munabao-Khokhrapar (the Thar Express) (Patil 2008:4). There are now 12 flights a week connecting the Indian cities of New Delhi and Mumbai with the Pakistani cities of Lahore and Karachi (BBC 2008a online).

²¹ In 2010, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, visited India to discuss the Farrakha Barrage issues among other issues of a bilateral nature.

have been significant developments in bilateral relations between the two countries through high-level meetings and agreements over a host of issues, such as the demarcation of disputed territories, border management, development cooperation and so on, but there has been no progress to resolve the water disputes (*India Today*, 6 September 2011).

The issue of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants in India has been a challenge for relations between the two neighbours. According to an estimate, in the Indian state of Assam there are about 10 –14 million illegal immigrants (Upadhyay 2008:158). To block the movement of illegal immigrants and movement of anti-India elements from Bangladesh, India has fenced its 2,000-kilometre border with Bangladesh. India's Border Security Force (BSF) has a "shoot-to-kill policy" to stop infiltration across the India-Bangladesh border. Consequently, BSF killed over 1,000 people between 2001 and 2011 (Adams 2011 online). There continue to be differences between the two sides on the actual position of the fence at certain places along the border (Buerk 2006 online).

With regard to India-Nepal relations, there have been several hiccups, for example after the massacre of King Birendra of Nepal and most of the royal family members in June 2001. The incident escalated anti-Indian sentiments with nationwide protests against India because the Nepalese people perceived the murders of the King and his family members to be an Indian conspiracy against Nepal. This occurred despite the announcement by the Supreme Court that the eldest son of the King, Dipendra, was the gunman (Johnson 2006:61; Swamy 2001:172). New Delhi also continues to refuse the demand of the new Maoist government to update the Indo-Nepal Treaty of 1950 because it gives India a great deal of control over Nepal's foreign and defence relations (Bhasin 2008:8). Since its inception, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists) has been demanding sovereignty and independence for the country from all external interferences, particularly from India (Upreti 2006:39).²²

Since the early 1990s, there has been another inter-state conflict between Bhutan and Nepal over the issue of over 75,000 Bhutanese refugees in Nepal (Baral 2006:74; UNHCR 2010:38-43). The issue has not yet been resolved and Nepal demands that India resolve this issue, as it a trilateral issue because refugees actually travelled through India to reach Nepal. So far India has been silent on this matter.

²² Since 2009, the Communist Party of Nepal has been known as the Unified Communist Party of Nepal.

3.4 The costs of conflicts and militarisation

Today's South Asia is known for being a land of conflicts. In 2007, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, out of 14 armed conflicts in the world, three were in South Asia: Afghanistan, India (Kashmir), and Sri Lanka (Tamil Eelam) (SIPRI 2008:4). As mentioned before, the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka ended in 2009 with the defeat of LTTE. In the four years between 2002 and 2006, Central and South Asia were the most conflict-prone regions in the world with an overall increase in conflicts from seven in 2002 to ten in 2006. In the same period, battle deaths in the two regions increased by 36 percent, specifically due to the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka and an ongoing international war against the Taliban in Afghanistan (HSRP 2007:33-34). In addition, the human cost of war on terror has sky rocketed due to military operations and drone attacks in Pakistan's tribal areas.

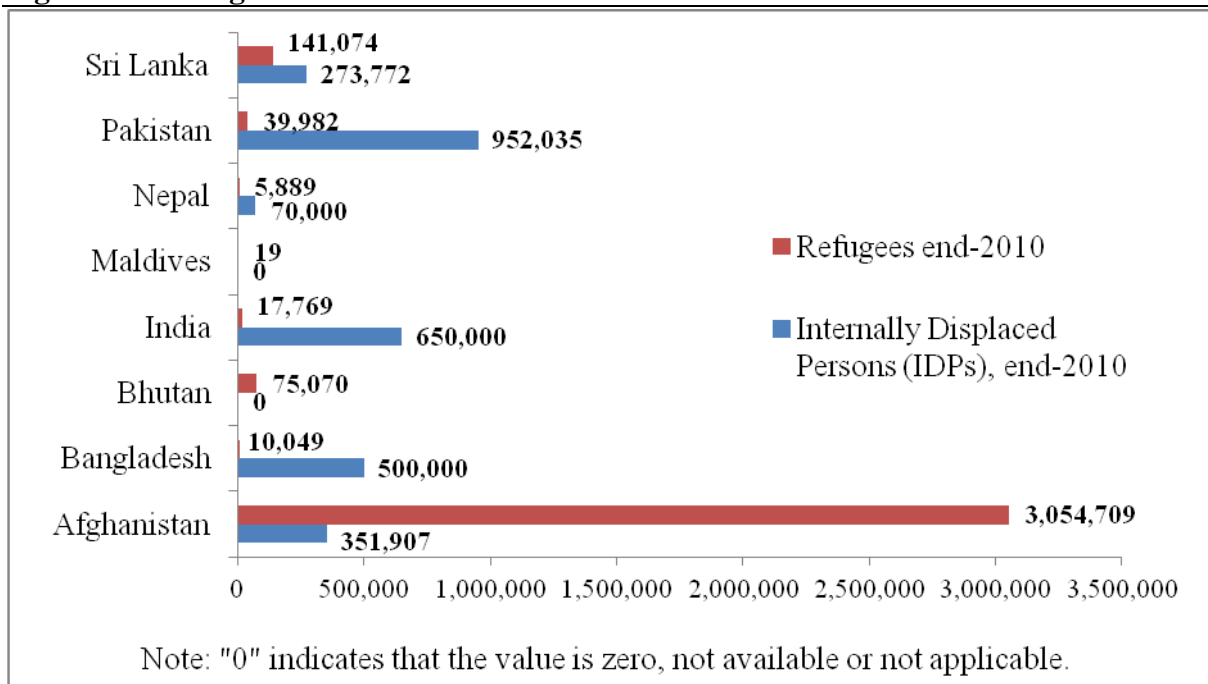
There are different ways of estimating the human cost of conflicts and a simple way could be to look at the numbers of battle-related deaths, refugees, and internally displaced persons (IDPs). With regard to battle-related deaths, Afghanistan continues to be the focus of human suffering, with a series of conflicts, particularly the Afghan-Soviet war, causing the deaths of 562,628 people between 1946 and 2005 (HSRP 2008:52-53). In terms of battle deaths on home soil between the period of 1946 – 2005, India and Sri Lanka follow Afghanistan with 83,130 and 62,044 casualties, respectively (HSRP 2008:54-58).²³

In all South Asian countries, people have been directly affected by conflicts, either domestic or bilateral. For example, there has been a conflict between Bhutan and Nepal over the issue of the people of Nepalese origin living in Bhutan. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees considers them as refugees from Bhutan, as shown in Figure 3.2. In contrast, the current crises in Afghanistan and Pakistan are of international nature due to forces of more than 40 countries being present in Afghanistan, and the US-led NATO drone attacks into Pakistan's tribal areas. Looking at Figure 3.2, it is clear that the people of Afghanistan have suffered the most due to conflicts, either violent or non-violent, with over three million Afghan refugees in the world. On the other hand, with reference to IDPs, Pakistan is home to the largest number of IDPs in South Asia. It is important to mention that since 2004, clashes in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) have been a major cause of displacement,

²³ Battle deaths are caused by combats and include both combatant and civilian casualties and do not include deaths due to war-exacerbated disease (HSRP 2008:66).

in addition to the displacement crisis caused by the July-August 2010 floods in Pakistan (see Chapter 6).

Figure 3.2: Refugees and IDP numbers in South Asia to December 2010



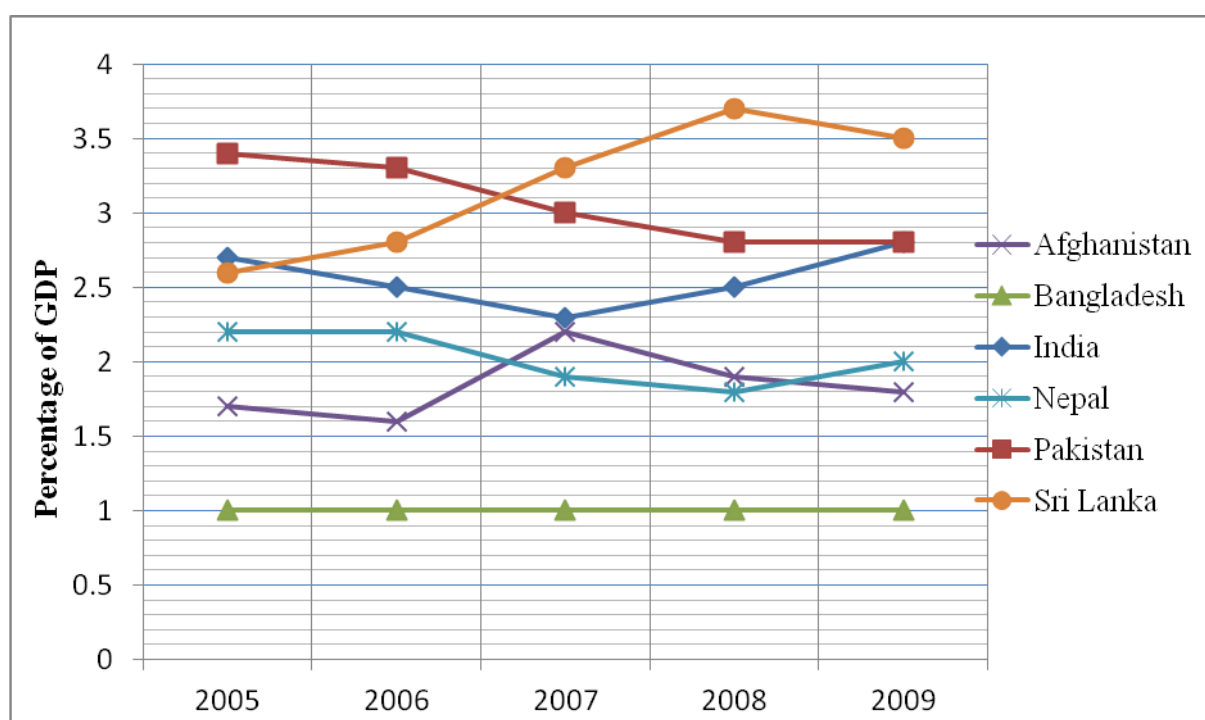
Data sources: (IDMC 2011 online; UNHCR 2010:38-43)

Conflicts are not limited to human suffering in the form of deaths, disabilities, rape, disease or forcing people to leave their homes to take refuge either in their homeland or across the borders in other countries. Conflicts also, though indirectly, cause more suffering due to the destruction of infrastructure and crops, and because of increased military spending and neglect of investment in the areas of human security. According to an estimate, the world's military expenses reached the massive figure of \$1,339 billion in the year 2007 equating to an increase of 45 percent from 1998 to 2008 (SIPRI 2008:10). High defence spending also characterises countries experiencing conflicts or vulnerability to armed conflicts, which is the case with South Asia.

The data on military expenditure (Figure 3.3) of selected South Asian countries shows significant differences among the countries. Sri Lanka has been spending a major portion of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on the military because the country was embroiled in an ethnic conflict for well over two decades until 2010. From 2006 to 2009, Sri Lanka's military spending as a percentage of GDP was the highest in comparison to other countries in the region. The country's defence expenses also exceeded those of other conflict-ridden states,

such as Colombia, Myanmar, Sierra Leone, Sudan and the Philippines (Reddy 2006:para. 4). Since 2005, Bangladesh has allocated a consistent level of one percent of its GDP to military spending. The case of Bangladesh is unique amongst South Asian states because it is not faced with any serious conflicts. Looking at the 2009 data (Fig. 3.3), India and Pakistan spent 2.8 percent of their GDP to cover military costs. It is less than Sri Lanka's spending of 3.5 percent, but far more in terms of money because both countries have bigger economies than Sri Lanka. Also, India and Pakistan have the biggest armed force in the region comprising of 1,100,000 and 510,000 soldiers, respectively (Johnson 2006:10). Therefore, they need more resources to either sustain or build on the current level of military strength. In 2010, India was ranked first and Pakistan second in the list of top international importers of conventional weapons. India maintained its rank from the previous year but Pakistan jumped from sixth to second. In addition, India purchases nine percent and Pakistan five percent of all global imports of conventional weapons (SIPRI 2011a online).

Figure 3.3: Military expenditure of South Asian countries (2005-2009)



Data source: (SIPRI 2011b online)

India, with an ambition to become a global power and due to threats from China and Pakistan, continues to invest in upgrading its defence capabilities. Looking at military spending, India stays at the top in absolute terms in South Asia and in comparison to most countries of the

world. India's defence expenses increased from US\$24.2 billion in 2007 to over US\$34 billion in 2010 (SIPRI 2008:11; SIPRI 2011b online). However, India's growing defence spending needs to be compared with that of China, its biggest rival. In 2010, Beijing spent over US\$114 billion on defence (SIPRI 2011b online). In response to India's increasing defence capability because of its mounting defence expenditure, Pakistan has also been compelled to spend more on its military. Since 2004, Pakistan has spent roughly US\$5 billion on defence (SIPRI 2011b online). This shows that there are both intra-regional and extra-regional factors responsible for an ongoing arms race in this part of the world.

It makes sense to spend less money on defence to fulfil the needs of people through investment in human welfare, but national security cannot be compromised in circumstances of serious security challenges. For military spending to decline, the South Asian countries need to resolve their intra-state and bilateral disputes, and need to eliminate other security challenges (terrorism and transnational crime).

3.5 Conclusion

There continue to be differences on defining South Asia, but there has been some mutual agreement in the scholarly and political circles that the region comprises of the SAARC members. There exist both similarities and differences among the countries based on cultures, ethnicities, and religions. However, religious and ethnic diversity have created intra-state and external security problems in South Asia, particularly in India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

Conflict management, either at intra- or inter-state levels, has not been a completely lost cause in South Asia. Bangladesh dealt with the insurgency in CHT through a peace deal with the insurgents (Shanti Bahini), which to-date serves as a good example of conflict management in South Asia. The Maoists' insurgency in Nepal has concluded with the end of monarchy and the communist government. At the bilateral level, some conflicts have been addressed with wisdom. For example, India and Pakistan, and India and Bangladesh have managed to considerately deal with disputes over equitable sharing of river waters in a timely and sensible manner. Between Bangladesh and India too, an agreement has been reached to end the dispute over the demarcation of territories; however, there still remain differences on the Farrakha Barrage. There has not been any progress on a whole range of pending issues between India

and Pakistan, such as the Kashmir dispute, Sir Creek, cross-border terrorism and so on, and this poses a great challenge to regional security.

As time passes, the Indo-Pak rivalry is becoming more intense due to the ongoing disputes and other occasional challenges, such as cross-border terrorism. The nature of some conflicts is severe, such as the Kashmir dispute, over which India and Pakistan have fought three wars, including two major confrontations in 1948 and 1965. Currently, when both countries are heavily investing in their defence capabilities, including an increasing number of nuclear warheads, there is always going to be a likelihood of a nuclear war, especially if no permanent solutions are reached to resolve the disputes.

State concerns involving internal challenges, such as separatism, insurgency and terrorism, and external threats have led to an increasing level of militarisation in South Asia. Although Sri Lanka has been spending the highest, as a percentage of its GDP, on defence in comparison to other South Asian countries, it is actually far behind India and Pakistan in terms of actual military expenditure. Increasing armament and nuclear weapons in India and Pakistan pose a great threat to security in the region. However, in the case of India, it is also a threat from China which is making New Delhi spend more on bolstering its defence capabilities. Therefore, there are insecurities in both India and Pakistan leading to greater defence spending.

CHAPTER FOUR

SAARC: AN OVERVIEW

4.1 Introduction

This chapter aims at presenting an overview, rather than a detailed account, of SAARC. The main objective of this chapter is to set up a framework for this thesis. Thus, it explores the motivations and processes that led to the creation of a regional organisation and the motivating factors behind the formation of the Association, especially with reference to Ziaur Rahman's proposal for regional cooperation in South Asia. In this discussion, it is crucial to not only understand member states' responses to the idea of a regional forum in South Asia, but also to develop an understanding of South Asian countries' attitudes to external linkages – both with individual countries and multilateral organisations. The issue of links with extra-regional countries and organisations was a contentious one during the pre-SAARC discussions; therefore, it is significant in this thesis to know how similar concerns were addressed before the formation of SAARC. This analysis also helps to understand how member states' policies towards the Association have transformed, if at all, since the creation of the forum.

The level of political will for regionalism is reflected through the mandate for a regional forum. Therefore, the discussion in this chapter also traces pre-SAARC developments with reference to the agenda of the Association. As this chapter aims to introduce SAARC, the first section illustrates the series of events that led to the creation of SAARC, its objectives and structure. Considering the thesis structure, this chapter is limited to presenting analyses of the structure and scope of SAARC with reference to the organisation's history.

SAARC has changed in response to variations in attitudes of its member states because not only has the organisation become somewhat action-oriented, but also there has been an increasing tendency in the policies of the member states to establish greater ties with extra-regional countries, regional organisations and development agencies. In addition, the organisation has also extended its membership by including Afghanistan in 2007. This chapter also covers the issue of SAARC's expansion vis-à-vis challenges and opportunities.

Among many challenges faced by SAARC, bilateral tensions, particularly between India and Pakistan, have been a constant bone of contention. However, informal mechanisms or deliberations of SAARC have provided much needed opportunities for dialogues between the heads of state to discuss their bilateral matters and it is important to discern the extent to which SAARC could go considering limitations put in place in its Charter. It is therefore crucial to discuss the ‘informal’ SAARC because that provides an open space for the discussion of some important matters, especially the ones affecting the Association, such as bilateral disputes. Nonetheless, the SAARC process has been constrained by some other issues and this chapter presents an overview of those challenges, with a particular focus on political, economic and organisational factors.

4.2 The formation of SAARC

Here, the intention is to present a synopsis of the developments behind the formation of SAARC; therefore, the analysis focuses on the following four phases that led to its evolution: (1) Rahman’s proposal; (2) Meetings of Foreign Secretaries (1981-1983); (3) Meetings of Foreign Ministers; and (4) the formation of SAARC (1985). There is a sub-section analysing the responses of South Asian states to the idea of a regional forum.

There were some preceding initiatives for regional cooperation in Asia involving South Asian countries, such as the Asian Relations Conference in Delhi in April 1947, the Colombo Conference in 1954, and the Bandung Conference in 1955 (Didi 1991:148). However, the actual blue-print of a South Asian association was drawn up through the initiative of Ziaur Rahman of Bangladesh in 1977.²⁴ As soon as the idea of a regional organisation was put forward by Rahman, King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev (1945-2001) of Nepal began to support Rahman’s proposal (Basnyat 2009, pers. comm.).²⁵ Initially, President Rahman sent a detailed proposal to other countries in the region, containing his vision of a regional institution in South Asia. From 1977 to 1979, Rahman met with leaders of India, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka.²⁶ To persuade his counterparts, Rahman had discussed his vision for a

²⁴ Ziaur Rahman was a hero of the Bangladesh freedom struggle against the central government of Pakistan in 1971. He was a retired Lieutenant General and the President of Bangladesh from 1977 until 1981 when he was assassinated.

²⁵ King Birendra of Nepal called for a regional cooperation in South Asia during his address at the Colombo Plan Consultative Committee (Kathmandu, 1979) (Iqbal, M.J. 2006:131).

²⁶ To discuss his proposal on SAARC, Ziaur Rahman visited India and Pakistan in 1977 and Sri Lanka in 1979. He met King Birendra of Nepal in Bangladesh in 1978 (Naqash 1994:61).

regional organisation with South Asian leaders of the Non-aligned Movement (NAM) and fellow Commonwealth members (India, the Maldives, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka) during the Commonwealth Summit in Lusaka (August 1979). Later in September 2009, he took the opportunity at another multilateral forum to interact with the leaders of South Asian states (Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka) at the Non-aligned Movement (NAM) Summit in Havana (1979) (Dash 1996:186). As per Rahman's understanding of South Asia, Afghanistan and Myanmar were not included in his proposal for a regional forum; therefore, he did not meet with the representatives of these countries at the 1979 NAM summit.

By the end of 1970s, Rahman had realised that regional cooperation was essential to voice the concerns of the Third World in global forums. At the 96-nation NAM conference in Havana (1979), he voiced concerns on food security in the developing world and pointed to the widening gap between rich and poor countries (Khan 1991:35). Moreover, South Asia was the only region not to have a regional arrangement to promote cooperation in the economic, social and cultural fronts. His proposal advocated cooperation in these fields (Ahmed 1991:76).

Rahman's proposal for a regional cooperation in South Asia was rough, until the conclusion of initial meetings with his counterparts in the region (Iqbal 2006:131). It was after these meetings that Rahman, by fully appreciating regional and global dynamics, constructed his vision for a South Asian forum. By 1980, Rahman dispatched letters to the heads of state of the six countries. Under his direction, the Government of Bangladesh made persistent attempts to persuade heads of state of other South Asian countries to support the proposal.

South Asia was experiencing several changes while Rahman and his officials were developing the final proposal for a regional cooperation in South Asia. At that point, in the late 1970s, most of the South Asian countries had already become members of other multilateral organisations, such as the British Commonwealth Association, NAM and the United Nations (UN), but a specific regional body for countries to discuss their issues and concerns was absent. Since 1974, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have also been members of the Asian Clearing Union together with Iran and Myanmar, dealing with payment agreements between the member states. That was the closest to being a

regional group (Sobhan 1989:21).²⁷ Apart from this, Muslim countries in South Asia, namely Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Maldives have been interacting with each other through the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

During the Cold War, global multilateralism in general and the UN in particular had limited scope, especially with regard to the UN's ability to either manage or resolve conflicts in different parts of the world (Thakur 1995:22). Consequently, many regional organisations were created during the Cold War era because countries in those regions had realised that their issues would be better addressed through regional measures and regional representation at global levels (See Chapter 2). Until the end of the 1970s, countries in many regions had already formed regional organisations to advocate their mutual concerns. Countries in South Asia were slow to react to developments in other parts of the world, mainly due to the post-partition trauma (Kizilbash 1991:118).

The time was appropriate for Rahman to introduce such a concept in the region because South Asian countries were looking inward for “survival and progress” (Khan 1991:33). For example, after facing an embarrassing defeat at the hands of India and losing its eastern part in 1971, Pakistan realised that the Southeast Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO) was fruitless; therefore withdrew from its membership in 1972.²⁸ Experience of an alliance with the US changed Pakistan's foreign policy in favour of stronger links with Asian countries. The same year after leaving SEATO, Pakistan recognised North Korea and North Vietnam (Rizvi 2004:17).

There were both economic and political motivations for the initial moves towards regional cooperation in South Asia. Economically, the failure of the North-South dialogue made developing countries understand unfair terms of trade and the worth of South-South cooperation (Mayrzedt & Ernst 1981:218). South Asia countries also were also concerned over the collapse of North-South dialogue and wanted their own regional forum to raise their concerns (SAARC 2008d:5).²⁹ Moreover, as a result of the 1979 oil crisis, South Asian

²⁷ Asian Clearing Union, comprising of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran, Myanmar, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, is a simple form of payment agreements between the member states.

²⁸ To find out about the impacts of membership in SEATO for Pakistan, read Lubna Saif 2007, 'Pakistan and SEATO', *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture*, vol. XXVIII, no. 2, pp. 77-90.

²⁹ Heads of state of the SAARC members in the Dhaka Declaration of 1985 “expressed concern over the diminishing capacity of international financial and technical institutions to respond effectively to the needs of the disadvantaged and poorer countries” (SAARC 2008d:5).

countries were experiencing immense balance of payment deficits (Iqbal 2006:132). Thus, South Asia would be left behind without an intra-regional mechanism addressing regional and global challenges a realisation.

There were both personal and national motives behind Rahman's proposal. At the personal level, he needed the support of India to legitimise his coup in Bangladesh (Iqbal 2006:132). In addition, Rahman's vision of regional cooperation aimed at addressing human security challenges facing South Asia, but it had national (traditional) security dimensions as well (Muni 1989:41). His idea was related to the national interests of Bangladesh's security concerning India. These security concerns arose because, soon after Bangladesh got independence in 1971 with the help of India, there emerged some disputes between the two countries, namely the dispute over the sharing of Ganges water, and the Muhurichar Island border conflict. Therefore, Rahman was also interested in creating a forum to better negotiate his country's grievances against India.

In 1980, the approval for formal meetings towards the establishment of SAARC was reached after a series of diplomatic encounters among the foreign ministers at the UN headquarters in New York (Iqbal 2006:132). It was then decided that the Government of Bangladesh would prepare the draft plan for a regional organisation in South Asia. To actualise the vision of President Rahman and his Foreign Minister, Professor Shamsul Huq, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs prepared and circulated the Bangladesh Paper for Regional Cooperation in 1980 outlining a framework for a regional forum. This paper also became the basis for the first meeting of the Foreign Secretaries held in Colombo (21-23 April 1981) (Dixit, A. 2011 online). At that meeting India came up with interesting suggestions, especially with regard to having common positions at global multilateral forums, for example the North-South dialogue, World Bank, IMF, the UN, et cetera (Ahmed 1991:77). However, there was no immediate response from other South Asian countries to the Indian proposal because discussion at the initial meetings was deemed premature.

The proposal from the Bangladesh government was approved at the foreign secretarial level. Between 1981 and 1983, the foreign secretaries had four meetings to brainstorm the mechanism of regional cooperation for the first Ministerial Meeting in New Delhi (1-2 August 1983). These meetings agreed on an Integrated Programme of Action (IPA) to initiate cooperation in the areas of agriculture, health and population, transport, postal services,

sports, rural development, meteorology, telecommunications, science and technology, and arts and culture (Ahmed 1991:77). IPA is conducted by a Technical Committee which helps member states reinforce their national capabilities and accordingly implement programmes at national levels (Lama 2008a:3). Once finalised, IPA was shared with the Standing Committee comprising of foreign ministers. (More details presented later in this chapter.)

Once through with agreements at foreign secretarial and ministerial levels, the process of establishing SAARC moved to the heads of state level. Consequently, the Association was established at the SAARC Summit (Dhaka, 1985) where the heads of state formally affirmed their commitments to cooperation in pertinent areas of human security, such as poverty and hunger (SAARC 2008d:4-5). The leaders also reiterated the importance of South-South cooperation. Particularly, in his address at the inaugural meeting of SAARC held in Dhaka, King Birendra of Nepal (1985:2) said:

The weakening of the global economic interdependence and the disillusionment with the continuing deadlock in restructuring the international economic order have thrust upon us greater responsibilities for collective self-reliance and South-South cooperation on a much larger scale.

SAARC emerged in the midst of security crises in the region. In Sri Lanka in 1983, while leaders from South Asian countries were preparing to launch the Association, anti-Tamil rioting followed the deaths of a few Sri Lankan soldiers in an attack by Tamil Tigers (Kanesalingam 1993a:43). In 1984 in India, her Sikh bodyguard assassinated Prime Minister Indira Gandhi after she ordered troops to the Indian Punjab to crush the Khalistan Movement of Sikhs. At bilateral levels, there were troubles in the region, especially heightened tension between India and Pakistan following the 1971 war. In addition, in 1985, India and Bangladesh faced each other for the third time over the conflict of Muhurichar Island.³⁰ It was also the time of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and Pakistan was involved in the Afghan Jihad to support the US proxy war against the USSR.

³⁰ The conflict, between India and Bangladesh is over India controlling a part of land along the border near the village Pyrdiwah on Muhurichar Island. The conflicting claims over the river island have resulted in four violent clashes between the troops of the two countries, in 1975, 1979, 1985 and 2001. Since 2002, the countries have been engaged in talks to resolve the conflict.

4.2.1 Responses of South Asian states

To fully understand the motivations of member states behind SAARC and to find out how such national policies have evolved since 1985, it is essential to trace the initial responses towards the idea of SAARC from within South Asia.

President Rahman wanted his country to play a greater role in regional and international developments. For example, outside the region he offered to mediate in the Iran-Iraq conflict. About SAARC, Bangladesh wanted to gain more balance in its relations with India and this was the case for Nepal. Bangladesh and Nepal hoped to expand the scope of their negotiations on water sharing with India (Muni 1991:59).³¹

Smaller South Asian countries shared a somewhat similar agenda for joining SAARC. According to Muni (1991:60), for Bhutan, the Maldives and Nepal, SAARC became a forum for projecting their individual identities by asserting their differences with India, without inviting undue displeasure from New Delhi. For landlocked Bhutan and Nepal, there was also an interest in forging cooperation with countries not bordering them. In short, there was a “look beyond India” approach prevailing in all quarters. Smaller countries perceived SAARC as an instrument of peace and stability in the region. Nepal, being sandwiched between China and India, wanted to stay out of any conflict between the two giants (Pokharel 2009, pers. comm.).

Sri Lanka showed interest in Rahman’s proposal for a regional forum in South Asia, but there was great confusion in Colombo over this matter. While discussions were on to set up a regional forum in South Asia, Sri Lanka made successive fruitless attempts during 1981 and 1983 to gain entry into ASEAN (Bhattacharya 2007:6). Nonetheless, Sri Lanka was keen to put issues of peace and security on the SAARC agenda, as long as there was emphasis on the principles of non-interference and non-use of force in the SAARC Charter. In particular, Sri Lanka was keen to speak against the intolerable role of India in its internal (ethnic) conflict. For this purpose, Colombo wanted bilateral issues to be discussed and settled, at least informally, through the Association and made a futile attempt to place this one the agenda at the June 1987 SAARC Ministerial Meeting (2009 pers. comm.).

³¹ Between Bangladesh and India, there has been a conflict over the sharing of the Ganges water. There has also been a water dispute between India and Nepal over the area of Kalapani.

It is clear from the above discussion that countries other than India and Pakistan warmly accepted the proposal for a South Asian regional organisation (Didi 1991:148), but there were a few reservations from New Delhi and Islamabad. Both countries saw the move from Bangladesh as being motivated by Washington – with reference to the Carter Doctrine of engaging South Asia in the Cold War.³² In particular, the Carter Doctrine emphasised some sort of a regional security framework in South and South-West Asia; consequently India and Pakistan were not enthusiastic about the idea of such a regional forum in South Asia (Muni 1989:40). It was a time when both India and Pakistan were in a strong anti-American mood, though the US was making successive attempts to engage Pakistan as an ally in its Cold War game plan to curb Soviet expansion in Afghanistan. For New Delhi, it was vital not to take sides in the Cold War. However, in Islamabad, there was also a desire to avoid providing a forum to India which could facilitate its possible alliance with the US, as SAARC under the influence of Washington could have been such a forum (Muni 1989:41).

Unlike some of the other member states, Pakistan was suspicious of expanding the institutional scope of SAARC to include security issues because, according to the mind-set in Islamabad, that would have strengthened the dominance of India. Pakistan was in agreement with other smaller countries in the region to resist any widening of regional economic disparities with reference to India versus the rest of South Asia. Between 1970 and 1980, Pakistan wanted to gain more from stronger ties with China while being independent of the US-led alliance and by playing a significant role in the NAM (Malik 1994:1079). Pakistan's foreign policy was grounded on the principle of avoiding violent confrontation with India, especially after the 1971 war.

Pakistan wanted to establish closer ties with South Asian countries, but its foreign policy was inclined towards brotherly relations with fellow Muslim nations. Furthermore, Islamabad's approach was to join SAARC but without compromising its links with Central Asia. Since 1964, Pakistan has been a member of the Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD) along with Iran and Turkey, which now, in its expanded form, is known as the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO).³³ Prior to the formation of SAARC, President Zia ul Haq of

³² The Carter Doctrine was a 1980 policy of President Jimmy Carter of the US. The doctrine advocated the use of force to defend national interests in response to the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (Klare 2009 online).

³³ The Regional Cooperation for Development was transformed into the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) in 1985 and expanded in 1992 by extending its membership to Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Pakistan made the point clear that participation in a South Asian forum would not affect his country's relations with the Muslim world (Murthy 2009 online).

Initially, the idea of a regional forum in South Asia had seemed to present more threats and concerns than opportunities to India. The basic challenge was of neighbouring countries becoming a united pressure group against India to resolve their bilateral issues. For New Delhi, one strategy was to make its neighbours seek help from India for their developmental and security needs – the South Asian country having the capability to provide this. However, India was wary of SAARC because it realised it could be a collective constraint on India itself; therefore, India has continued to prefer bilateralism to regionalism in South Asia.

For India, SAARC was important to advance cooperation in hardcore economic areas, such as trade, industry and finance. The idea was to foster greater interdependence in the region by reducing differences among the member states in economic and political spheres. At this point, India was also in favour of greater interaction with the outside world in order to access foreign funds in the future. Through SAARC, India sought to gain more prominence in global affairs by strengthening its position in North-South and other forums, especially by developing a collective South Asian foreign policy (Ahmed 1991:77). It was also an intention of New Delhi to gain some sort of legitimacy over its involvement in the domestic affairs of smaller countries of South Asia. However, along with other members, New Delhi agreed on the principle of non-interference in the SAARC Charter, but in principle only.³⁴ Ever since the establishment of SAARC, India has been influencing the affairs of its smaller neighbours. Examples include its military interventions in the Maldives to prevent a coup in 1988 (Didi 1991:159), and also operations under the Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka from 1987 to 1990 (See Chapter 3).

Through SAARC, both India and Pakistan had hoped that such a regional body would help to weaken their rival's alliance with extra-regional superpowers, such as the US and Soviet Union. For example, India was interested in drawing Pakistan away from the Pakistan-US-China axis, while on the other hand Pakistan hoped for a weaker India-Soviet bond (Didi 1991:149). Although India and Pakistan had different motives for going ahead with SAARC, there was at least a consensus to accept a regional organisation without any traditional

³⁴ In this regard, it is important to recall India's decisive role in preventing an attempted coup d'état against President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom of the Maldives in 1988. Afterwards, Gayoom was heard applauding the Indian support and the significance of India in regional affairs (Didi 1991:159).

security agenda (Muni 1989:42). India hoped SAARC would be based on an indigenous model developed according to the needs of people in the region. However, India's biggest concern was to avoid SAARC turning into a future political union. The aim in New Delhi was to keep SAARC isolated from other regional blocs and international organisations (Naqash 1994:56) with the prime objective of ensuring India's dominance in the regional organisation.

In this era, the key challenge for India and Pakistan was to maintain their relations with their extra-regional partners, namely the Soviet Union and the US. During the time of war in Afghanistan, New Delhi's policy was to stop South Asia from becoming a battlefield of rivalry between the superpowers. India wanted the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, but without the involvement of the US. For Pakistan, it was difficult to deviate from a partnership with the US, which was showering Islamabad with billions of dollars in military and economic aid. Since August 1947, both India and Pakistan have established relations with superpowers to suit their national security policies (See Chapter 3).

The above discussion reflects the difficulty in reconciling differences on SAARC and in this regard the credit goes to Rahman and the officials involved who finally resolved all concerns through the Bangladesh paper on regional cooperation.

4.3 Agenda and areas of cooperation

As many respondents mentioned in personal communications, SAARC's agenda is comprehensive as the organisation works on almost any issue relevant to its member states. The Association works in the following areas: agriculture and rural development; health and population activities; women, youth and children; environment and forestry; science and technology; transport and human resource development; biotechnology; and tourism and energy. However, it is the process through which the SAARC agenda was or has been finalised that is important; therefore, this section presents an in-depth analysis of the SAARC Charter with reference to the policies of key member states.

South Asia is unlike any other region due to the level of animosity existing amongst its member states in relation to territorial disputes; thus, a motive for the establishment of SAARC was to generate opportunities to resolve such issues (Singh 2007:27). It was through the meetings at the foreign ministerial level that the actual work to establish a regional forum

began. During these meetings, the Indian foreign secretary lobbied to the inclusion of the following two principles into the SAARC framework: unanimity in decisions, and setting aside discussions on contentious political issues (Naqash 1994:64). India did manage to get the support of other countries to include these two principles in the SAARC Charter. Before the summit of leaders in 1985 to launch the Association, there were two ministerial meetings organised, one in 1984 in the Maldives and the other in 1985 in Bhutan. Eventually, in December 1985, the following seven founding members established SAARC: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. At that point, Afghanistan was not invited to join the regional forum due to the Soviet occupation (Khan 1991:33). The leaders of the member countries stated in the SAARC Charter that they were:

Desirous of promoting peace, stability, amity and progress in the region through strict adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter and Non-Alignment, particularly respect for the principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, national independence, non-use of force and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states and peaceful settlement of all disputes (SAARC 1985:1).

By keeping contentious issues off the agenda, the idea behind SAARC has been to pave the way for sustainable regionalism in South Asia. In this regard, Article X of the SAARC Charter (SAARC 1985:11) specifically states that “bilateral and contentious issues shall be excluded from the deliberations.” While formulating the organisation’s agenda, the South Asian leadership was aware of the fact that a sudden shift into the area of traditional security involving contentious bilateral issues might derail the whole process of regionalism, and this awareness was labelled as “very wise” by the Director of Pakistan at the SAARC Secretariat, Dastgir (2009, pers. comm.). According to Khosla (1999:13), ex-secretary of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (1989-1992), this omission from the agenda was “necessary” due to the socio-political and economic challenges of South Asia.

The thinking behind the exclusion of bilateral disputes from the SAARC was to allow the cooperation to progress and to pave the way for peace and security in the region through cooperation in functional areas, such as trade, poverty alleviation, health security and so on. It is important to quote King Birendra (1985:2) who stated at the opening summit of SAARC in Dhaka that, “regional cooperation can strengthen the building of a lasting edifice of peaceful co-existence through initiatives and interactions in ... cultural, scientific, technological and economic spheres.” This is also the central hypothesis of the thesis and forthcoming chapters are aimed at presenting a detailed analysis to explore the extent to which cooperation in

human security areas has led to meaningful cooperation in areas of a contentious nature, such as cross-border terrorism, drug smuggling, and human trafficking.

It was not all successes for India with reference to the formulation of SAARC's agenda, because New Delhi had to compromise in permitting the Association to cultivate greater ties with the outer world. The Charter specifically allows for greater cooperation with other developing countries, international and regional organisations having similar objectives (SAARC 1985:1). However, perhaps to New Delhi's content, it was agreed upon in the Charter that the members should strengthen cooperation among themselves in global multilateral forums of common interest (SAARC 1985:1).

In early deliberations on the establishment of SAARC, the issue of linkages with the outside world became a cause of disagreement due to reservations, mainly from India. All member states of SAARC bear the financial burden of regional cooperation, including India and Pakistan, which are the biggest contributors. Therefore, apart from India, there was an interest among countries in accepting financial aid not only from international development agencies but also from developed countries. Smaller countries wanted SAARC to be a body accepting and channelling funds into regional projects, particularly in their countries. According to Muni (1991:65), the Indian lack of enthusiasm for foreign aid was mainly due to their wish to avoid any external interference in the affairs of South Asia because aid could be used as an instrument to promote the foreign policy of outsiders. Furthermore, there was a risk that the Association could be influenced, not only by foreign governments, but also by multilateral corporations, and international organisations (Khatri 1999:212). All of these actors, depending on the parameters of their roles, may try to influence a regional body to further their objectives in a particular region.

As soon as SAARC was established, the UN, and the European Economic Community (EEC) were eager to promote regional cooperation in South Asia, and their interest was welcomed by the SAARC member states. As indicated before, the issue of external linkages was controversial at SAARC because of a variety of points of view. However, this issue was eventually somewhat resolved, at least in the matter of obtaining financial aid. In the SAARC Charter, it is clearly stated that:

In case sufficient financial resources cannot be mobilised within the region for funding activities of the ASSOCIATION, external financing from appropriate sources may be mobilised with the approval of or by the Standing Committee (SAARC 1985:10).

External sources of funding, as per the Charter, are considered a last resort to support SAARC programmes. However, at this point in the mid-1980s there was still uncertainty about accepting offers of funding from Japan, West Germany, Norway, Canada, Australia, and the US. The Soviet Union also offered support to establish economic linkages between SAARC and the communist bloc's Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), but this proposal was turned down due to suspicions on the part of South Asian countries.

SAARC has been a forum for its members to reach common positions on issues of a global nature, such as climate change, and global economic recession. It is one of the key objectives of the Association, as stated in the SAARC Charter, to strengthen collaboration among the members at global multilateral forums (SAARC 2008b:3). There has been a strong commitment of the political leadership of the member states on this matter, as was reflected in the declaration of the Sixth SAARC Summit (Colombo, 1991):

The Heads of State or Government resolved to encourage consultations among delegations of SAARC countries at all international fora and to promote articulation of joint positions where such action would be in the interest of all. They felt that the development of a collective position in international fora would accord them greater credibility and enhance the international profile of South Asia (SAARC 2008d:65).

There are reasons why, through regional organisations, developing countries are developing common positions towards global dialogues on a whole range of issues from trade to climate change. Globalisation continues to influence multilateralism, in either the UN or regional organisations. However, in some cases, particularly through debates at the World Trade Organisation (WTO), global multilateralism has a tendency of favouring the developed world, thus discriminating against the least developed and developing countries. Due to this, a couple of South Asian scholars are convinced that there is no alternative for South Asian countries but to act as a regional forum in the global arena (Baral 1989:197; Thapa 1999:174).³⁵ Hence, there is an opportunity for member states to develop their collective approaches in global forums and thereby avoid being the losers in global policies. Nevertheless, the Association

³⁵ It was Professor Lok Raj Baral of Nepal who, early on, introduced the idea of a "regional foreign policy" in South Asia. Read the following book chapter to learn more about his proposal: Lok, R. B. 1989, 'Towards a Regional Foreign Policy', in *Regional Cooperation in South Asia: Problems & Prospects*, B. Prasad (ed), Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, pp. 187-197.

has often struggled because “it is very difficult to coordinate the foreign policies of all eight states”, as Basnyat (2009, pers. comm.) pointed out. However, a change has recently occurred at SAARC with the members obtaining global bargaining power through common positions at global forums on climate change (see Chapter 6).

The key objectives of the Association are presented in the SAARC Charter. The heads of state devoted article one of the Charter to define the purpose of the organisation, with particular emphasis on promoting “the welfare of the peoples of South Asia and to improve their quality of life” and “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 realise their full potential” (SAARC 1985:3). The focus is on the welfare of individuals – an aspect which is central to the human security agenda (Feigenblatt 2010:63; Langenhove 2004:2-3), as discussed in Chapter 2.

To date, the official SAARC agenda has remained unchanged with the primary focus on people’s welfare. In the words of the Director of Nepal at the SAARC Secretariat, Basnyat (2009, pers. comm.), “in the SAARC Charter, it is mentioned that the socio-economic wellbeing of the people is crucial. The leaders are always thinking to make this region more self-sufficient.” Specifically, the first objective, as stated in Article I of the Charter, is to promote the welfare of the people in South Asia (SAARC 1985:1). Through the Charter, the SAARC leaders also defined the course of action leading to individual focused development in the region by directing the organisation “to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region to provide all individuals the opportunity to live in dignity and to realise their full potentials” (SAARC 1985:1).

As discussed earlier, the issue of India’s dominance in SAARC was central to the agenda of smaller countries and, on the other hand, India was wary of its neighbours ganging up against her; therefore, such concerns were addressed in the process of formulating the SAARC Charter. In this regard, an important principle of the SAARC Charter (SAARC 1985:11) was stated in Article X: “Decisions at all levels shall be taken on the basis of unanimity.” This principle might appear as a constraint to the SAARC process but there are provisions in the Charter that if more than two member states feel it appropriate, then they can create action committees to promote their agenda. SAARC was created with the purpose of complementing

bilateral and multilateral cooperation in South Asia, as stated in Article II of the SAARC Charter (SAARC 1985:5).

The SAARC Charter was moulded with consideration for the asymmetry existing among the member states, in terms of size, population, economic status and military strength, especially with reference to India and the rest of the region. This was not only reflected in the key principles of the organisation, but also the central objectives focusing on the Association contributing to “mutual trust, understanding and appreciation of one another’s problems” (SAARC 1985:1). These aims have also become key values at SAARC because issues faced by the member states are considered on a state-to-state basis, and not collectively. For example, there are special considerations at SAARC for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs)³⁶ as opposed to the developing countries³⁷ in various programmes, such as the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA).

At the commencement of SAARC, the member countries were wary of certain international dynamics, such as the nuclear arms race and Cold War, and their implications for South Asia. For example, in the Dhaka Declaration of 1985, the SAARC member states expressed concerns over the mounting nuclear arms race and called upon the nuclear weapon states to enter into negotiations for a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (Prasad 1989:7; SAARC 2008d:4-5). However, such aspirations were not given consideration in the nuclear programmes of India and Pakistan. Since SAARC was established, both India and Pakistan have continued to build on their nuclear capabilities. In 2011, India clinched a civil nuclear deal with the US, while Pakistan has reached an agreement on a similar deal with China. Therefore, India-Pakistan rivalry and their nuclear arms race continue to pose a unique challenge to the development of regionalism in South Asia. Furthermore, in the Dhaka Declaration, heads of state “reaffirmed their deep conviction in the continuing validity and relevance of the objectives of the Non-Aligned Movement as an important force in

³⁶ The Economic and Social Council of the UN is responsible for reviewing the list of LDCs based on its comprehensive criteria, for example of gross national income per capita (under \$750 for inclusion, above \$900 for graduation), and other indicators looking at human resources, economic stability, and economic potential vis-à-vis exports (UN 2003 online). According to this criterion, there are 48 LDCs in the world, including the following SAARC members: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal. SAARC continues to consider the Maldives as an LDC, even though the country was removed from the list of LDCs by the United Nations in January 2011 (UNCTAD 2011a online).

³⁷ There is no exact definition available for developing countries but these are generally known to be countries other than ‘developed’ and LDCs.

international relations” (SAARC 2008d:3). However, Pakistan refrained from non-alignment by becoming a key player in the US-USSR proxy war in Afghanistan.

By recognising the significance of cooperation at all levels, the SAARC Charter encourages all other mechanisms of regionalism. There is a provision in the SAARC Charter for sub-regionalism, as mentioned by a Director at the SAARC Secretariat (2009, pers. comm.). Cooperation at sub-regional levels could be between three to seven members of SAARC. It is quite pragmatic of SAARC to allow sub-regionalism with a vision that such processes will foster regionalism via the Association. There are some areas in which regional cooperation may not work immediately and in those areas sub-regionalism has a potential to work in the short-run. For instance, a fully-fledged regional transport agreement will take more time than a few sub-regional agreements or mechanisms supplementing the regional goal.

The SAARC leadership perceives sub-regional cooperation as complementary to bilateral and multilateral relations of SAARC member states (SAARC 2008b:2). Similarly, Basnyat (2009, pers. comm.) pointed out that, “at SAARC, we see that sub-regional projects will also help in overall regional economic union and in the future we will have more than one such project, for example, the Maldives, Sri Lanka and India might have another sub-regional cooperation.” The remarks of Basnyat depict the willingness of SAARC to fully utilise the potential of sub-regionalism towards greater regional cooperation in South Asia. “Naturally, it is easier to work at the sub-regional level because the smaller the group, the easier it is to handle” (Karmacharya, 2009, pers. comm.) (see Chapter 5).

The Charter, in totality, is a reflection of the functionalist approach to regionalism. The limitations of the SAARC Charter are a reflection of the nature of bilateral relations of the SAARC members and this fact is reflected somewhat in the area of cooperation among the members. However, the process has been flexible enough for cooperation beyond the Charter, especially through working together in sensitive areas, such as terrorism and transnational crime. This is not exclusively the case of SAARC because some other regional organisations have also returned to functionalism as a way to progress towards regional integration, especially with the hope of peace and stability at regional levels. The members of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) see the functionalist approach to regionalism as the backbone of regionalism. There are parallels between the charters of OAU and SAARC (Nweke 1987).

To cover its wider agenda, the Association organises numerous meetings to reach consensus on certain action plans. SAARC meetings are held behind closed doors, meaning that they are as official as possible. Shifau (2009, pers. comm.), the Director from the Maldives at the SAARC Secretariat, said that SAARC meetings are limited to the officials of SAARC member states. He also claimed that the Association organises roughly 180 activities per annum. This is a new development at SAARC because prior to 2005 there were no more than 120 activities per annum. According to an Indian representative at the SAARC Secretariat (2009, pers. comm.), SAARC is more active now because the norms' setting stage is complete and countries are jointly sailing towards implementation of projects.

4.3.1 Informal SAARC

While recounting the practical success stories of SAARC, for the purpose of this thesis, it is also important to underscore the groundwork, which the organisation has done through consensus and confidence-building in a region engulfed by bilateral conflicts. Analysis of the informal affairs of SAARC is crucial because the Association has been pragmatic enough to allow bilateral discussions on the sidelines of annual SAARC summits. Informal SAARC has been significant for the formal SAARC process because it allows political consensus to emerge on issues outside the official purview of SAARC.

As mentioned earlier, the agenda of SAARC prohibits discussions on bilateral tensions or related issues. Considering good bilateral ties crucial to regional cooperation, the leaders of SAARC countries endorsed the process of “informal” dialogues at the Ninth Summit (Male, 1997):

The Heads of State or Government recalled their commitment to the promotion of mutual trust and understanding and, recognising that the aims of promoting peace, stability and amity and accelerated socio-economic cooperation may best be achieved by fostering good neighbourly relations, relieving tensions and building confidence, agreed that a process of informal political consultations would prove useful in this regard (SAARC 2008d:110).

SAARC stays away from the geo-politics of South Asia, as the researcher was informed by a director at the SAARC Secretariat (2009, pers. comm.). However, all of the directors at the Secretariat and even many non-SAARC participants highlighted the value of the leaders' “retreat” during SAARC Summits. A SAARC representative (2009, pers. comm.), who wanted his name to be kept confidential, elaborated on this feature of summits noting that a

retreat at summit level is of great importance because it provides opportunities for leaders to interact without the “trappings or formalities”. During their speeches at the Sixteenth SAARC Summit (Thimphu, 2010), the leaders of Bhutan and the Maldives mentioned their appreciation of the level of frankness they experienced during casual deliberations of the summit (Nasheed 2010; Thinley 2010).

Usually on this retreat leaders discuss what new areas of cooperation SAARC should be focussed on. Leaders can also freely express themselves on some emerging issues even of a bilateral nature. A renowned researcher from Pakistan, Khan (2009, pers. comm.), pointed out that now, “after assessing the value of retreats, there is increasing pressure from smaller countries in South Asia to institutionalise the process of informal discussions on political matters.”

When bilateralism failed due to heightened tensions between some member states, the SAARC forum provided “informal” opportunities to stakeholders to discuss their concerns. Moreover, the organisation, through numerous regional level meetings, agreements and measures, has been successful in promoting CBMs. For example, at the First SAARC Summit (Dhaka, 1985), Rajiv Gandhi and General Zia-ul-Haq of Pakistan met, and soon after the summit Zia visited New Delhi (Pattanaik 2004:435). Another worthwhile example occurred during the Second SAARC Summit (Bangalore, 1986) when Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi met with Sri Lankan President J. R. Jayawardene and three members of LTTE to discuss the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka (Sri Lanka Guardian, 28 June 2008). At the same SAARC meeting in Bangalore, Rajiv Gandhi also met his Pakistani counterpart, Muhammad Khan Junejo, to discuss bilateral issues (Pattanaik 2004:435). Therefore, Khan (2009, pers. comm.) recognised that “SAARC has facilitated conflict resolution through sideline meetings during SAARC Summits; therefore, we should also underline the intangible benefits of SAARC.” Khan further added that, there is a need for research on how SAARC can facilitate conflict resolution, even though SAARC’s agenda does not permit this.

Opportunities by way of informal meetings between the heads of state during SAARC summits continue to offer the organisation a viable political environment to uphold the agenda of regional cooperation. For the time being, these meetings are the only ways that SAARC can encourage bilateral dialogue between the heads of state to resolve their bilateral disputes. For example, before the Eleventh SAARC Summit which was scheduled to be held

in Kathmandu in 2002, tension escalated between India and Pakistan due to the December 2001 terrorist attacks on the Indian Parliament in New Delhi; in spite of this the leaders of both countries attended the meeting. According to Ahmad (2002:190), “this reflects the potential of SAARC as a mechanism for reducing tensions and improving cooperation in the region.” Dastgir (2009, pers. comm.) highlighted this aspect of SAARC:

The example is that a couple of years back there was some difficulty between India and Pakistan, but still the SAARC forum was available where the leaders had a chance to meet each other ... When Musharraf was here in Nepal, even his plane was not allowed to fly over the Indian air space. But he was here and then he went to shake hands with PM Vajpayee of India. That was the starting point for the peace process between two rivals.

One recent example is of the Prime Ministers from India and Pakistan meeting on the sidelines of the Sixteenth SAARC Summit held in Thimphu in April 2010 (Dikshit 2010). Dr Manmohan Singh of India and Yousuf Raza Gilani of Pakistan met and their discussion was followed by a meeting of foreign ministers of both sides. An informal agreement to resume the process of composite dialogue to address various bilateral issues, including the Kashmir dispute, was reached. Quite often, informal meetings have led to the initiation of formal bilateral dialogues between SAARC members. This underscores the potential of SAARC in yielding intangible benefits by reducing tensions between the member states.

Considering the value of informal political discussions, the 2000 report of the Group of Eminent Persons suggested the ‘institutionalisation’ of this process. Pakistan has been supporting the idea of formally discussing bilateral issues at SAARC and in the beginning Islamabad wanted India to resolve the Kashmir dispute before moving ahead with any regional arrangement (Muni 1989:41). New Delhi has always opposed any move towards conflict resolution in SAARC. An example is of India reacting furiously when in 1987 Sri Lanka, with the support of Pakistan, attempted to include ‘informal’ discussions on bilateral issues in SAARC. This was Sri Lanka’s response to India’s unilateral decision to drop relief for Tamils in Jaffna. In reaction, India warned that the inclusion of discussion on bilateral issues would be the “end of SAARC” (Muni 1991:62). Even though Pakistan and Sri Lanka support this idea, there is a risk of endangering the benefits of such informal discussion by making it official. Therefore, at this stage, it is important to stay with informal meetings, until the right time comes for future steps towards formalising this process.

4.4 Structure of SAARC

It is clear from the above discussion that SAARC has been working on almost all crucial areas of relevance to its members, except for conflict resolution. To work in the above mentioned areas, as per the mandate of the organisation, SAARC has a widespread structure.

Over the years, SAARC has not only undergone continuous consensus-building, but the formation of institutions across the region to deal with issues of common interest among its member states has also been prominent. With certain developments in the region and beyond, SAARC's structure has been experiencing transformation. For example, with the admission of Afghanistan as a permanent member there is now a division at the SAARC Secretariat to facilitate the addition of the new members in the organisation. It is therefore, important to mention that the information in this section is limited to the SAARC structure as of December 2009.

The SAARC member states have agreed to a set of rules for the working of the organisation. There is a financial scheme according to which member states make monetary contributions to the Association. Member states make provisions in their national budgets for financing activities and programmes, which includes their assessed contribution to the SAARC Secretariat and regional centres. It is clear through an agreed SAARC schema that a country hosting a centre is responsible for contributing 40 percent of the institutional cost and the remainder is divided among the other member states on the following basis: 24 percent of the balance of 60 percent that is 14.40 percent is shared equally and the remaining 76 percent of the balance of 60 percent (45.60%) is divided among the member states as assessed shares (Dastgir 2009, pers. comm.). An assessed share of a member state is calculated and mutually agreed upon by all member states by taking into consideration the economic state of that particular member. To give a clear picture of the institutional cost, an example of Pakistan as a host country of a SAARC regional centre has been provided in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Institutional cost sharing (Effective since December 2006)

Country	Equal share of 14.40%	Assessed share of 45.60%	Total share %
Afghanistan	1.80%	1.20%	3
Bangladesh	1.80%	4.63%	6.43
Bhutan	1.80%	1.20%	3
India	1.80%	16.40%	18.20
Maldives	1.80%	1.20%	3
Nepal	1.80%	4.63%	6.43
Pakistan (40%)	1.80%	11.71%	53.51
Sri Lanka	1.80%	4.63%	6.43

Source: (Dastgir 2009, pers. comm.)

Similarly, there is a formula for sharing the programming cost of SAARC centres (Table 4.2). In the case of an event (programme) in a member country, local expenses, including hospitality, are borne by the host government, while the cost of travel is met by participating governments (Batra & Banerjee 2002:13).

Table 4.2: Programming cost sharing (Effective since December 2006)

Country	Equal share of 24%	Assessed share of 76%	Total share %
Afghanistan	3%	2%	5
Bangladesh	3%	7.72%	10.72
Bhutan	3%	2%	5
India	3%	27.32%	30.32
Maldives	3%	2%	5
Nepal	3%	7.72%	10.72
Pakistan	3%	19.52%	22.52
Sri Lanka	3%	7.72%	10.72

Source: (Dastgir 2009, pers. comm.)

In relation to the financial inputs of member states, the level of their economic development has been taken into consideration. Through the above-presented tables, it can be seen that there are four levels among the member states regarding their financial inputs towards SAARC. There is one category for Afghanistan, Bhutan and the Maldives, another for Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka. India and Pakistan are treated separately in SAARC

financial schemes. The structure of SAARC is designed to give equal value to all of its member states in terms of their voice at meetings and summits, irrespective of their size and economic strength. Basnyat (2009, pers. comm.) elaborated on this feature of SAARC:

In South Asia, there are big countries and very small countries; therefore, SAARC has to take into consideration the interests of these countries. Similarly, there are also least developed countries, some countries are technologically advanced, and others are not. At SAARC, we have to balance between these countries in our summit declarations and programmes.

There is no non-SAARC funding towards the programme and institutional costs of either the SAARC Secretariat or centres (Dastgir 2009, pers. comm.). However, in certain cases some projects of the Secretariat and regional centres are financially assisted by external sources, such as inter-governmental and international non-governmental organisations (See Chapters: 5 – 8).

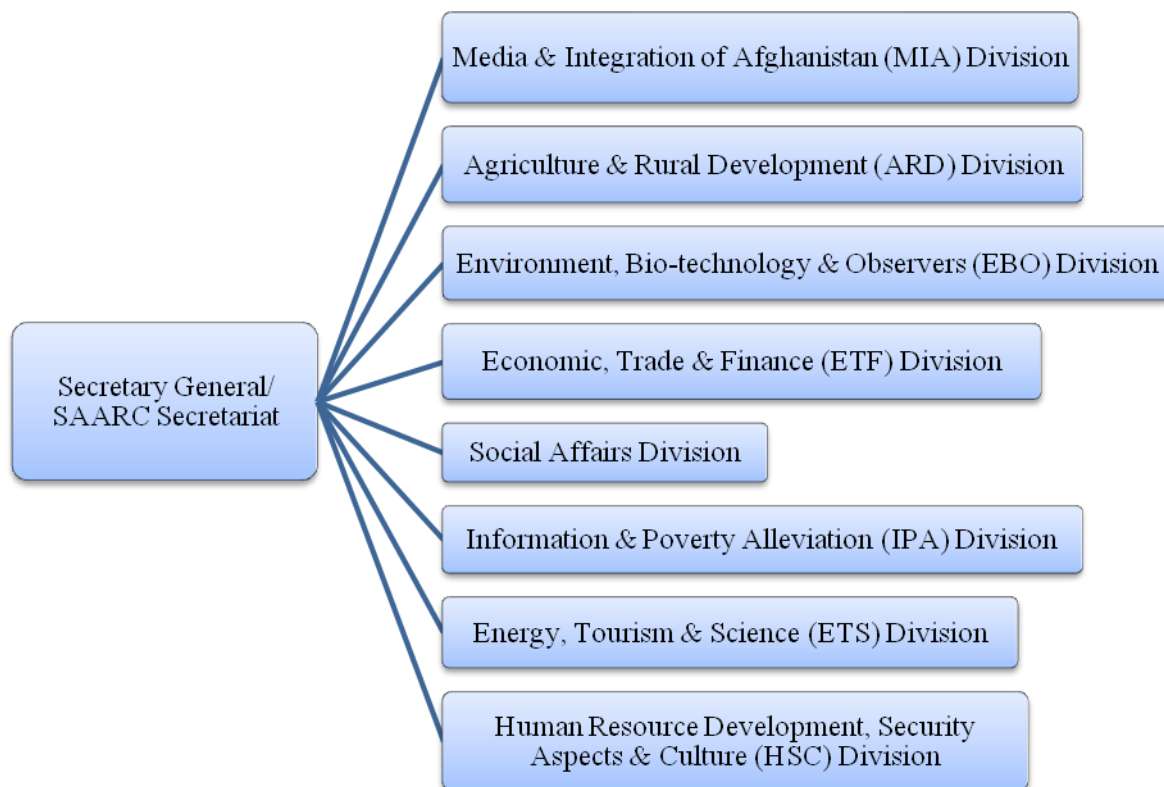
In 1987, the SAARC Secretariat was established in Kathmandu, Nepal, and a nominee of Bangladesh became the first Secretary General.³⁸ The initial cost of providing the building for the Secretariat, together with facilities and equipment was provided by Nepal (Batra & Banerjee 2002:13). However, other costs of running the Secretariat are shared by the member states. As per the MoU on the establishment of the SAARC Secretariat, “the role of the Secretariat shall be to coordinate and monitor the implementation of SAARC activities and to service the meetings of the Association, and initiate proposals for regional cooperation, preparation of projects for regional cooperation and identification of sources of funding” (SAARC 1986:1). An official of the SAARC Secretariat, who requested his identity not be disclosed (2009, pers. comm.), mentioned that the SAARC Secretariat should work harder to achieve its objectives. Member states do most of the practical work and the Secretariat only coordinates. SAARC is not a fund-disbursing organisation; projects are developed for the member states to implement.

A Secretary General, who is appointed for a three-year term from member states in alphabetical order, heads the Secretariat. The Secretary General holds the rank of an

³⁸ The capital cost for setting up the SAARC Secretariat in Kathmandu was provided by Nepal, and other member states paid as per their capacity towards the overall expenditures of running the secretariat. It was then decided that India would contribute 32 percent, Pakistan 25 percent, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka 11 percent each, and Bhutan and the Maldives 5 percent each towards the budget of SAARC Secretariat (Saksena 1989:89).

Ambassador (SAARC 1986:2).³⁹ The Secretary General is responsible for coordination, monitoring and evaluation of SAARC programmes for which he/she is assisted by eight directors delegated by the member states (SAARC 1986:5). Directors usually work for a period of up to three years at the Secretariat. Each director at the Secretariat manages programmes in different divisions, as assigned by the Secretary General. The structure of the Secretariat, as of 2009, is shown in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1: Structure of the SAARC Secretariat



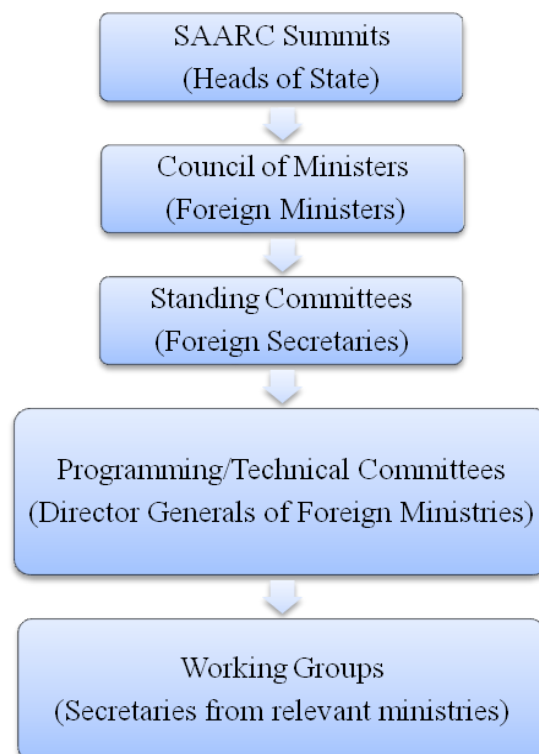
Annual Summits are the highest decision-making authority in the Association. At these annual meetings, the heads of state represent their countries along with other high-level officials, such as foreign ministers. During annual summits, the leaders evaluate the Association's progress and approve its future directions. The usual practice is for each member state to ask for proposals from its various ministries and then to take those proposals to SAARC summits. It is during the summits that various project ideas are approved for forwarding to the SAARC Secretariat for appropriate measures to be taken through its various

³⁹ At the time of this researcher's fieldwork, Dr Sheel Kant Sharma of India was Secretary General of SAARC. He was Secretary General from 2008-2010 and finished his term at the SAARC Secretariat in early 2011. In March 2011, he was replaced by the first woman Secretary General of SAARC, Fathimath Dhiyani of the Maldives.

channels (2009, pers. comm.). The country hosting the summit holds the Chair of the Association until the next summit. In the SAARC process, all decisions are made based on unanimity. To date, 17 SAARC Summits have been held between 1985 and 2011 (see Appendix 3 for list of SAARC Summits). Except for Afghanistan, all SAARC members have hosted annual summits.

Next in line, in terms of authority, is the Council of Ministers – comprising of foreign ministers. The hierarchical structure of SAARC is shown in Figure 4.2. The council meets at least twice a year. By April 2010, the council had met 32 times (SAARC 2011e online). Its functions include formulating policy, reviewing progress of regional cooperation, identifying new areas of cooperation and establishing additional mechanisms that may be necessary to support the work of SAARC (Batra & Banerjee 2002:8). The organisation also convenes various ministerial-level meetings in relation to its programmes, in particular in the areas of transport, commerce and energy. The tradition of the SAARC Foreign Ministers meetings on the sidelines of UN forums, especially the General Assembly, has continued since the early 1980s (Basnyat 2009, pers. comm.). These informal interactions are crucial too for SAARC. For example, the ministers met on 26th September in New York and reviewed the progress of SAARC to share with the heads of the state at the Sixteenth SAARC Summit (2010).

Figure 4.2: Hierarchy of SAARC



The Standing Committee comprising foreign secretaries assist the Council of Ministers. The committee monitors and coordinates programmes of cooperation, approves projects including their financing, and mobilises regional and external sources of funding. The Standing Committee meets as often as necessary and reports directly to the Council of Ministers. By the end of 2010, this committee had held 37 regular sessions, excluding five special meetings (SAARC 2011q online).

In addition, SAARC has a Programming Committee and Technical Committee comprising of the Directors General of foreign ministries, and they do all the groundwork for the Standing Committee. The Technical Committee communicates with relevant SAARC centres and non-SAARC research institutions in the region (SAARC 1985:9).⁴⁰ Most proposals are initiated at the level of Technical Committees and then they go through a chain of processes, including the Standing Committee and the Council of Ministers, for final approvals at annual summits. The Association has also set up Working Groups in some technical areas, such as Information and Communication Technology (ICT), biotechnology, and energy. As per the guidelines developed by SAARC, “Working Groups should explore how the region could benefit from the new and emerging technologies in their respective areas and should concentrate on transfer of technology and setting up of medium-term and long-term projects/programmes” (SAARC 2006a:8). Working Groups are also comprised of secretary-level officials from relevant ministries of member states. In the SAARC Charter there is also a provision for Action Committees comprising of member states concerned with the implementation of projects involving more than two members, but not all member states (Batra 2002:9). At present, there are no such committees formed by SAARC members.

Due to its complex structure, the SAARC process is time-consuming as decisions travel through multiple channels of preparations, from programme and technical committees up to the Council of Ministers. Due to this comprehensive structure, it has been easier for SAARC to reach consensus on most issues raised at its annual summits because its mechanism allows in-depth discussions among the members. Nevertheless, this time-consuming process has its costs too due to the financial implications of organising numerous meetings, both for the SAARC Secretariat and the host country of the summit.

⁴⁰ Consult the SAARC Charter for more information on the work of different SAARC bodies (SAARC 1985).

SAARC enjoys some level of political commitment. This is evident in the launching and sustaining all its institutions and bodies and organising an impressive number of meetings due to its ever-expanding agenda. All of the members with the exception of Afghanistan host the regional centres. This reflects the dedication of hosting countries towards regionalism in South Asia because they provide a major share of the human and financial resources to sustain an SAARC centre. Other than the centre, a few countries are also hosting some important SAARC mechanisms, for example the South Asian University (India), and the SAARC Arbitration Council (Pakistan). The credit for hosting some high level meeting is not often given to the countries, but in terms of devotion to regionalism they are significant too because the costs of organising a summit can be heavy on smaller economies. For instance, according to a newspaper report, the expenditure of holding the 2004 SAARC Summit in Pakistan exceeded Rs.44 million, over US\$700,000 at that time (*Dawn*, 18 March 2004). A summit lasts for up to six days, including two days of meetings among the heads of states.

4.4.1 Expansion

SAARC has opened up to the outer world, not only through an extension of its permanent membership but also by giving observer status to some countries and the European Union. With this there has been keen interest in forging relations with inter-governmental organisations, local and international NGOs.

Since its beginning, leaders at SAARC have been cautious of formal connections with multilateral organisations and individual states, as they feared those countries, or perhaps donors, might also look for formal presence in the Association. At that juncture, the inclusion of observers was considered premature for SAARC (Muni 1991:65). However, it was not long before a consensus was reached among the member states to forge collaborations with other regional organisations. In relation to this, at the Fourth SAARC Summit (Islamabad, 1988), the Secretary General of SAARC was asked to explore possibilities for establishing cooperation with other regional organisations (SAARC 2008d:35).

There have been debates in SAARC about being more inclusive by including all the countries in the region. Afghanistan and Burma could both claim membership of SAARC but initially they were not in the South Asian group of seven. India was in favour of extending membership to Afghanistan ever since the Association was founded. In fact, at the Third

SAARC Summit (Kathmandu, 1987), New Delhi forwarded Afghanistan's application for membership. The Indian proposal was strongly opposed by Pakistan not merely, because it came from New Delhi but due to concerns that Afghanistan might use the forum to lobby support over its territorial dispute with Pakistan. In the beginning, Islamabad was also in favour of excluding bilateral issues from SAARC deliberations. Pakistan was more interested in developing SAARC's partnership with the neighbouring ASEAN. Ultimately, Afghanistan was not approached to become a member of this regional body due to the Soviet invasion of the country in 1979 and subsequent decade long occupation. There were no reasons provided by SAARC for the non-admission of Burma. India did approach Burma in 1987 to discuss its inclusion in SAARC but it was in vain owing to Burma's greater inclination towards ASEAN (Muni 1991:66).⁴¹

After the end of the Cold War followed by a civil war and Taliban rule, there was interest in SAARC to include Afghanistan as a new member because New Delhi felt that Afghanistan could become South Asia's connection with the Central Asian states rich in natural resources. Other members at SAARC also shared this feeling. Subsequently, Afghanistan became the eighth member of the SAARC during the Fourteenth SAARC Summit (New Delhi, 2007) (SAARC 2008d:191). Kabul was interested in joining SAARC due to a whole range of issues, such as greater investment in the country, gaining from becoming a corridor for energy trade between Central and South Asia, and getting assistance for counterterrorism efforts at home (O'Rourke 2007 online).

The mandate of SAARC, similar to that of ASEAN and some other regional organisations, allows for including additional countries. The Secretariat is acting appropriately to fully integrate Afghanistan into the SAARC process. The new member is still learning about the SAARC process but has become a party to all the agreements of the Association. Afghanistan is still trying to engage with SAARC as much as possible, but as pointed out by Dastgir (2009, pers. comm.), given the difficulties they have, sometimes it is not possible for them to attend all SAARC meetings. Dastgir also mentioned that because of the political and security situation, Afghanistan has not been as active as the other member states. Afghani officials are still undergoing training at SAARC. It was observed by this researcher at the Secretariat that attempts are being made to engage Afghanistan in the process. For this purpose, the

⁴¹ Burma (Myanmar) joined ASEAN in 1997.

Secretariat, earlier in 2009, had invited three Afghan officials to get to know the procedures of SAARC. In 2009, for the first time, Afghanistan convened the meeting of the SAARC Development Fund in Kabul, which reflects some level of development with reference to Afghanistan's integration in SAARC. The membership of Afghanistan in SAARC has been viewed in terms of its pros and cons. A prominent think-tank researcher from Islamabad, Akhtar (2009, pers. comm.) argued: "I think the immediate impact is negative in terms of regional security because it has opened a new battleground." However, few participants, including Akhtar, commented on the future benefits of including Afghanistan into SAARC, such as the access by South Asian countries to the Central Asian markets, notably energy resources.

As the newest member, Afghanistan has a long way to go to fully integrate itself into the SAARC process. However, some progress has been made in this area. Ahmadzada (2009, pers. comm.) noted that an SAARC Division has now been established at the Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kabul. Previously, all the communication with SAARC was done through the Afghan Embassy in New Delhi. He further mentioned that in 2008 Afghanistan participated in roughly 82 SAARC meetings. This is still not a large number considering the fact that SAARC organises over 180 meetings per year, but the increasing interest of Afghanistan is worth appreciating.

With Afghanistan, becoming the eighth member of SAARC, there has emerged another, relatively less well-known dimension of tension between Afghanistan and Pakistan. There are issues of border demarcations and cross-border terrorism; both countries have therefore often blamed each other for disturbances in the security situation in their own countries. As far as Pakistan is concerned, Islamabad has been suspicious over the ties between Kabul and New Delhi, and has blamed India for escalating intra-state conflict in Pakistan through intervention in the province of Baluchistan through Afghanistan (Ahmed & Bhatnagar 2007:174). Even though there are bilateral issues between India and Pakistan, and Afghanistan and Pakistan separately, the situation in Afghanistan could be handled effectively if India and Pakistan commit to reconstruction and development in Afghanistan. Increasingly, bilateral issues are becoming multilateral, whether it is the issue of cross-border terrorism or the India-Pakistan proxy war in Afghanistan; therefore, the situation again points to the need for a regional level security dialogue for a timely solution to an apparent impasse regarding security in South Asia.

There is more scope for SAARC to establish extra-regional linkages due to a policy shift in New Delhi and India joining other members favouring the establishment of greater South Asian ties with other regions and countries. As it was found during the researcher's time at the SAARC Secretariat, officials have a reassessed vision to connect with neighbouring regions and to be more inclusive in terms of observer membership. China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, USA, Iran, Mauritius, Australia, Myanmar and the European Union have joined SAARC as observers.⁴²

The earliest decision on the granting of observer status to Japan and China was taken at the Thirteenth SAARC Summit (Dhaka, 2005) and then the Council of Ministers was directed to work on this matter (SAARC 2008d:187). Even though the initial idea was to include China and Japan as observers, other countries also showed interest. Consequently, at the Fourteenth SAARC Summit (New Delhi, 2007), SAARC welcomed China, Japan, the EU, South Korea, and the US as SAARC observers (SAARC 2008d:198). Since their admission as observers, those countries and the EU have been limited to sharing their proposals for greater cooperation with SAARC, and participation in the inaugural and concluding sessions of annual summits. However, for the meaningful cooperation of observers, the Guidelines for Cooperation with Observers were adopted at the Fifteenth SAARC Summit (Colombo, 2008) (SAARC 2008d:211).⁴³ It is yet to be seen in what ways and what levels SAARC engages with the observers.

The process of extra-regional linkages has grown with nine observers, including eight countries and an intergovernmental regional organisation – the EU. There is growing interest from other countries in joining SAARC as observers. For example, Russia's interest in becoming an observer is supported by India, the Indonesian case is endorsed by Sri Lanka, and Pakistan backs the application of Turkey, but no decision has yet been reached to approve their applications (Dikshit 2011 online). Nonetheless, this illustrates the interest in SAARC by outsiders; however, the organisation has been cautious in issuing either membership or observer status to any country seeking affiliation. Basnyat (2009, pers. comm.) revealed the

⁴² See the following for more information on the SAARC framework: K. P. Saksena 1989, 'Institutional Framework', in *Regional Cooperation in South Asia: Problems & Prospects*, B. Prasad (ed), Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi.

⁴³ The Observers from Australia, China, Iran, Japan, South Korea, Mauritius, Myanmar, the USA, and the EU participated in the sixteenth SAARC Summit held in Thimphu, April 2010. This was the first time that representatives of Australia and Myanmar attended the summit. The Guidelines for Cooperation with Observers were adopted by the Fifteenth SAARC Summit held in Colombo (August 2008).

limited role of observers in the SAARC process. He explained that “observers want to monitor our progress and also sometimes, if they request, they can speak at SAARC forums ... They can advise us in certain matters.” From the point of view of SAARC, the Association is more interested in seeking financial support from its observers for its various projects, and this may be because the earliest SAARC observer, Japan, has generously supported the SAARC. For example, through the SAARC-Japan Fund, Tokyo gives about US\$250,000 per annum for SAARC projects (Basnyat 2009, pers. comm.).

Having more observers is a relatively new development at SAARC. Therefore, the Association is taking time to fully benefit from interactions with observing countries and the EU. However, for SAARC it has been easier to deal with Japan and South Korea, and its association with the former has been continuous since the early 1990s. A high-ranking SAARC Secretariat official, who did not want to be quoted (2009, pers. comm.), mentioned that in 1993 an MoU was signed between the SAARC and Japan. He also highlighted the fact that so many countries are interested in becoming SAARC observers because the region is a huge market with great potential for investment. They can learn from the example of the SAARC-Japan Special Fund, which has facilitated activities in the region. For example, the Government of Japan has been funding youth exchange programmes in South Asia. Similarly, South Korea has been funding short-term training programmes in the areas of Information Technology (IT), and Human Resources (HR).

From the observers’ point of view, it is clear that they seek greater engagement with South Asia via SAARC. Perhaps that is the key reason they have joined the forum; however, reasons vary from country to country. For example, the US and Australia have been interested in South Asia and thus SAARC due to an increasing South Asian diaspora in their countries. There are different priority areas for the observers when it comes to collaboration with SAARC. Australia is interested in environmental security and sustainable water usage for agriculture; South Korea in human resources development; Japan in human development; China in the SAARC Development Fund; Iran in Energy trade; and the US in cooperation for climate change adaptation (Blake 2010; Guangya 2010; McMullan 2010; Mottaki 2010; Nishimura 2010; Win 2010; Yong-Joon 2010). All observers, other than Mauritius and the EU, had representatives at the Sixteenth SAARC Summit (Thimphu, 2010) to share their motives for cooperation with SAARC. It is encouraging to see that the observers are seeking

meaningful cooperation with the organisation; however, the SAARC Secretariat needs a better working mechanism to fully benefit from its observers, such as ASEAN (see Chapter 9).

Since the Association entered into a phase of implementing projects in 2005 – a move advanced by the SAARC Summit held in Islamabad in 2004 – there have been greater efforts from international agencies to support regionalism in South Asia. Another reason is that, in some ways the improvement in India-Pakistan relations, especially after the Islamabad meeting, led to collaborations with organisations such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the UN (Karmacharya 2009, pers. comm.). After the implementation of some meaningful projects in the areas of human security, there has also been a growing interest in developed countries to establish direct links with SAARC, mainly with the purpose of systematic economic and political linkages with South Asia.

SAARC has gradually come out of its introvert mode to interact with the external world. To achieve its goals in the areas of human security, SAARC has signed MoUs with numerous international organisations, such as the World Health Organisation (WHO), the UN, ASEAN, and the European Commission. Some aspects of these cooperative arrangements will be discussed in later chapters. For more details on SAARC MoUs, see Appendix 4.

4.5 Challenges

The forthcoming analysis focuses on the prominent challenges faced by SAARC, such as institutional and structural, institutional, and economic challenges. This discussion is presented prior to a detailed critique of SAARC programmes, in selective areas, to develop a better understanding of regionalism in South Asia. It should be mentioned that there are numerous other challenges, such as the consequences of regional asymmetry in South Asia on SAARC, and those are dealt with in other chapters.

4.5.1 Political challenges

SAARC was born in the midst of security crises in the region, both at domestic and inter-state levels. The situation at that time also forced SAARC to become an introverted organisation (Naik 1999:334). In the opinion of Sheikh Hasina (2003:6), this inwardness of South Asian countries has been constraining the exploitation of the full potential of SAARC. Due to their

negative national attitudes towards SAARC, India and Pakistan half-heartedly welcomed SAARC; therefore, in the earlier years regional cooperation was almost paralysed.

The initial obstacles for SAARC were created because of the India-Sri Lanka dispute over India's military involvement in Sri Lanka's domestic conflict (See Chapter 3). Initially, in objection, Sri Lanka postponed the scheduled SAARC summit and the Ministerial Council in 1989 (Ahmed 1991:74). Later, this tension led to the cancellation of the scheduled 1989 SAARC Summit. There were similar occasions when SAARC had to postpone its meetings due to tensions between India and Pakistan. During a period of high tension between India and Pakistan, the Eleventh SAARC summit was postponed from 1999 to 2002 – the post Kargil war era – and the Twelfth summit from 2003 to 2004 due to allegations of cross-border terrorism (Sobhan 2005:4) (See Chapter 3). Consequently, in 26 years from 1985 to 2011, SAARC organised 17 summits, instead of one per year.

Each member state of SAARC follows a rigid foreign policy. For example, Pakistan has returned to its traditional position on SAARC vis-à-vis India, which is linked to the resolution of the Kashmir dispute – “the core issue”, as stated by Dastgir (2009, pers. comm.). Therefore, Ahmad (2002:191) is of the view that multilateralism will remain stagnant unless bilateral relations among the stakeholders are conducive. On the other hand, New Delhi continues to prefer bilateralism to regionalism in South Asia, and this has its implications for the SAARC process (Ahmad 2002:191). However, formulation of a foreign policy relating to national policy aims is not just limited to South Asia because this is the general practice in international organisations (Haas 1956:241). According to a delegate at the SAARC Secretariat (2009, pers. comm.), “in any regional cooperation there are competing interests among the member states. That has been the case of SAARC.” Therefore, it has even been difficult for SAARC to take action in certain areas because each country has its own priorities, as mentioned by a SAARC representative (2009, pers. comm.). Similarly, an Indian diplomat to SAARC (2009, pers. comm.) pointed out that “there is a bit of a lack of perspective on regional plans in South Asia, though all countries know of bilateral concerns ... And the way countries approach regional issues is influenced by bilateralism.” There are many who shared feelings similar to the above-mentioned Indian representative. Dahal (2009, pers. comm.), a Nepali political analyst, argued:

Each country has different images. Each country has different capabilities and also each country has different perceptions of the other neighbours, and they have different intentions. Unless, they are harmonised into a common regional identity, no matter size varies, no matter histories differ, and we cannot cope with the future challenges until we come together.

Irrespective of the security situation of South Asia and the level of India-Pakistan enmity, some still see hope in multilateralism. A renowned Pakistani scholar, Khan (2009, pers. comm.), expressed his thoughts on the intangible benefits of functionalism:

Human security threats in South Asia are emerging very fast and they include not only the population increase but also illegal migration, health problems, environmental security, water sharing etc. Earlier or later, both India and Pakistan will realise that only through some kind of collaboration in addressing common human security challenges they can develop. I do not think the bilateral relations between India and Pakistan can be based on zero sum game anymore.

The SAARC process was initiated on the basic assumption of functionalism that economic cooperation leading to economic integration would pave the way for peace and stability in the region; therefore, there is a need to evaluate the progress of SAARC in a wide range of so-called uncontroversial areas to test the success of the functionalist approach.

4.5.2 Institutional challenges

For SAARC to be more active, the Secretariat needs to have a direct and efficient mechanism of communication with its member states. On this, Basnyat (2009, pers. comm.) mentioned that “mostly through internet and the media SAARC is trying to stay connected with other countries in the region. For example, we do not have embassies of all the SAARC countries in Kathmandu, only four SAARC member states (Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) have their diplomatic missions in the city hosting the SAARC Secretariat.” For faster communication, SAARC would like all its member states to have embassies in Kathmandu. However, there are certain considerations; for instance, Afghanistan has recently joined SAARC, and thus is still considering this matter, and the Maldives now is going through an economic crisis. Basnyat further added that, “If there are embassies of all the SAARC member states in Kathmandu then it will be easier to cooperate with each other.” Even though the Secretariat has representatives of all eight stakeholders, having embassies of the member states would serve the purpose of greater and faster cooperation in several areas, such as education, trade, culture, and defence. Embassies often have representatives in the mentioned areas, for example education ministers.

SAARC is for the welfare of South Asians but its target group is hardly aware of its role. As admitted by the Director of the Maldives at the SAARC Secretariat, Shifau (2009, pers. comm.): “South Asians do not know about the work of the Association because no media coverage is allowed of SAARC meetings. And it appears that the SAARC leadership has been resistant to interaction with media.” This changed somewhat during the time (2008-2011) of Dr Sheel Kant Sharma, Secretary General of SAARC, who was active in clarifying issues relating to SAARC through articles and interviews.⁴⁴ Ahmadzadda (2009, pers. comm.) further elaborated on this point by saying, “there are financial implications of dealing with media; therefore, often the SAARC leadership has not been in favour of media coverage.” For example, to have the SAARC media productions broadcast across the region for cultural awareness, the organisation needs funds dedicated to this task.

As soon as the word ‘media’ is uttered in front of a SAARC official, they become uncomfortable due to their professional limitations and perceptions of the media. An SAARC Secretariat official, who preferred not to be attributed (2009, pers. comm.), elaborated on this issue: “We are not in [the] media because nothing bad is happening at the SAARC and [the] media does not have a culture of giving coverage to positive developments.” However, with the current leadership, SAARC has undergone changes in various important sectors, such as media. Director of the SAARC Secretariat, Ahmadzadda (2009, pers. comm.), from Afghanistan who heads the media division at the SAARC, disclosed that “at the SAARC, we are cautious with the media, however there was a decision at the 36th Programme Committee meeting [in August 2009] to improve relations with the media.” Even though the SAARC Secretariat and its regional centres now publish regular newsletters and widely circulate them, much more needs to be done to benefit from interactions with the media. This is basically the job of the SAARC Information Centre based in Kathmandu, but the centre has been ineffective due to SAARC’s lack of trust in the media (2009, pers. comm.). Interaction with journalists and the promotion of SAARC through the media is crucial for identity formation in South Asia. However, even though at a slow pace, the mind-set in SAARC is changing because at the Sixteenth SAARC Summit (Thimphu, 2010) efforts were made to attract greater media coverage. For this purpose, a summit website was created to share the press kit, the summit declaration and statements from the heads of state.

⁴⁴ Some of the messages, articles and interviews of Dr Sheel Kant Sharma are available from the SAARC website: www.saarc-sec.org. To find out more about the understanding of Dr Sharma of SAARC’s progress with reference to opportunities and challenges, see the following online: (Sharma, S.K. 2010) and (Shah, S. 2010).

As discussed in Chapter 3, India and Pakistan were reluctant to allow any external interference in South Asia due to their concerns over the region becoming a stage for Cold War rivalry. It also appears that their current representatives at the SAARC Secretariat follow the same line, and are fearful of external interventions into the work of SAARC. A prominent SAARC representative (2009, pers. comm.) argued, “What hinders regional cooperation are misperceptions of outsiders, developed solely on the basis of one or two conflicts in South Asia. SAARC addresses multi-dimensionality in the region through people-to-people contact.”

Another matter hindering the progress of SAARC is the level of faith in the institution’s leadership, namely the Secretary General. Repeatedly, research participants referred to a problem with reference to the national agenda of successive Secretary Generals. On this matter, a delegate of the SAARC Human Resources Development Centre (SHRDC) (2009, pers. comm.) commented, “if a Secretary General is from Bangladesh then he will do everything in favour of his country, and the same goes for other countries because they learn from each other. There is no broader perspective to the position of Secretary General.”

Other than concerns over the role of the Secretary General, there are grave challenges faced by South Asian regionalism. An Indian representative at SAARC (2009, pers. comm.) expressed the opinion that the challenges of capacity and prioritisation might hinder progress during the next decade of trade integration in South Asia. He added:

Countries still do not prioritise regionalism and continue to prefer bilateralism. No country in the region is different and in a way it slows down regionalism ... Capacity even at the SAARC Secretariat is an issue because we do not have capacity to promote a technical agenda.

It was observed during the fieldwork that diplomats of the member states dominate the SAARC Secretariat and there were no technical experts to support the “technical agenda”. According to Mitrany (1966:134-135), technical experts should be integrated in a regional organisation to fulfil its mandate.

There are other implications of being dominated by diplomatic staff. For example, the diplomatic staff only looks at the foreign policy aims of their countries and also, in practice, rarely remain for long in any one position. For example, as was observed by the researcher, the SAARC Desk at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Pakistan was the most disorganised,

and served more as a transit point for diplomats waiting for their next posting. A bureaucrat there (2009, pers. comm.) hesitantly mentioned that, “I do not know much about SAARC because I have recently moved to this position after serving at the Embassy of Pakistan in Libya.” Diplomats usually do not get enough time to fully understand SAARC’s mission and priorities because they are moved to the next position abroad in a period of less than three years. There are similar practices across the region. In addition to this, the researcher came to know through informal interactions with directors at the SAARC Secretariat that some of them moved to their positions for brief periods in anticipation that their tenure in Kathmandu would be relaxing; however, they found it otherwise.

SAARC is faced with another challenge in the form of officials who do not have confidence in regionalism. A spokesperson of SHRDC (2009, pers. comm.) responded that, “With reference to regionalism, if you take SAARC as an example then it can never become a single region due to heterogeneity. India behaves as a big brother in South Asia and wants the younger brothers to obey her.” The reasons for such a conservative view were explained well by Karmacharya (2009, pers. comm.) thus: “Whatever is decided by politicians is not effectively translated among the bureaucrats ... Politicians may think big, but finally there are bureaucrats at foreign ministries who need to translate their dreams into reality.” It appears in the case of South Asia that it might not entirely be the fault of bureaucracy because even after showing a high level of enthusiasm at the SAARC Summit, leaders of SAARC member states may also convey to their ministries that cooperation in certain areas is not a priority. However, this does not indicate that such systems have no potential to work, as shown by SAARC’s slow but steady progress. Murthy (2009, pers. comm.), who is a renowned journalist, elaborated on this topic:

SAARC is yet another bureaucratic system, which can be made to work to one’s advantage, if one pushes. However, by nature, it is a bureaucratic setup and such systems need plenty of energy and on-going effort to be responsive, especially in the case of smaller member countries.

To some extent, SAARC is not yet ready to fully embrace networks of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the region and thereby benefit from them, particularly in the implementation of grassroots projects. This is perhaps because the NGO sector in South Asia has been too critical of the slow development at SAARC. However, there has been some change with reference to the SDF projects in India and Pakistan, but there are still limitations

to the involvement of NGOs with SAARC programmes. There is no direct channel or mechanism available to allow the civil society to collaborate with SAARC. This SAARC rejection of the civil society has also largely prevented interested groups from engaging with SAARC.

4.5.3 Economic challenges

Similar to other multilateral organisations, particularly the EU (EC 2009 online), the performance of SAARC has been hampered by the on-going global economic recession. The 2009 SAARC annual summit, which was scheduled to be held in the Maldives, was moved to Bhutan because the economy of the Maldives, which is dependent on the tourism industry, could not afford to host it. In 2009, the Maldives experienced a negative GDP growth rate of -2.3 percent (WB 2011a online).

South Asia is home to developing and least developed countries; therefore, they tend to focus on national welfare rather than regional development. Some countries do not pay much attention to regional cooperation because they are fully occupied with their domestic affairs, in particular developmental issues. For instance, for Bhutan, the country's infrastructural development is a prime concern and for Afghanistan, the obligations towards SAARC are difficult, due to the country's persistent instability. The 2010 floods in Pakistan have restricted the country to investing its resources in reconstruction and rehabilitation in the areas affected by the natural disaster. Therefore, a delegate at the SAARC Secretariat (2009, pers. comm.) stated that, "the diverse economic profile of the SAARC member states poses a major challenge for the [organisation]."

For some SAARC member states, it has been hard to financially commit to each and every initiative of the organisation. Basnyat (2009, pers. comm.) disclosed that Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka have already expressed in several meetings that there might be difficulties for them to financially contribute towards the South Asian University (SAU). Ahmadzadda (2009, pers. comm.) admitted that, "being a member state of SAARC involves certain financial implications as Afghanistan has to contribute five percent towards the overall budget of SAARC; therefore, our contribution is around US\$280,000-300,000 per annum." He also mentioned that that was a large sum of money for Afghanistan, which has to pay an additional US\$9,000 per year towards the SAARC Culture Centre in Colombo. Perhaps

Ahmadzadda was bothered by the full integration of Afghanistan into SAARC, where, in Kabul, some ministries, such as foreign and finance departments, have to coordinate in order to allocate the required budget for SAARC. As a new member, Afghanistan has to follow the SAARC procedures including financial obligations, established by the founding seven members. However, the problem is evident because for Afghanistan it is hard to financially contribute towards SAARC, including the Secretariat and eleven regional centres.

4.6 Conclusion

Established in the Cold War era, the SAARC framework is a reflection of the security concerns of the member states. India and Pakistan initially had apprehensions about the Rahman's proposal for a regional organisation in South Asia because they perceived that to be a regional security mechanism. Finally, when everyone's concerns were addressed the Association was created. As evident through the discussion on the SAARC Charter, the organisation has adopted the functionalist approach to cooperation. This schema was seen relevant not only to the geopolitics of the region but also to millions suffering from poverty, hunger, disease and homelessness.

The SAARC process is constrained by several factors, mainly political, economic and organisational. Even though, through its mandate, the SAARC founders wanted the organisation to refrain from bilateral disputes between its member states, this has not happened. Often bilateral conflicts have affected SAARC through postponement of its annual meetings and that, too, delayed the implementation of SAARC projects, although not in all areas. Nevertheless, SAARC has been a forum for the leaders and officials of the member states to exchange their concerns, both officially and informally. In this regard, as analysed in this chapter, the mechanism of sideline discussions or retreats has been influential in providing opportunities for dialogue between the heads of state, especially when no other venue for such a meeting has been available in times of high tension, for example between India and Pakistan.

Moreover, by nature of the economic status of its member states, SAARC has also been affected by economic crises at all levels, global, regional and national. For example, the Maldives refused to host the scheduled summit in 2009 due to the severe economic crisis in that country. In terms of organisational challenges, SAARC still lacks enough financial

resources to boost the process of project implementation. In addition to that, there is a chronic problem of lack of professionalism in SAARC because the organisation has failed to integrate professionals into its various institutions, in particular the SAARC Secretariat which is dominated by diplomats of the member states.

The change in SAARC has come not only with a transformation in leadership but also after certain vital milestones. In this regard, the SAARC Summit held in Islamabad (2004) was an important turning point for SAARC with renewed assurances from heads of state to push the Association towards the implementation of projects (SAARC 2008d:165-172). Also, due to improvement in the SAARC mechanism vis-à-vis the implementation phase, much needed support in the form of financial and human resources were provided by international agencies, such as the UN and ADB. Since SAARC entered into the project implementation phase in 2005 and developed institutions and programmes in areas relevant to the region, there have also been renewed efforts from non-South Asian observers for greater engagement with SAARC, and support for the organisation's regional agenda.

Since its establishment, SAARC has followed the functionalist approach of regionalism – cooperation in softer areas. This schema has been a crucial factor behind the over 25-year existence of the organisation; therefore, there will be an interwoven theme in most of the following chapters exploring the effectiveness of the functionalist approach to cooperation in South Asia. The analysis will focus on the pros of cons of functionalism in South Asia.

CHAPTER FIVE

ECONOMIC COOPERATION

5.1 Introduction

SAARC leaders understand the value of economic growth in the region because economic activities are likely to produce income-generating activities for tens of thousands of their people. Economic development on this scale is likely to contribute to the human development endeavours of SAARC. Economic growth is not merely limited to state-centric measures, such as industrialisation and foreign direct investment (FDI), because states also benefit through trade at bilateral, sub-regional, regional and global levels. It is important to be familiar with the economic profile of the region to weigh the impact of SAARC vis-à-vis economic development in South Asia; therefore, this chapter commences with a brief discussion of the relevant economic indicators of South Asia as a whole and of the SAARC member states.

South Asia's rapidly growing markets, rising middle class, cheap but skilled labour and limited natural resources provide an attractive market for foreign investors, and thus a path leading to sustainable development for countries in the SAARC region. As a cohort of both developing and least developed countries, SAARC faces both challenges and opportunities, especially in the area of economic cooperation. There are constraints in the form of bilateral disputes and concerns of smaller economies about the strength of the Indian economy. There are obviously opportunities for the Association to contribute towards the economic development through regional measures on free trade leading to the expansion of trade in South Asia. This chapter focuses on SAARC's progress to date after the implementation of the SAARC Preferential Trading Agreement (SAPTA) and its successor, the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA).

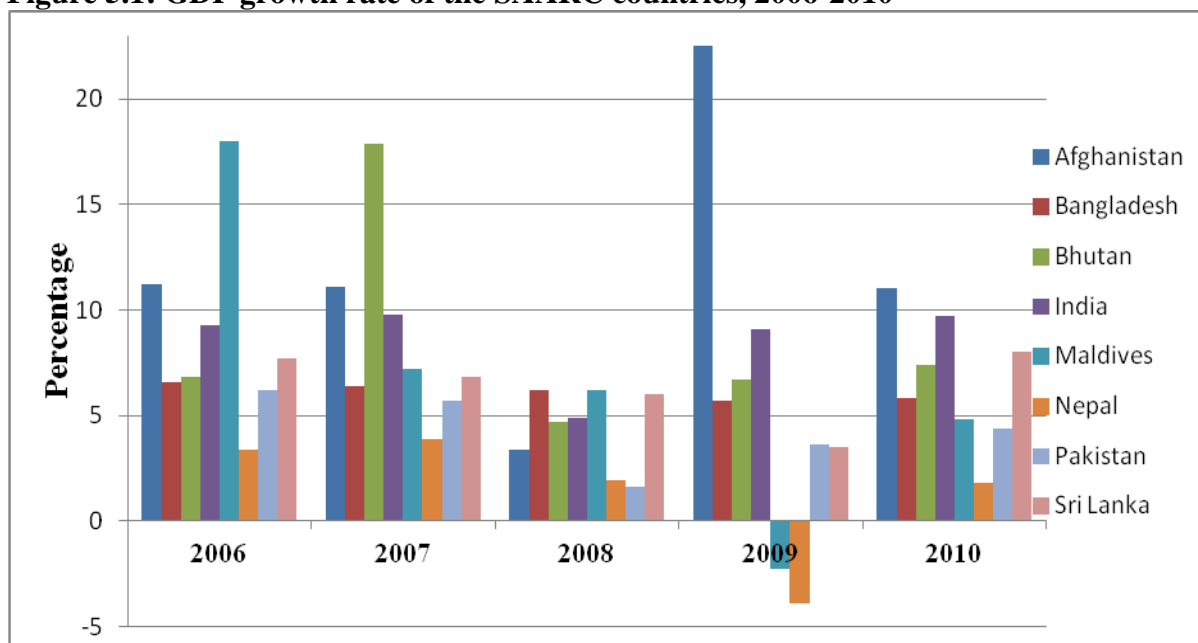
To become a working free trade region, SAARC member states have to remove existing trade barriers, whether political or physical. As political matters are not dealt with by SAARC, at least not formally, this chapter also identifies the physical hurdles (inadequate transport infrastructure, etc.) constraining intra-regional trade in South Asia. The analysis of all these factors is crucial to develop an understanding of the prospects of the work of SAARC in the area of economic cooperation.

It is important to mention that the scope of this chapter is limited to the analysis of the role of SAARC in promoting economic integration in South Asia through trade-related agreements and measures. As the focus is on implementation, there is limited focus on energy trade and on trade in services because of SAARC's insignificant progress in these areas.

5.2 Economic profile of South Asia

South Asian economies have been vulnerable to domestic, regional and global factors. The Global Economic Crisis (GEC) has affected the overall economic growth of the region, which declined from 9.1 percent in 2007 to 5.5 percent in 2009, but recovered in 2010 with a growth of 8.9 percent – led by India with a massive increase of 9.7 percent (ILO 2011:45). The GEC and some other factors, such as the 2010 floods in Pakistan, the decline of tourism because of the GEC in the Maldives, and reduction in foreign trade in Nepal, left the economies of these countries severely dented. As shown in the Figure 5.1, the GEC had some sudden impacts on South Asian economies with a swift decline in GDP growth rates experienced by all countries. Countries greatly dependent on revenues from the tourism industry, such as the Maldives and Nepal, even suffered in 2009 with negative GDP growth rates. In 2010, except for the aid-dependent economy of Afghanistan, all other countries were on upward GDP trends. According to a newspaper report, 90 percent of Afghanistan's public spending comes from foreign aid (*Hindu*, 23 November 2011).

Figure 5.1: GDP growth rate of the SAARC countries, 2006-2010



Data sources: (USDS 2011 online; WB 2011a online)

Crises of different kinds experienced by the SAARC countries also affected the unemployment rate which grew from 4.3 percent in 2007 to 4.5 percent in 2010 (ILO 2011:45). The economies of the region are prone to not only international incidents, such as the GEC, but also to the adverse affects of natural disasters and transnational crime (see Chapter 6 and Chapter 8). In 2009, due to a huge population and limited resources the average per capita income of the region was US\$986.8 (ADB 2009:4), which grew to over US\$1,500 in 2010 (see Table 5.1). As can be seen in Table 5.1, South Asia is home to diverse economies. The Maldives, whose economy is now back on track after being badly disturbed by the GEC, has the highest per capita income, which is also reflected through the country's better performance on human development (see Chapter 7). However, looking at the per capita income, Afghanistan is at the bottom followed by Nepal and Bangladesh.

The region is home to over 1.5 billion people and had a GDP of US\$1,437.4 billion in 2007 (ADB 2009:4), which declined after the GEC, leading to greater dependence on external financial support for some South Asian economies. Collectively, external debt of the SAARC members stood at 18.5 percent of the GDP in 2009 (ADB 2009:4). Although the GEC is not yet over in many parts of the world, the South Asian economies are showing some optimistic results with an increasing volume of FDI. In the region, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh attract the highest amounts of FDI showing positive signs of economic development in these countries (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: Selected Economic Indicators of the SAARC countries

Country	GNI per capita (US\$), 2010	FDI, 2010	External debt (US\$), 2009
Afghanistan	290 ^a	75,650,000	2,328,450,000
Bangladesh	700	967,645,395	23,820,176,000
Bhutan	1,880	11,690,756	762,380,000
India	1,340	24,159,180,720	237,691,640,000
Maldives	4,240	163,815,284	780,230,000
Nepal	480	87,847,608	3,682,958,000
Pakistan	1,050	2,016,000,000	53,709,628,000
Sri Lanka	2,240	478,212,000	17,208,032,000

Note: In data symbol 'a' refers to figures of 2008. Data source: (WB 2011a online)

South Asian economies are somewhat similar with regard to sector-wise contributions to GDPs. For example, in India and Pakistan, agriculture and textiles are the two major sources of not only the economy but also of employment. According to one estimate, agricultural industry contributes 16 percent to India's GDP and 20 percent to Pakistan's economy (Haq 2010 online). Similarly, in terms of major exports, some South Asian countries compete in the international and regional markets. For instance, tea is a major export of Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka. See Appendix 5 for a list of the major exports of the SAARC members, excluding Afghanistan.

5.3 Regional economic cooperation

Economic integration is one of the priority areas at the SAARC Secretariat, as emphasised by the SAAR Secretariat officials interviewed by this researcher. Integration is a procedure, either economic or regional because there are various stages involved before delivering the final product (Laursen 2008:4). Therefore, the Association is currently overseeing important processes to enhance cooperation in trade, economic and financial sectors (SAARC 2011c):

- SAFTA Committee of Experts and SAFTA Ministerial Council for the administration and implementation of SAFTA;
- Finance Ministers Mechanism to enhance cooperation in relevant areas, including trade;
- Committee on Economic Cooperation for the overall coordination in economic areas;
- Standing Groups of Standards and SAARC Standards Coordination Board with the aim of harmonising standards in the region; and
- The Group of Customs Cooperation deals with matters of customs union. This group is comprised of the heads and representatives of the customs administration of SAARC member countries. The group discusses ways of harmonising the customs-related processes and formalities for creating a free trade area in South Asia with a common external tariff.

Central to SAARC's agenda on regional economic cooperation is the scope of increasing interdependencies among the member states, which is crucial for the success of any regional forum. This was the vision of the heads of state of the SAARC member states at the Seventh SAARC Summit (Dhaka, 1993) when they underlined:

The critical importance of urgently promoting intra-regional cooperation, particularly in the area of manufactures in order to enhance the productive capacity of the Member Countries, and to promote sustained growth and development to prevent the marginalisation of South Asia's trade interest in the larger global context (SAARC 2008d:78).

In the area of economic cooperation, which is multifaceted in its approach at SAARC, the work focuses on enhancing the enormous potential of intra-regional trade in South Asia.

5.3.1 Trade

Expanding the scope of intra-regional trade through trade liberalisation and facilitation is crucial for regional economic integration – the process which demands a free flow of goods, services, et cetera among the member states and aims for a unification of individual financial markets (Lamberte 2005:4). The following analysis aims to evaluate the current state of intra-regional trade, its prospects and the role of all related factors, particularly SAARC.

During the time of the British Raj and even during the previous Mughal era,⁴⁵ the Indian sub-continent was a free trade region. At that time, different parts of the region were well connected for the exchange of goods and services. For instance, jute was produced in East Bengal (Bangladesh) but jute mills were situated in West Bengal (India), major production of raw cotton was in areas now in Pakistan but cotton mills were in constituencies presently under India (Mishra 1984:2). Ever since the partition of the British sub-continent, intra-regional trade has been far below its estimated potential. According to an estimate, intra-regional trade in the SAARC region was 19 percent in 1948 (Abdin 2010 online) – soon after the partition – and at that point, today's Bangladesh, India and Pakistan still had a common market with a joint monetary and communication system (Hossain & Duncan 1998:5). Since then, partly because of their bilateral differences, the trade relations between these countries have declined. However, the economic growth experienced by South Asian countries through the 1980s created optimism for economic cooperation among the countries in the region (WB 2006b:i). Following its creation in 1985, SAARC has initiated some important programmes for regional economic integration with an intention of equitable development at the regional level. Sustainable economic growth leads to ensuring economic security and increase in trade to development on a larger scale, which the SAARC region is in dire need of.

⁴⁵ The Mughal Empire or Mughals ruled a large portion of the Indian sub-continent from 1526 until the mid-19th century (Metcalf & Metcalf 2006:I).

Economic cooperation is an important objective of the Association, as per the SAARC Charter, but the real work in this area began following the *Study on Trade, Manufactures and Services* in June 1991 (SAARC 2011n). This study provided a roadmap for economic cooperation in the areas of trade, manufacture and services. It was in December 1991 at the Sixth SAARC Summit held in Colombo that Sri Lanka proposed the idea of a preferential trading agreement in South Asia. The proposal on SAARC Preferential Trading Agreement (SAPTA) received an encouraging response from all the member states. It is important to recall that this was a crisis period for SAARC due to escalated tensions between India and Pakistan, as well as between Bangladesh and India (Kanesalingam 1993a:61). Nonetheless, at the conclusion of the summit in Colombo, the leaders approved the setting up of the Inter-Government Group (IGG) which would by 1997 come up with an agreement on preferential trade in the SAARC region (SAARC 2008d:67). Accordingly in 1992, Sri Lanka hosted the second meeting of the Committee on Economic Cooperation to further discuss this idea (SAARC 2008d:67). The same year, the SAARC Chambers of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) was set up.⁴⁶ It is to be reiterated that the biggest motivation for Sri Lanka to join SAARC was to establish greater trade ties with South Asian countries. Perhaps to Colombo's surprise, the SAPTA was reached in 1993 and was implemented in 1995 after being ratified by all the member states.

Before the first steps were taken towards SAPTA, there were concerns among SAARC members about the success of this agreement due to Pakistan's interests in another regional trade pact. According to Kanesalingam (1993a:45), Pakistan, being a member of the Muslim-dominated Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO), was initially reluctant to allow progress on a preferential trading agreement within the SAARC region. In 1993, Pakistan, along with two other members of ECO, namely Iran and Turkey, plus the newly admitted six independent Central Asian Republics and Afghanistan, decided to cooperate in financial and economic matters (Kanesalingam 1993a:61). Islamabad's enthusiasm for economic cooperation via this forum could have been because of a Pakistani Secretary General at ECO from 1992 to 1996. However, because this organisation was immature during its first decade (1985-1995); therefore, the process of economic cooperation was then delayed (ECO 2011

⁴⁶ The SAARC Chambers of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) is officially recognised by all the governments of South Asia, and therefore is a consortium of the similar bodies in all of the SAARC member states.

online).⁴⁷ Nonetheless, delays towards a trade agreement in ECO and benefits of SAPTA could have both been the motivating factors for Islamabad to join the free trade regime in South Asia.

Due to its limited scope and other challenges, there was no direct effect of SAPTA on intra-regional trade. In four rounds of SAPTA negotiation, the members agreed to trade in over 5,000 commodities (SAARC 2011n online). Due to a number of reasons, the positive list of trade remained limited to a select sensitive (negative) list.⁴⁸ All of the SAARC members bordering India feared being swamped by the Indian economy; therefore, SAPTA, in reality, could not boost intra-regional trade (Prasad 1989:11; Sami 2005:35). The apprehensions of smaller economies about India's economic strength are quite obvious too, considering that India accounts for roughly 84 percent of the value added in manufacturing – a complete domination in the region (Guru-Gharana 1997:34).

Considering the level of hope attached to economic cooperation in the SAARC region, an early decision was made at the Sixteenth Session of the Council of Ministers (New Delhi, 1995) to work towards a free trade area in South Asia. It was a time when SAPTA was just being implemented and member states were grappling over negotiations on preferential trade (SAARC 2011n online). Nonetheless, another IGG was set up in 1996 to identify necessary stages for establishing a free trade area for the SAARC members. In this regard, an important step was taken during the Tenth SAARC Summit (Colombo, 1998) to form a Committee of Experts (COE) to draft an agreement (SAARC 2008d:132).

While SAPTA was not making expected headway with regard to increasing the level of economic cooperation among the member states, the majority of SAARC members preferred sub-regionalism. In 1997, India, Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh established the South Asia Growth Quadrangle (SAGQ) within the framework of SAARC (Crow & Singh 2000:1920).⁴⁹ This sub-regional cooperation is an outcome of frustration with the SAARC among the four countries (Yun 2005:15). The mechanism aims at promoting cooperation in economic sectors,

⁴⁷ In 2003, the ECO's Economic Cooperation Organisation Trade Agreement was signed. Accordingly, the ECO Trade Promotion Organisation was established in Iran in 2009 (ECO 2011 online).

⁴⁸ "The sensitive list is a list of products that are exempt from liberalisation for various reasons ranging from health, safety, food security and protection of domestic industries" (Mel 2010:100).

⁴⁹ In 1997, at the Ninth SAARC Summit in Malé the possibilities of sub-regional cooperation in South Asia were discussed (SAARC 2008d:110). Later in 1998, at the Tenth SAARC Summit in Colombo, the representatives of the SAARC member states specifically underscored the value of developing sub-regional cooperation under the provisions of Article VII of the SAARC Charter 1985 (SAARC 1998).

energy, trade, and tourism, and efficient use of natural resources; however, it has failed to develop and implement any meaningful multilateral projects.

In the area of economic cooperation, SAARC has enjoyed a great deal of political will from most of the member states; therefore, a lack of progress has often faced criticism. There were some leaders from SAARC countries, such as Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh, who were disappointed by the slow pace of economic cooperation. On one occasion she said: “We in South Asia have not been able to increase our economic cooperation in the region and trade/investment flows are amongst the lowest of any groupings of the world” (Hasina 2003:9). Due to the time-consuming progress of SAPTA, Naik (1999:336) had correctly predicted the deadline of 2001 for SAARC to fully implement SAPTA to be unattainable. Irrespective of this, an agreement on a South Asian Free Trade Area was reached in 2004 and implemented in 2006. Thus, a representative of the SAARC Human Resource Development Centre in Islamabad (2009, pers. comm.) felt that this was a hasty transition from an unsuccessful SAPTA to SAFTA. Similarly, Baral (1999:251) described this evolution as a “quantum jump”.

SAFTA builds on the provisions of SAPTA, thereby extending its scope to include trade facilitation and liberalisation within the region. It is important to mention that a free trade agreement is the second stage of economic integration followed by a customs union which implements a common external tariff (Lamberte 2005:5). Therefore, as it might appear from its name, free trade is ‘open’ only to the stakeholders and not to external parties through SAFTA.

As most of the SAARC members, namely Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka, are members of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), there were concerns at SAARC regarding the scope of SAFTA due to moves for an FTA in the BIMSTEC sub-region.⁵⁰ Then in 2007, there was a feeling in South Asia that if SAFTA would not work then the joint members of BIMSTEC would lose interest in free trade within the SAARC region (Mel 2005:100). However, perhaps in SAARC’s favour, to date there have not been concrete steps taken towards the creation of an

⁵⁰ In June 1997, a sub-regional grouping was created with the name of Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Cooperation (BIST-EC). Soon after, Myanmar joined the group and the name of the organisation was changed to BIMSTEC. Since then, the organisation has expanded to include Bhutan and Nepal, making BIMSTEC a group of five SAARC and two ASEAN members.

FTA by the BIMSTEC members, even though Thailand has been pushing for an FTA (Balasubramanian 2011 online). Most of the people interviewed for this thesis did not view participation in other forums as having a negative impact on South Asian regionalism. A SAARC Secretariat official, Basnyat (2009, pers. comm.) elaborated on this issue by saying:

Some SAARC members (who) are participating in other multilateral organisations and I think their participation is complementary to SAARC. For example, BIMSTEC is taking a different economic agenda and they are trying to have some products, which may be custom free inside the region, and SAARC is thinking of replicating the same.

There could be drawbacks to SAFTA for smaller economies; therefore, this issue has been addressed in the agreement. For example, a salient feature of SAFTA is the compensation for revenue losses for LDCs (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives, and Nepal)⁵¹ in the event of tariff reductions because of trade under SAFTA. SAARC has developed a mechanism for compensation of revenue loss for LDC member states in accordance with Article 7 of the agreement. SAFTA required the non-LDCs in South Asia, namely India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, to bring their duties down to 20 percent in the first phase of the two-year period ending in 2008. In the final five-year phase ending in 2013, the 20 percent duty, after a series of annual cuts, will be reduced to zero. Both India and Pakistan have brought down their duties to 20 percent after a delay of roughly three years; however, Sri Lanka is yet to make a final decision. According to an *India Today* report (10 November 2011), New Delhi has decided to bring down the duty to zero percent for the SAARC LDCs. On the other hand, the LDCs' group in South Asia get an additional three years to reach zero duty; they have until 2016 to achieve that (SAARC 2004a:4). However, details of the compensation for losses were not developed until December 2005. Nevertheless, it is an important agreement at the South Asia level as the LDCs are given consideration, which shows that policymakers in the SAARC region want all countries to experience development concurrently through trade expansion. Such initiatives are likely to reduce gaps between the developing and the LDCs in South Asia.

The SAFTA agreement was imperfect due to either no mention of or incomplete details on some crucial aspects, such as rules of origin, the sensitive list (negative list), and the revenue loss compensation mechanism for the LDCs. This provision in SAFTA has been crucial considering the protectionist trend in the major economies of South Asia. Due to unresolved

⁵¹ Under SAFTA and in SAARC, the Maldives is still considered an LDC, even though the country graduated from the UN list of LDCs in January 2011 (UNCTAD 2011a).

issues, it took roughly two years, until 2006, to implement the agreement. However, the abovementioned issues were dealt with after the First SAFTA Ministerial Council session (Dhaka, 2006), which paved the way for a free trade vision of SAARC leaders (Sami 2008:136).

Before assessing the progress of SAFTA, it is crucial to have an idea of the potential of this agreement. With the incremental functioning of SAFTA, the region will move towards a greater economic interdependence because of an increase in intra-regional trade. Sami, an ex-diplomat of Bangladesh, estimated that the complete removal of tariffs would enhance intra-SAARC trade by 160 percent, and regional markets would expand as a result of trade expansion (2005:39). In addition, the trade between India and Pakistan could be expected to reach the volume of US\$10 billion if SAFTA was operating at optimum efficiency (Ali 2005:145). As a consequence, growth in intra-regional trade will create more jobs and will enable all SAARC members to address the menace of economic marginalisation in their countries – the vision of SAARC leaders, as stated in the SAARC Charter (SAARC 1985:3). Frequent increases in intra-regional trade could have positive impacts in other areas, for example, the full utilisation of production capacities; transfer of suitable production technologies within the region; and expansion of markets for better utilisation of capital, manpower and natural resources (Guru-Gharana 1997:36). These are just a few tangible of the benefits of successful free trade in the SAARC region.

Even though trade under SAFTA is still far behind the full estimated potential of intra-regional trade, it is encouraging to see that there have been some positive developments. For example, the number of items on a negative list of each country is on the decline and in this regard India has brought down its negative list from 744 items to 500 (Sen 2009 online).

Table 5.2: Yearly Trade of SAARC Member States under SAFTA in US\$⁵²

Year	Bangladesh	India	Maldives	Pakistan	Sri Lanka	Total US\$
2007	15.27m	3.78m	NA	576,164.9	19,828.0	19.65m
2008	98.31m	8.98m	NA	31.79m	40,789.2	139.13m
2009*	72.16m	31.58m	NA	14.05m	176,452.5	117.98m
Total	185.75m	44.35m	14,001.1	46.48m	237,069.8	276.98m

Note: SAARC Secretariat only keeps the data of trade under SAFTA. In the table * refers to the 2009 data of the period between January and September. Data source: (SAARC 2009d:1)

In Table 5.2 it can be seen that the volume of trade under SAFTA has been on the rise since 2007. It should be mentioned that these data reflect the volume of official trade enabled by SAFTA. In 2009, Bangladesh was the biggest exporter under SAFTA, whereas India was the major importer. Thus, the available data contradict the popular perception that the regional big economies of India and Pakistan will dominate trade under SAFTA and the weaker will suffer under an RTA (Razzaque 2010:396; Sami 2008:136). From 2006 until September 2009, the total volume of Bangladesh's trade under SAFTA was over US\$185 million, which is far more than US\$46.4 million of Pakistan and US\$44.3 million of India, second and third under SAFTA trade, respectively. The first four years of trade under SAFTA prove that LDCs can also dominate in RTAs, which is the case of Bangladesh in the SAARC region.

There are many reasons for Bangladesh benefitting from trade under SAFTA. The government has implemented some favourable policies to encourage investment from within and abroad. For example, Bangladesh has a tax free zone in Fareedpur near Chittagong for the textile sector with the only condition being that 60 percent of the workforce should be Bangladeshi. This is a lucrative offer which has encouraged large textile firms from Pakistan to establish factories in Bangladesh (Syed 2010 online).

During the fieldwork, the researcher could only obtain data until September 2009, but according to the SAARC Secretary General, Uz. Fathimath Dhiyana Saeed, trade under SAFTA had exceeded US\$1.2 billion in the first half of 2010 (Saeed, U.F.D. 2011 online). This shows an increasing interest in trade under SAFTA because in nine months, from October 2009 to July 2010, the volume of trade increased by 400 percent. This is still far behind the estimated potential of trade in South Asia, but rapidly increasing figures of intra-

⁵² There are no data on Afghanistan, Bhutan and Nepal (Table 5.2) because the SAARC Secretariat was still waiting for 2006 to 2009 intra-SAARC trade figures from these countries.

region trade indicate the value of SAFTA. According to Banerjee (1999:305), “under the prevailing condition of continued threat perceptions and security anxieties, there will always be an enormous gap between what is achieved and the potential.”

Most of the SAARC countries have concerns that a complete trade liberalisation would damage their local industries because of obvious competition with India. A study has found that the sensitive lists of items of India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka in SAFTA are larger than the bilateral FTAs of Sri Lanka with India and Pakistan (Mel 2010:105). This is because at the regional level, due to overlapping production strengths, there are risks for domestic industries. Consequently, economic interdependence in the region is low.

It should be noted that the SAARC members, being primary producers, compete against each other even in the external market, particularly when trading with the members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); therefore, naturally they benefit more from trade with the outside world (Reed 1997:239). For example, in 2002, Bangladesh exported US\$1.9 billion to the US market and roughly US\$60 million to India, showing that the latter is not the biggest market for goods produced by Bangladesh (Sami 2005:35). India has FTAs with non-OECD countries having demand for its products and services.⁵³ The SAARC countries have longer sensitive lists for intra-regional trade under SAFTA as they produce similar goods, such as agriculture products and textiles. These long sensitive lists restrict the scope for intra-SAARC trade.

Bilateral problems have disrupted the progress of SAFTA. At the time the seven signatories of SAFTA implemented the first tariff reductions in July 2006, India called for an urgent meeting of the SAFTA Ministerial Council. In this emergency meeting, India accused Pakistan of not abiding by the agreement. New Delhi was concerned about Islamabad’s decision to trade with India on the basis of a short list of 773 items in a positive list (Baabar 2006 online). This also shows the sensitivity of SAARC because traditional rivals – India and Pakistan – are preoccupied with their bilateral disputes, and as a result, both countries have

⁵³ In 2005, India’s first comprehensive FTA was reached with Singapore entitled the “Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement”. The India-Singapore FTA quickly proved its worth with bilateral trade growing by 20 percent (US\$13.3 billion) from 2005 to 2006 (Kiang 2009:xi). Negotiations are progressing with regard to a Pakistan-Singapore FTA. Meanwhile, India is negotiating FTAs with Thailand, South Korea, Japan, and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). India has reached an FTA with ASEAN and therefore it is investing in several infrastructural projects in the ASEAN region, for example, the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway under the Mekong Ganga Cooperation agreement of 2005. The GCC-Pakistan FTA has entered into final rounds of negotiations.

not been able to fully exploit the potential of bilateral and intra-SAARC trade. In 2011, Pakistan had a sensitive list of 1,946 and India 850 items (*Express Tribune*, 29 April 2011), for bilateral trade under SAFTA. This is a large number of items prohibited from trade between the South Asian rivals.

The level of trade between India and Pakistan has also fallen well short of its potential due to the issue of Pakistan not reciprocating the Indian move to grant her Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status in 1996.⁵⁴ Mainly due to domestic pressure to resolve the dispute over Kashmir before establishing cordial relations with India in any area, Pakistan avoided granting MNF status to India for roughly 15 years.⁵⁵ It was only in November 2011 that Pakistan considered India as a MFN trading partner (Taneja 2011 online).⁵⁶ Though not directly related to SAFTA, both countries granting MFN status to each will boost trade ties between the two, which will have an indirect impact on SAFTA. In addition, on this occasion, the Pakistan government has withstood any opposition to this decision, which shows its mission to improve the country's economy by fully benefiting from trade with India. According to an estimate, the full potential of Pakistan's exports to India is around US\$2.5 billion per year and could include fresh and dry fruits, cotton, textiles, leather, gems and marbles, as key products (Ramzan 2011 online). The level of Indian exports to Pakistan is estimated at US\$9.5 billion per annum (Saleem 2011 online); therefore, increasing bilateral trade will be a win-win situation for both parties.

Informal trade, which is often unrecorded, is highly significant within the SAARC region, particularly between India and Pakistan. For example, items such as cement, spices, tea, videotapes, cosmetics, sugar, textile items, dried fruits, and many more are often informally traded between India and Pakistan (Taneja 2006:54). As it is informal, it is not quantifiable or does not qualify for national-level official statistics on trade. Total informal trade in South Asia is estimated at about US\$1.5 billion (Pahariya 2006:1). Interestingly, of the US\$525

⁵⁴ MFN is an important aspect of the WTO agreement and allows free flow of trade and capital between contracting parties (Hussain 2010:19). MFN gives special treatment to a trading partner but at the WTO it means non-discrimination, a system of trade in which everyone is treated equally.

⁵⁵ There has already been opposition to Pakistan's decision on granting MFN to India from major political parties, such as the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz), and the Jamaat-e-Islami. In particular, the Jamaat feels that this decision will undermine the freedom struggle of parties in the Indian-administered Kashmir (*Lahore Times*, 19 October 2011).

⁵⁶ According to a news reports published in *Express Tribune* (29 April 2011), at the conclusion of the bilateral meeting of commerce secretaries of India and Pakistan, Islamabad agreed to grant MFN status to India. However, it is unclear when a formal decision will be made.

million in India's informal trade with Pakistan, almost half is traded officially first to Dubai and then to Pakistan via Iran and Afghanistan (Pahariya 2006:1). An obvious impact of trade through third countries is on the overall costs of trade, which affects both importing and exporting parties.

There are different points of views on bilateral FTAs between SAARC members. Either to maximise the benefits from the potential of economic cooperation or due to the slow progress of SAPTA, some of the SAARC member states reached bilateral FTAs, and notable examples are the following agreements: India-Nepal (1991); India-Sri Lanka (1998); and Pakistan-Sri Lanka (2005) (Sanjeev 2010:51).⁵⁷ According to Kelegama (2007:3912), these trade agreements diverted attention from developing free trade in the SAARC region. Similarly, Harun (2010:298) argues that, if not managed well by members, the web of bilateral and regional FTAs will create a chaotic situation hindering regional integration in South Asia. On the contrary, a SAARC official (2009, pers. comm.) mentioned that bilateral trade can be complementary to the free flow of trade at the regional level.

To understand the relationship between bilateral and regional FTAs, the example of the India-Sri Lanka agreement is useful. The partial implementation of the free trade deal in 2000 produced some significant results. During the first year, Sri Lankan exports to India increased by 138 percent, and the Indian exports to Sri Lanka by 39 percent (Basrur 2005:10). Considering SAARC's aim of free trade in South Asia, bilateral FTAs can be seen as complementary to SAFTA because of similar motives, though at smaller levels. In addition, the benefits of bilateral agreements might lead to greater commitment of all stakeholders in regional measures to enhance the process of economic integration.

Considering that smaller economies have concerns over the dominance of India – the bigger economy with a well-developed services sector – in any FTA, the positive role of bilateralism cannot be neglected. Currently, India has trade agreements, both FTA or preferential, with Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, and these might lead to a much-needed confidence in economic cooperation – something needed by SAARC at a regional level.

⁵⁷ Other bilateral FTAs are: India-Bangladesh (2006); and India-Bhutan (2006). Since 2003, India has also had a preferential trading agreement with Afghanistan (Sanjeev 2010:51).

Looking at the cases of other regional organisations, bilateralism and sub-regionalism could work for SAARC. In Europe, there were several cases of small scale (intra-European) cooperation, such as the Franco-German relations, creating momentum for regional integration (Amin 2008:19). However, it could be argued that the EU is a much bigger mechanism than SAARC and therefore there is a need for smaller mechanisms to complement regionalism because it is usually easier to reach consensus and implement agenda with fewer members.

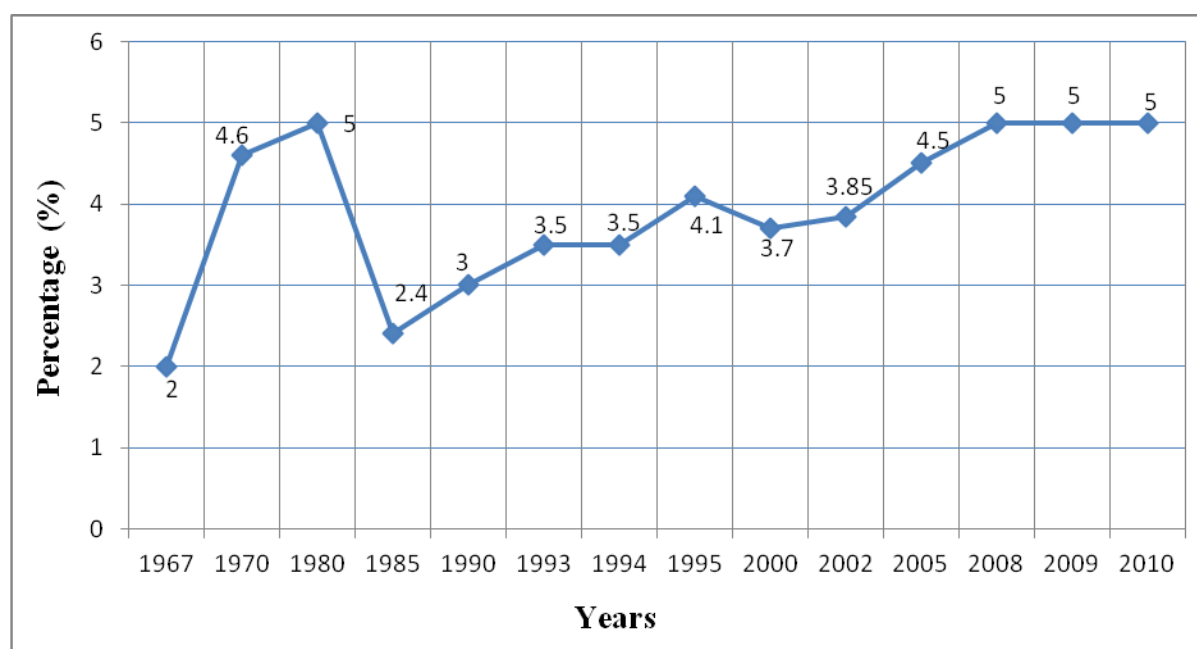
There is evidence to suggest that bilateral agreements have led to some degree of economic integration in South Asia. Therefore, Sobhan (2005:7), who has been a member of the SAARC Group of Eminent Persons, is of the view that bilateral FTAs may facilitate SAFTA. Nonetheless, in the current state of economic integration in South Asia, the contribution of SAFTA is less than bilateral FTAs (Weerakoon 2010:73). The size of intra-SAARC trade was estimated at US\$15 billion in 2010, including US\$1.2 billion of trade under SAFTA (Saeed, U.F.D. 2011 online; Tabish 2011 online). Based on these figures, trade under SAFTA accounts for 8 percent of the total volume of intra-South Asia trade.

Since 2009, there has been a change in India's policy towards SAARC, particularly with greater interest in trade within the region. This is also evident through India's mounting trade figures under SAFTA (Table 5.2). However, if looked at collectively and in contrast with trade in other regions, the progress of SAFTA has been minimal. As mentioned before, the percentage of intra-regional trade is only five percent in the SAARC region – far less in comparison to the 25 percent in both ASEAN and the EU. However, in NAFTA the level of intra-regional trade has declined to merely seven percent in 2010 (OECD 2010:80; Sinha 2010 online).

Other than the level of regional cooperation, the volume of intra-regional trade depends on the economic capability and the number of members in a regional forum (OECD 2010:80). SAARC with its eight members is smaller than the ten-member ASEAN and the EU with its 27 members. In addition, there are very large differences in terms of the economic capabilities of the SAARC members and the stakeholders of ASEAN and the EU. The volume of trade in NAFTA is less because it has only three members (Canada, Mexico, and the US), but their economic potential is far superior to that of the SAARC members with the only exception of India.

The progress of SAFTA should not be judged only by comparison to other regions. To have an idea of SAFTA's performance, we should compare the volume of current intra-regional trade with data from the pre-SAARC era. There have been difficulties in the intra-SAARC trade, as can be seen from the data in Figure 5.2. It should be highlighted that after the partition in 1947, intra-regional trade began declining and sank to the level of only two percent in 1967 (Abdin 2010 online) – mainly as a result of the 1965 war between India and Pakistan. It is important to note that at the time of the creation of the Association, the volume of intra-South Asia trade was 2.4 percent and since then it has been on an upward trend. The scale of intra-regional exports even declined during the initial decade of SAARC, from five percent in 1980 to 4.1 percent in 1995 – the year SAPTA was implemented – of the global imports of the South Asian countries. As discussed before, SAPTA could not achieve much in terms of increasing the volume of trade within South Asia and this is clear from the data in Figure 5.2. In 2000, the trade among the SAARC countries was 3.7 percent of their trade with the world, but an ineffective SAPTA was not the only factor. For example, from 1998 to 2002, there was a period of high tension between India and Pakistan (see Chapter 3). Since 2008, it appears that the volume of trade has stagnated at five percent.

Figure 5.2: Percentage share of intra-SAARC trade in world



Note: The data of intra-regional trade only includes the official trade among the countries. Data sources: (Abdin 2010 online; Banerjee 2011 online; Dash 2008:152; De 2005:273; Fischer 1998:167; Weerahewa 2009:8)

As shown in Figure 5.2, there have been vicissitudes in the level of intra-regional trade in South Asia. It is important to note that this is not peculiar to the case of SAARC because such fluctuations have been seen in the EU, NAFTA and other associations. For example in the EU, the volume of intra-regional trade dropped from 65 percent in 2003 to 25 percent in 2010 (Mashayekhi, Puri & Ito 2005:4; OECD 2010:80). In the case of SAARC, even with variations in intra-regional trade, its volume has not been above five percent since 1967.

Although sensitive lists are bigger and positive lists are smaller, restricting the scope of intra-regional trade, SAARC has been focusing on trade expansion. Since 2005, SAARC has moved ahead to enhance regional cooperation in the energy sector with greater focus on exploiting the full potential of energy trade in South Asia. Since 2006, the SAARC Energy Centre (SEC) has been operational in Islamabad and mainly works on ideas, such as the Energy Ring in South Asia.⁵⁸ Considering the persistence of bilateral tensions, including border disputes, the concept of the Energy Ring might take decades to become a reality. To date, India and Pakistan have failed to agree on the gas pipeline project due to differences on numerous matters, such as how to secure the pipeline in Pakistan and the overall cost of the project for India.⁵⁹ On this matter, a high-ranking official of the SEC (2009, pers. comm.) admitted that “political commitment is at the lowest in South Asia in the area of energy trade. At the centre we aim at sharing best practices in energy efficiency but some countries do not want to share.”

While multilateral energy trade projects have been faced with difficulties, bilateral energy trade agreements have offered win-win scenarios for the stakeholders. India, to meet its constantly increasing energy demands, has signed deals with its Himalayan neighbours having enormous hydropower potential, namely Bhutan and Nepal. These projects have been beneficial for the stakeholders, especially for the smaller economies of Bhutan and Nepal. This project has been the backbone of the Bhutanese economy and will ultimately lead to development in the country. A SAARC Secretariat representative (2009, pers. comm.)

⁵⁸ The idea of the SAARC Energy Ring refers to the exchange of renewable as well as non-renewable energy and technology among the SAARC member states. The concept of Energy Ring was approved by the Energy Ministers during their third meeting (Colombo, 2009) (SAARC 2011c).

⁵⁹ At present, there are four proposed gas pipeline projects: 1) Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India, 2) Iran-Pakistan-India, 3) Myanmar-Bangladesh-India, and 4) Qatar-UAE-Pakistan-India. Pakistan is the shortest and most viable route for India to access natural gas from Central and Western Asia, as well as the Gulf markets (Ali 2005). All these gas pipeline projects are faced with various challenges, particularly security in Afghanistan and Pakistan (Yun 2007:15). Similarly, there has been no development with regard to the proposed gas pipelines from Myanmar to India via Bangladesh.

mentioned that, as a result of energy exports, Bhutan will, in the near future, have the highest per capita income in the SAARC region.⁶⁰ The benefits of the bilateral agreements and the growing demands for energy might steer countries towards multilateral agreements at intra and inter-regional levels.

With the purpose of creating a favourable climate for free trade in South Asia, SAARC has stepped forward with negotiations on the services sector. It has been another sensitive issue but the members have shown a willingness to discuss this with a mission to give reality to their dream of having an economic union in South Asia. Most of the SAARC officials mentioned that the whole idea behind SAFTA is to create an economic union in the region; however, there are various steps to be taken before the ultimate objective becomes reality. The Director of Nepal at the SAARC Secretariat, Basnyat (2009, pers. comm.), revealed that SAARC members “are negotiating a document in SAARC on services and it is a very difficult sector because sometimes if you allow all the SAARC countries to come into your country then your own services sector might suffer.” Developing countries have been cautious about opening up their services sector, particularly banking, education, telecommunication, and healthcare, to the external world and that was a key reason that led to the collapse of the WTO Doha round in 2001 (Jacques 2006 online). Considering this challenge, scholars are of the view that regional trade agreements are likely to complement global trade regulations by virtue of the required level of trade liberalisation (Low 2003:66; Mukherjee 2002).

Cooperation in the services sector is crucial to increase the currently stagnant volume of intra-SAARC trade. With the aim of increasing the volume of trade, the SAARC members signed the SAARC Agreement on trade in Services in 2010. A key objective of the agreement is to “promote and enhance trade in services among” the members (SAARC 2010c:5). According to Mukherjee (2002:240), trade in services “will add value to the existing trade amongst South Asian countries and needs to become an integral part of SAPTA/SAFTA.” This agreement has suffered due to the fears of the dominance of the Indian services sector; therefore, it had not yet been implemented by November 2011. According to a report of *States*

⁶⁰ The India-Nepal Power Trade Agreement signed in 1996 has been an imperative milestone towards friendly relations between India and Nepal (Crow & Singh 2000:1918). The Pancheshwar project on the Mahakali River under the *Mahakali Treaty of 1996* between India and Nepal would generate 5,600 MW. The mega project would also irrigate 1.6 million hectares in India (Parsai 2008 online). On the other hand, the India-Bhutan Agreement for the Tala Hydroelectric Project was reached in 2006. The 1000MW Tala hydroelectric plant is an important energy generation and sharing agreement between India and Bhutan. It is expected that through this plant, both parties will be able to reach the target of 10,000MW of electricity by 2020 (Dixit 2008 online).

Times (3 October 2011), Afghanistan, Bhutan, Nepal, and the Maldives have been reluctant to ratify this deal.

5.3.2 Trade facilitation

In any region, trade among countries is not only dependent on certain RTAs, but equally on a better trade infrastructure, comprising of a better transport system, greater transport connectivity, and favourable trade-related policies (customs, taxations) (Roy & Banerjee 2010:110). A lack of sufficient infrastructure, for example transport, ICT, energy, and telecommunication, has been identified as a major obstacle to regional trade in South Asia as it increases the costs of doing business (Sami 2005:35; WB 2006b:i).

Certain bilateral disputes are constraining free trade in South Asia, as has been argued earlier. For example, there are still restrictions on transit routes and cross-border trade between India and Pakistan, and between India and Bangladesh. A container takes about 35 days from New Delhi to Dhaka through the maritime route via Mumbai-Singapore/Colombo to Chittagong. The same container could take only five days if there were direct rail connectivity between the two capitals – New Delhi and Dhaka (Rahmatullah 2010:177). There is a train service from Dhaka to Calcutta which Bangladesh wants extended to other cities in India, such as New Delhi (Chowdhury 2011 online). There are also restrictions on transit routes, for example, between Bangladesh and Pakistan via India; and on Indian trade with Afghanistan via Pakistan. India's trade with countries not having borders with her, for example Afghanistan, means that it costs India more to trade via longer routes, but this also has ramifications for possible transit countries, such as Pakistan, who could be reaping the financial benefits of increased commercial cooperation with India. There are, however, better trade facilities between India and the Himalayan states, namely Bhutan and Nepal, but even so, it is estimated that exporting a carpet from Nepal to Europe via Mumbai instead of Kolkata would save US\$1,1300 – roughly 40 percent (Roy & Banerjee 2010:120).

Even though there has been some success, there is a long way to go in improving transport and transit systems to boost regional trade in the SAARC region. Prior to the membership of Afghanistan in SAARC, the issue of a better transit system within the region was not an issue for India because of its international borders with all the SAARC members. However, with the inclusion of Afghanistan has come an increasing desire in India to develop direct transport

links and to arrange necessary transit facilities for trade in South Asia. Better transit facilities for trade by land have been a matter of great concern for some other member states, such as Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

SAARC has embarked on the mission of increasing connectivity in the region and this is evidence that there is some level of political will, particularly in the area of transport integration in South Asia. According to Rahmatullah (2010:175), intra-regional trade would increase to US\$40 billion were the right political environment and transport network in South Asia established. Furthermore, as a result of capacity development in trade facilitation, such as customs modernisation, regulatory reforms, port efficiency and services infrastructure, the SAARC region is expected to gain US\$2.6 billion (Roy & Banerjee 2010:113). Nevertheless, for higher gains from SAFTA, there is a need for greater political commitment and substantive financial investment to build the infrastructure for trade facilitation.

There was always a wish at the SAARC level to develop infrastructure with the purpose of supporting economic cooperation in South Asia, but the issue received only “lip service” during the Sixth SAARC Summit (Colombo, 1991) and the Eighth SAARC Summit (New Delhi, 1995). It was at the Ninth SAARC Summit (Malé, 1997) that the leaders demonstrated their commitment towards better connectivity among the SAARC member states. In 2004, realising the obligation towards cooperation in transport integration, ADB supported a SAARC study with a grant of US\$500,000 (Bhattacharyya & Chakraborty 2010:5). The ADB project entitled “SAARC Multimodal Transport Study” identified feasible road, rail, maritime and air routes within the SAARC region.

The major breakthroughs in intra-regional transport connections came at the Fourteenth SAARC Summit (New Delhi, 2007) and the Fifteenth SAARC Summit (Colombo, 2008), when the leaders agreed to promote connectivity among the SAARC members (SAARC 2008d:193). According to Basnyat (2009, pers. comm.), “SAARC has been emphasising greater connectivity because South Asia does not have [compatible] connections by road, by air, by rail, or in communications, such as internet – the fastest way of communication in the world and that should be taken into account.”

According to the above-mentioned SAARC study, in road transport, trucking has been the dominant mode of transport accounting for roughly 70 percent of the movement within the

SAARC region. The study also reported that the region is blessed with a wide network of roads covering 3.82 million kilometres, as of 2002 (SAARC 2006b:xii). However, most of the good quality roads are in India and Pakistan – wide enough to have separate lanes for heavy vehicles (trucks and buses). South Asia has one of the largest rail networks in the world. The network has 77,000 kilometres of rail of which the India rail infrastructure covers 63,465 kilometres (SAARC 2006b:xii). For trade, mostly with the outside world, South Asian countries have relied heavily on maritime transport. The region has therefore invested significantly in ports, and there are now 25 major ports. In 2003, these sea ports, handled 366.22 million tonnes of traffic, including 5.85 million containers (SAARC 2006b:xiii).

There have been limitations in terms of connecting SAARC members via maritime, road and rail routes because South Asia is home to two island states (Sri Lanka and the Maldives), and three landlocked countries (Afghanistan, Bhutan and Nepal). Integration of the transport infrastructure is crucial for all member states, but more for the landlocked members, because an integrated transport system would offer them more opportunities to trade, especially by accessing the sea ports in other countries (Rahmatullah 2010:174). Considering the limitations posed by the geography of the region, air transport has been the most viable mode of transportation in South Asia. According to a study by SAARC (2006b:xiii), it was found that 251 weekly flights were operating between different regional destinations, and in 2004 they carried around 2.23 million passengers. The transportation links have further increased due to an increase in the number of flights between India and Pakistan, and Nepal and Pakistan, and due to an increase in the number of bus routes between India and Pakistan.

South Asian countries have developed their transport infrastructure, but primarily at the national levels with less attention to cross-border transport connectivity. A representative of SAARC Secretariat (2009, pers. comm.) mentioned that for his country it is a priority to invest in domestic infrastructural development. Because the transport system in the region is less developed and integrated, the logistical costs of trade are in the range of 13 to 14 percent of the GDP (Rahmatullah 2010:174). Higher logistical costs are mainly due to bottlenecks in South Asia's port and transport infrastructures, regulatory environment, and infrastructure of services sector. For example, by road, rail or sea, goods face long delays at transit points and final destinations. The poor road infrastructure, mainly in the landlocked states, is also seen as an obstacle leading to delays in transit (Wilson & Ostuki 2007:236).

Since 2006, the project of regional-level transport connectivity has aimed at facilitating the process of regional trade. As a result of an initiative of SAARC, trucks from India and Pakistan were, for the first time since partition, allowed to travel one kilometre into each other's country (2009, pers. comm.). For example, trucks from Pakistan are not allowed to travel more than one kilometre inside India and from there the goods have to be transported via Indian trucks. As revealed by a diplomat at the SAARC Secretariat (A SAARC Official 2009, pers. comm.), a railway agreement is to be discussed at a SAARC ministerial-level meeting. In this regard, experts from member states met in January 2011 at the SAARC Secretariat to select routes for road and railway links among the SAARC members.

Advancement of the infrastructure is necessary for sustainable development in South Asia. Improved connectivity within the SAARC region is also crucial for the long-term goal of trade in services, such as tourism, education and health, and, to accomplish this, a better transport system is required. In addition, a better visa system for facilitating greater people-to-people contacts is needed. With the aims of increasing movement of people within the region, SAARC has expanded the scope of its visa exemption scheme to consider the business sector. This comes under trade facilitation and is likely to have positive implications for trade across borders in South Asia.

SAARC is now trying to harmonise standards in South Asia and accordingly in August 2008 an agreement was reached to establish the South Asian Regional Standards Organisation (SARSO). As per the agreement the organisation will be based in Dhaka (SAARC 2008a). However, as of April 2011, the headquarters of SARSO had not been established and further delays are likely to hinder the expansion of trade under SAFTA, as SARSO aims to deal with technical barriers to intra-SAARC trade.

With the purpose of fostering intra-regional trade, SAARC has paid equal attention to cooperation in related areas, such as transport, services, visas, customs and taxation. An official dealing with intra-SAARC trade in South Asia, at the SAARC Secretariat (2009, pers. comm.), disclosed: "SAARC is trying to reduce the number of items on negative lists of member states and if that happens then in some years the volume of intra-regional trade will reach its full potential." He further added, "There are other crucial stages, such as customs union and harmonisation of investment policies ... SARSO is crucial to enhance trade through SAFTA. For example, 250 g or one *pao* in India and Pakistan is 200 g in Bangladesh, and

such diverse standards hinder regional trade.” This is one of the ways in which SAARC is trying to address the concerns of its members on technical issues with reference to trade; for example, a country demanding from others that their standards be tested by a particular laboratory before being traded. SARSO aims to resolve such issues. In addition, at the Thirteenth SAARC Summit (Dhaka, 2005), the following agreements were reached to increase the pace of economic cooperation in the SAARC region:

- Mutual Administrative Assistance in Customs Matters;
- the establishment of the SAARC Arbitration Council; and
- SAARC Limited Multilateral Agreement on Avoidance of Double Taxation and Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters.

Significant among these agreements was an approval to set up the SAARC Arbitration Council. The council, once launched, aims to provide a forum to settle commercial disputes by conciliation and arbitration. This initiative has a potential for positive consequences for intra-regional trade. A country director at the SAARC Secretariat (2009, pers. comm.) believed that the council would be in operation soon. In 2010, Pakistan appointed the head of the council and therefore the system is in place and ready to operate.

With the available road, rail, maritime and air transport infrastructures already in place, SAARC only needs to ensure a better transport connectivity and trade infrastructure to enhance the scope of intra-regional trade. Nevertheless, for SAARC to do this, the Association needs sincere political commitment from its members.

5.4 Prospects of economic cooperation

Assuming that SAARC under SAFTA will successfully attain its targets – zero duties across South Asia – the leaders of the region envisage establishing a South Asian Economic Union by 2015 taking this region back to the pre-partition era of free movement of goods and people. This was the essence of the researcher’s meetings on SAFTA with the SAARC Secretariat officials. Even though the progress to date on trade under SAFTA shows a different picture, Basnyat (2009, pers. comm.), at the SAARC Secretariat, was confident that an economic

union will be a reality by 2020.⁶¹ The idea of an economic union in South Asia is not new, as it was introduced and promoted by the SAARC Group of Eminent Persons (GEP) in the late 1990s.⁶²

There is no harm in keeping the final objective in mind, but there are some stages to be achieved before that, such as a customs union. Although discussions at SAARC are in progress to create a customs union, no real progress has been made. The process is slow because the growth of SAFTA is stagnant due to numerous limitations, such as longer sensitive lists, lack of trade facilitation, trade in services and energy has not begun, and so on. Considering the SAARC's incremental approach, it could be said that the progress will be slow.

A regional monetary fund is seen as an important stage towards an economic union (Lamberte 2005:5). However, as the researcher observed at the SAARC Secretariat, the idea of a common currency with reference to a regional monetary fund is considered premature, but not impossible for the region. In South Asian scholarly circles there have been attempts to explore the possibilities of regional economic integration, including free trade, customs union and even a common currency in South Asia (Pandey 2005; Rana 1997). In terms of the stages towards an economic union, SAARC has moved from a preferential trade area to a free trade area, but the organisation still needs to ensure the success of free trade in South Asia before heading towards a customs union, and a common market. It is a time-consuming process because there are so many issues involved in making South Asia a free trade region, even just for the SAARC members, such as resolution of trade-related disputes, and equitable standards of goods.

It is also believed by people within the SAARC and outside the organisation that the success of regional economic cooperation will provide bonuses in the form of easing bilateral tensions, mainly as a result of increasing economic interdependence and the bond of a South Asian community (Beg 2001:10). Thus, Kiang (2009:xsi) is of the view that FTAs not only

⁶¹ For an interesting analysis of monetary cooperation in SAARC read Rahul Tripathi 2005, 'Political Economy of Monetary Cooperation in SAARC', in *New Life within SAARC*, N.N. Pandey & D.R. Dahal (eds), Institute of Foreign Affairs & Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Kathmandu.

⁶² GEP was setup to look into the weaknesses and make appropriate recommendations to the SAARC, specifically to further enhance the efficiency of the SAARC. GEP was comprised of twelve distinguished people, all of whom were associated with the SAARC in different capacities. GEP submitted its first report at the Tenth SAARC Summit (Colombo, 1998) and in the same report, GEP recommended substantial concessions for the LDCs in South Asia (Ahmed 2005:23).

open up domestic and regional markets to the external world for business and investment, but also serve as important tools of diplomacy and conflict transformation. Similar views are shared inside the SAARC community, as Dastgir (2009, pers. comm.) elaborated:

Deeper cooperation in uncontroversial areas will pave the way for future cooperation on traditional security issues, and in promoting peace and security in South Asia ... Cooperation through SAARC in energy, trade and poverty alleviation by engaging all members will ultimately contribute to better bilateral relations between the member states.

It is, however, still to be seen whether greater cooperation via SAARC leads to better bilateral relations or not, especially in areas from cooperation in human security to some issues of contentious nature (traditional security), such as terrorism and transnational crime (see Chapter 8). Functionalism stands on the premise that economic integration leads to some sort of a political union among the stakeholders (Schulz, Soderbaum & Ojendal 2001b:10). It is too early to claim that the functionalist approach to regionalism has failed in the case of SAARC because the full scale of economic cooperation has not been exploited yet.

Nonetheless, by cooperating in the areas of services and standards, the idea is to address issues relevant to enhance the scope of regional markets through economic cooperation. If domestic markets grow, then this will have spill-over effects in other areas, such as investment, production, job market and in increasing the standards of living in South Asia (Islam et al. 2010; Sami 2005:39). Therefore, in terms of intra-regional trade, it is not the end of road yet for SAARC because economic cooperation in some crucial areas is yet to take off, for example, the services and energy sector.

Due to increasing regional cooperation, especially in the economic area, SAARC countries are working towards achieving a major objective of SAARC Charter to cooperation beyond SAARC in other multilateral forums. In this regard, it is to be recalled that at the Sixth SAARC Summit (Colombo, 1991), “projection of collective positions” at international levels was an important theme (SAARC 2008d:65). However, no significant action occurred until recently because the consequences of globalisation have made countries the world over, particularly in the developing regions, more vulnerable. For SAARC, as a regional forum, the negatives impacts of globalisation offered opportunities in the form of its members developing joint positions on international challenges, such as the 2008 Global Economic Crisis (GEC) and climate change. This is evident from the “SAARC Ministerial Statement on Global Financial Crisis” in 2009. In their joint statement, the finance ministers of the SAARC

countries shared their concerns over the global financial turmoil. In particular, the statement demanded that the global community address the concerns of developing countries in the SAARC region (SAARC 2009c:1). In quantitative terms, it is hard to measure the impact of such symbolic gestures, but qualitatively they are important for the growth of regionalism by increasing the value of a regional organisation. This is evidence that the member states understand the value of using their regional and multilateral forums to have a stronger voice at global levels. It is just the beginning and there is potential in this area because developing countries are at risk of marginalisation in global economic dialogues, such as the WTO; therefore, they have no better choice than to mutually raise their concerns. According to Ahmad (2002:187), this will save the developing countries from reliance on “the mercy of international power structure” dominated by the US.

Economic cooperation via SAARC has been an ever-evolving process and currently has many dimensions. A notable move is the creation of the South Asia Forum (SAF). This initiative was launched in April 2011 in New Delhi (SAARC 2011s online). SAF is a South Asian version of the Boao Forum for Asia (BFA) based in China, the World Economic Forum based in Davos (Switzerland), and the Asia Pacific Roundtable based in Australia. SAF is intended to be a platform for business leaders, public figures, academics, politicians and representatives of civil society from South Asia to deliberate on economic cooperation in the SAARC region. Even though the SAF project looks promising, not much can be said about its effectiveness because it was only launched in 2011, and is yet to hold its first annual meeting. Nonetheless, it reflects the willingness of the member states to make the process of regional economic cooperation more heterogeneous by including all relevant actors.

5.6 Conclusion

Regional asymmetry continues to have implications for economic cooperation. There has been a fear of the dominance of India among the other members if free trade is fully realised. Furthermore, the smaller economies, namely Afghanistan, Bhutan, Nepal, and the Maldives, have been reluctant to ratify the SAARC agreement on trade in services because of concerns of negative implications for their services sector due to the supremacy of the services industry in India. For SAARC, it is an enormous task to address the concerns of all stakeholders, which is necessary before the process can move forward. This will be a time-consuming process of regular negotiations. In this regard, India's FTAs with the SAARC members, with

the exceptions of Pakistan and the Maldives, are likely to play a positive role by decreasing the level of the fear of India's dominance in economic cooperation.

Economic cooperation is a gradual process and naturally takes time to reach its full potential, especially in a functionalist approach to regionalism and a region faced with bilateral tensions. There is still the possibility of an economic union in South Asia emerging from the process of economic cooperation in the SAARC region, and there have been some steps taken to achieve this ultimate objective, such as towards a customs union and taxation reform. However, the goal of a common currency or a monetary union in SAARC still appears far off, but not impossible, as there are stages to be achieved before that.⁶³ Nonetheless, economic cooperation has great potential not only to enhance the scope of regional cooperation but also to speed up the process of development in South Asia.

Considering the case of economic cooperation in SAARC vis-à-vis all the political and structural challenges, it could be said that functionalism has not failed. The process has been progressing and some mechanisms have been established, such as the SAARC Arbitration Council to deal with trade-related disputes. This reflects some level of political commitment to economic integration in South Asia. The volume of intra-regional trade depends on many factors, such as the economic capabilities, trade facilitation, interdependence, number of countries, level of cooperation, et cetera. For example, in comparison with the EU in which its members have achieved full-scale economic integration, the SAARC members are yet to enter into a customs union.

The current level of intra-regional trade in South Asia shows stagnancy and this could be because trade in various areas is yet to begin, for example in the services sector. Although the volume of intra-SAARC is less than trade within other regions, particularly ASEAN and the EU, it is important to note that SAFTA was only implemented in 2006. The cooperation of SAARC in trade is immature at this stage because consensus on many issues is yet to be reached, such as trade facilitation through better transport connectivity and customs regulations, and the fruits of cooperation in the services sector are yet to be tasted. The agreement for cooperation in the services sector was reached at SAARC in 2010, after a long delay, because it is a sensitive area for the member states. Even at the global level, developing

⁶³ On the issue of a common currency in South Asia, read a useful paper by Nischal N. Pandey 2005, 'Looking Towards the Future: Common Currency and South Asian Parliament', in *New Life within SAARC*, D.R. Dahal & N.N. Pandey (eds), Institute of Foreign Affairs & Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Kathmandu, pp. 45-54.

countries have been wary of risk to their services sector through trade liberalisation and these concerns led to the failure of the WTO Doha Round in 2001. However, considering the complementarities between the regional and global mechanisms, it is hoped that regional cooperation will produce a better consensus and cooperation at the global level.

Removing political and non-political barriers, such as transport connectivity, is a key to enhancing the scope of SAFTA. This is not an easy task, as evident from the analysis provided in this chapter, owing to the political differences among the member states and protectionism. For this reason, India has begun the process of developing alternative trade routes via Iran and Myanmar to connect with Central Asian republics and the ASEAN region. With her growing economic strength, India can afford to establish direct links with extra-regional countries, especially by bypassing certain SAARC members, if they do not adhere to New Delhi's terms of trade. When one considers that it took the EU nearly 50 years to achieve an ideal level of connectivity, it is evident that the process of transport integration in SAARC member countries will take considerable time yet. Cooperation in the energy sector is just in the initial stages and faces political challenges involving discussions on sensitive issues including transit facilities, visa rules and customs regulations. By its nature, the SAARC process is cumbersome and time-consuming; therefore, the cooperation in the area of energy cannot be considered a failure because it is a new area of cooperation in South Asia.

CHAPTER SIX

ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY

6.1 Introduction

There are several environmental security threats common to the SAARC members, such as deforestation, air and water pollution, and natural disasters. In the literature, environmental security is cited as a key human security threat. The use of the term environmental security is relevant to the overall analysis of human security in South Asia. This term is also seen to be comprehensive enough to use in this thesis because it covers the costs of environmental threats, and the impact of human interventions on the environment. Environmental security is also a known term in international relations.

Environmental security in general and climate change in particular have provided SAARC with opportunities to renew its efforts at both regional and global levels; therefore, it is an area in which people like Sarker (2011 online) have viewed the role of SAARC as successful. However, there have not been in-depth studies on the role of SAARC vis-à-vis environment protection to justify its successes. This chapter presents an in-depth analysis of SAARC's actions in other areas of environmental security.

Climate change is predicted as one of the greatest dangers to environmental and human security. In this chapter, climate change is a theme interwoven with other environmental issues, such as forestry and natural disasters. Water security is not dealt with in this chapter because SAARC does not address this issue specifically. The issue of water supply is just one aspect of regional cooperation on climate change and agricultural development in South Asia. At the Association, there are still no discussions on either clean drinking water or water pollution caused by industrial and other wastes. Moreover, water management is not an issue that has arisen at SAARC.

As in some of the other chapters of this thesis, the analysis here relies on primary sources, such as the data collected during the fieldwork in Nepal and Pakistan, and through SAARC documents, statements issued by the heads of state, other South Asian officials and representatives of SAARC Observers at SAARC forums. In terms of the scope of this chapter, it is important to mention that South Asia has a long history of trends indicating stress on the

environment, but statistical figures in this chapter are limited to some recent trends at national, regional and global levels.

6.2 Challenges to environmental security in South Asia

Since the late 1960s, awareness of international environmental problems has greatly increased (Greene 2005:451). In recent times, meetings at global multilateral levels have gained momentum not only for discussing the sources and consequences of climate change, but also to reach agreement on joint actions for addressing this challenge. However, the causes and impacts of environmental insecurities vary between regions across the world.

Rapid population growth rate is a major cause of stress on environmental resources. South Asia is home to 1.6 billion people and accounts for only 3.5 percent of the global land surface area, about half the size of China, making this region one of the most densely populated parts of the world (Adeel & Piracha 2004:205; SAARC 2010e:1). According to an estimate, population density in Bangladesh – the world’s most densely populated country (*Economist*, 17 March 2011) – is in the range of 400-1,000 persons per square kilometre (Adeel & Piracha 2004:205). High population density not only means low per capita natural resources, but also a higher number of casualties due to natural disasters. Also, related to the high population growth rate in South Asia is the urbanisation phenomenon, which continues to put pressure on environmental resources. Urbanisation is growing at the rate of 3.4 percent per annum in the region, greatly affecting the standards of living in South Asian cities (Adeel & Piracha 2004:210). In 2005, the urban population was 30.2 percent in the region (SACEP 2011 online).

A consequence of swiftly increasing urbanisation has been air pollution. According to a recent study, air pollution levels in major cities of South Asia are amongst the highest in the world with serious implications for human health and ecosystems (UNEP & SAARC 2009:17). Air pollution in major South Asian cities has been increasing with the number of vehicles because of a continuous population increase. With growing urban population, there has been substantial increase in fuel consumption in major South Asian cities. The poor quality of fuel (petrol, diesel and engine oil) used in two-wheelers and other vehicles has increased the concentration of total suspended particles in Calcutta, New Delhi, Mumbai, Dhaka, and Karachi, far exceeding the maximum levels set by the World Health Organisation (WHO)

(Adeel & Piracha 2004:213; UNEP & SAARC 2009:17). Overall, carbon emissions in South Asia have increased as a share of world total from 4.4 percent in 1990 to 6.7 percent in 2004 (SACEP 2011 online). This growing trend has serious implications for environmental security regarding global warming.

Deforestation, one of the biggest threats to environmental security, is mainly caused by human interventions. It is also viewed as a major cause of global warming. There have been some positive trends observed in South Asia because of afforestation efforts in Bhutan and India, similar to the precedents set by other Asian countries, such as China and Vietnam. Except in South Asia and Oceania, the area of productive forests declined over the last decade in the Asia Pacific region (FAO 2011b:x). In South Asia, forest area increased by 78 million hectares in 2000 to over 80 million hectares in 2010. Some national afforestation schemes, such as incentives for smallholders to plant trees, contributed to the increase in planted forests in the region. The area of planted forests increased from roughly eight million hectares in 2000 to over 11 million in 2010 (FAO 2011b:8-9). The region is home to one of the world's largest man-made forests, namely Changa Manga in Pakistan.⁶⁴

The above data show some positive trends in South Asia but they do not mean that deforestation is negligible. The biggest forest in South Asia – Sunderban – is disappearing at a rapid rate. Since the 1980s, Bangladesh and Pakistan have lost 70 percent of their mangrove forests (Adeel & Piracha 2004:213). Such deforestation has led to soil erosion and a decrease in biodiversity. There are a host of reasons for deforestation in South Asia, but a significant one is the reliance of the millions of people on forest goods for their livelihood. South Asia stands at the top among other sub-regions in Asia with regard to employment in primary production of forest goods. There are over six million people engaged on a full-time basis in this sector (FAO 2011b:12). This also shows the socio-economic value of forests in South Asia, where increasing deforestation is likely to affect the lives of millions employed in this sector.

Many of the South Asian countries share the same reasons for an increase in carbon emissions, even though India accounts for the most carbon emissions in the region. Since 1990, GHG emissions have increased by 3.3 percent per annum in South Asia (WB 2011d

⁶⁴ Changa Manga forest was planted in the 19th century by then the British administration to meet the growing demands of timber for the Indian railways network. The forest covers an area of 4,860 hectares (*News*, 10 October 2010).

online).⁶⁵ In the agricultural sector, rice cultivation and livestock mainly emit the above-mentioned GHGs with bigger agricultural economies contributing the most, namely India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Among other causes are increasing industrialisation, use of coal for energy production, and air pollution from transport. For example, in India, 80 percent of electricity is produced from coal (WB 2011d online).

While the implications of climate change are expected to be a huge threat for the whole world, its consequences could be much worse for South Asia – home to the highest mountains (Mount Everest and K2) and the Karakorum (mountain range). It is estimated that temperatures in South Asia are likely to increase by two to four degrees Celsius by the mid-21st century – affecting the rate of glacial melting (IPCC 2007b:882). In South Asia, the Himalayan region is seriously under threat due to the catastrophic consequences of glacial melting, including Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs).⁶⁶ GLOFs are a threat to many countries across the world, but a serious threat to many SAARC members, mainly Bhutan, India, Nepal and Pakistan. According to ongoing reports on glacial melting in the Himalayas, a few glacial lakes are expanding at an alarming rate (SAARC 2011p:54).⁶⁷ Even though the region is home to potentially dangerous lakes, primarily in Bhutan, India, Nepal and Pakistan, no GLOFs occurred in 2010 (SAARC 2011p:55). This does not mean that GLOFs are not a long-term threat because the expansion of glacial lakes might suddenly create a calamity.

It is not only the increase in population stressing water resources but also the devastating impacts of climate change that lead to water insecurity in South Asia. According to an estimate, melting at the Dokriani glacier⁶⁸ in 1998 was 20 metres compared to an annual average of 16.5 metres over the period 1993–1998. Between 1977 and 1990, the 30.2 km long Gangotri Glacier has been receding at an alarming rate of 364 metres per annum. Another study states that glaciers in the Himalayas are receding at an unprecedented rate and there is the likelihood of their disappearance by 2035 (UNEP & SAARC 2009:24).

⁶⁵ In South Asia, the major greenhouse gases (GHGs) are CO₂, N₂O (nitrous oxide) and CH₄ (methane); CH₄ and N₂O are largely produced by agriculture (WB 2011d online).

⁶⁶ “[GLOFs] are sudden discharges of ice-cold water due to failure of a terminal moraine triggered by a build-up of water pressure” and a variety of other reasons (SAARC 2011p:54).

⁶⁷ Regular monitoring of glacial lakes in the Himalayas is jointly done by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), Water and Energy Commission Secretariat (WECS) Nepal, Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology, G. B. Pan Institute of Himalayan Environment and Development, National Environment and Development (Bhutan), and the UNEP.

⁶⁸ Dokriani Glacier is one of the several hundred glaciers feeding the Ganges River (Mirza 2007 online).

Due to the effects of climate change, the survival of some South Asian countries is at stake as they depend on the Himalayan river system. Himalayan rivers provide an estimated 8,500 km³ of water per annum out of which ten percent comes from glacial melting which maintains flows during dry seasons (Mirza 2007:4-5). More importantly, 15,000 Himalayan glaciers form a unique water reservoir supporting vital rivers, namely the Indus, Ganges and Brahmaputra flowing to Bhutan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan (IPCC 2007a:493). IPCC reports that if, due to climate change, the same trends of glacial melting continue then the Ganges, Indus, Brahmaputra and other rivers would be likely to become seasonal rivers (IPCC 2007a:493). Measurements indicate that precipitation decline including droughts has already resulted in the drying of wetlands and severe degradation of ecosystems in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India (IPCC 2008:87).

South Asia is a disaster-prone region. If the rains are scarce, the region faces the prospect of drought: when the rains are heavy, the silt-laden rivers rise and fall rapidly, threatening vast areas with floods (SAARC 1992b:198). In addition to deaths and injuries, natural disasters demolish infrastructure, property and crops. Some South Asian countries have been experiencing floods at regular intervals, such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India. It takes much effort, time and resources to assist the victims to return to pre-disaster living standards. Countries in developing regions do not possess enough financial resources and skills to guarantee rehabilitation and reconstruction in the disaster-hit areas. Even so, according to the World Bank, in 2006, higher government expenditures for reconstruction in disaster-affected areas led to government deficits in Bangladesh, the Maldives, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka (WB 2006a online). Poor countries also lack sufficient infrastructure to withstand the destruction caused by natural disasters. For example, in comparison to the 2005 earthquake in Pakistan – leaving around 75,000 dead – the earthquake of a similar magnitude in Japan in 1995 resulted in 6,000 deaths (Laplante 2010:510).

Natural disasters strike countries across the world, but their impacts are worse in countries with poor infrastructure and disaster management strategies, and high population densities. It has been reported that natural disasters are on the rise throughout the world. A SAARC report mentioned that the number of natural disasters increased from 335 in 2008 to 373 in 2010. In 2010, natural disasters affected 207 million people, including around 300,000 fatalities (SAARC 2011p:1). The increasing frequency of natural disasters is alarming, particularly for countries with large populations and fewer resources, such as the ones in South Asia. In 2010,

floods in Pakistan left the country with long-term impacts on the economy and infrastructure, and severe impacts also on human beings, wildlife and the environment. The overall damage in Pakistan was estimated at US\$10.05 billion, mainly as a result of destruction of infrastructure, such as housing, education, health, communication, water and sanitation, energy and irrigation (SAARC 2011p:35). As shown in Table 6.1, people in Pakistan have suffered the most from natural disasters. In total, over 26 million people have suffered because of natural calamities in South Asia.

Table 6.1: Number of people affected by natural disasters in South Asia to 2011

Country	Number of affected people
Afghanistan	46,310
Bangladesh	822,222
India	4,788,209
Nepal	13,426
Pakistan	20,367,598
Sri Lanka	239,193
Total	26,276,958

Note: Data for Bhutan and the Maldives not available.

Data source: (SAARC 2011p:5)

In South Asia, most countries are prone to natural disasters, particularly to floods. Severe flooding, the tsunami of 2004, and the earthquake of 2005 account for the large number of casualties in India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. It is noteworthy that the tsunami and the earthquake were exceptional in their impact and fatalities. For Pakistan, an earthquake-prone country, the earthquake of 2005 was a major disaster (Bokhari 2011 online). Frequent droughts are another cause of human suffering and are likely to increase due to climate change. In September 2001, more than a million in Sri Lanka were affected by drought and, in 2002, more than 300 million people were affected by a severe drought in India (Bailes 2007a:175). Natural catastrophes have affected food security and the wellbeing of people in South Asia due to negative impacts on the agriculture industry and food prices resulting in widespread poverty in the region. Across South Asia, two major floods and a cyclone in 2007 destroyed two million metric tons of rice crops (WB 2008 online).

National borders do not limit environmental insecurities, such as natural disasters and the implications of climate change, and therefore multilateral cooperation in this area makes much better sense in realistically tackling environmental dangers.

6.3 SAARC and environmental security

There is a long history of cooperation among the South Asian countries in the area of environmental security. In 1982, the current eight SAARC members founded the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP), as an inter-governmental organisation to promote and support protection, management and enhancement of the environment in South Asia.⁶⁹ As far as SAARC is concerned, environmental security has been on its agenda since its first meeting in 1985. Particularly, since 1987, the heads of state have been emphasising greater cooperation in preserving, protecting and managing the diverse ecosystems of South Asia, especially to counter the effects of climate change and natural disasters. Among first steps were agreements among the member states to explore the degree of environmental dangers in the region. At the Third SAARC Summit (Kathmandu, 1987), approval was granted for a “Regional Study on the Causes and Consequences of Natural Disasters and the Protection and Preservation of the Environment”, which was completed in 1991 (SAARC 2008d:26). The study among other findings highlighted the extent of environmental problems in each of the member state and presented some valuable policy recommendations. For SAARC members, it has been crucial to understand the extent to which their environment is being damaged and explore the causes of environmental problems. In 1992, another study, “Greenhouse Effect and its Impact on the Region”, was published by SAARC to explore the implications of climate change in South Asia.

In their initial stages, the above-mentioned studies triggered some moves at SAARC in the area of environmental security. In 1992, SAARC created the Technical Committee on Environment with a limited mandate to review the progress made regarding the implementation of the findings of related SAARC studies. The committee was reformed in 2004 by the 29th Session of the Technical Committee held in Islamabad to include forestry. Accordingly, it was renamed the Technical Committee on Environment and Forestry. Since

⁶⁹ SACEP has been active in generating consensus between the SAARC members on a whole range of issues and has implemented programmes in the areas of air pollution, biodiversity, climate change, coastal and marine environment, and others. SACEP works closely with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and is affiliated with SAARC.

then, the committee has irregularly met four times up to May 2011. It is responsible for coordinating and monitoring the implementation of SAARC action plans on the environment and forestry (SAARC 2011d online).

In the area of environmental protection, a major development was in the form of urgent high-level meetings.⁷⁰ However, the meetings of SAARC environment ministers took roughly five years to agree on the much-needed actions. In 1997, at the third meeting of Environment Ministers in Malé, the SAARC Plan of Action on Environment was adopted. It stressed the need to establish two regional centres of excellence to address environmental issues in South Asia, particularly focused on coastal areas and forestry. As per the usual practice of setting up regional institutions, SAARC reacted to the recommendations of the agenda provided by the Ministers, but it took the Association roughly eight years to create the much-needed institutions.

Generally, putting ideas into practice, especially with reference to institutionalisation takes time because this demands both financial and human resources, and a member state is expected to offer to host a proposed centre and bear the complete burden of setting up the centre in addition to the extra 40 percent of the institutional cost (see Chapter 4). After resolving all the related issues in 2005, the SAARC Coastal Zone Management Centre (SCZMC) was set up in the Maldives with the purpose of promoting cooperation in planning, management, and sustainable development of coastal zones in South Asia, particularly through research, training, and awareness raising.

SCZMC is similar to some other SAARC initiatives in that it lacks funding and human resources. In early 2011, a team of seven, including three professionals, was running the centre. New Delhi has agreed to donate one million US dollars to SCZMC (Sinha 2009 online). This is in line with India's policy on taking the lead role in actions on climate change in South Asia. Even with limited resources, the centre has been relatively more active in comparison to other SAARC centres, such as the SAARC Information Centre based in Kathmandu. Since 2006, SCZMC has been organising workshops and study trips across the region to share information and expertise on issues relating to rainwater harvesting and

⁷⁰ Since 1992, SAARC Environment Ministers have met nine times up to 2011 to discuss cooperation in the areas of environment, climate change and natural disasters (SAARC 2011d online).

climate change. The centre's activity is also reflected through regular meetings of its governing board, which till 2011 had met six times on an annual basis.

With greater focus on other issues, such as economic cooperation, agreements in the area of environment were delayed at SAARC. However, at the Sixteenth SAARC Summit (Thimphu, 2010), the SAARC Convention on Cooperation on Environment was signed (SAARC 2010d). This is an important development in cooperation towards environmental security in the region because it affirms the commitment of the member states towards cooperation in the fields of environment and sustainable development through sharing of best practices, capacity-building, and transferring of eco-friendly technology. However, the convention will only come into effect after its ratification by all SAARC members.

SAARC's cooperation in the area of environmental security is multidimensional and focused on some key areas, such as natural disasters, climate change, and forestry; therefore, the following sub-sections aim at comprehensively analysing the ways in which SAARC has been fostering cooperation in these areas.

6.3.1 Natural disasters

South Asia is a disaster-prone region as evident from past and present circumstances of some countries. Natural disasters in some cases are not restricted to one country because there are examples of catastrophes affecting people across borders in the region. Natural disasters in some of the SAARC countries have destroyed infrastructure and put a massive burden on local economies, for example in Pakistan after the 2010 floods. Domestic challenges of member states cannot be divorced from the overall SAARC process because in a way local challenges constrain member states' ability to contribute towards some meaningful actions at multilateral levels. This is particularly true in the case of SAARC, the body, which is sustained by the support, both in terms of financial and human resources, of the member states. However, member states' inabilities to tackle domestic problems provide greater opportunities for cooperation at regional and global multilateral levels. However, this has not happened in South Asia. Hence, SAARC countries are interdependent in managing natural calamities, providing opportunities for greater cooperation (Swain 2004:248). For example, after the 2005 earthquake, India and Pakistan opened their controversial borders in the Kashmir region for relief operations in the earthquake-affected areas. Another case is the

2008 floods in Bihar which could have been prevented or at least managed through better cooperation between India and Nepal.⁷¹ As six of the SAARC members have land borders with each other and have rivers flowing from neighbouring countries, greater cooperation is needed for early warning and management of floods. There is scope for regional cooperation to tackle both causes and effects, such as through mitigation, adaptation and resilience, especially in South Asia where most countries suffer from lack of human and financial resources, and even necessary skills and well-equipped institutions.

It took SAARC roughly 15 years after the production of the study in 1991 to initiate meaningful cooperation on environmental security. In 2005, as a result of a special session of SAARC Environment Ministers, the Malé Declaration on a collective response to large scale natural disasters was adopted (SAARC 2011d online). In 2006, in line with the principles of the Malé Declaration and in order to address the specific need for disaster risk reduction and management, members adopted the Comprehensive Framework on Disaster Management (2006-2015). Until the establishment of the SAARC Disaster Management Centre (SDMC) in New Delhi in 2006, at the regional level there was no mechanism to assist disaster-affected countries. The Director from Nepal at the SAARC Secretariat, Basnyat (2009, pers. comm.), mentioned that SDMC has obtained data on all the disaster-prone areas in the region. He further reported that the Centre has satellite pictures of weather patterns on the website and all the countries and relevant organisations are sharing the information through the Centre.

Considering the value of providing timely relief in humanitarian emergencies and afterwards in reconstruction and rehabilitation, the SAARC members decided to set up a mechanism for rapid response to natural disasters (SAARC 2008d:204). The idea behind this mechanism is to swiftly react to emergency circumstances in disaster-struck member states with the purpose of decreasing loss of life and damage to socio-economic and environmental resources (Saeed, F.D. 2011 online). The SAARC Agreement on Rapid Response to Natural Disasters was signed at the Seventeenth SAARC Summit (Addu, 2011); however, it is still to be ratified for implementation. Once launched, this mechanism will work within the framework of SDMC.⁷²

⁷¹ In 2008, Bihar in India faced the worst ever flood in the state's history, caused by a breach in the Koshi Dam in Nepal (on the India-Nepal border). This catastrophe affected 1.4 million people in India (UNICEF 2008 online).

⁷² The SAARC agreement is a replica of the 2005 ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response.

In the drafting of the agreement and approval from the heads of state, the issue of using military assets was a delicate matter considering the level of bilateral relations between some members, especially India and Pakistan. The Director from Nepal at the SAARC Secretariat, Basnyat (2009, pers. comm.), shared his concerns over sensitivity in relation to cooperation in disaster management with reference to the involvement of militaries from other member states. Nonetheless, this agreement has been finalised with the provision of using military capacities towards rapid response in the region on a voluntary basis and only if 'requested' by a state struck by a catastrophe (SAARC 2011j:4). However, considering the nature of their rivalry and military strength, India and Pakistan might not need the support of each other or any other member to cope with emergency situations, and this could be a reason that both ratifying this agreement. It is a comprehensive agreement and the members have also committed to bear a share of the extra expenses of SDMC when the Centre responds to emergency circumstances (SAARC 2011j:8).

In comparison to other areas of operation at SAARC, cooperation in this area is still feeling its way. Nonetheless, cooperation through SDMC could move beyond collection and dissemination of data, to capacity-building in the area of disaster management and rehabilitation. In this regard, SDMC needs to establish working relations with the relevant international organisations, such as the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR). UNISDR has been organising conferences on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) in different regions of world, including Asia. UNISDR has been in favour of regional measures in the area of DRR, and ASEAN and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) regions have already taken similar moves. Considering the fact that the SAARC members have been taking part in UNISDR conferences on DRR, it is important that the Association progress in this direction via SDMC. SAARC countries could jointly participate in UNISDR events, which will put them in a better position to learn from relevant regional experiences, such as that of ASEAN. According to a SAARC Secretariat official (2009, pers. comm.), the Association is exploring possibilities for global South-South cooperation, in the area of disaster management. SAARC wishes to establish working ties with ASEAN in this area.

Pakistan was struck by the heavy floods during July-August 2010, right after the SAARC celebrated its Silver Jubilee at the Sixteenth SAARC Summit in Thimphu (April 2010). Yet SAARC members only pledged to make a donation of US\$32 million, and no actions were

taken via either the SAARC Secretariat or SDMC to respond to the calamity in Pakistan (Sharma, S. 2011:20). Due to climate change, natural disasters are not going to be only occasional incidents in South Asia; therefore, timely and sustainable solutions are required to reduce the costs of these natural catastrophes. This also reflects the large gap between rhetoric and actions at SAARC, and might be linked to the bilateral contentious issues that have been haunting the SAARC process. For example, after the 2010 floods in Pakistan, the country refused to directly accept the aid of US\$5 million from India (Yousaf 2010 online).⁷³ Islamabad only allowed the aid from India via the UN. This example shows that the delicate bilateral relations between India and Pakistan have implications for cooperation in human security areas. This example also reflects the significance of multilateralism that allowed the much-needed funds to reach Pakistan.

The establishment of an institution dealing with the issues of natural disasters and regional agreements shows a growing cooperation among SAARC countries in this very important area. Considering the often slow implementation at SAARC, it is unclear when the concrete steps will be taken on disaster risk reduction and management. In addition, there is a need for the relevant SAARC institutions to establish working relations with global multilateral and non-governmental organisations to enhance the scope of regional projects in South Asia.

6.3.2 Forestry

Even though national measures to prohibit deforestation and promote afforestation are crucial, the importance of regional and global measures cannot be neglected. SAARC's cooperation in this area has long suffered from having no particular body to deal with this issue. The organisation has been very slow to initiate consensus-building and undertake programmes in the area of forestry. For example, the SAARC Forest Centre (SFC) was established only in 2008. The centre has been set up in Bhutan, a country at the forefront of forest protection and the promotion of afforestation, and this is likely to work in favour of this SAARC institution. According to the initial plans, the Centre will prepare a database on forestry research and will conduct workshops on medicinal plants in South Asia. For this purpose, the Centre has a budget of US\$ 359,118, as reported in the *Hindustan Times* (17 June 2008). Since its inception, the Centre has organised a few regional workshops on topics such as carbon

⁷³ It is important to mention that this occurred in a period of tense India-Pakistan relations in the aftermath of the 2008 terrorist attacks on Mumbai (see Chapter 8 for details).

sequestration. SFC is in the initial phase of institutionalisation and is still under-resourced, both financially and in terms of human resources. However, New Delhi has agreed to provide one million US dollars towards the Centre, which might help in implementing some worthwhile projects (Sinha 2009 online).

There have time-bound commitments from the SAARC countries to protect the environment in South Asia. This is evident from the Thimphu Statement on Climate Change, through which the SAARC members have agreed to certain important actions. A relevant example here is a pledge to plant ten million trees between 2010 and 2015 as part of a regional afforestation campaign (SAARC 2010e:3). This is in accordance with national policies and measures taken by some SAARC members, in particular Bhutan and India; therefore, it is likely that the SAARC members will take national action.

Nevertheless, it is unclear what role the SFC will play in afforestation in South Asia and this could be because the centre is still in its infancy, and has still to develop significant programmes.

6.3.3 Climate change

Climate change has grown in prominence to become one of the core areas of SAARC's agenda on environmental security. This is because some assessments of the implications of climate change declared South Asia a vulnerable region. In addition, the South Asian states are wary of the global politics attached to negotiations on climate change mitigation and adaptation. This section covers a detailed discussion of the consequences of climate change at the global and South Asian levels. The actions of some South Asian countries and SAARC are analysed to see how some initiatives and cooperation in this area are progressing.

In recent times, climate change implications have appeared to become the core of debates on environmental security at multilateral forums, particular at SAARC. The subject of climate change has received much attention because several studies have alleged a human contribution to the present state of environmental destruction. Considering the seriousness of climate change threats to its member states, SAARC has become more active towards addressing challenges to environmental security. On this, a former Secretary General of SAARC, Sheel Kant Sharma, said: "The good thing is that all SAARC countries realise the

dangers and there is heightened awareness and consciousness to deal with the problem” (Shah 2010 online).

It is important to underscore that the SAARC countries are not among the world’s biggest polluters of the environment. Collectively, South Asia’s absolute contribution to the world’s total CO₂ emissions is only 6.7 percent, of which 4.6 percent comes from India, as per 2004 figures (UNDP 2007:310-313). The CO₂ emissions from the region are negligible in comparison to the industrialised world. In per capita terms, the CO₂ emissions of South Asia in 2004 were 1.3 (metric tons per capita), much less than the global 4.5 (metric tons per capita) (SACEP 2011 online). The former Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, pointed out that, “the countries most vulnerable are least able to protect themselves. They also contribute least to the global emissions of greenhouse gases. Without action they will pay a high price for the actions of others” (UNDP 2007:72).

Larger South Asian countries might have more people exposed to the implications of climate change, but smaller countries are also severely threatened. Climate change is expected to have grave consequences for the Maldives as it is feared that the entire country could go under water due to a sea-level rise by just a metre (Mirza 2007:5). Some indications of climate change are already visible in the country with erosion affecting most of the 200 inhabited islands. Other contributing factors in the Maldives are pollution, and illegal coral and land mining causing erosion (Lang 2009:para. 10). Climate change is likely to damage the country’s industries, such as fisheries and tourism. The latter contributes to one-third of the GDP. The livelihoods of locals in the Maldives depend on these sectors and fishermen have already seen a reduction in the amount of tuna fish in the local waters (Lang 2009 online). Throughout the region, “prolonged climate stress could also impinge on the livelihoods of marginalised communities, while poverty increases vulnerability to climate change by further limiting options” (Kelkar & Bhadwal 2007:5).⁷⁴

Multilateral negotiations on climate change are taking longer than expected partly because this phenomenon will not affect all countries in the same manner. Greenhouse gas mitigation

⁷⁴ Climate change is a human security threat to the lives of roughly 300,000 people living in the Maldives. Therefore, the first ever democratically elected President, Mohammed Nasheed, has decided to set up a fund to acquire land in other parts of the region for his people affected by climate change. Initially, the idea is to set up a “sovereign wealth fund” using tourism revenues to purchase land in countries with similar climate conditions, such as India and Sri Lanka (BBC 2008b online).

efforts are supposed to take into consideration the economic situation of countries, as “any strategy or measure for addressing climate change that stalls development will have far-reaching impacts in making future generations more vulnerable to climate change” consequences (Kumar, V. & Kumar 2008:43). Therefore, South Asian countries are aware of the need to cooperate regarding environmental protection, both at regional and global levels. Therefore, the SAARC members are signatories to the major environmental treaties.⁷⁵ Their commitments to international agreements show a sincere desire in South Asia to cooperate at the global multilateral level.

Occasionally, SAARC does react to the findings of research reports, specifically the ones published under the SAARC banner. The 1992 study, “Greenhouse Effect and its Impact on the Region”, recommended regional measures in sharing experiences, scientific capabilities and information on climate change; and global collaboration in monitoring climatology, sea level rise, natural disasters, technological transfer and finance. In addition, the study provided SAARC with national strategies for emissions reduction, the legal framework for environmental protection and measures for implementation, monitoring requirements and, most importantly, recommendations for regional cooperation in the area of climate change. The research suggested the establishment of a SAARC Meteorological Research Centre to improve climate change monitoring in the member states, especially with reference to information on sea-level rise (SAARC 1992a:xiii). Like the implementation of many of the SAARC projects, the completion of this study took a long time – roughly four years – and the approval for this research project was reached during the Fourth SAARC Summit held in Islamabad in 1988 (SAARC 2008d:37).

Even though the members treated the findings of the above-mentioned studies seriously, actions could not be taken due to SAARC being immature at that point of time. Therefore, cooperation on the issue of climate change remained stagnant until this issue became a matter of serious debate at global multilateral levels. After the SAARC Summit in Islamabad, the Association had matured to a stage where it could implement some of the necessary programmes. While the world as a whole is only belatedly responding to climate change, the

⁷⁵ All SAARC members have signed the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer, 1988; the Montreal Protocol on Substances that deplete the Ozone Layer, 1989; the Framework Convention on Climate Change, 1992; the Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992 etc. (UNDP 2007:314-317).

SAARC reaction was even slower. It was only in 2008 that the countries finally managed to reach consensus on a regional-level climate change strategy.

The position of South Asian countries is similar to that of other developing regions. The heads of state at the Fifteenth SAARC Summit (Colombo, 2008) explicitly pointed out that “any efforts at addressing climate change should take into account historical responsibility, per capita emissions and respective country capabilities” (SAARC 2008d:204). Through SAARC, India, being the biggest contributor to CO₂ emissions in South Asia, has been encouraging action at all levels, particularly the regional-level, to address the issue of climate change. In May 2007, India’s Environment Minister announced the National Environmental Policy together with energy efficiency, conservation measures, power sector reform, fuel switching to cleaner energy, and afforestation efforts, all of which are designed to enable India to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by more than 25 percent by 2020 (UNEP 2008:3).

It seems New Delhi’s policy of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, as a domestic pledge, was a response to similar actions taken by other countries. India has joined the list with the US, China, Brazil, Indonesia and South Korea in making this commitment before the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). However, similar to the case of China, India’s approach is focused on improving energy efficiency rather than implementing mandatory limits on greenhouse gas emissions (Yardley 2009 online). Therefore, by its nature, the New Delhi’s policy is insufficient to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions. To date, India has not implemented meaningful actions to focus on energy efficiency. Nonetheless, some serious action at the domestic level is needed from India to set the precedent for countries across the world, particularly in South Asia.

Climate change and environmental insecurities are not a threat exclusive to some states, but a challenge common to the South Asian region (Najam 2004); therefore, climate change was a central theme of the Fifteenth SAARC Summit (Colombo, 2008). Heads of state at the summit in Colombo expressed their satisfaction on the adoption of SAARC Action Plan and Dhaka Declaration on Climate Change at the SAARC Ministerial Meeting on Climate Change (Dhaka, 2008) (SAARC 2008d:203).⁷⁶ This was an important meeting and the venue for this meeting on climate change was appropriate because, at that time, large parts of Bangladesh

⁷⁶ The Environment Ministers of the SAARC states attended the meeting.

were affected by heavy floods.⁷⁷ Also Bangladesh, through the platform of SAARC, has been advocating regional initiatives to address climate change implications and this commitment is manifested through the following statement of Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed (Chief Adviser to the interim caretaker Government of Bangladesh, 2006-2008) to the 2008 SAARC Summit in Colombo:

Climate change has become a major cause of concern for us. South Asia is acutely vulnerable to global warming and climate change. The melting of Himalayan glaciers, rising sea level, drought and desertification, increasing salinity in our rivers are most visible manifestations of [climate change]. In South Asia, global warming is rendering natural disasters frequent and more intense, causing greater damages and devastation to lives and livelihood (Ahmed, F. 2008:4).

Due to some severe implications faced by smaller SAARC members, they have been very active in guiding the SAARC's agenda on climate change, but at the same time, they have voiced their concerns globally, including through symbolic gestures. Nepal has been active in drawing the attention of the whole world towards the severity of climate change. A renowned Nepali researcher, Pokharel (2009, pers. comm.), said:

Nepal raised its voice on the issue of climate change at the General Assembly on 22 September 2009. Our Prime Minister also gave a gift of a rock from Mount Everest to Barack Obama, to demonstrate the extent of climate change because previously the mountain used to be covered with snow. Now we have started seeing naked rock portions. That does show that if the rate of present deterioration continues then really it is alarming.

Multilateral mechanisms are regarded as very important by small countries, either at global or regional levels. According to Tin (2006:304), "No small country can prosper outside the framework of regional cooperation and integration. Small countries cannot make their voice heard unless they band together." The small countries, such as Nepal and the Maldives, are pushing for a stronger commitment towards a climate change policy and they have been active not only within SAARC, but in global multilateral forums as well. For example, in 2009, the chair of the 49 LDCs grouped under the UN system in Geneva, was transferred to one of the smallest countries in South Asia, Nepal. Similarly, the Maldives is a member of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), which aims to raise joint concerns on global warming and its implications. This suggests that the governments of smaller countries have realised that they cannot make policy reforms at global and regional levels by acting alone. They have also understood that the best option for them is either to unite with other smaller

⁷⁷ In 2007, the flood-prone Bangladesh was hit by heavy floods affecting approximately 13 million people and killing more than 1,000 (TD 2008:para. 4).

countries in the region or to join a regional group dominated by a bigger and stronger country, or even to form a coalition with like-minded countries across the world.

India is increasingly becoming a key player in SAARC. New Delhi not only agreed to sign the Thimphu Statement on Climate Change (to be discussed later) as an assurance of its solidarity with other SAARC members but also agreed to support some regional actions. In this regard, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh made an announcement at the Sixteenth SAARC Summit (Thimphu, 2010) that his government would set up an “Indian Endowment for Climate Change” to help other SAARC member states in meeting urgent needs towards climate change, particularly adaptation and capacity-building. Singh (2010 online) also proposed establishing the Climate Innovations Centre in South Asia to develop sustainable energy technology. This is a welcome move from India – the only South Asian country capable of financing such an expensive project – because some SAARC countries cannot wait for actions at global multilateral levels. The India Endowment has been established and is in the process of receiving project proposals from SAARC countries (SAARC 2011r online).⁷⁸

New Delhi is sticking to its national policy of energy efficiency and is promoting the same at the regional level in South Asia. Even though significant, the invention and promotion of low-carbon technologies are not going to have short-term impacts on carbon emissions in South Asia, nor elsewhere in the world. Therefore, India needs to focus on all crucial areas of cooperation to make South Asia an example of cooperation in the area of environmental security, in particular climate change.

There has not been a sudden shift of policy in New Delhi towards regionalism in South Asia. Since the end of the Cold War, India has been keen on playing the role of a regional leader. With reference to global negotiations on environmental issues, India’s ambition is to become a global leader, especially by becoming a representative of developing states and their concerns on climate change. Climate change negotiations have become a highly political issue since the first real step of the G5 developing nations, Brazil, India, South Africa, Mexico and China, in 2005. The G5 members collectively met the G8 countries and discussed their concerns on climate change by stressing the transfer of technology and financial support (Sharma 2011:11). India is very much a part of the politics linked to global talks on climate

⁷⁸ As of December 2011, New Delhi has not announced the amount of money it will be putting into this planned mechanism.

change. For example, India is a member of the BASIC Group comprising of Brazil, South Africa, India and China, which negotiates on behalf of the developing world. The Group was created in 2009. It seems that the purpose of the big four developing economies is to bring on board all developing countries to obtain better bargaining power in global discussions on climate change. Considering this, India's support of the SAARC's climate change agenda is a mere reflection of its bigger objectives. New Delhi's approach is not different from similar policies of other emerging economies, such as Brazil in MERCOSUR. Therefore, Hurrell (2006:8) has rightly argued that "a state may see the region as a means of aggregating power and fostering a regional coalition in support of its external negotiations."

In South Asia, it is difficult to compromise economic growth in the region in response to the pressure from the international community on greenhouse gas emissions,⁷⁹ as countries in the region need money to provide for the needs of their people. Repeatedly, SAARC members have demanded support from the developed world to handle the causes and consequences of climate change in South Asia. At the same time, SAARC countries have stressed the need to ensure rapid socio-economic development to equip them to address the implications of climate change (SAARC 2009a:1). However, they do put greater emphasis on reducing reliance on carbon in their economic growth (SAARC 2010e:1). In this regard, a decision was reached through the Thimphu Statement on Climate Change in 2010 to commission a feasibility study on establishing a SAARC mechanism which would fund projects promoting low-carbon technology and renewable energy, and a Low-carbon Research and Development Institute at the South Asian University (SAU) in New Delhi (SAARC 2010e online). This project seems to have much potential, considering the fact that SAU has been operational since 2010 and that the Indian government has committed to provide funds for projects relating to climate change.

Because of a strong commitment expressed by SAARC heads of state to manage the implications of climate change in South Asia, the Inter-Governmental Expert Group on Climate Change (IGEG.CC) was established in 2010. The IGEG.CC will monitor, review progress and make recommendations towards the implementation of the Thimphu statement (SAARC 2011d online). This development shows that there is a greater level of political

⁷⁹ The key greenhouse gases contributing towards global warming are: carbon dioxide (CO₂); methane (CH₄); nitrous oxide (N₂O); sulphur hexafluoride (SF₆); hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs); and perfluorocarbons (PFCs). In the greenhouse gases, CO₂ contributes the least towards global warming but it is still very significant because of its high quantity of production (Report of the Task Group on Emissions Trading 2007:2).

commitment towards intra-regional reliance, as far as the matter of climate change is concerned. As projects have not been implemented in this area, it is hard to tell whether SAARC will deal this issue differently to others, such as energy. Often institutions are established but they remain limited in their ability to produce concrete results in accordance with declarations, conventions and action plans produced at SAARC.

SAARC has been somewhat active in raising awareness of climate change in South Asia. For example, SAARC has nominated Mr Appa Sherpa, twenty times Everest Summiteer, as a SAARC Goodwill Ambassador for Climate change (2010-2012). During his time as a Goodwill Ambassador, Mr Sherpa will disseminate information specifically on SAARC's work in the area of climate change (SAARC 2011d online). This action is in line with the Thimphu Statement on Climate Change stressing timely action on awareness and advocacy on climate change in South Asia.

Through slow progression, climate change has become the highlight of SAARC. The issue was the theme of the Sixteenth SAARC Summit (Thimphu, 2010) and the member states gathered "towards a green and happy South Asia." Similar to the case of other SAARC agreements on climate change, the focus of the summit declaration was to announce a common position of SAARC members for global multilateral forums on climate change, such as COP16 (SAARC 2010d:2).⁸⁰ South Asian states seem to be quite aware of the seriousness of these issues and that the major environmental problems have been caused by the industrial states; therefore, they have reached common positions at global multilateral forums on climate change. South Asian countries emphasise that there should be "adequate resources to tackle climate change without detracting from development funds" and "equitable burden-sharing" (SAARC 2007b:1). The President of Sri Lanka, Mahinda Rajapaksa, stated at the Sixteenth SAARC Summit (Thimphu, 2010) that, "those in the developed world who have historically contributed to climate change must now bear the [lion's] share of the burden to mitigate this phenomenon" (Rajapaksa 2010:2). Although climate change is a global phenomenon, timely actions are demanded at all levels to address this challenge.

The production of a joint statement at multilateral levels demands commitment and a greater level of coordination among the stakeholders, and on occasions, the SAARC members have

⁸⁰ At the Sixteenth SAARC Summit "the leaders emphasised that global negotiations on climate change should be guided by the principles of equity, and common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities as enshrined in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change" (SAARC 2010d:2).

demonstrated this commitment to the issue of climate change. At this level, Bangladesh and India have been very active in bringing on board other members. In September 2010, ahead of a meeting in New York on the sidelines of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG) Summit India stressed the need for a common South Asian stance on climate change. Bangladesh organised this important sideline meeting which Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina chaired. On this occasion, serious attempts were made to develop a common South Asian position on climate change ahead of the scheduled UNFCCC in Cancun. Accordingly, in 2010, a joint statement was produced demanding the negotiations on climate change be transparent, and based on the principles of equity, common but differentiated responsibilities, and respective capabilities.⁸¹ SAARC was accredited with Observer status at the UNFCCC process at COP16 in 2010 (SAARC 2011d online). Obtaining Observer status at COP16 was the reward for SAARC for presenting a common position of its members at COP15 (Copenhagen, 2009) and as a result SAARC is now included in a list of IGOs, like ASEAN, having observer status at UNFCCC (UNFCCC 2011 online).

Obtaining bargaining power at global forums is what a regional organisation aims at. “To strengthen cooperation among themselves in international forums on matters of common interests” is a key SAARC objective (SAARC 1985). Thus, the significance of SAARC statements on climate change cannot be ignored. However, this might give a wrong impression to the world that SAARC is making headway in the promotion of greater cooperation because that has not been the case. Sharma (2011:22) argues that, “the common SAARC posture in global Climate sweepstakes ... is more of an ornamental value aimed at deceiving regional population that SAARC is together in responding to the threats of climate change”.

The SAARC members view climate change as an external threat and a problem mainly caused by industrial states because South Asian countries’ GHG emissions have been much lower than those of the industrialised states. Joint positions on climate change have already provided SAARC with much needed momentum through coherence in some aspects of environmental and foreign policies of member states. Multilateral discussions on climate change have

⁸¹ Dr Pema Gyamtsho (Minister-in-Charge of National Environment Commission, and Minister for Agriculture and Forests, Royal Government of Bhutan) at the Sixteenth Conference of Parties presented the SAARC statement to the UNFCCC (Cancun, December 2010).

brought the SAARC members together to raise their concerns both regionally and globally, especially via the Association.

While the developing South Asia demands serious actions from the industrialised world, much more needs to be done to ensure environmental security in the region. The global consensus on climate change action is taking a long time to achieve desired outcomes; therefore, in the meantime, the SAARC countries need to focus on actions that can be implemented, especially as SAARC has established institutions to address the causes and consequences of environmental degradation. In addition to switching to cleaner sources of energy, the SAARC countries also need to focus on transport and industrial pollution.

Cooperation among the SAARC countries in the area of climate change is not limited to certain vital agreements and common positions at global multilateral forums. SAARC has quickly come up with the SAARC Action Plan on Climate Change (2009-2011) which focuses on cooperation in important thematic areas, such as adaptation to climate change, policies and actions for climate change adaptation, technology transfer and financing. Particularly, the action plan puts emphasis on prioritising SAARC climate change projects and those to be implemented by the national governments with the member states to submit reports of their actions directly to the SAARC Secretariat for review (SAARC 2009a:2). Certain planned actions are a reflection of SAARC members' understanding that "South Asia is particularly prone to climate change and related disasters making the need for a regional response to meet the challenge of climate change more urgent and compelling" (SAARC 2010e:1). However, a limitation of this action plan is its complete reliance on actions taken by the SAARC states in connection with the regional action plan, and the common problem of insufficient financial and human resources may lead to very slow implementation. In addition, as Baral (1999:249) rightly argues, the political commitments at SAARC often lack support at the domestic level.

SAARC has been actively cooperating with regional and international organisations, such as SACEP, UNEP, and UNISDR. Cooperation between SAARC and SACEP has led to some meaningful actions at the regional level. For example, in response to the agenda provided by SAARC Ministers, SACEP organised a meeting of the SAARC Environment Ministers to discuss the South Asia Wildlife Trade Initiative to prohibit the organised illegal trade of

wildlife products (Joshi 2008 online). In collaboration with UNEP, SAARC produced the South Asian Environment Outlook in 2009.

As there is a direct link between climate change and the frequency and intensity of natural disasters, SAARC has established a network composed of the following regional centres: SAARC Coastal Management Centre, SAARC Disaster Management Centre, and the SAARC Forestry Centre. Considering the magnitude of the potential environmental threats to South Asian countries, the work of SAARC is under resourced. A team of three to ten people, half of which number are usually support staff, runs individual SAARC regional centres. These centres, like other SAARC institutions, are financially supported through compulsory (see Chapter 4) and voluntary contributions from the member states, but in some cases projects have been implemented in collaboration with some non-governmental and inter-governmental organisations, such as UNEP, UNDP, FAO, ADB and SACEP. There have been commitments from India and some SAARC Observers to fund needy projects in the region, but nothing concrete has happened yet to evaluate the level of commitment. With reference to institutionalisation and consensus-building, SAARC has moved ahead in environmental cooperation by setting up the SAARC Agriculture Centre, SAARC Meteorological Research Centre, SAARC Coastal Zone Management Centre, SAARC Disaster Management Centre, and SAARC Forestry Centre. However, the focus of these institutions has been limited to conducting research projects, collection of information, publications and capacity building in relevant areas. These activities are important too because there is some level of sharing of experiences occurring among the officials of the SAARC members, but there is an urgent need to lift the level of cooperation in project implementation. Nevertheless, most of the above-mentioned centres have been putting forward recommendations for some regional projects in South Asia.

There is a greater dependence among the SAARC countries on global developments regarding climate change. The lack of cooperation at SAARC could be a mere reflection of the failure of global negotiations on climate change and the huge gulf between the developed and the developing world. Developing countries want the wealthy, industrialised states to provide the financial support by accepting 'common but differential responsibility'; however, many developed countries do not want such commitments. This has led to an impasse in global climate change negotiations (Sharma 2011:11). This global context has provided the SAARC

countries with greater motivation to fight for their rights. India's financial support might also lead to some meaningful regional initiatives in this area.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to analyse how natural disasters have been affecting the lives of millions in addition to the loss of wildlife and destruction to the environment. However, cooperation at SAARC with the purpose of reducing the costs of natural disasters has been slow, as it was only after the tsunami of 2004 and the earthquake of 2005 in Pakistan that the organisation moved to promote cooperation in this crucial area. Even though certain important agreements were reached among the SAARC members and the SDMC was established in 2006, there has been less to evaluate in terms of concrete actions, such as the implementation of the SAARC Agreement on Rapid Response in Natural Disasters. Nonetheless, the signing of the agreement is a significant step because that shows a level of confidence among the members because the option of using military resources is included.

There are challenges of different degrees facing environmental security in South Asia, such as deforestation, water security, natural disasters, and climate change. In some areas, action at national levels in accordance with regional and global commitments has shown some results, for example, some worthy afforestation efforts in Bhutan and India. Nevertheless, at the same time, deforestation continues in South Asia due to the large number of people relying on forest goods for their livelihood. Thus, there are socio-economic dimensions to deforestation in the region, which demands serious action to protect not only the livelihood of the people but also the environment. However, SAARC has been slow to develop policies and institutions for protecting the environment in general and the forestry sector in particular. For example, the SAARC Forestry Centre was only established in 2008 in Bhutan.

The commitment of the SAARC members towards environmental security is demonstrated through cooperation both at regional and global levels. By hosting regional centres in their countries, for example, the SAARC Forestry Centre in Bhutan, the SAARC Meteorological Research Centre in Bangladesh, the SAARC Coastal Zone Management Centre in the Maldives, and the SAARC Disaster Management Centre in India, these member states have shown sincere support for regional cooperation in this area. However, these issues are highly under-resourced; therefore, they greatly rely on project-based funding from extra-regional

states and non-state actors. Those factors, such as the development agencies (UNEP, UNDP, FAO, ADB etc.) have been the driving force behind the SAARC's agenda on environmental security issues; therefore, it is difficult to tell whether the SAARC projects are driven by a genuine need to address the environmental vulnerabilities of the SAARC members.

It is clear from the scale of the problem that on climate change, SAARC not only needs a clear line of action, but its relevant institutions need a complete overhaul with more financial and human resources to mitigate the effects of climate change. Even though internally there is a mechanism based on which the member states fund SAARC institutions, this funding is insufficient to improve the quality of these institutions. This is evident from the case of the SAARC institutions discussed in this chapter because they are under resourced. It has been timely of India to offer some much-needed financial support to SAARC institutions, but that is not enough considering the amount of work needed to be done. As it was required, New Delhi has shown commitment to launching a long-term funding mechanism for projects in South Asia.

India's support for SAARC and a regional position on climate change is a mere reflection of its bigger motive of becoming a global player, but it has positively influenced the work of SAARC in the area of environmental security. New Delhi's policy, similar to the case of other BASIC Group members, is to create a common policy on climate change among the developing countries in order to steer the developed world towards an urgent and necessary resolution. Developing countries have demanded technology transfer and financing for climate change mitigation and adaptation from the developed world. Accordingly, India has been reacting via SAARC to promote invention and transfer of technology within South Asia by agreeing to fund such projects.

To summarise, recent challenges faced by the SAARC region, such as climate change, have provided the countries with a fresh regional agenda to bargain for their concerns at global levels. These global threats to their welfare and security also warned SAARC members of their vulnerability to the consequences of global environmental degradation caused by climate change. Although South Asian countries have contributed the least to this problem, the region will be among the most vulnerable to the consequences of climate change. Moreover, the existence of the Maldives is under threat due to rising sea levels, which is a consequence of global warming. On the issue of climate change, the SAARC members have used the regional

forum to obtain bargaining power at global levels, and this has been manifested through SAARC obtaining Observer status at COP 16 of UNFCCC. This is a significant development for SAARC and is likely to have positive implications for its future vis-à-vis regional integration in South Asia.

CHAPTER SEVEN

HUMAN WELFARE

7.1 Introduction

The SAARC process centres on human welfare as per the SAARC Charter defining the objectives of the Association. A key goal of SAARC is “to promote the welfare of South Asia and improve their quality of life” (SAARC 1985:1). Accordingly, ever since the creation of the organisation in 1985, human welfare has been a constant feature of its programmes.

This chapter begins with an analysis of the state of human welfare in South Asia. It then analyses the SAARC’s mandate, mechanisms and actions relating to the general framework of poverty alleviation. Then follows a detailed analysis of the role of SAARC in promoting regional cooperation in the areas of food and health security, and education. The areas of cooperation covered in this chapter have been selected because of their significance to the welfare of people in South Asia.

The work of SAARC is not limited to issues covered in this chapter because the Association has been promoting cooperation in other important areas, such as gender equality and development, and child welfare, but its initiatives in those areas have been superficial and have lacked action plans. The same could be said about the recent symbolic move of the member states through the SAARC Charter of Democracy (2010) which is linked to human welfare. The charter focuses on good governance in South Asia, but is a too young an agreement to be considered when evaluating SAARC’s achievements in the area of human welfare.

7.2 The state of human welfare in South Asia: an overview

The region comprising of the SAARC members is home to more than one-fifth (22 percent) of the world’s population, roughly 1.6 billion people (MHHDC 2005:7; WMO 2008:3). The population of South Asia is projected to reach 1.84 billion by 2015 and the urban segment will comprise 33.8 percent of the total (UNDP 2007:246). More stress has been put on natural resources, services and infrastructure because of the higher population growth rate.

Poverty is one of the tough challenges faced by the SAARC members – both developing and LDCs. According to the UN, South Asia is home to an equal number of developing countries (India, the Maldives, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka) and LDCs (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal) (UNCTAD 2011b online). The region is home to the “largest concentration” of the poor in the world, roughly 31.7 percent of South Asia’s population – almost half of the world’s poor (Laplante 2010:507; Pasha 2004:131; Tripathi 2008:para. 3). Even India, with its remarkable economic growth has not been able to significantly transform the lives of many millions of its people through effective poverty alleviation programmes.

In Table 7.1, the SAARC countries are compared with the ASEAN member states to show the diverse membership of both organisations. Human Development Index (HDI) ranks are used here because of their relevance to the theme of this chapter, as HDI contains ‘welfare’ measures.⁸² None of the SAARC members has either a very high level or high-level of human development. This is contrary to the case of ASEAN, where Singapore and Brunei have higher ranks on HDI, meaning better human development than most of the OECD countries, for example, the United Kingdom is ranked at 28 behind Singapore (UNDP 2011b online). The lowest ranked country of ASEAN, Myanmar, has a better record of accomplishment in human development than Nepal and Afghanistan. The youngest member of SAARC, Afghanistan, has a very low level of human development and is ranked at 172 amongst the poorest African countries, such as Ethiopia, Sierra Leon, Liberia and Zimbabwe. Therefore, the Director of Nepal and the head of division of Information and Poverty Alleviation at the SAARC Secretariat, Basnyat (2009, pers. comm.), rightly said that the plight of Afghanistan is often compared with Sub-Saharan Africa. The poor ranking of most SAARC countries on HDI shows how enormous the challenge is for the Association and its member states to lift the standards of human welfare in South Asia.

⁸² HDI is a composite index which measures a country’s progress in three areas of human development: health, knowledge, and income.

Table 7.1: Human Development Index (HDI) ranks of SAARC versus ASEAN countries, 2011

SAARC countries	HDI Rank	ASEAN countries	HDI Rank
Sri Lanka	97 ^μ	Singapore	27 [*]
Maldives	109 ^μ	Brunei	33 [*]
India	134 ^μ	Malaysia	61 ^α
Bhutan	141 ^μ	Thailand	103 ^μ
Pakistan	145 [∞]	Philippines	112 ^μ
Bangladesh	146 [∞]	Indonesia	124 ^μ
Nepal	157 [∞]	Vietnam	128 ^μ
Afghanistan	172 [∞]	Laos	138 ^μ
		Cambodia	139 ^μ
		Myanmar	149 [∞]

Note: Information on symbols used for data years: * = Very High HD; α = High HD; μ = Medium HD; ∞ = Low HD. Data source: (UNDP 2011a online)

Food insecurity is common among South Asian countries. Hunger is a global phenomenon, though more severe in the developing world with the majority of the victims living in the Asia-Pacific (roughly 578 million, as of 2010). According to an estimate, most of the more than 400 million victims of hunger in the Asia-Pacific region live in South Asia (Williams 2009 online). According to 2008 estimates, around 284 million people are undernourished, with insufficient access to food, in the SAARC region, more than half of whom are children (Pasha 2004:132; WMO 2008:3). The Global Hunger Index 2011 has included five SAARC members in its list of 81 countries faced with hunger. A higher rank shows the greater severity of the problem and in that ranking Sri Lanka is at 36, Nepal at 54, Pakistan at 59, India at 67, and Bangladesh at 70 (IFPRI 2011:17).⁸³ According to the same report, the countries in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa have the highest GHI scores, but in the former region there has been some progress since the 1990s. However, the trend of progress from 1990 and 1996 in South Asia could not be maintained due to socio-economic and political issues, and the consequences of globalisation in the form of the 2008 Global Economic Recession. Also,

⁸³ The 2011 report did not include data on the following SAARC members: Afghanistan, Bhutan and the Maldives. The Global Hunger Index estimates are based on the calculation of several indicators related to 'hunger', such as undernourishment, underweight children and child mortality (IFPRI 2011:7).

there are more underweight children in South Asia due to women having low “nutritional, educational, and social status” in South Asia (IFPRI 2011:5).

One main cause of hunger and malnutrition is global food price inflation. The gap between the demand and supply of food is increasing, as agricultural productivity cannot match rapid population growth. Food price inflation reduces people’s ability to afford food. According to a report, high food inflation affects countries with more poor people, such as China, India, and Indonesia (IFPRI 2011:22). In South Asia food prices increased by 75 percent from 2002 to 2007 (WB 2008:para. 3). In the financial year 2007-2008, food price inflation in the two biggest SAARC countries increased dramatically – 14 percent in India and 20 percent in Pakistan (Hasan 2008 online). Between 2007 and 2008, the price rises in India included essential food items with 20 percent increase in the price of rice, 18 percent in lentils, 11 percent in milk, and 40 percent in the price of edible oil (Thakurta 2008:para. 5). Periodic slumps in agricultural output are also partly attributed to natural disasters – both floods and droughts – that are exacerbated by climate change (see Chapter 6).

In a region like South Asia an “increase in food prices with stagnant wages can create problems for the poor” (MHHDC 2005:14), even the working class poor. Increase in food prices due to manufacturing and supply costs can lead to food insecurity. Food price inflation can push more people into poverty, especially the ones marginally surviving above the poverty line (Vokes & Jayakody 2010:215). Food price inflation is just one among many factors that raise the level by which poverty is defined, for example earning a dollar a day becomes irrelevant when people who are living above the poverty line can no longer afford to eat. Food security has to focus on people’s ability to purchase food, as with hikes in food prices the poor find it either difficult or impossible to buy basic food items.

Often, in studies on food security, a causal link has been found between food price inflation and the crude oil price and that is a crucial factor too. The price per barrel of crude oil increased from US\$88.35 in January 2008 to US\$131.22 in July 2008, but later dropped to US\$93.62 in 2011 (OPEC 2011 online). In July 2008, during the time of rapid rise in the crude oil price in the global market, millions were affected in the developing world, due to an increase in oil price affecting the costs of other related items, such as energy, transportation and food.

Globally, food prices also increased partly due to Western countries switching to biofuels⁸⁴ that reduced the food supply. Farmers in the United States and many European countries have switched to the production of biofuel crops, such as maize. Among the emerging economies, there is a growing trend of biofuel crop production in India and Peru. This has led to a strong link between the supply of energy and food demand (IFPRI 2011:24).

In the developing world, the prospects of survival are often poor due to gaps in the public health sector with regard to highly infectious diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis (TB) (Sen 2000:2). Malaria re-emerged in South Asia in the 1980s and 1990s and by 2003 there were around two million reported cases of infected people (MHHDC 2005:15). Most of the victims are in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh; countries where a large number of the poor are living under unhygienic tropical conditions and thus are vulnerable to malaria and other diseases.

There are a host of other causes of widespread, potentially deadly but curable, infections in South Asia. For example in Bangladesh, malaria cases have increased and are likely to further increase due to frequent floods and the tropical climate. Health insecurity is also exacerbated by climate change. Increases in temperature can affect the lifecycles of many pathogens and infecting insects. Global warming will thus increase the spread of vector-borne diseases such as malaria, dengue fever, yellow fever, and encephalitis (Sinha 2006:604). Consequently, the range of disease transmission will expand in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives (Kelkar & Bhadwal 2007:9-10).

With their large and constantly increasing populations, most South Asian countries lack resources to develop health infrastructure. This means there are millions who have not received vaccines against preventable diseases. It is reported that each year 2 to 2.5 million people are infected with TB in South Asia alone and approximately half a million people died due to TB in 2003 (MHHDC 2005:16). According to the “Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic 2010”, South and Southeast Asia are home to the highest number of people living with HIV in Asia. In 2009, around 4.1 million were infected with HIV in both regions (approximately 12 percent of the world total of 33.3 million) with an overall 260,000 AIDS-related deaths (UNAIDS 2010:20-21). An increase in the number of drug addicts also increases the prevalence of HIV/AIDS (Yun 2007:12). The increasing infection rate is also

⁸⁴ Biofuels are based on bioethanol produced from starch crops, such as sugarcane and maize.

due to widespread prostitution, with either the prostitutes or their clients being unaware of the need for protection against HIV/AIDS. For this reason, there have been projects to increase awareness of HIV/AIDS among prostitutes and communities in general in South Asia.

Table 7.2: Health-related indicators of South Asian countries, 2011

Country	Expenditure on health (% of GDP)	Under-five mortality (per 1,000 live births)	Life expectancy at birth (years)
Afghanistan	1.8	257	44.6
Bangladesh	1.1	54	66.9
Bhutan	3.3	81	66.8
India	1.1	69	64.4
Maldives	6.4	28	72.3
Nepal	2	51	67.5
Pakistan	0.8	89	67.2
Sri Lanka	2	15	74.4

Data source: (UNDP 2011b online)

In South Asia, as elsewhere, the focus of health expenditures has been on curative rather than preventive healthcare (MHHDC 2005:15). As shown in Table 7.2, most South Asian countries spend less than four percent of their GDP on health. This shows a lack of commitment to providing basic health facilities to the masses. This is one of the reasons that on HDI ranks, the SAARC members are ranked in the medium or low level human development category, thus far behind countries like Australia (HDI rank second in 2011)⁸⁵ which spends nine percent of its GDP on health (Banks 2008:1; UNDP 2011b online). Afghanistan is in a war situation and, therefore, has the highest mortality rate and the lowest life expectancy of all SAARC members. It is interesting to compare the data from Bhutan and Sri Lanka because the former spends more on health but still has a shorter life expectancy and greater under-five mortality. Life expectancy in Bhutan is even lower than in Pakistan, which spends a mere 0.8 percent of GDP on health. A lack of infrastructure and difficult terrain are the major hurdles in the way of the Bhutanese government in providing accessible health facilities and services. In countries like Pakistan, health is not the only sector neglected as other areas have also been experiencing severe financial constraints, partly due to greater defence expenditure due to the internal and external security challenges (see Table 3.1).

⁸⁵ In the 2011 HDI ranks, Norway is ranked first in the list of 187 countries (UNDP 2011b online).

Even though there has been some progress since the 1970s, South Asia remains home to a large number of illiterate people. However, the proportion of literate people has been growing in the region, reaching 56 percent in 1999 (Ahmed 2004:298). However, there are variations among the South Asian countries. In 2006, half of the SAARC members (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan) were found to be on track in terms of achieving the target of one of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of achieving universal primary education by 2015 (UNESCAP 2006 online).

Table 7.3: Education-related indicators of South Asian countries, 2008

Country	Expenditure on education (% of GDP)	Adult literacy rate (% aged 15 and above)	Combined gross enrolment ratio (%)
Afghanistan	1.9	28 ^ε	50.1 ^μ
Bangladesh	2.4	56.5 ^α	52.1 ^β
Bhutan	5.1	52.8 ^μ	54.1 ^μ
India	3.2	68.3 ^α	61 [∞]
Maldives	8.1	97.3 ^α	71.3 [∞]
Nepal	3.8	60.3 ^α	60.8 [∞]
Pakistan	2.9	54.2 [∞]	39.3 ^μ
Sri Lanka	2.7	90.8 [∞]	68.7

Note: Data is from 2008, unless otherwise specified. Information on symbols used for data years: ε = 2000; β = 2004; μ = 2005; ∞ = 2006; α = 2009. Data source: (UNDP 2011b online)

The data in Table 7.3 show that greater spending leads to visible improvement in the education sector. An example of that is the Maldives with the highest adult literacy rate (97.3 percent) and combined gross enrolment (71.3 percent). Bhutan's recent increase of spending on education, enabled by selling hydroelectric power to India, is already being rewarded.⁸⁶ The gross enrolment ratio in Pakistan is unique. The country has the lowest enrolment rate (39.3 percent) in the region even though there are more financial resources devoted to the education sector than in Bangladesh and Afghanistan, but in those countries, enrolment is higher. Poverty and gender disparity play a large role in limiting opportunities for girls to attend school, particularly in the rural areas where the majority of Pakistanis live (UNESCO 2011:8).

⁸⁶ Hydroelectricity is the major source of Bhutan's economy, the others being tourism and forestry. The country has experienced a major increase in GDP after initiating its energy trade with India, for example through the Tala Hydroelectric Project, completed in March 2007 (Tshering & Tamang 2011:3).

There is an enormous task awaiting SAARC member states in addressing the human security challenges faced by their people. There are many millions suffering from acute poverty, hunger, malnutrition and diseases, lacking access to education and health facilities.

7.3 SAARC and human welfare

SAARC has a wide range of activities and mechanisms focusing on various aspects of human welfare, such as women's empowerment, child welfare etc.; however, for the purpose of analysis in this chapter the following sub-sections present evaluations of regional cooperation in the areas of poverty alleviation, food and health security, and education.

7.3.1 Poverty alleviation

*"Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural.
It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings."*
Nelson Mandela (UNDP 2007:72)

At the creation of SAARC, leaders decided to combine efforts for the welfare of their people. At the inaugural SAARC Summit (Dhaka, 1985), the King of Nepal, Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev (1985:2), was referring mainly to poverty and hunger when he stated: "The problems of basic needs remain real for large segments of our people." These problems could be addressed through actions at all levels, including efforts at sub-regional, regional and global levels. The forthcoming analysis will test the following claim made by a Director at the SAARC Secretariat (2009, pers. comm.): "One has to appreciate that SAARC has moved forward and there are tangible projects on the ground, especially on poverty alleviation." Firstly, there is a need for a critique of the regional instruments addressing this problem.

At SAARC, Bhutan, more than any other state, has been urging the Association for proactive measures to alleviate poverty. This could be due to Bhutan's emphasis on people's welfare through its unique philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH) which, over the years, has been appreciated at regional and international levels.⁸⁷ Lyonchhen Jigmi Y. Thinley, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan, illustrates their commitment through the following statement:

The primary goal of SAARC to improve the wellbeing of our peoples remains elusive. Millions continue to be mired in inhuman conditions of want and deprivation. We must

⁸⁷ King Jigme Singye Wangchuck of Bhutan first presented the GNH term as he felt it was a better measure of people's well-being than a financial term such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

intensify our efforts so that the poor and destitute have the opportunity to break free from the shackles of poverty and realize their potentials (SAARC 2008h:3).

SAARC has developed a two-tier mechanism, comprising of ministers and secretaries dealing with poverty alleviation in the region. Since 1995, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has been providing technical and financial support for SAARC activities in this area (SAARC 2011b online). This external support has been a key factor in the development of some policy documents and mechanisms on poverty alleviation.

Poverty eradication is an area in which SAARC countries have not hesitated to take action, though often limited in scope. For instance, the Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation (ISACPA) was established at the Sixth SAARC Summit (Colombo, 1990). Subsequently, at the Twelfth SAARC Summit (Islamabad, 2004), ISACPA was directed to identify SAARC Development Goals (SDGs) (see Appendix 6). SDGs are a reflection of the MDGs because the latter area is seen as a significant development in understanding poverty, “as they assess the multidimensionality of poverty in a more holistic sense” because of being target oriented and by declaring states more accountable (Chatterjee & Kumar 2010:97). In 2004, in response to ISACPA’s submission, SAARC designated 22 SDGs and submitted its very important report entitled “An Engagement with Hope” to SAARC. The 2004 Islamabad summit also approved the SAARC Social Charter with the purpose of fulfilling their commitments to both SDGs and MDGs. In particular, article III of the SAARC Social Charter puts forward the case of poverty alleviation in South Asia (SAARC 2004d:7). Nonetheless, the Charter seems to be a comprehensive agreement reaffirming the commitment of the member states to addressing various common social problems, such as poverty alleviation, health insecurity, illiteracy, discrimination against women, child abuse and so on. The Charter demands that the member states develop ‘people-centred’ and ‘result-oriented’ policies and programmes in the social sector (SAARC 2004d:3). Nonetheless, through the Social Charter, the member states have recommitted to the central focus of the Association:

The principle goal of SAARC is to promote the welfare of the peoples of South Asia, to improve their quality of life, to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development and to provide all individuals the opportunity to live in dignity and to realise their full potential (SAARC 2004d:1).

Like other SAARC charters or conventions, this Charter is strong on rhetoric and there is very little focus on functioning. In terms of actions, it is also limited as there is no direct mention

of stipulated deadlines for actions, such as achieving SDGs. With reference to coordination efforts, the charter does refer to national commissions being the implementing bodies with the leverage to change national plans in accordance with the ethos of the SAARC Social Charter (SAARC 2004d:15-16). However, there is no evidence to suggest that the charter has led to any such reforms in the member states. Some SDGs are aspirations, such as goal number one: eradication of hunger, because this does not have a timeframe unlike goal two: halve the proportion of people in poverty by 2010.

In the area of poverty alleviation, SAARC has faced the dilemma of being over ambitious, as certain deadlines of reaching either the initial target of eliminating poverty by 2002 or SDGs on livelihood (Goals 1 to 8) have not been significantly translated into concrete actions, never mind outcomes. Consequently, SAARC moved on to extend its target of poverty alleviation in South Asia to 2015 through the ongoing SAARC Decade of Poverty Alleviation (Lama 2010:406).

The region is far from significantly reducing the number of poor, and the blame cannot be put on SAARC because its job is to prepare policies and coordinate actions. The implementation of SDGs in South Asia has also been constrained by several other factors beyond regional and national control, as discussed previously, such as the economic recession, natural disasters, and an increase in global oil and food prices. However, SAARC has still been trying to play its role. For example, the concerns of the consequences of the 2008 Global Economic Recession were expressed by the member states through the “SAARC Ministerial Statement on Global Financial Crisis” in 2009. In the statement the members demanded special stimulus packages from the international community for the developing countries for the realisation of MDGs and SDGs (SAARC 2009c:1). Laplante (2010:507) argues that the current economic crisis may significantly obstruct the realisation of MDGs on poverty alleviation.

Often trapped by their domestic issues, SAARC members lack the ability to fully respond to their commitments at the regional level. Nevertheless, some measures have been taken to cement member states’ pledges to the SAARC Decade of Poverty Alleviation (2006-2015). During this decade, actions at both national and regional levels, are to be taken towards making South Asia a poverty-free region (Lama 2010:406). In this regard, some member states have taken certain symbolic steps, for example with regard to the SAARC Village programme. Since 2008, India and Sri Lanka have launched SAARC Village projects by

selecting one rural community in their respective countries. This project aims at displaying and providing opportunities to learn from the SAARC member states' development models. Currently, this project also suffers the predicament of non-implementation in most of the SAARC countries and this could be due to insufficient funds.

SAARC poverty alleviation programmes have some priority areas, such as empowerment of the marginalised, particularly women. In the SAARC Social Charter, the member states have affirmed their commitment on the need "to empower women through literacy and education recognising the fact that such empowerment paves the way for faster economic and social development" (SAARC 2004d:11). Economic empowerment has been identified as a key to women's socio-economic advancement, not only by international development organisations but also by states and NGOs in South Asia. There is the notable example of the Grameen Bank, a micro-finance organisation and community development in Bangladesh, which has significantly improved the lives of the poor in the country of its origin and beyond. The Grameen's approach has been replicated in almost all of the SAARC countries by government agencies and NGOs, often with the help of IGOs, such as UNDP.

The SAARC leadership is committed to socio-economic advancement of the region. At the Fifteenth SAARC Summit (Colombo, 2008), an agreement was signed to set up the SAARC Development Fund (SDF) (SAARC 2008d:205). SDF has come into operation with three "Windows" – Social, Economic and Infrastructure. The social window focuses on poverty alleviation and development projects. The economic aspect aims at funding non-infrastructure projects, for instance related to trade and industrial development, agriculture, the service sector, and science and technology, while the infrastructure feature centres on funding projects for the development of the following sectors: energy, power, transportation, telecommunication, environment, tourism and so on (SAARC 2011i online). SDF is a successor of the South Asian Development Fund (SADF), which was created in 1996. SADF lacked the political commitment and, therefore, had only US\$7 million until it became the SDF (Manatunga & Somarathna 2008:para. 3). In contrast, SDF enjoys some level of political commitment due to much support from New Delhi, its biggest contributor. As per the SDF agreement, the SAARC countries will make the following contributions to the fund: Afghanistan (US\$10 million), Bangladesh (US\$21.44 million), Bhutan (US\$10 million), India (US\$60.64 million), the Maldives (US\$10 million), Nepal (US\$21.44 million), Pakistan (US\$45.04 million), and Sri Lanka (US\$21.44 million) (SAARC 2008c:16). India has

voluntarily contributed an additional US\$100 million towards SDF. In 2010, the Secretariat of the SDF was inaugurated in Thimphu.

As this researcher observed during an internship at the SAARC Secretariat, SDF is seen as an important milestone. On this, a senior member of the SAARC Secretariat (2009, pers. comm.) asserted, “I do not know of any region having US\$300 million of its own for development, which is the case of SDF”.⁸⁸ Even though South America does have this level of funding, the statement shows the degree of enthusiasm for SDF at SAARC. However, by the end of 2010, the only contributions SDF had received were those from Bhutan and India amounting to a total of US\$170.64 million (SAARC 2011a online). SDF is far short of the expected amount of US\$300 million and this could be because some of the other member states, such as Afghanistan, the Maldives, Nepal and Pakistan have been experiencing economic crises and thus their contributions are late in coming.

As per its plan, SDF is not solely dependent on funding from the SAARC member states as it is a mechanism of directly receiving financial support from concerned donor organisations and countries. China, a SAARC observer, convinced of the potential of SDF, agreed to provide US\$300,000 for the fund (Guangya 2010:2). It is likely that other SAARC observers will learn from the precedent set by Beijing to contribute to SDF funds. However, there is no apparent sign of that happening. Acceptance of funding from China shows the changed attitudes of SAARC members to external funding, especially from states. In particular, this also reflects New Delhi’s re-evaluated role within SAARC because India is no more wary, as it used to be in the past, of the influence of outside powers in South Asia.

SDF is a step in the right direction in realising several SAARC projects – a key purpose of this fund. While affirming their agenda on SDF, the heads of state at the Fourteenth SAARC Summit (New Delhi, 2007) declared that “the focus of SAARC should be on implementing collaborative projects ... [SDF] is an important pillar that would bring concrete benefits to the people of the region” (SAARC 2008d:193). At its heart, the Fund focuses on the welfare of the people of South Asia. The Fund is seen as a funding mechanism for all SAARC projects and programmes, particularly in the following three spheres: social, economic, and infrastructure.

⁸⁸ In 2000, the SAARC Eminent Persons had suggested at least US\$500 in contribution towards the development fund (Dubey 2005:30).

In the past decade, there has been a growth of micro-credit schemes in South Asia, which has also contributed, to poverty reduction. Therefore, special emphasis has been put on “access to micro-finance” and “small and medium enterprise development” in the SAARC Plan of Action on Poverty Alleviation (SAARC 2004b:2). Because Bhutan has been a key player in promoting actions in this area, its concept of GNH has been considered an important approach in enriching the concept of human development in South Asia (SAARC 2004b:2).⁸⁹ By virtue of having funds in SDF, SAARC has been able to implement, more than ever before, regional projects in the areas of human development.

If, on the one hand, valuable initiatives like the SAARC Food Bank are taking longer than expected to be operational, then on the other hand there is SDF reaching out to people at the grassroots level through actions. Therefore, a SAARC Secretariat official (2009, pers. comm.) was delighted to mention that due to the availability of funds SAARC has implemented two important projects. It has funded the Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) to work for the welfare of poor and self-employed women in South Asia and the SUNGI Development Foundation in Pakistan for regional projects on maternal and child health. The same respondent disclosed that Dr Manmohan Singh, the Prime Minister of India, himself recommended SEWA be funded through SDF.⁹⁰ It is the first time that SAARC has implemented its agenda through a non-governmental organisation (NGO). However, for NGOs to be supported under SDF, their governments have to support and promote their proposed projects. This shows that there are still many formalities to be met by NGOs to obtain funds from SDF.

SEWA is the first occasion that a project with the label of SAARC has been implemented at a large scale; therefore, is much more visible than projects of SAARC regional centres. Since August 2008, the project with SEWA, known as “Strengthening livelihood initiative for home-based workers in SAARC region”, has been promoting women’s empowerment. SAARC, through SDF, will fully fund this project with a grant of US\$13.59 million. The project will concentrate on home-based workers in all of the SAARC member states (SAARC 2011t online). This project is well on its way and SEWA has already established the SAARC

⁸⁹ The SAARC Plan of Action on Poverty Alleviation has a reference to ‘Gross National Happiness’ for expanding the concept of human development through equitable socio-economic development; preservation of environment; promotion of cultural heritage; and good governance (SAARC 2004b:2).

⁹⁰ The Government of Pakistan recommended the SUNGI Development Foundation for SDF funding (2009, pers. comm.).

Business Association of Home-Based Workers (SABAH) in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The creation of SABAH in Bhutan and the Maldives is in progress. In Pakistan, SUNGI Development Foundation is partnering with SEWA to manage SABAH and already 160 home-based workers from Hazara (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) have become SABAH members (SDF 2009:18). In Afghanistan, SEWA was engaged before the implementation of SABAH with the support of the Government of India. In 2008, SEWA formed a centre with the name of *Bagh-e-Zenana* (Women's Garden) for the training of women entrepreneurs. Through this project, which is now funded by the SDF, SEWA has managed to take this initiative in Afghanistan to a higher level with greater participation of home-based women workers through 14 groups. Furthermore, some of the women from *Bagh-e-Zenana* participated in an international trade fair in New Delhi and sold goods worth roughly US\$11,000 (SEWA 2008:70). In dollars, the total amount might appear insignificant, but in the local currency, Afghan Afghani (AFN), it is equivalent to over 500,000 AFN. In this case, it was an earning without deductions by other sources, such as sales tax, intermediaries, et cetera.

The progress of SAARC in the area of poverty alleviation is ongoing and is merged into various areas of cooperation of SAARC, such as food security, education, economic development vis-à-vis free trade in South Asia, and so on. Poverty has so many dimensions and that could be a reason that targets of poverty alleviation at SAARC are deliberately left vague, for example the goals on poverty and hunger eradication in SDGs. In addition, poverty is seen as an interwoven theme of SAARC's programmes in other areas of human security, such as food security, health and education, because the marginalised segments are the intended target groups of regional projects in those areas.

7.3.2 Food security

As SAARC countries have predominantly agrarian economies, agriculture and rural development have been on the Association's agenda ever since the first meetings were organised to create the Association in the early 1980s. In 1981, a meeting of the SAARC Study Group of Agriculture was held in Dhaka. A Working Group on Agriculture met twice in 1982 and led to the creation of the SAARC Technical Committee on Agriculture. The committee met in 1983 and provided the founding members with an initial agenda of cooperation in the agriculture sector, including exchange of scientific/technical information.

In 1985, to further cooperation in agricultural development, the Association approved the establishment of SAARC Agriculture Information Centre (SAIC) in Dhaka and the centre was set up four years later.

As far as intra-SAARC mechanisms related to food security are concerned, two separate committees on agriculture and rural development operated until they were merged in 2000 and named the Technical Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (TCARD). Since then, the committee's mandate has been expanded to include cooperation in the areas of livestock and fisheries. It has been active in promoting action on some innovative projects, as will be discussed later. TCARD met five times before 2010 and a special session was held in New Delhi in November 2008. TCARD projects failed to get off the ground due to the Committee's ineffective functioning at the SAARC Secretariat; therefore, at their meeting in 2006, Agriculture/Food Ministers from the SAARC countries, emphasised the need for TCARD to deliver meaningful projects, and they renamed SAIC the SAARC Agriculture Centre (SAC).

Like cooperation in other areas, SAARC has a multilevel mechanism to expand cooperation in agriculture and rural development. As well as TCARD and the SAC, there is the Inter-governmental Core Group on Research-Extension-Farmer Linkages (IGCG-R-E-F), the SAARC Food Bank Board, and Meetings of Agriculture Ministers. There have been four meetings of SAARC Agriculture Ministers between 1996 and 2010. Although not frequent, these meetings have been productive, leading to institutionalisation and project implementation.

Ministerial meetings have been focusing on agricultural and rural development through measures at all levels, national, regional and global. Ministerial meetings were held in 1996 and 2002 to jointly prepare for the FAO's World Food Summits, both held in Rome. Participation in these forums by SAARC representatives assured the world of some common areas of interest in South Asia, such as food security. The potential for wider cooperation between the international community and SAARC was highlighted. Accordingly, as a follow-up of the 2002 summit in Rome, FAO began meaningful cooperation with the SAARC Secretariat to develop a Regional Strategy and Regional Programme for Food Security. This included funding of US\$122.8 million (FAO 2011a online). Consequently, at the Fifteenth SAARC Summit (Colombo, 2008), project concept notes were approved under this

programme. Currently, ADB is assisting SAARC in developing detailed project proposals to implement some strategic initiatives in food security. The regional vision focuses on four key clusters, namely, productivity, sustainability and income enhancement; pre and post-harvest loss reduction and value chain management; biosecurity; and agricultural trade and marketing for food security (SAARC 2011a online).

There have been some other important measures taken at SAARC to ensure food security for South Asians. In 2004, at the SAARC Summit held in Islamabad, the proposal to set up the SAARC Food Bank (SFB) was discussed (SAARC 2008d:167). In 2006, the SAARC Agriculture/Food Ministers in Islamabad endorsed the SFB concept paper, revised earlier in the same year. In 2007 an Agreement on Establishing SFB was signed by the representatives of the SAARC member states in New Delhi (SAARC 2008d:196). This Agreement is aimed at providing support to the member states during food shortages and emergencies (SAARC 2007a:2). It was decided that the SFB Secretariat would be based in Bangladesh (Vokes & Jayakody 2010:224), but there was no move on that until September 2011.⁹¹ A member country withdrawing food grain from SFB is responsible for restoring food grain within a year from the date of withdrawal. SFB is also aimed at enhancing collaborative regional efforts towards national food security efforts with a reserve of 243,000 metric tons of food grain (SAARC 2011a online). All SAARC countries will contribute towards the reserve of food grain in SFB. There will be a total of 243,000 metric tons (MT) of food grain at the bank, as per the following shares from the member states: Afghanistan (1,420 MT) Bangladesh (40,000 MT), Bhutan (180 MT), India (153,000 MT), Maldives (200 MT), Nepal (4,000 MT), Pakistan (40,000 MT) and Sri Lanka (4,000 MT) (SAARC 2007a:12).

The SFB's contributions are determined in relation to the food production capacity of member states and, as such, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh are the three biggest food contributors to the regional reserve. SFB has a workable mechanism that enables member states to have food grain in storage facilities in close proximity to respective borders so that in emergency situations food could be sent across borders to a member state requesting help. In the agreement, there is no limitation on how much a country can draw from the Bank. Once

⁹¹ In the absence of a permanent secretariat, the SAARC Food Bank Board takes care of matters relating to SFB. The board met four times between 2008 and 2009, which shows the momentum of cooperation for food security. Considering the level of existing food shortages and some forecasts, at a meeting in Kabul (2009), the board decided to double the quantum of SFB to 486,000 MT (SAARC 2011a online).

operational, it will be easier for the smaller countries to draw from food reserves in India – the biggest contributor to SFB.

Notwithstanding high-level policy declarations, some of which are indeed significant, the work of SAARC on food security is largely still in its infancy. Initially, SFB has suffered, as an agreement could not be reached among the member states on food-grain pricing, operational guidelines and delivery systems. Due to these limitations even when some SAARC countries needed the support of the Bank, they could not get it (Lama 2010:418). This is despite the fact that the SAARC members with the exception of Afghanistan have reserved their quota of food grains to SFB (Mondal 2010 online). SAARC now has developed operational details and a coordinating mechanism so the member states in need can really benefit from the Bank. However, to be operational the SFB agreement is needed to be ratified by all member states. Afghanistan has not yet agreed on contributing towards SFB by not ratifying the agreement, and this has further delayed the functioning of the Bank (SAARC 2011a online). By appreciating the significance of the food security mechanism, the heads of state directed SAARC to make the SFB fully operational as soon as possible (SAARC 2008d:201), but the SAARC Secretariat awaits Afghanistan's ratification.

An ambitious and much-needed project, SFB, is facing delays and the blame for that could be put on the seven founding members who invited a politically and economically unstable country into the Association. With an ongoing war in the country and its aid-dependent economy, the country still lacks proper institutions to be an active member of SAARC. For example, Afghanistan signed the SFB agreement in 2007, but the approval from its parliament (*Wolesi Jirga*) was only obtained in October 2011, and the SAARC Secretariat is yet to be notified of the decision of the Afghan lower house (Waghazi 2011 online).

SAARC has developed a multifaceted mechanism to address the problem of food insecurity, but without any significant outcomes yet. In 2008, the SAARC member states launched the South Asia Food Security Programme with an estimated cost of US\$25 million (Padma 2008a online), which is aimed at comprehensively addressing the issue of food security by focusing on food production in the region. The initiative aims at improving crop production and nutrition in the region by benefiting from mutual scientific resources, such as technology, research and development. This project has been funded by ADB, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and FAO. At a meeting of the SAARC Agriculture

Ministers (New Delhi, 2008), the Indian Agriculture Minister, Sharad Pawar, said, “there is potential to turn agriculture in the SAARC region into a dynamic sector with rapid technological innovation accelerating growth and reducing poverty” (Padma 2008b online). The Food Security Programme is indeed a much-needed initiative at the regional level as the projected impacts of climate change significantly reduce or increase rainfall accompanied by unexpected temperature increases, which will negatively influence crop production. This project was facilitated by external support from donors, notably funding. SAARC, being a representative of development and least developed countries, often needs such support to implement its vital agenda.

Repeatedly, the member states have urged SAARC to collaborate with the greater international community towards promoting food security in South Asia. In November 2008, an extraordinary meeting of the Agriculture Ministers of the SAARC member states was held in New Delhi, where the agriculture ministers of the SAARC countries adopted the SAARC Declaration on Food Security to set up SFB. Through this agreement, the member states agreed to share best practices for increasing agricultural output without risking the availability and quality of precious natural resources (SAARC 2008f:1). The declaration does not have much substance in terms of clear objectives and actions because it is mainly limited to concerns over the impacts of climate change and trans-boundary movement of plant diseases. However, the ministers expressed a commitment to cooperation in the areas of safe movement of agriculture commodities in the region, and towards the development of agricultural science and technologies (SAARC 2008f).

The Colombo Statement on Food Security of the heads of state at the Fifteenth SAARC Summit (Colombo, 2008) was the product of an extraordinary ministerial meeting (New Delhi, 2008). Even though it was a page-long statement showing willingness to initiate collaborative projects in related areas, such as towards increasing food production, it has had a bigger impact because it showed the interest of the Association in greater cooperation with the international community to ensure food security in South Asia (SAARC 2008d:211), such as ADB, FAO, IFAD and other organisations.

Considering the fact that most of the South Asian countries are agricultural economies, there have been some steps taken in this area to ensure the growth of agriculture productivity. The SAARC countries also understand that the realisation of MDGs and SDGs depend on the

stability of their economies; therefore, “agriculture growth is a necessary condition for access and affordability to ensure food and nutrition security” (SAARC 2009b:3). In this regard, SAARC has prepared a comprehensive, action-oriented, SAARC Agriculture Vision – 2020. It is a common regional agriculture perspective among the SAARC members to promote agriculture development and cooperation in South Asia. A key objective is to develop a “science based strategy for collective response to threat, challenges, opportunities and global shocks, based on ground realities of SAARC countries” (SAARC 2009b:1). The vision paper discusses opportunities and challenges with reference to agriculture productivity in South Asia, with emphasis on either expanding or initiating cooperation in the areas of farm technology, biotechnology, adaptation to climate change, and biodiversity. SAARC Agriculture Vision – 2020 is supposed to be a guiding document for regional projects via SAARC.

There have been some notable developments on agriculture productivity vis-à-vis food security in South Asia. For example, the SAARC Declaration on Ug99 was signed in 2008 to discuss the consequences of a wheat disease – Ug99 – on development and food security in South Asia. Through the agreement, the SAARC countries agreed to “establish ... a multilateral regional framework based on a spirit of partnership and cooperation to scientifically tackle the ill-effects of [Ug99]” (SAARC 2008g:1). Cooperation in this area is limited to sharing information of scientific findings in respective countries.

With SAARC now connected with many inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations, and developed countries, there is potential for the organisation to obtain necessary external support for the implementation of regional projects. Now, because SAARC is more active than it was in its past, there has been keen interest shown by some SAARC Observers to support the work of SAARC in the area of agriculture development. In this regard, the move from Australia to fund South Asian projects aimed at improving water management and dry-land agriculture is notable. Australian experience on water management is greatly relevant to South Asia; therefore, the plans have moved ahead with Australia committing technical and financial support to the SAC (Dhaka) via the Australian Centre for International Agriculture Research (ACIAR), and the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) (McMullan 2010:2-3). This project has already kicked off at the SAC with an initial two-year phase focusing on capacity-building in cropping systems modelling to promote food security and the sustainable use of water

resources in South Asia. In contrast, the US, another SAARC Observer, has not directly been supporting SAARC institutions, which is evident from Washington funding some non-governmental initiatives in South Asia, such as the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) (Blake 2010:3). Nonetheless, the support of SAARC observers is crucial for the implementation of some much-needed measures in South Asia.

Considering the extent of the problem, food insecurity has to be tackled with timely national and regional policies in South Asia, especially by increasing agricultural production to match the rapid population growth. For this, SAARC needs to promote the development and sharing of agricultural technologies for enhancing agricultural productivity across South Asia. In this regard, a “Second Green Revolution”⁹² in South Asia has been advocated by the Indian leadership (SAARC 2008f:3). In the 21st century, the green revolution is more about sharing expertise in the agriculture sector to develop higher quality and quantity of yields. For this to happen, the work of SAARC in the area of agriculture and rural development is vital. Nonetheless, the importance of SFB, in which the SAARC countries have invested time and resources, cannot be ignored. The only hurdle is its ratification by Afghanistan. Once this is surmounted, SFB will have the legal status to become operational and address food-related emergencies.

7.3.3 Health security

Health security of the people of South Asia is linked to both poverty and food security. Food insecurity manifested in hunger and malnutrition leads to serious health problems. Therefore, SAARC promotes cooperation on a few important health risks facing millions in the region. Cooperation for health security has not merely been limited to agreements, as has been the case with some other SAARC initiatives.

Certain diseases, due to lack of proper health infrastructure and awareness, are commonly spread across South Asia – for example, TB and HIV/AIDS. Considering this, the SAARC Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS Centre (STAC) was established in Kathmandu in 1992. The STAC works closely with the SAARC member states by coordinating the National TB Control Programmes of member states. The Centre works to prevent TB and HIV/AIDS as

⁹² The so-called first worldwide Green Revolution occurred in the 1960s and 1970s (UN 2011e:67). It featured a large increase in the use of fertilizers and pesticides (UN 2011e:88).

well as malaria in South Asia with the collaboration of several international development agencies. The Centre works closely with the World Health Organisation (WHO), United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) and the United Nations Programmes on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) on controlling malaria, TB and HIV/AIDS in the SAARC member countries. Such cooperation with international development agencies shows the international community's support for regional cooperation and its mechanisms in achieving measures in the area of human development.

Due to insufficient financial support from the member states, the STAC is greatly dependent on foreign aid money to implement its crucial action plans. The cooperation with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) is considered to be one of the successful initiatives. In this four-year project (2000-2004) CIDA provided US\$1.8 million (Lama 2008a:228). The financial support of CIDA was a significant factor in activating STAC because it enhanced the capacity of the centre in dealing with the combined effects of TB and HIV/AIDS. STAC remained inactive in the first five years of its existence due to lack of finances, until the SAARC-CIDA project was implemented in 2000.⁹³ The project achieved most of its desired objectives, such as regional TB and HIV/AIDS epidemiological networking; data sharing among the SAARC members through the STAC; improved accuracy in laboratory diagnosis of TB through better quality in national laboratory networks; and an operational SAARC Regional TB Reference Laboratory for quality purposes (Lama 2008a:230). The example of STAC shows that, with sufficient funds and human resources, SAARC institutions have the potential to accomplish their goals.

In the health sector, MDG-6 focuses on combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. The initial target under MDG-6 is to “have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS” (UN 2011b online). The region collectively observed the year 2004 as the “SAARC Awareness Year for TB and HIV/AIDS” with awareness-raising activities in respective countries, but information is not available on how many activities were organised under the SAARC programmes by each member state. As the STAC still needs more financial resources to implement some projects, New Delhi has agreed to support the centre (Basnyat 2009, pers. comm.). Basnyat further mentioned that New Delhi, through a Programming Committee meeting in 2009 comprising of the secretaries of foreign ministries, expressed

⁹³ The SAARC-CIDA MoU was signed in 1997.

willingness to support the STAC. However, India has not shown any formal commitment to that yet.

All these measures have led to greater cooperation among the SAARC countries for health security in the region. In the SAARC Social Charter, signed in 2004 in Islamabad, the heads of state agreed to cooperate at the regional level towards protecting and promoting the health of their people (SAARC 2004d:4). Achieving the needed health security for the people of South Asia would have been feasible with a SAARC Plan of Action for Cooperation which, among other objectives, emphasised sharing medical expertise and pharmaceuticals. Even though heads of state at two consecutive summits, 2004 in Islamabad and 2005 in Dhaka, asked for the finalisation of this action plan, so far there have been no steps taken to develop such a policy document at the SAARC Secretariat (SAARC 2008d:165-182).

While leaders in the SAARC region have envisaged and implanted health projects to protect people from diseases, such as malaria, TB, leprosy, diarrhoea, human rabies and HIV/AIDS, there is a lot more required at national levels. At the domestic level, individual states have to include both preventive and curative measures to enhance the scope of their health-related services. The SAARC policies on health and the STAC have the potential to pool resources not only from the member states but also from other countries and donor agencies to collaborate with health ministries in South Asia. This will help the Association to realise country-relevant projects.

The countries also have been concerned that due to globalisation the region is increasingly prone to infectious diseases, such as SARS and bird flu, originating from other regions. In 2003, the Maldives hosted the Emergency Meeting of the SAARC Health Ministers on the SARS epidemic. At the meeting, the policymakers committed to strengthen cooperation in tackling the spread of SARS in South Asia. Later in 2005, the Islamabad Declaration on Health and Population was signed, which proposed the creation of a SAARC Disease Surveillance Centre, and Rapid Deployment of Health Response System (SAARC 2005:1-3). However, this initiative has not been implemented yet. This could be due to a lack of funding as the support of CIDA was only for a four-year period and India is yet to contribute to

STAC. Nevertheless, there could be other problems, mainly bureaucratic, as those procedures are time consuming, especially the ones leading to implementation.⁹⁴

SAARC has failed to implement effective regional projects, particularly against HIV/AIDS, even though a comprehensive action plan, the SAARC Regional Strategy on HIV and AIDS (2006-2010), was developed in 2006. Since then the Regional Expert Group on HIV/AIDS had not evaluated the strategy. Nevertheless, on is the aspect of advocacy for awareness raising (SAARC 2006c:27), SAARC nominated two SAARC Goodwill Ambassadors for HIV and AIDS, namely Shabana Azmi (actress) of India and Sanath Jayasuriya (former international cricketer) of Sri Lanka. Some activities were organised for the Goodwill Ambassadors to raise awareness on HIV/AIDS. For example in 2009, Shabana Azmi visited Nepal and met with the victims of this disease, especially the affected children (SAARC 2011h online). Azmi's visit helped in giving SAARC more coverage in the media, but this was mainly limited to media venues in Nepal and India. However, these have only been tokenistic measures and even the awareness-raising strategy needs to be multifaceted with focus on vulnerable groups rather than just the affected ones. Nonetheless, awareness of HIV/AIDS is important in a context like South Asia with a large illiterate population, but for a sustainable solution, SAARC needs to encourage education on all preventable diseases.

SDF is a mechanism through which SAARC aims at implementing projects in a whole range of areas of human welfare, including health. For example, a SDF-supported project on "Maternal Child Health" is another regional project to be implemented by the SUNGI Development Foundation. The key objective of the project is to reduce Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) and Infant Mortality Rates (IMR) in the SAARC member states. SDF will provide US\$12.65 million for this project (SAARC 2011i online). The above is what the SAARC sources report about the implementation of SDF; however, the reality is slightly different. The project on "Maternal Child Health" was approved in the late 2009 to be implemented via the SUNGI Development Foundation of Pakistan, but as of August 2011, it has not progressed beyond the approval stage. For this delay, neither SAARC nor the SUNGI Development Foundation provided reasons to the researcher.

⁹⁴ A major portion of South Asians depends on livelihood from livestock; therefore, bird flu was considered a serious issue in South Asia. On this, SAARC organised a Conference of Chiefs of Veterinary Services in 2008 to address the issue of trans-boundary animal diseases (Sharma 2008 online).

To promote its often comprehensive actions plans in the area of health security, the SAARC mechanism lacks both human and financial resources. However, considering awareness is important to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, the role of SAARC has been limited to the use of the Goodwill Ambassadors. SAARC could have more ambassadors to spread awareness all across the region.

7.3.4 Education

Since the establishment of SAARC, there has been an understanding that human resource development (HRD) is a key area in South Asia. In SDGs, major emphasis has been placed on education. In this there are four goals agreed upon by the SAARC members: access to primary/communal school for all children, boys and girls; completion of primary education cycle; universal functional literacy; and quality education at primary, secondary and vocational levels (SAARC 2007c online). The objective of ensuring “quality education” is vague because this term has not been identified in SAARC proceedings. SDGs aim at collectively reaching the targets of MDGs in South Asia. However, SDGs are limited in scope to a five-year plan (2007-2012) and so far it is unclear what impact this project has had in promoting education for all in South Asia, which was the rhetorical goal espoused by the SAARC Education Ministerial-level meeting (Dhaka, 2009).

There are some initiatives of SAARC in the area of education. Since 1987, SAARC has been promoting cross-fertilisation of ideas through greater interaction among students, scholars and academics through the SAARC Chair, Fellowship and Scholarship Scheme. This project has been appreciated by the heads of University Grants Commissions from the SAARC member states (SAARC 2011k online). The Association has also created the SAARC Consortium of Open and Distance Learning (SACODiL) for standardisation of curricula, mutual recognition of courses and promotion of transfer of credits among the open universities in South Asia. Negotiations on finalising rules regarding SACODiL have been in progress since 1999; however, nothing concrete has been achieved. This could be due to the usual problem of lacking enough financial resources, or to a diversion of interest to some other projects.

In 1988, at the Fourth SAARC Summit held in Islamabad, an understanding was developed on the role of HRD in achieving the goals of SAARC. During the meeting, Pakistan proposed

⁹⁵ In 2002, the SAARC countries signed the SAARC Convention on Regional Arrangement for the Promotion of Child Welfare in South Asia.

hosting an HRD centre and the heads of states agreed that this suggestion be raised with the SAARC Standing Committee (SAARC 2008d:39). However, again due to bureaucratic hurdles and financial challenges faced by Pakistan, the creation of the centre was delayed. After a gap of more than ten years, in 1999, the SAARC Human Resources Development Centre (SHRDC) was established in Islamabad. The SHRDC has been actively engaged in research and training activities on a whole range of issues, such as small and medium enterprises, vocational education and skill development, impact of decentralisation on poverty reduction, et cetera (SAARC 2010b). The Centre is truly regional in scope and nature because its team is comprised of professionals from some of the SAARC member states, a situation unlike the other regional centres, such as the STAC. As of August 2011, the SHRDC has a staff of eight, including four support staff.

For its training programmes, the Centre focuses on areas directly relevant to the work of SAARC, for example child trafficking, governance in South Asia, education for all, and best practices in prevention of HIV/AIDS, among many others. It selects core areas in human development in which to impart training to the representatives of the SAARC member states. Its other role is to undertake research activities. It produces three to four research studies each year and the Centre solely conducts some of these. SHRDC also publishes the SAARC Journal of Human Resources Development. An official (2009, pers. comm.) mentioned that the Centre is “integrated into the SAARC process with regular communication with other SAARC centres across the region, which is not the case with other SAARC centres”.

With its much more active role, the SHRDC has been entrusted by the member states to offer training activities in other important areas. In the late 1990s, the Centre was directed by the SAARC leadership to look into the possibility of strengthening the human resources development aspect of the regional poverty reduction programme. In addition, the SHRDC was given the mandate on education and skill development by the 34th Session of the SAARC Standing Committee (New Delhi, 2007) (2009, pers. comm.). Since then, the Centre has expanded the scope of its HRD programmes, and, in 2010, organised training programmes on both education and poverty alleviation. Examples of these training programmes included: Livelihood Opportunities for Eradication of Hunger and Poverty from South Asia; and SAARC Development Goals: Initiatives for poverty reduction in South Asia.

In different areas, some of the SAARC observer states have shown commitment to HRD in South Asia. For example, Australia in the area of agricultural development (see Chapter 6), and South Korea generally has been keen on HRD in the SAARC region. Since 2008, South Korea has been carrying out a project entitled “SAARC Special Training Programme” to provide training to officials from South Asia. Until April 2010, 152 representatives of the SAARC countries had benefitted from this programme in South Korea through training on agricultural development, IT, health care systems, HRD, and the environment (Yong-Joon 2010:2). Considering the interest of South Korea in HRD in South Asia, the SHRDC could explore possible synergies with Seoul, for example by conducting joint programmes across South Asia to benefit more and more people.

In the area of HRD, higher education has captured the attention of SAARC policymakers with regard to regional cooperation. At the Thirteenth SAARC Summit (Dhaka, 2005), India proposed establishing a South Asian University in New Delhi and made a commitment to bear most of the financial burden of this project. Hence, in April 2007, an agreement was reached among the SAARC member states to establish the South Asian University (SAU) in New Delhi. Accordingly, an extensive consultative process began and lasted until 2010 involving academic experts and government officials from all the members for the conceptualisation of the SAU (SAU 2010:1-2). This is another important initiative of the SAARC, which aims at providing quality education in both technical and non-technical areas to students from across the region, and beyond. Among other ideas, the SAU aims to foster interaction between students from different nations, but its agenda is not limited to that. Among its key objectives, the SAU endeavours to “enhance learning in the South Asian community that promotes an understanding of each other’s perspectives” (SAU 2011 online). SAARC is not the only regional forum that has created a regional university because there is the earlier example of the University of the South Pacific.⁹⁶

The SAU, besides providing quality higher education, aims at facilitating the process of identity formation within the region – one of the intentions of SAARC behind the establishment of the SAU. A well-known Nepali researcher, Pokharel, (2009, pers. comm.) applauded the initiative of the South Asian University. The first session at the SAU started in

⁹⁶ The University of the South Pacific established in 1968 by the member states of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF). The Forum is comprised of Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshal Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

August 2010 with a cohort of 50 students enrolled for courses leading to Masters in Computer Application and Masters in Economics. In the first student intake, most of the students were from India, but there were also two from Pakistan, five from Bangladesh, four from Nepal, two from Bhutan and one from Sri Lanka. Since July 2011, the SAU has also been offering postgraduate degrees in Biotechnology, Computer Science, Sociology, International Relations, and Law. Once fully operational, the university will have 7,000 students and 700 teachers in 11 faculties. The SAU is supposed to have a minimum of four percent of its students from each member state, but not more than 50 percent from India. There is a provision for the enrolment of students from non-SAARC countries, but students from non-SAARC countries should not exceed 10 percent of the total student population (SAU 2010:2).

The university is in its infancy as far as the process of institutionalisation goes. Since its inception, the SAU has been based at a temporary facility at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi. According to the SAU agreement, India will bear the entire infrastructural cost (US\$250-300 million) of setting up SAU and it has already provided 100 acres of land in New Delhi (SAU 2010:3). In terms of the tuition fee, students from all the SAARC member states pay a subsidised fee of US\$880 per annum, and there are scholarships for these students from the Government of India. Students from outside South Asia pay the full fee of US\$8500, not dissimilar to the amount local non-scholarship holders pay (SAU 2010:2-3). The initial operational costs will be shared by all SAARC nations, with 50 percent from India, at least for the initial period of five years. Basnyat (2009, pers. comm.) mentioned that the member states would make their financial contributions towards the university's recurrent operations, as per the SAARC formula (see Chapter 4). After the initial five-year period, the SAU will survive solely on Public Private Partnerships (PPP), especially with industry (SAU 2010:3). The construction of the SAU site had not begun as of August 2011, but it is scheduled to start in 2012. Considering the progress of the SAU to date, the university management needs to be very careful to ensure that it becomes not only a centre of excellence in higher education but also a true symbol of South Asian identity. As of August 2011, roughly 90 percent of the SAU's faculty members are Indian and the rest from Nepal and Sri Lanka. If the idea is to facilitate interaction among the students and faculty members from across the region, then there should also be a formula, mutually agreed upon by the members, to recruit faculty from all the member states, perhaps similar to that which the United Nations has. The UN has a

quota system for permanent staff to ensure that all its 192 member states are represented in its team.

There has been greater focus paid on higher education and HRD than primary education, as youth (ages 15-24) comprise one-fifth of South Asia's total population. The young generation need skills and jobs (WB 2011c online). Both the SHRDC and the SAU are essential in building a regional identity in South Asia because they are forums, which bring together policymakers, bureaucrats, civil society workers, researchers, academics, students and the general populace from across the region.

7.4 Conclusion

Millions in South Asia are the victims of poverty, hunger, malnutrition, poor health conditions and so on. Consequently, the progress of the SAARC members on HDI has been slow in most cases and no country has moved beyond a medium level of human development. The region is home to a large number of poor, hungry, illiterate, and ill (particularly TB and HIV/AIDS) people. The plight of South Asia demands action resulting from policies at regional, national and global levels. In this regard, the role of SAARC is important, being the only South Asian regional forum.

SAARC's agenda on human welfare has long been strong on rhetoric but some action has emerged from the extensive consensus-building, especially in the areas of poverty alleviation and education. However, the work of SAARC has been limited in the areas of health and food security because the implementations of certain projects, such as SFB, have been facing constant delays. The STAC has been working for a period of time, but cannot fulfil its action plans due to a shortage of resources. This is despite putting a lot of effort and resources into the development of certain worthy and timely ideas for the welfare of the entire region. A similar situation exists regarding the SDGs, notably the elimination of poverty and hunger, where targets have not been met.

The role of India has been decisive in some recent positive developments through SAARC, in particular funding SAU and SDF. Both initiatives have the potential to play significant roles in changing the outlook of SAARC by making the organisation more responsive to the needs of people in the region. They are also significant in terms of playing a central role in regional identity formation. For example, the SABAH project via SEWA is just the beginning of

introducing the “made in SAARC” label at all levels, regional, national and global. Nonetheless, for the first time, by virtue of having funds of its own, SAARC has been able to implement much-needed projects for the welfare of South Asians through organisations having expertise in performing such work.

The examples of SDF and SAU show that with finances institutions can start operating even before they are expected to. Both these institutions began operating prior to having permanent buildings. In contrast, the SHRDC was on hold awaiting final approvals and allocation of financial resources, mainly from Pakistan.

The role of some donor organisations, such as CIDA, ADB and the UN, has also been vital either to begin some SAARC projects or to increase the capacity of certain SAARC institutions, especially the STAC in Kathmandu. In addition, since their affiliation with SAARC, some SAARC Observers have established meaningful relations with SAARC for the wellbeing of South Asians. For example, since 2008, South Korea has been providing valuable training to officials from the SAARC countries. In 2010, China decided to support the SDF with a grant of US\$300,000. This also shows the value of the SAARC funding mechanism, which is now in a position to receive funds directly from donor organisations and countries.

CHAPTER EIGHT

COOPERATION IN SECURITY MATTERS

8.1 Introduction

At the time of its inception, the leaders of the SAARC member states hoped that the Association would establish much needed confidence-building measures (CBMs), as reflected in the First SAARC Summit declaration (Dhaka, 1985): “periodic meetings at their level were central to the promotion of mutual trust, confidence and cooperation among their countries” (SAARC 2008d:3). Moreover, the leaders at the same meeting recognised that “peace and security” were essential for achieving the objectives of human welfare in South Asia (SAARC 2008d:3). This clearly indicates an understanding among the member states of a strong correlation between the human and traditional security issues.

It is now an appropriate time to evaluate SAARC’s progress of cooperation in security matters. The idea of this chapter is to analyse the central hypothesis of this thesis, which is to explore the extent to which the growing cooperation in human security areas has paved the way for meaningful cooperation in other forms of security, such as transnational crimes, at SAARC.

The reasons for considering terrorism a traditional state security matter have already been discussed in Chapter 2, especially with reference to the involvement of both state and non-state actors in South Asia. Therefore, terrorism, a transnational crime, cannot purely be seen as a non-traditional security threat. It is important to reiterate that transnational crimes, such as human trafficking and drug smuggling, are considered non-traditional security threats in this thesis. This chapter commences with an overview of factors responsible for making the SAARC region vulnerable to numerous organised crimes of a serious transnational nature.

It should be noted that the predominant focus of this chapter is on terrorism as the severity of this issue, with accusations of cross-border terrorism, has constrained the SAARC process, mainly due to tensions between India and Pakistan (see Chapter 4). This focus on terrorism is also motivated by some anti-terrorism developments at SAARC, as this issue continues to be at the top of the Association’s security agenda.

Due to the lack of cooperation at bilateral and multilateral levels, the region is increasingly troubled by numerous transnational crimes, such as terrorism, smuggling of weapons and drugs, human trafficking, money laundering, illegal trade, piracy, illegal migration of people, and terrorism. However, the scope of this chapter is limited to the analysis of the transnational crimes, namely, terrorism, drug smuggling, and human trafficking, against which SAARC has initiated cooperation. This chapter highlights some of the political and non-political hurdles faced by the Association to promote greater cooperation against transnational crimes.

8.2 An overview of transnational crimes in South Asia

Even though lack of cooperation is one of the reasons that transnational crimes exist in South Asia, the prevalence of crimes at domestic levels also point to the failure of states in dealing with such matters domestically. There are certain transnational crimes that continue to trouble most SAARC members, such as smuggling of drugs and arms (Gordon 1996:7). There have been fewer restrictions to the mobility of terrorists, drugs and weapons within South Asia, and because of that, transnational crime continues to grow within the region.

The illegal migration of people in South Asia is not a recent phenomenon. For decades, India has been a destination for illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. It used to be due to the porous nature of the India-Bangladesh borders, which is now fenced, that thousands from Bangladesh annually migrated to settle in various Indian states, mostly in West Bengal, Assam, Bihar and New Delhi. According to a 2005 estimate, there were more than 75,000 Bangladeshis illegally living in India (Maitra 2005 online). In addition, South Asian illegal immigrants have been moving to developed countries, and that trend has continued since the 1970s. There is no exact estimate available to give an indication of the number of illegal South Asians in other regions. However, as a rough indication, approximately 80,000 illegal Pakistani immigrants were living in more affluent countries in the early 1990s (Gordon 1996:125).

South Asia and its people have been exposed to heinous crimes, particularly trafficking in women and children for prostitution. It appears that there are cross-border linkages between the groups trafficking women and children into sex industries in South Asia and beyond. Although, there is no exact estimate of the number of people trafficked from South Asia, according to a report approximately 150,000 people are moved from the region annually, mostly women and children. Most of the trafficked victims are transported to the Middle East

(UNODC 2008:8), but they are also taken to many other places. The “Trafficking in Persons Report” of 2011 suggests that human trafficking occurs on a very large scale within South Asia. For example, as their first destinations, Afghan women are firstly trafficked to either Pakistan or Iran, and then to countries such as Slovenia and Greece (DOS 2011:62). The report also mentioned that the Maldives is a destination for women and children trafficked from Sri Lanka (DOS 2011:332).

Among other transnational crimes, illegal trade, money laundering, and arms smuggling are very serious issues for South Asian countries. Another concern of SAARC is the linkages between crimes, such as money laundering and terrorism, discussed later in the chapter. There are well-developed routes for both illegal trade and money laundering, such as from Afghanistan into Pakistan, and via Nepal into India. Furthermore, Cox’s Bazar in Bangladesh has become a large market for arms smuggling into South Asia from Southeast Asia (Gordon 2009:87).

Terrorism is not a recent phenomenon in South Asia. There are several examples of suicidal and other forms of terrorist attacks killing prominent figures. For instance, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) assassinated Ranasinghe Premadasa of Sri Lanka in a suicide bomb attack in 1993. Previously, LTTE also operated across borders by killing Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi of India in a suicide attack in 1991. In 2007, Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan was killed in a supposed terrorist attack and investigations to find the culprits are still proceeding.

There is also a strong link between transnational crimes of a different nature, such as terrorism, drug trafficking and smuggling of weapons. Terrorists have created lawlessness, allowing certain crimes to thrive in areas under their direct influence. For example, in post-Taliban Afghanistan, opium production has become a serious concern for both regional and global actors. In the initial years after the Taliban, perhaps due to negligence, opium production increased, but that has since been declining due to cultivation being restricted to seven provinces.⁹⁷ According to an estimate, the opium production declined by 22 percent between 2008 and 2009 (Sachdeva 2010:177). Thus, the inclusion of Afghanistan in SAARC

⁹⁷ The provinces responsible for cultivating 98 percent of opium in Afghanistan are: Helmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan, Daykundi, Zabul, Farah and Nimroz (Sachdeva 2010:177).

offers both opportunities and challenges to the organisation, especially in the area of cooperation against transnational crime.

The ongoing war in Afghanistan has changed the security spectrum of South Asia. There are millions of people suffering on a daily basis due to the war against terrorists in Afghanistan and Pakistan (see Chapter 3). Most of the South Asian countries have been exposed to terrorism, as shown from a selection of the post-9/11 terrorist attacks in the region in Table 8.1.

Table 8.1: A snapshot of post-9/11 terrorist attacks in South Asia, up to October 2011

Country	Place	Casualties	Year
India	New Delhi	14	2001
Bangladesh	Mymensingh	19	2002
Bangladesh	Dhaka	20	2004
India	Mumbai	209	2006
Pakistan	Karachi	139	2007
Maldives	Male	0	2007
Afghanistan	Kabul	50	2008
Pakistan	Orakzai Agency	110	2008
Sri Lanka	Piliyandala	27	2008
Pakistan	Peshawar	118	2009
Afghanistan	Kabul	18	2010
Pakistan	Laki Marwat	105	2010
Pakistan	Lahore	53	2010
Pakistan	Peshawar	34	2011
Afghanistan	Nimruz	20	2011
India	New Delhi	14	2011
Afghanistan	Kabul	6	2011

Data sources: (BBC 2011b online; Maqbool 2010 online; Qayum & Sharif 2010 online)

Terrorist organisations in South Asia have regional and global links. This was confirmed by the Director of Afghanistan at the SAARC Secretariat, Ahmadzadda (2009, pers. comm.) who stated, “Terrorists are now recruiting youngsters from the Maldives and Bangladesh.” Frequent attacks on India by terrorist organisations originating from Pakistan prove the

capability of such groups to operate across the border (Rabasa et al. 2009:7). Pakistan-based terrorist groups, such as the Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Haqqani group have often been blamed for terrorist attacks in India and Afghanistan, respectively (Ansari & McElroy 2008; Faiez 2011 online).⁹⁸ In the worst cases, cross-border terrorism could almost trigger a war between the two rivals. When the relationship between countries is based on suspicion then acts of terrorism have a potential to further deteriorate fragile bilateral relations, as has been proved in the Indo-Pak case. After the Kargil war in 1999, there were a few tense years between India and Pakistan and relations got worse with the terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament in 2001. The peace process between the two countries was paralysed because they were on the verge of war. For about ten months from the end of 2001 to October 2002 there was heavy mobilisation of troops on borders (Sridharan 2005:103). Similarly, after the 2008 terrorist attacks on Mumbai, the tension dramatically increased between India and Pakistan raising the prospect of a conventional war (Ahmed, Z.S. 2009:2; Rabasa et al. 2009:1-2), and possibly a nuclear confrontation. Probably that was the intention behind those attacks on Mumbai (Mohan 2008:1).⁹⁹ According to Ahmed (2009:2-3), terrorists have been successful in derailing the peace process between India and Pakistan through similar acts in the past.

It is important to emphasise that terrorism is just a method being exploited by terrorist groups to attain their political and non-political goals. Both state and non-state actors have employed terrorism as a tactic to achieve their objectives. If we take the case of South Asia, then these actors could be religious extremists (sectarianism), nationalists, secessionists, narcotic (drug) mafia, international terrorists (Al-Qaeda), victims of oppression or injustice (ethnic and religious minorities, tribes, et cetera), and in the case of inter-state conflicts possibly secret service agencies (the Research and Analysis Wing-RAW of India, the Inter-Services Intelligence-ISI of Pakistan, et cetera) (See Chapter 3). It is not an exclusive strategy of non-state actors because both India and Pakistan, in particular, in the past two decades have been accusing each other's intelligence agencies of cross-border terrorism.

⁹⁸ New Delhi accused the Lashkar-e-Taiba of executing the 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai. For the September 2011 attacks on the US Embassy and NATO headquarters in Kabul, the US ambassador to Afghanistan blamed the Pakistan-based Haqqani network.

⁹⁹ The following readings are suggested for a detailed account of the 2008 terrorist attacks on Mumbai and their implications for India-Pakistan relations and regional security in South Asia: Samarjit Ghosh 2008, *Indo-Pak composite dialogue-2008: a review*. New Delhi: Institute of Peace & Conflict Studies; Fahmida Ashraf 2009, *India Pakistan relations-post Mumbai attacks: chronology of Indian statements*. Islamabad: Institute of Regional Studies; & Brian Michael Jenkins 2009, *Terrorists can think strategically: lessons learned from the Mumbai attacks*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation.

The above facts and figures, and analysis of terrorism and transnational crimes, though a brief one, shows that most of these security challenges thrive in South Asia due to lack of cooperation both within and outside the region. Crimes, such as human trafficking, smuggling of drugs, and terrorism and so on, even though originating from within some states, grow because of the demand for drugs, cheap labour or prostitutes in other countries; therefore, criminal groups have established intra and extra-regional linkages. Due to this level of networking, these groups are able to supply trafficked women and children to Middle Eastern countries, drugs to Southeast Asian countries, and launch terrorist attacks in cooperation with international groups like Al-Qaeda. Considering this, the SAARC members stand a better chance of effectively dealing with international criminal groups through both regional and global cooperation.

8.3 Regional cooperation on security issues

The analysis in this section focuses on the SAARC's role in addressing terrorism and transnational crimes. Here, an analysis of the overall range of regional cooperation on security matters in South Asia is presented.

8.3.1 Terrorism

It was at the First SAARC Summit that the heads of state agreed to explore the possibilities of cooperation against terrorism by acknowledging that this problem affects the “security and stability” of the members (SAARC 1985:7). In 1987, contrary to a key principle of the SAARC Charter (1985),¹⁰⁰ deliberations began on anti-terrorism measures in the region. Nonetheless, it was a brave move of the SAARC leaders to engage in this area. According to several SAARC officials and Khan (2009, pers. comm.), a renowned Pakistani security pundit, “terrorism is the most important agenda for SAARC”, especially in the light of threats to regional security created by terrorists. This could be the reason that cooperation on security aspects have centred on the issue of terrorism.

Statements condemning terrorism have been a regular feature of SAARC deliberations. In 1986, at the Second SAARC Summit in Bangalore, the leaders of South Asia agreed on cooperation against terrorism and on formulating a regional agreement to curb this security

¹⁰⁰ According to the SAARC Charter, “bilateral and contentious issues shall be excluded from the deliberations” (SAARC 1985:11).

challenge (SAARC 2008d:13). Accordingly, in June 1987, the SAARC Council of Ministers met in New Delhi to accelerate the process of drafting a Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism. The SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism (RCST) was signed at the Third SAARC Summit (Kathmandu, 1987) (SAARC 2008d:27). According to Prasad (1989:10), “the convention generally is regarded as a major success of SAARC.” It shows the willingness of the countries to discuss political matters (Naqash 1994:96). When signing the convention, the SAARC leadership “unequivocally condemned all acts, methods and practices of terrorism as criminal” (SAARC 2004c:1). Although strong in rhetoric, the convention lacks substance with reference to any directions given on actions against terrorism. Furthermore, the convention seems merely an agreement limited to defining terrorism, and declaring it a serious problem and crime, because its clauses are so vague. For example, on the matter of extradition, the agreement is not strong enough to push a member state to extradite a criminal (SAARC 2004c:4). With all its limitations, this convention is a reflection of trust deficit among SAARC members because this agreement has become hostage to national interests/laws.

There have always been disagreements on defining ‘terrorism’ or ‘terrorist groups’ within SAARC. In discussions on drafting the RCST, tension between the delegations of India and Pakistan arose over differentiating ‘terrorists’ from ‘freedom fighters’. Between Bangladesh and India, there have been differences over ‘cross-border movement of people’ being different from ‘infiltration’. Either due to bilateral differences or the fear of losing sovereignty and because New Delhi is keen to push for a common extradition treaty in the region, there has been virtually no action taken to directly address the issue of terrorism in South Asia (Khan, R.A. 2010 online).

To resolve the differences, SAARC dealt with the issue of defining terrorism by excluding political offences or infractions connected with political motives. Thus, the 1987 convention defined terrorism as conduct constituting the following criminal behaviour:

Murder, manslaughter, assault causing bodily harm, kidnapping, hostage-taking and offences relating to firearms, weapons, explosives and dangerous substances when used as a means to perpetrate indiscriminate violence involving death or serious bodily injury to persons or serious damage to property (SAARC 2004c:2).

Once ratified, the convention is a legal document, but that does not permit SAARC to force member states to abide by the agreement. The Association is powerless in ensuring the full

execution of its regional mandate through legal reforms at local levels; therefore, there have not been any changes in national laws regarding regional agreements. Cooperation against terrorism among the SAARC countries demands a certain degree of legal reforms at local levels, for example, to realise the provisions of regional agreements in this area, and that has not happened yet.

At SAARC, terrorism has been viewed as a collective threat to the member states. However, the importance of cooperation against terrorism has faced difficulties at the Association over the past 25 years. Particularly after the 9/11 incident, due to the world's attention on terrorist groups in South Asia, SAARC members also realised the greater implications of fast-spreading transnational crimes. In relation to this, the Afghan Director at the SAARC Secretariat, Ahmadzadda, (2009, pers. comm.) argued, "Terrorism is disturbing our security; therefore, we need to collaborate through regional and international platforms."

Following the tragic events of 9/11 in the US, the Security Council Resolution 1373 was introduced as a counter-terrorism commitment at the global level. At that time, the SAARC mechanism was faced with difficulties due to tense bilateral relations between India and Pakistan. For example, there was no SAARC summit held for three years (1999, 2000 and 2001). The meetings among the heads of state resumed with the Eleventh SAARC Summit (Kathmandu, 2002). It was after this summit that the members introduced a revised approach to counter-terrorism by reaffirming commitments to the SAARC Convention (1987) and by strengthening regional measures in this area (SAARC 2008d:159).

Considering its various obligations, both regional and global, members adopted the Additional Protocol to the RCST in 2004. This agreement came into force in 2006 after being ratified by all members. This Protocol supplements the original RCST, which was adopted in 1987. The Additional Protocol aims at strengthening the RCST by addressing the issue of restriction on the financing of terrorist groups. The new agreement is in accordance with the commitments of the SAARC members at global levels through the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism, approved by the UN General Assembly in 1999 (SAARC 2004c).

The Additional Protocol, produced in the aftermath of the 9/11 attack and the 2001 attacks on the Indian Parliament, is, compared to the 1987 SAARC convention, a much stronger, legally

binding document. It is only through this that SAARC members have, to some extent, been able to reach the roots of terrorism and the elements supporting terrorist groups. Obviously, to address terrorism it is important to eliminate sources and channels of funding and recruitment. However, the recruitment aspect was not included in the agreement because of the key focus on funding-related offences. Thus, the Additional Protocol expands the definition of 'terrorism' as a crime by expanding the category of offenders to people supporting terrorists. The members agreed that a person is an offender if that person "by means, directly or indirectly, unlawfully and wilfully, provides or collects funds with the intention that they should be used or in the knowledge that they are to be used, in full or in part, in order to carry out" offences covered in the agreement (SAARC 2004c:9).

The new agreement demands that member states adopt practical measures for eradicating the financing of terrorism (SAARC 2004c:11). However, Pakistan had to make reforms quickly after the 9/11 attack, mainly due to pressure from Washington. In 2002, in response to this and other multilateral agreements, as well as enormous pressure from Washington and New Delhi, Pakistan launched a crackdown on some terrorist organisations and even closed their bank accounts. The groups included Jaish-e-Mohammad and Lashkar-e-Taiba (Bedi 2002 online). These crackdowns were unproductive because some of the terrorist organisations are more visible now than ever before. For example, the 2005 massive earthquake in Pakistan and in parts of Indian-Administered Kashmir provided Jihadi organisations like the Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) and Mutahida Jihad Council to take part in unprecedented relief work in the affected areas of Pakistan. Consequently, JuD managed to obtain a good reputation in the local communities and also support in the form of donations from the government (John 2006:3). Even though Lashkar-e-Taiba is banned in Pakistan, its humanitarian wing – JuD – is operational despite being blacklisted by the Pakistan government in reaction to the sanctions imposed by the Security Council. This has been precipitated by ongoing tension between the biggest political rivals in Pakistan, the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz), the latter being the government in Punjab (Tahir 2010 online). Closing bank accounts is not enough in the presence of persistent money laundering – cash moved illegally from one country to another. It is reported that the 2005 attacks in London were fully funded using cash (Kaplan 2006 online). Nevertheless, the search for permanent solutions to the problem of terrorism is in progress around the world and South Asia is no exception.

Among other measures, the Additional Protocol states that cooperation between the immigrations and customs controls of the member states should aim “to detect and prevent international movement of terrorists and their accomplices and trafficking in arms, narcotics and psychotropic substances or other material intended to support terrorist activities” (SAARC 2004c:13). At the time of the fieldwork for this study in 2009, the SAARC Secretariat had no details of the prospects of cooperation between immigration and customs controls among the member states. These are among the many ideas being deliberated upon at the Association.

The level of commitment demonstrated could be evaluated from domestic measures taken by the member states, as per the Additional Protocol to the SAARC RCST (2004). In the agreement, the members agreed to become parties to the related international instruments to which they were not a party in 2004 (SAARC 2004c:10).¹⁰¹ In some cases, it seems commitments towards SAARC agreements encouraged members to become parties to previously ignored international agreements. For example, the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism (1999) was ratified by some of the SAARC countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Pakistan), after signing the Additional Protocol to the SAARC RCST.¹⁰² Nepal is the only member yet to become a signatory to this International Convention (UN 2011d online).

After the analysis of agreements, it is important to evaluate the SAARC’s anti-terrorism measures. In 1995, eight years after the signing of the SAARC RCST, the Association established the SAARC Terrorist Offences Monitoring Desk (STOMD) in Colombo. The aims of STOMD are to collate, analyse and disseminate information on terrorist offences, tactics and methods to the SAARC member states. STOMD operates under the Terrorism Unit of Police and, since 1995, has partly been funded by India.¹⁰³ STOMD greatly depends on information provided by the member states; however, this mechanism has not worked yet because there has not been much sharing of required data, for example secret information of terrorist groups.

¹⁰¹ The annex to the Additional Protocol provides a list of related international agreements for the member states to be considered (SAARC 2004c:19).

¹⁰² The International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism (1999) was ratified by Afghanistan in 2003, Bangladesh in 2005, Bhutan in 2004, India in 2003, the Maldives in 2004, Pakistan in 2009 and Sri Lanka in 2000 (UN 2011d online).

¹⁰³ In 2008, New Delhi provided one-off funding of Rupees 20 million (roughly US\$400,000) to strengthen STOMD and the SAARC Drug Offences Monitoring Desk (SDOMD) (SATP 2010:109).

Since its creation in 1995, the national coordinators of STOMD, comprising of the Secretaries of Ministry of Defence of the member states, have met only four times and at a meeting in 2010 (Islamabad), a decision was made to share information on a real time basis and to exchange data of terrorist elements in respective countries (SAARC 2011o online). Basnyat (2009, pers. comm.) revealed that, “I heard foreign ministers saying that the countries can share information on terrorists crossing borders with other countries and how many people are crossing borders between the SAARC countries, with relevant authorities from other SAARC countries.” In this regard, there is a notable example, albeit not among the SAARC members, when, on the basis of the timely information provided by Pakistan to INTERPOL (International Police),¹⁰⁴ terrorists from the Maldives were arrested as they were planning to attack Colombo during the Cricket World Cup of 2011 (*News*, 25 March 2011). The information was shared with INTERPOL directly and not through STOMD because the SAARC mechanism has limited capacity to operate in a timely fashion via a regional network of law enforcement agencies.

In addition, the work of STOMD faces other constraints, as disclosed by a SAARC official (2009, pers. comm.): “STOMD has not more than ten people working with local salaries; therefore, they are highly under-resourced.” This shows that the financial support from New Delhi is insufficient as it funds only a portion of the costs of this mechanism. The plight of STOMD is clear. There is a lack of cooperation in this area manifested through member states not engaging with STOMD either through exchange of information or by providing urgently required human and financial resources. Considering the seriousness of the problem, all member states need to support STOMD to make it effective with stronger intra- and inter-regional linkages in accordance with the SAARC agreements addressing this issue.

There is an organisational challenge created by the SAARC structure for STOMD. This has financial implications. As per the SAARC framework, the member states financially contribute towards the SAARC Secretariat and regional centres. STOMD does not meet the criteria to qualify as a regional centre and thereby have its expenses shared by all the member states. The same situation applies to SDOMD. Therefore, to realistically keep the cooperation progressing in these areas, SAARC could consider the idea of setting up a SAARC Centre for Transnational Crime Prevention. This is different from a proposal from Pakistan to set up a

¹⁰⁴ INTERPOL is the world’s biggest police organisation comprising of 188 members, including all SAARC members.

SAARC Institute of Criminology because that, if implemented, will solely focus on the capacity-building aspect of cooperation against transnational crimes (Radhakrishnan 2011 online). A regional centre could cover both capacity-building and direct actions to engage countries in meaningful cooperation to curb transnational crimes. In addition, a centre could amalgamate the efforts of STOMD and the SAARC Drug Offences Monitoring Desk (SDOMD) thereby pooling much-needed financial and human resources.

The SAARC's objective to promote regional cooperation against terrorism seems to be a lost cause because intra-regional circumstances are not ideal or supportive. Gordon (2009:101-102) suggests that at SAARC, "Cooperative efforts should focus initially on a non-securitised approach. The focus of cooperation should not be on issues like terrorism as such, but on cross-border crime – harm to property and life, fraud, people smuggling and trafficking." Gordon's argument is realistic considering the difficulties faced by the Association in the area of cooperation against terrorism. This issue alone has serious bilateral dimensions and goes against the ethos of the SAARC Charter (1985) which demanded member states to refrain from bilateral contentious issues. For example, Pakistan has been facing accusations from the US, NATO, Afghanistan and India, of harbouring and supporting terrorist groups for cross-border terrorist acts. Thus, regional dynamics will not allow cooperation against terrorism to mature at SAARC.

8.3.2 Drug smuggling

At the Fourth SAARC Summit (Islamabad, 1988), some steps were taken towards cooperation against drug smuggling in the region. For example, a symbolic gesture was made by declaring 1989 to be the "SAARC Year for Combating Drug Abuse and Drug Trafficking" (SAARC 2008d:36), and this also shows the significance attached to this issue. At the meeting in Islamabad, the leaders directed the relevant Technical Committee of SAARC to examine the possibility of a regional convention on drug control. Accordingly, moves were quickly made at SAARC to reach consensus among the member states for a regional agenda to limit and, if possible, eradicate drug smuggling. Consequently, at the Fifth SAARC Summit (Malé, 1990), the SAARC Convention on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances was signed. This came into force in 1993, after ratification from all the members.

The convention is comprehensive with agreements on the definitions of the types of drugs, cultivation of drugs, related offences and sanctions, jurisdiction, prosecution, extradition, rehabilitation and social integration of offenders. Particularly, each member state was required to establish as criminal offences the following:

The production, manufacture, extraction, preparation, offering, offering for sale, distribution, sale, delivery on any terms whatsoever, brokerage, despatch, despatch in transit, transport, importation or exportation of any narcotic drug or any psychotropic substance contrary to the provisions of the 1961 Convention, the 1961 Convention as amended or the 1971 Convention (SAARC 1990:4-5).¹⁰⁵

To give reality to some aspects of the convention, in 1992, SAARC established the SAARC Drug Offences Monitoring Desk (SDOMD) in Colombo. SDOMD is based at the Police and Narcotics Bureau in Sri Lanka with the function of analysing and disseminating information on drug-related offences in South Asia, which is in accordance with the SAARC Convention on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances.

SDOMD has been in existence for more than 15 years and, as in the case of STOMD, it has not been able to fulfil its agenda. It faces a chronic shortage of professional staff and financial resources. Since 1995, it has been receiving some funding from New Delhi (2009, pers. comm.), but this has not been enough to motivate the staff of the Police and Narcotics Bureau of Sri Lanka to take on the extra burden on meagre local salaries (2009, pers. comm.). Up to October 2011, SDOMD had failed to collect and share information with member states on networks of drug smugglers in South Asia.

The SAARC Coordination Group of Drug Law Enforcement Agencies supervises the work of SDOMD. That it has met only thrice since inception (the last time it met was in 2006 in Kathmandu), indicates that cooperation in this area has been stagnant. However, as mentioned by a SAARC official (2009, pers. comm.), there is growing cooperation between the SAARC Secretariat and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), which could fortify SDOMD. There is a UN proposal to have a Drug Liaison Officer from each of the SAARC member states at SDOMD and there is interest at SAARC in collaboration with ASEAN, but the SAARC Coordination Group has not met to finalise these decisions. To date, no outcomes are evident.

¹⁰⁵ The SAARC Convention refers to the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, and the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances of the United Nations.

There is a need to strengthen SDOMD to implement the SAARC's agenda. This could be achieved through intra-SAARC measures of increasing human and financial resources for SDOMD, and through increased collaboration with related international agencies. At the conclusion of the third meeting of the SDOMD focal points (Islamabad, 2010), Pakistan offered to develop a concept paper on greater cooperation between SDOMD and UNODC. Also at the same meeting, the officials of Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka agreed to offer training programmes for the SAARC member states in fields related to narcotics and other drugs (SAARC 2011m online).

SAARC's role is to promote cooperation to address the widespread problems of drug use and smuggling in the region, and their failure to do this reflects the lack of interest of the member states in cooperation against this common transnational crime. The insufficient support for regional cooperation in this area is reflected through a symbolic measure, SDOMD, and irregular meetings of concerned authorities.

8.3.3 Human trafficking

When SAARC was established, strong efforts were made by civil society to guide the SAARC process on issues, such as human trafficking. A renowned Nepali journalist, Laxmi (2009, pers. comm.) elaborated on this case further: "In the early 1990s, NGOs from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh lobbied for a declaration on the issue of human trafficking to be passed through the SAARC." However, processes at SAARC were very slow to respond to civil society advocacy.

In 1997, the first meaningful step was taken at the Ninth SAARC Summit (Malé, 1997) in the form of a decision to do a feasibility study on cooperation to curtail human trafficking (SAARC 2008d:114). The issue was put on the back burner during a period of heightened tensions between India and Pakistan, from 1999 to 2001, and which caused the postponement of annual SAARC meetings among the heads of state. It was during this time that the Eleventh SAARC Summit was postponed until 2002. However, as soon as the SAARC process returned to its routine affairs in 2002, the SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution was signed. All the members ratified the convention in 2005. It is important to emphasise that, with this development,

SAARC became the first regional body to produce a treaty against trafficking – three years ahead of the European convention on this issue.¹⁰⁶

The convention is a step in the right direction because it demonstrates member states' commitment against heinous crimes, such as human trafficking. The agreement places the onus on members to curb employment agencies from facilitating trafficking. There is focus both on prevention and protection, with even a clause urging member states to promote awareness of the problem of trafficking in women and children through media programs (SAARC 2002:2-3). However, the convention has come under criticism due to its limited scope and incomprehensive definition of 'trafficking', which, according to Article 1 of the convention, "means the moving, selling or buying of women and children for prostitution within and outside a country for monetary or other considerations with or without the consent of the person subjected to trafficking" (SAARC 2002:1). On the other hand, civil society groups and NGOs have been demanding the definition be changed to the following:

All acts involved in the recruitment, transportation, forced movement and/or settling and buying of women and children within and/or across borders by fraudulent means, deception, coercion, direct and/or indirect threats, abuse or authority for the purpose of placing a woman and/or child against her/his will with or without her/his consent in exploitation and abusive situations, such as, forced prostitution, marriage, bonded slavery and slavery like practices, begging, organ trade, drug smuggling, use in armed conflict, etc. (Raghuvanshi 2002:3).

The above definition is adapted from the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime.¹⁰⁷

Since the development and approval of the convention, civil society groups and NGOs have been unhappy with this tokenistic move by SAARC. If on the one hand, some NGOs limited their response to making policy recommendations and workshops, others like the South Asian March against Child Trafficking (India) have been proactively campaigning against SAARC. An example of that is a protest organised by the group in New Delhi involving hundreds of

¹⁰⁶ Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings was produced by the Council of Europe in 2005.

¹⁰⁷ According to the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children the following is the definition of human trafficking: "Trafficking in persons" shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs" (UNODC 2004:42).

former child victims of trafficking, bonded and child labour, to question the relevance of the SAARC convention/actions against human trafficking. Incidentally, at the time of the protest, the SAARC leaders were meeting at the Fourteenth SAARC Summit (2007) in the city. The group stated that the Association's promises on this issue have been "inadequate and undelivered" (SAMACT 2007 online). At this event, Kailash Satyarthi,¹⁰⁸ the leader of the march said, "Children from Bangladesh are bought and sold like animals ... If SAARC cannot tackle the most heinous organised crime of human trafficking with adequate political will and honesty, what else can we expect [from] the rituals of annual SAARC summits" (SAMACT 2007 online).

The agreement to cooperate against trafficking in women and children has been in place for over eight years, but not much has been done to act against networks responsible for human trafficking in South Asia, and beyond. In addition, SAARC is yet to create an institution to implement their collective mission stated in the convention against trafficking. Nonetheless, the Task Force was created in response to the directions provided by the heads of state in the declaration of the Eleventh SAARC Summit (Kathmandu, 2002) for monitoring and evaluation of cooperation in this area (SAARC 2008d:154-155).¹⁰⁹ There have been agreements on sharing of relevant information by the governments and NGOs, but nothing has happened yet. Furthermore, during a special session of the Task Force held in 2010, it was decided to establish two regional toll-free help lines dedicated to help the victims of trafficking in the region. It is an interesting action-oriented development, but was not launched until September 2011 (SAARC 2011g online).

Some NGOs in the SAARC region have expertise in the area of preventing human trafficking and rehabilitating victims of this crime, and SAARC has engaged them to assist in implementing its agenda. The Association also realises that it was due to the lobbying of certain NGOs that led the organisation to include this issue on its agenda. The Task Force responsible for implementing the convention has been a forum of interaction among government officials and relevant NGOs from all the member states. For example, for the meeting in July 2007 held in New Delhi, Pakistan was represented by an official of the

¹⁰⁸ Kailash Satyarthi is a renowned child rights campaigner from India. He was nominated for the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize.

¹⁰⁹ Since 2007, the Task Force members have been regularly meeting and up to 2010 met four times on an annual basis.

Federal Investigation Authority (FIA)¹¹⁰ and the head of the Lawyers for Human Rights and Legal Aid (LHRLA). The involvement of civil society groups could be the reason that the meeting concluded with a clear action plan. It was decided that information on best practices to combat trafficking would be shared by government agencies and NGOs, and the SAARC Secretariat by November 2007 and afterwards annually (MADADGAAR 2007 online). This is yet to happen. The SAARC Secretariat, a limited staff, failed to conduct any follow up. Therefore, SAARC needs to hand over the task of monitoring progress in this area to a group of proactive NGOs, and such a mechanism could possibly be funded under the Social Window of the SAARC Development Fund (SDF) (Lama 2008a:15).

At the 2007 meeting of the Task Force, another decision was made that the government of India would prepare a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to implement various provisions of the convention and would share information with the SAARC Secretariat by September 2007. As of September 2011, New Delhi had not developed a SOP (MADADGAAR 2007 online). Without a SOP, the convention remains unimplemented. Moreover, because the convention lacks crucial details, such as how repatriation of victims should be carried out, it has remained unrealised. Thus, government bodies and NGOs are restrained from approaching relevant authorities across the region to curb the crime.

Cooperation against human trafficking, in general, and trafficking women and children, specifically, is yet to show any significant regional progress. A plausible reason for this is SAARC's consideration of this issue as a social/gender one and not specifically dealing with security aspects, and one that therefore falls under the jurisdiction of the Social Affairs Division at the Secretariat. Nonetheless, human trafficking is an important component of SAARC meetings on security matters, especially conferences of police chiefs and ministerial meetings, as will be discussed later.

8.3.4 Spectrum of cooperation against transnational crimes

There have been attempts at SAARC to comprehensively deal with transnational crimes. The idea of this section is to discuss the overall range of cooperation in security matters because there have been some developments at SAARC in this area.

¹¹⁰ The Federal Investigation Authority (FIA) works under the Ministry of Interior in Pakistan and serves as a criminal investigation body. FIA also cooperates with INTERPOL.

Cooperation in criminal matters has moved on, not only through STOMD and SDOMD, but also with the help of an Expert Group on Networking among Police Authorities. This group has been responsible for monitoring the progress of both STOMD and SDOMD. From 1996 until 2010, SAARC has organised eight meetings on cooperation among police of the member states. In 2008, at the Seventh Conference of SAARC on Cooperation in Police Matters held in Islamabad, a range of critical issues were discussed, such as terrorism, human trafficking, organised crime, drug trafficking, money laundering, police training, police reforms and SAARCPOL. This is just the beginning of the cooperative approach because police institutions are only responsible for tackling domestic crimes, and therefore at later stages the cooperation amongst border security forces will be crucial in restricting the movement of criminals within the SAARC region.

All the above-mentioned mechanisms have attempted to address interrelated matters such as the production and smuggling of drugs, and to stop the sources of funding for terrorist groups in South Asia (Rosand, Fink & Ipe 2009:8). SAARC bodies are networking amongst themselves to launch comprehensive measures against collective issues faced in South Asia. Khan (2009, pers. comm.), in being critical of the cooperation through SAARC to eliminate smuggling of drugs and weapons, said, “[These] problems have not been taken care of very properly and SAARC might discuss this in upcoming meetings.” The issue of arms smuggling has appeared in high-level meetings, but only with reference to the availability of weapons to terrorists. Nevertheless, cooperation against drug trafficking has been on the SAARC agenda for more than two decades.

SAARC has steadily been expanding its agenda on cooperation in criminal matters. In April 2008, the first biannual conference of SAARC Police Chiefs was organised in Islamabad at which a range of issues were discussed, including SAARCPOL, STOMD and SDOMD. In this regard, at the Fifteenth SAARC Summit held in Colombo in 2008, the SAARC Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters was signed (SAARC 2008e:210). If cooperation between the law enforcement agencies succeeds, then it is likely that the much more serious issue of terrorism will also be addressed because STOMD has the potential to become an early warning mechanism within the SAARC region (Rosand, Fink & Ipe 2009:8).

While commenting on security sector projects, a SAARC representative (2009, pers. comm.), who preferred not to be mentioned in this study, said:

[The] cut off point in the evolution of SAARC is 2005 when PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee of India went [to] Islamabad to attend the Twelfth SAARC Summit in 2004 ... the Cold War period is over, which had hampered the SAARC performance in the second half of the 1980s. There are now initiatives at the SAARC in the areas of anti-terrorism and anti-trafficking, and SAARC leaders will be considering the proposal to set up a SAARCPOL.

Nepal has proposed the creation of SAARCPOL – along the lines of INTERPOL. It will be a regional mechanism for cooperation among law enforcement agencies, particularly the police forces. The Nepalese police department has refined the plan after recommendations received from the member states and the Secretariat. It focuses mainly on networking among the police authorities of the member states to implement the SAARC's agenda against terrorism and transnational crimes. So far, the SAARCPOL discussions have focused on extradition of fugitives, control of pan-South Asia counterfeit notes rackets and drug trafficking. In particular, India has been urging other members to include in the proposed SAARCPOL initiative the issue of fake currency, which New Delhi identifies as a serious transnational crime (Mittra 2011 online).

At this stage, it seems the biggest issue for the police chiefs of the member states is to accommodate the interests of all stakeholders in the implementation of this mechanism. This will not be an easy task because some issues are of bilateral contentious nature, often creating tensions between some members. For example on the issue of counterfeit notes, New Delhi has often accused both state and non-state actors in Pakistan (Gilani 2009 online).

If the SAARCPOL project manages to obtain approval at the SAARC summit level, it will boost the process of identity formation in South Asia, and strengthen the cooperative relationship between the security agencies of the SAARC member states. However, in the present climate of virtually 'no trust' between India and Pakistan, it seems unlikely that the SAARCPOL proposal will be realised, at least in the near future. According to a SAARC representative (2009, pers. comm.), "Some member states might reject the idea because it is premature." On the other hand, there has been a general acceptance of SAARCPOL, even though the proposal has come from Nepal – the country always wishing to remain a zone of peace. Dastgir (2009, pers. comm.) mentioned that Pakistan would welcome SAARCPOL.

There are hopes attached to the idea of SAARCPOL in South Asia, especially at SAARC. There is an example of an INTERPOL-like body at a sub-regional level being productive in Africa with practical cooperation between law enforcing agencies through an around-the-clock communications network (Naik 2004:9). There are also examples of similar bodies in Europe (EUROPOL) and Southeast Asia (ASEANPOL). Therefore, there are high hopes that SAARCPOL could boost cooperation in security matters within the SAARC region. Khan (2009, pers. comm.) is of the strong opinion that, “Sooner or later, because of the collective challenges that the SAARC members are facing, some sort of a joint security mechanism will be inevitable, perhaps in the long-run.” However, no agreement was reached in the Ninth SAARC Police Conference on Cooperation in Police Matters (Colombo, 2011) to establish SAARCPOL, although the proposal has been under discussion among the police chiefs for the past five meetings (Radhakrishnan 2011 online). Constant deliberations on the same proposal show the level of difficulty of cooperation in this area.

The need for greater cooperation in human security areas has been appreciated at ministerial level meetings. Since 2006, meetings of the SAARC interior/home ministers have been taking place, increasing the likelihood of some practical measures against terrorism and transnational crimes in South Asia being adopted.¹¹¹ At the third meeting held in Islamabad in 2010, the ministers adopted the SAARC Ministerial Statement on Cooperation against Terrorism. They emphasised the need for linkages between various crimes, such as terrorism, illegal trafficking in drugs and psychotropic substances, illegal trafficking of persons and arms, and threats to maritime security (SAARC 2010a:1). Prior to this, in 2009, the ministers had also demanded the urgent ratification of the SAARC Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters (signed at the Fifteenth SAARC Summit, Colombo in 2008) through the SAARC Ministerial Declaration on Cooperation in Combating Terrorism (2009).

While actions on security issues face delays, the Association is not prevaricating about expanding its agenda against transnational crimes. In 2011, at the Fourth Meeting of SAARC interior/home ministers held in Thimphu, the possibility of cooperation in the areas of maritime security and piracy were discussed. Nonetheless, anti-terrorism measures were again the central focus of these deliberations and notable was the inaugural statement of the Prime Minister of Bhutan, Lyonchhen Jigmi Y. Thinley. He stated: “Preventing terrorism was

¹¹¹ Up to 2010, the SAARC interior/home ministers had met three times.

about preserving our common values such as democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms” (SAARC 2011f online).

It seems the desires of SAARC leaders, such as those of Thinley, have little impact on the meaningfulness of the cooperation in this area. Even though some level of consensus has been achieved through irregular meetings, SAARC is increasingly facing a lack of interest from the member states in terrorism and transnational crimes. This is evident from the fact that there have only been four rounds of meetings on STOMD and SDOMD, and among secretaries and ministers of interior/home ministries. In addition, representatives of the member states quite often fail to attend SAARC meetings addressing the issues of transnational crimes. For example, at the Fourth Meeting of Ministers of Interior/Home (Thimphu, 2011), only the ministers of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives and Pakistan participated. This could be a reason why these meetings usually conclude with motherhood statements and not on agreements for certain regional actions.

With reference to anti-terrorism measures, perhaps a suitable example for SAARC is the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO),¹¹² which has moved forward from mere agreements to actions against terrorism. SAARC can draw some lessons from SCO’s success. SCO is an appropriate case because two SAARC members, India and Pakistan, have observer status at SCO. In addition, China, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan border the SAARC region via land borders with Pakistan and Afghanistan; therefore, there is also scope for inter-regional cooperation.

The SCO agreements against terrorism, such as the 2001 Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism; the 2004 Agreement on the Database of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation; and the 2009 SCO Convention on Counter-Terrorism, are not merely ‘in-principle agreements’. They empower the SCO’s anti-terrorism mechanism, namely the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS). SCO is based in Tashkent and serves to coordinate operations and data exchange among the member states. SCO also maintains a RATS database of terrorist organisations to help in detecting terrorist attacks from within the member states. Through the agreement on the database, the member states are obliged to share the required information with RATS,

¹¹² SCO was established in 2001 and has the following member states: Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

which is not the case of SAARC because there is no such agreement to ensure the sharing of data with STOMD. In contrast, by April 2010, RATS had a database comprising of 42 terrorist organisations and 1,100 individuals, and this information is available to security agencies of all the member states (OHCHR 2011 online).

Anti-terrorism measures of SCO are not only limited to sharing of information on terrorist groups and criminals. Since 2002, the organisation has been conducting joint military and law enforcement exercises. The largest was in 2005 comprising of roughly 10,000 troops, including 8,000 from China (OHCHR 2011 online). This shows a great level of trust among the member states and commitment towards curbing terrorism in the region – both lacking in the case of SAARC.

In the light of these findings, it is to be emphasised that SAARC needs to continue avoiding being dragged into an over-emphasis on traditional security in the region because human security challenges are more severe in nature and are common to all the countries in South Asia. Such an approach is likely to provide the Association with a road map of socio-economic development (Rahman 2001:4), which would be the key to collectively address human security threats. Ahmadzadda (2009, pers. comm.) identified the link between human development and security in the region. He said that projects in the area of food security and development would influence the overall security in South Asia.

SAARC is expanding the scope of deliberations on transnational crimes by suggesting more issues at the dialogue table. This could be because the officials at SAARC want at least the process of consensus-building in the security sector to move on, irrespective of the level of cooperation in other areas, such as terrorism. This could be in line with what Gordon (Gordon 2009:101-102) suggests, avoiding terrorism and moving on with cooperation against transnational crimes.

SAARCPOL and ideas of similar organisations, such as a Security Organisation for South Asia (SOSA) (Naik 2004), have been considered ‘immature’ for SAARC because these involve a comprehensive cooperation of law enforcement and security agencies. However, the SAARC Secretariat officials interviewed by this researcher did not completely reject the possibility of a regional security mechanism in South Asia. Niaz A. Naik, Pakistan’s former foreign secretary, developed a SOSA proposal, but this idea has not been a part of SAARC

proceedings. The issue of cooperation among intelligence agencies is likely to become a bone of contention because in some cases such organisations have designed and launched terrorist activities in neighbouring countries, as occurred with India and Pakistan (Naik 2004:9). These could be reasons that Naik limited the scope of a security mechanism in South Asia to low level cooperation, such as monitoring of human rights violations, fact finding missions, conflict resolution workshops, mediation and so on (Naik 2004). By contrast, SAARCPOL, even though not yet implemented, focuses on the practical side of regional security – cooperation among the law enforcement and criminal investigation bodies. Therefore, SAARCPOL could be a step in the right direction towards the creation of a regional security mechanism in South Asia.

The SAARC members hesitate to engage in any serious cooperation against transnational crimes, which could force them to take domestic measures or possibly allow external players to interfere in their internal matters. A sense of insecurity is prevalent, especially among the smaller South Asian countries. Due to this they delay signing and ratifying security-related agreements, for example via SAARC. The responses of the SAARC members to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime, implemented in 2003, also show a mixed level of commitment at multilateral levels. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have ratified the UN convention. Nepal has only signed it, and Bhutan and the Maldives have not even signed the convention. Furthermore, only India has ratified the following agreements: Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (implemented in 2003); and the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (implemented in 2004). However, New Delhi ratified these two UN agreements in 2011. Since December 2000, Sri Lanka has only been a signatory to both the protocols (UNODC 2011 online). This, in a way, shows that SAARC members feel the complexity of global multilateral cooperation against transnational crimes and thus hesitate to even commit to certain agreements forcing them to make reforms and take action at domestic levels. This is more peculiar in the case of the UN because the UN bodies are more effective than SAARC in evaluating the implementation of their agendas. In SAARC, states, even after ratification of certain agreements, do not feel accountable to the organisation.

Nonetheless, the ratification of the above-mentioned UN conventions by all the SAARC members would be complementary to the work of SAARC in this area.

8.4 Conclusion

Terrorism by virtue of its nature and scope has become a serious traditional security threat for Afghanistan and Pakistan. Terrorism not only affects the livelihood and wellbeing of people in both countries, but also the state security and the process of development; therefore, naturally, it dominates the SAARC deliberations on cooperation in security matters.

It is time that SAARC initiates a dialogue to explore possibilities for promoting regional security by setting up meaningful institutions to curb transnational crimes. The SAARCPOL proposal is yet to be approved at SAARC. Particularly tardy are the police chiefs of the member states who have been deliberating over this matter for the past six meetings. It shows that the Association is not ready for SAARCPOL, considering the level of overall cooperation and trust among the member states.

It is evident through the analyses presented in this chapter that cooperation in security aspects – terrorism and transnational crimes – has been problematic for SAARC. Therefore, it is crucial to analyse and learn from the performance of other associations in order to improve the overall functioning of SAARC. While the subsequent chapter uses the case of ASEAN to extract some valuable lessons for SAARC, this chapter discussed the SCO's agreements and measures against terrorism. There is much for SAARC and its members to learn from SCO, which predominantly focuses on counterterrorism. The organisation, in roughly ten years, has moved beyond agreements on anti-terrorism to some real actions, such as joint military exercises. Nevertheless, a pre-requisite of that is an indispensable level of trust among the member states, something which is absent in South Asia, due to the unique geo-political and strategic dynamics.

While SAARC has a long way to go to fully implement its agenda in uncontroversial areas of cooperation on human security, much more is needed to be done to engage its member states in meaningful cooperation in security-related matters. Considering the state of cooperation in softer areas, such as trade, energy, environmental security, and human development and so on, as analysed in previous chapters, it cannot be said with confidence that cooperation has

been fully successful and has paved the way for greater cooperation in sensitive areas, such as terrorism. Thus, it is too early to tell whether the Association is heading towards a regional security mechanism or not. However, it is evident from the progress in security areas that the scale of cooperation has improved through meetings among ministers, police chiefs, and representatives of criminal investigation authorities of the member states. In this matter, the SAARC process deserves credit for providing CBMs through cooperation in human security areas creating an environment of trust for high-level discussion among the officials dealing with security matters.

CHAPTER NINE

SOUTH ASIAN REGIONALISM: POSSIBLE LESSONS TO BE DRAWN FROM ASEAN

9.1 Introduction

Since 2005, the so-called project implementation phase of SAARC has been of immense interest, as evident by the increasing number of regional projects. There has been particular interest from the outside world and this is evident from the number of observers and cooperation in international development organisations. Considering this attention now should be the right time for SAARC to adopt lessons from similar regional organisations to progress further.

Since the EU is considered the world over the most popular and relatively successful regional bloc of the world, it is not surprising that organisations like SAARC are compared with it and can draw lessons for adoption or adaptation to emulate its successes (Bhargava & Hussain 1994; Kanesalingam 1993b; Silva 1999; Waqif 1999). Similarly, by considering ASEAN, a more suitable case for SAARC than the EU, there have been attempts to incorporate ideas from ASEAN in SAARC, especially in the areas of conflict management and economic integration (Sabur 2003; Sinha 2010; Solidum 1991). The approach in this chapter is different from the previous ones in that this researcher aims to present a comprehensive analysis of SAARC regarding opportunities and challenges explored in previous chapters. An attempt will then be made to draw lessons from ASEAN based on a comparative analysis between the two Associations and regions.

There are many precedents for multilateral institutions learning from the experiences of other similar bodies. On the economic front, the EU inspires ASEAN. An example of this is the ASEAN members moving towards a free trade area with tariffs below five percent among its six member states (Ahmad 2002:190). However, ASEAN had a different trajectory to the EU because a free trade agreement was reached long after the formation of the Association partly due to the organisation's original mandate of regional security cooperation.

However, it is unrealistic to measure the effectiveness of an organisation without taking into consideration its mandate. Firstly, intergovernmental organisations are reflections of the agenda set by member states. Secondly, the context of a particular organisation has to be

taken into consideration because each regional institution responds to issues specific to its member states. Thus, an understanding of the history of a particular region is crucial, comprising analyses of domestic, bilateral and regional issues.

An analysis of possible lessons from ASEAN for SAARC is considered important in this thesis because the regions are adjacent and there are socio-cultural, historical and religious similarities. There have also been bilateral tensions between the member states in the respective regions. Most importantly, ASEAN is viewed as the most successful regional organisation in the developing world. Therefore, in this chapter SAARC is compared with ASEAN to extract some possible lessons for the younger regional institution in South Asia, especially in areas of economic cooperation in trade, and in political and security cooperation, conflict management, and organisational development.

9.2 Origin of ASEAN

ASEAN was not the first case of a regional organisation in Southeast Asia as some countries in the region had in the past created a couple of unsuccessful regional forums. In 1958, Malaya's Prime Minister, Tunghu Abdul, worked towards establishing a regional body, and, in 1961, this became a reality in the form of the Association of Southeast Asia (ASA) comprising Malaya, Thailand, and the Philippines. ASA faced initial interruptions due to the political conflict over the creation of Malaysia in 1963. In the same year, Maphilindo was created, but it could not contain the security divergences of Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Later, leaders of Thailand and Indonesia met to conceive what today is known as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (Solidum 1991:83). ASEAN was founded in August 1967 by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand (ASEAN 2009a online). Poon-Kim (1977:754) is of the view that the formation of ASEAN was partly due the failure of both ASA and Maphilindo.

Some common interests brought these countries together to form ASEAN. The intention was to revitalise regional cooperation as well as to contain rising communist influence in the region (Hagiwara 1992:35; Poon-Kim 1977:754). Indeed, the biggest security worry for the ASEAN members was the rise of Chinese-supported communist insurgencies in their neighbourhood (Narine 1998:196). According to Tan (2004:935), "the *raison d'être* of ASEAN was a political one, to secure the region's peace, stability, and development."

Similar to the South Asian situation, the ASEAN region is asymmetrical. As shown in Table 9.1, Indonesia dominates among the ASEAN countries in terms of population size, area, and GDP. It is almost four times larger than the second largest country, Myanmar, in terms of the area. With regard to population size, Indonesia has almost three times as many people than the Philippines, and Vietnam. Indonesia accounts for 43 percent of the region's area, 39 percent of population, and 31 percent of GDP, which makes it a dominant player in all aspects.

Table 9.1: Overview of the ASEAN member states

Country	Population millions (2000)	Area (square km)	GDP Power (USD (2010))	Purchasing Parity (billions)
Brunei Darussalam	0.33	5,765		12.0 ^α
Cambodia	12.2	181,040		11.3
Indonesia	203.45	2,000,000		539 ^α
Lao PDR	5.12	236,800		6.9
Malaysia	23.26	329,847		255.3
Myanmar	49	678,500		40.28 ^β
Philippines	76.32	300,000		188.7
Singapore	4.0	712.4		222.7
Thailand	62.4	513,115		317
Vietnam	77.68	331,114		102

Note: α = estimated for 2009; β = estimated for 2011.

Data sources: (ASEAN 2000 online; USDS 2011 online)

9.3 Commonalities

For an understanding of ASEAN and Southeast Asia, this section aims at exploring some of the prominent similarities between ASEAN and SAARC, and the respective regions.

A common feature between ASEAN and SAARC is the level of asymmetry in both regions, due to the size, population and power of Indonesia and India respectively. However, India's sheer size, population, power and economic strength make it the only regional power in South Asia. For example, India alone accounts for roughly 81 percent of the total South Asian GDP

and 73 percent of the population (Bank 2011 online; IMF 2011 online). In contrast, in the ASEAN region, due to their remarkable economic progress, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand are labelled as “Asian Tigers” (Silva 1999:273), but Indonesia dominates with regard to its population size, area, and GDP (see Table 9.1).

Interestingly, there exist commonalities not just between the two organisations, but also between Southeast Asia and South Asia. Both regions are home to widespread cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity. For example, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity are the main religions in both Southeast and South Asia (Silva 1999:275). This religious diversity is one of the aspects making these regions different from Europe which is dominated by Christianity.

Both organisations, in their respective contexts, were born in the midst of economic, political and security challenges faced by their member states. In Southeast Asia, the countries were still experiencing the process of rebuilding after independence from colonial powers. More importantly, the region was divided on the basis of the communist and non-communist influences (Jetly 2003b:55). Similarly, South Asia was unstable when President Ziaur Rahman of Bangladesh mooted the idea of a regional organisation in 1978-79. At the time when the South Asian countries were discussing the SAARC proposal, the region was in turmoil. The Soviets occupied Afghanistan in 1979 and later Pakistan joined forces with the US to fight the Soviets; there were secessionist movements in the Indian Punjab and Sri Lanka; and Kashmir remained a source of conflict between India and Pakistan (see Chapter 3). At ASEAN’s establishment, Southeast Asia was still experiencing the consequences of the Cold War, and Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia were involved in a military conflict, the Vietnam War, which lasted for two decades (1955-1975).

The agendas of both Associations could be considered similar with immense emphasis on cooperation in human security areas. In ASEAN, security is defined in comprehensive terms with an equal focus on political, military and socio-economic factors; whereas SAARC’s predominant focus is human security, and, to date, military security has not been part of its agenda. Nonetheless, in 1967, the leaders of ASEAN shared the belief of the leaders of SAARC that regional cooperation could resolve problems of mutual concern in the economic, social, scientific, political and technical fields (Narine 1998:196).

With an emphasis on human security, both organisations aim at contributing to peace and stability within their respective regions. In addition, the Associations share some key principles, such as mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity and national identity of all nations. Then there is the ‘ASEAN Way’ of regionalism, comprising of principles of not commenting on internal affairs of other members (politics to human rights), face-saving and consensus. The ASEAN Way is reflected in the ASEAN Charter which is influenced by the organisation’s agenda on human security (Feigenblatt 2009:11). These values have been integrated into both formal and informal mechanisms of ASEAN and SAARC. A detailed analysis of the ASEAN Way is presented later in this chapter.

Similar to the situation faced by SAARC, the ASEAN members have been exposed to challenges demanding regional cooperation, particularly in the areas of economic stability (1997/98 financial crisis), environmental security (the forest fires in Indonesia – “the haze”), and health risks (SARS) (Hettne & Söderbaum 2004:225). To address the challenge of the Asian Economic crisis, Japan – a member of ASEAN+3 – proposed a regional monetary fund, but this idea was then strongly opposed by the EU, IMF, and the US (Hettne & Söderbaum 2004:215) and, for that reason, was not a workable solution for ASEAN. The severity of the common threats made ASEAN outward-looking for cooperation with state and non-state actors. Similarly, the multidimensionality of cooperation through SAARC is further evidence of a new regionalism in South Asia because there have been moves towards greater cooperation in areas covering economics, politics, security, culture and a host of other issues. Unlike the old regionalism, SAARC is also open to expanding its reach through the inclusion of new members and an example of that is Afghanistan’s induction in 2007. While emphasising the regional issues, the SAARC member states are also aware of the implications of global phenomena for the region; therefore, they have occasionally collaborated on collective concerns, such as climate change. Both ASEAN and SAARC have been used by their member states to raise their collective concerns at global forums on climate change. For this purpose, both regional institutions are observers, as intergovernmental organisations, at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (UNFCCC 2011 online). In comparison to SAARC, the heterogeneity of regionalism in Southeast Asia is at a much higher level due to the greater involvement of non-state actors, such as the business community (Frost 2008).

Multilateral organisations experience expansion in membership from time to time, and this has been the case of the EU. A similar perspective has been adapted by ASEAN regarding the inclusion of new member states, for example, the fast-tracked inclusion of Myanmar to manage China's southward influence on the region. However, to date, no consensus has been reached by the ASEAN members on including East Timor through this same process, possibly due to the opposition of the member states to Indonesia's support on this matter, and thus the decision is expected to take place around 2015 (Chongkittavorn 2011 online). In contrast, SAARC has shown a willingness to expand its membership, but at a much slower pace than in ASEAN due to difficulties in reaching consensus among the members. Afghanistan is the only new member of SAARC and decisions are pending on the membership of China and Iran.

The approaches to regionalism in SAARC and ASEAN are similar. Both organisations have adopted the approach of "soft institutionalisation" during their meetings and have been progressing through cooperation in functional areas, such as human security (Hettne & Söderbaum 2004:227). This is also the core of the functionalist approach on regional cooperation – meaning limiting the agenda of a regional organisation to cooperation in practicable areas. This approach has borne more fruit in the case of ASEAN, a more mature process than SAARC. However, as far as regionalism in South Asia is concerned, some gains have been achieved through projects focused on human welfare, such as health, education, and food security. In addition, through cooperation in functional areas, there have been opportunities for countries to discuss their bilateral issues, albeit informally (Amer 1999:1032; Denoon & Colbert 1998:506).

In the beginning, the SAARC leaders optimistically hoped that cooperation in non-controversial areas would pave the way for greater political understanding (Ahmed, F. 1991:79). On this matter, a SAARC Secretariat Director (2009, pers. comm.) stated, "We have to keep the ball rolling and do not need to wait for the right time because that might never come if we keep on waiting." It is important to see the extent to which SAARC has removed mutual mistrust to foster cooperation in South Asia. According to an Indian official at the SAARC Secretariat (2009, pers. comm.), "ASEAN meetings used to be smooth, friendly and now the same is the case of SAARC." This is a notable improvement because often SAARC meetings suffered due to differences among the member states. In the words of an official at the SAARC Secretariat (2009, pers. comm.), "It is a common phenomenon of

painstaking rounds of elaborate negotiations at SAARC because each member state has its own concerns.” Thus, it could be stated that the slow pace of negotiations is due to the functionalist approach to regionalism and therefore not peculiar to SAARC.

For informal discussions, there is a mechanism, ‘retreat’, which provides space for officials and politicians to frankly discuss all sorts of issues. Informal discussions are utilised as useful alternatives in both ASEAN and SAARC as neither of the regional forums are meant to ‘formally’ deal with contentious bilateral issues. ASEAN is known for practising “cautious diplomacy”, which allows its member states to put aside difficult issues in order to pave the way for cooperation on other issues (Narine 1997:964). To some extent, this type of diplomacy is also practised by SAARC; however, the SAARC process has often been the victim of bilateral tensions between its members, as some, in particular India and Pakistan, do not refrain from keeping bilateral issues aside to foster regional cooperation in South Asia. The processes of both organisations are painstakingly slow; it takes a long time to reach conclusion on any issue, and longer to implement any policy. Perhaps, “the cautious” approach is consuming more time because Asian multilateral organisations – ASEAN and SAARC – put emphasis on accommodating the concerns of all stakeholders through consensus-building and conflict avoidance (Feigenblatt 2011). Consequently, the functionalist approach of cooperation has worked for both organisations as they have managed to keep on working or remain operational through difficult times.

ASEAN and its accomplishments in the area of economic cooperation faced criticism in its first two decades for having failed to promote its optimistic agendas and this is similar to the case of SAARC (Hill 1978:569). However, economic cooperation via SAARC is still very limited and a major reason is that SAFTA was only implemented in 2006, and the process is thus still evolving. Experiences of countries in both regions have been different. In Southeast Asia, following the Asian economic crisis of 1997/98, the ASEAN members embarked on a course of productive economic cooperation. Prior to the setbacks of the economic recession, in an analysis of ASEAN, Hussey (1991:97) wrote: “In the economic realm, ASEAN has been long on rhetoric and short on concrete results; all projects sponsored by the organisation have fallen short of their goals.” The 2008 global economic depression has not uniformly affected SAARC members. This was also the case for ASEAN+3 members following the Asian economic crisis where there was a severe crisis in South Korea but less of an impact in Japan. The 1997-1998 Asian financial crisis affected South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia and

Thailand, more than any other country in the region (Schuman 2008 online). In the 2009 economic recession, all South Asian countries, with the exception of India, were badly struck by the global financial crisis due to their greater dependence on the outside world. For example, the Maldives economy was badly affected by a downturn in the tourism industry on which it depends, while India experienced a reasonable GDP growth rate of 6.7 percent in the midst of the economic turmoil (Schuman 2010 online).

9.4 Differences

After examining the similarities between SAARC and ASEAN, it is also worthwhile to discuss the main differences between the two organisations and their respective regions in order to draw possible lessons for SAARC.

As discussed above, ASEAN was created by the weaker Southeast Asian states to overcome superpower influences and other internal and external challenges (Jetly 2003b:55; Narine 1997:962; Reed 1997:249). For example, there was the fear of communist insurgency in Malaysia and Singapore in 1975, following the fall of non-communist regimes in Cambodia and South Vietnam (Tan 2004:935). In the words of Buszynski (1997:555), “Communism and, in particular, the threat posed by a united Vietnam after 1975, was an external challenge that galvanised ASEAN and strengthened its cohesion.” In contrast, (as discussed in Chapter 4) SAARC was established by the South Asian countries to act as a forum to address their joint human security concerns through action at all levels, domestic, regional, and global.

A major difference between ASEAN and SAARC is the role of the big players. It should be emphasised that Indonesia, along with Thailand, was a key player in creating ASEAN. Even prior to ASEAN, Jakarta was interested in Southeast Asian regionalism because Indonesia was a member of Maphilindo with Malaysia and the Philippines. In contrast, SAARC was the brainchild of a medium-sized country from the region, Bangladesh, and in the beginning was supported by all the smaller countries in the region, but not by India and Pakistan. Neither of these countries wanted a regional forum in South Asia to turn into a security organisation; however, their concerns were resolved and SAARC was established (see Chapter 4). It has often been stated by researchers that India should learn from the role of Indonesia in the ASEAN region, but, as debated by Muni (1989:49), the regional dynamics for India and

Indonesia are different: “The Indonesian political system, economy and strategic world view are comparatively more compatible with those of its neighbours than is the case of India.”

Soon after its formation, ASEAN faced criticism for its slow progress. The organisation, however, proved its worth by playing a positive role in curbing intra-regional bilateral disputes, and creating a strong regional identity among the member states (Hussey 1991:97). Within the first decade of the creation of ASEAN, the bilateral relations among ASEAN members began to improve and this led to the signing of the Declaration of ASEAN Concord and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in 1976. The significance of this treaty was an agreement among the countries not to attack each other. This was the beginning of a greater level of consensus-building within ASEAN, as per the wishes expressed in the Bangkok Declaration (1967) (Amer 1999:1033).

Malaysia has played a crucial role in ASEAN by convincing others of the importance of cooperation in human security areas. Malaysia has considered equally non-military threats, such as economic, political and psychological threats, as threats to its national security (Banerjee 1999:311). Due to the improvement of relationships between Indonesia and Malaysia, Malaysia no longer regards Indonesia’s security policy as its greatest security threat (Sabur 2003:93). This created a friendly and favourable environment for ASEAN. South Asia, on the other hand, is still dominated by rivalry between India and Pakistan. This has been a cause of the neglect of a much-needed focus on human security challenges. For example, India is the biggest arms importer in the world and Pakistan is ranked second, importing roughly five percent of the world’s conventional weapons (SIPRI 2011a online). Unlike any of the ASEAN members, the South Asian big brothers – India and Pakistan – are nuclear powers. Therefore, the rivalry between India and Pakistan changes the regional dynamics as far as regional security is concerned.

A major difference which stands out between SAARC and ASEAN is the direct impact of bilateral tensions on their operations. As mentioned before, the SAARC process has been constrained by bilateral disputes and tensions. The Association faced initial hurdles due to the bilateral dispute between India and Sri Lanka over the issue of India’s interference in its internal ethnic insurgency. Later, on some occasions, India-Pakistan tension led to the postponement of annual meetings (see Chapter 4). However, both forums have suffered to some extent from the domestic situations of member states. In 2009, the Maldives could not

hold the scheduled SAARC summit due to the economic crisis, and Thailand had to cancel the ASEAN summit owing to the attack of the Red Shirt protestors on the conference venue in Pattaya (Percy 2009 online).

An organisation's charter plays a significant role in giving legal shape to its mandate and principles. Even though ASEAN was established nearly two decades before SAARC, the ASEAN Charter did not come into force until 2008 – almost a decade later than the SAARC Charter (1985). However, in ASEAN, the charter is legally binding, unlike the 'in principle agreement' of the SAARC countries; therefore, the ASEAN Charter marks the beginning of an important era in Southeast Asian regionalism. With the charter being implemented there could also be procedures for accountability, which is important for any institutional framework. Although the ASEAN Charter is young in comparison to the SAARC Charter, it has the advantage of coming into play when the ASEAN process has matured and that is important for the complete execution of such a legal agreement. This could be a reason why, even though prohibited by the SAARC Charter from bringing bilateral contentious issues to the forum, some members have not refrained from this practice.

In SAARC, there had not been long-term engagement between its founding members and Afghanistan before it became a full member of SAARC. In contrast, through the 1980s in the ASEAN region, there were direct links between the original five members and the prospective members, such as Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. The process of direct engagement gained momentum after the resolution of the Cambodian conflict in 1991, thus opening the way for ASEAN's expansion to these countries (Amer 1999:1031). However, the case of Afghanistan is different from the newly admitted ASEAN members because before 2001 it was under Taliban rule and prior to that there was a decade-long Afghan-Soviet war (1979-1988). During these times, Pakistan was the only SAARC member having direct links with Afghanistan due to its greater influence in the country and its role in the Afghan-Soviet war (Ahmed & Balasubramanian 2010; Ahmed & Bhatnagar 2007; Nasr 2005).

9.5 Lessons

It should be reiterated that the officials at the SAARC Secretariat are impressed by the progress of ASEAN. During the fieldwork, a high-ranking SAARC official (2009, pers. comm.) said, "I can only envy what ASEAN has achieved." This suggests that relevant

lessons from ASEAN could be adapted by SAARC. This section of the chapter is sub-divided into areas in which ASEAN has significantly progressed and in which SAARC is yet to show meaningful cooperation.

9.5.1 Economic cooperation

One of the important achievements of ASEAN is the involvement of non-state actors in the process of regional economic cooperation, because of which there are multiple channels of cooperation in the ASEAN region: top-down and bottom-up. Top-down is through the official channel of ASEAN and bottom-up is where the private sector contributes towards the overall ASEAN process. Joint actions against common challenges, such as the 1997/98 Asian financial crisis, and health hazards, have changed the outlook of ASEAN (ADB 2008:22). Cooperation in the economic sector has grown since the agreement on the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) was reached in 1992. AFTA was a product of ASEAN countries rushing to beat the process of economic liberalisation initiated by the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). The result was that the ASEAN countries decided to aim for economic liberalisation by 2002 (Low 2003:267). It was an important move for ASEAN and most of its members are part of APEC, namely Brunei, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

AFTA is an important step towards an economic union in the ASEAN region. Overall, the ASEAN process, due to increasing involvement of non-state actors, such as the private sector, is seen as a bottom-up procedure and is more sustainable than the top-down approach because it is comprehensive in nature (Schulz, Soderbaum & Ojendal 2001b:4). This point is debatable because the ASEAN process is still predominantly state-centric with limited scope for the involvement of non-state actors, such as NGOs. Nonetheless, Frost (2008:16) believes that, “the Asia-wide wash of money, technology, and people is one of the factors driving governments to cooperate.” Therefore, in a way, the backbone of regionalism in Southeast Asia has been the growing regionalisation led by the private sector, such as the business community.

After experiencing common threats, most ASEAN members may have realised that they have a greater stake in regional cooperation and in creating meaningful alliances with non-ASEAN nations. Similar to the case of SAARC, ASEAN countries have mainly been trading with non-ASEAN countries, but, via ASEAN, the member states have managed to trade collectively

with some other regions and countries. This could be one of the greatest achievements of regionalism in Southeast Asia because ASEAN has reached regional trade agreements (RTAs). For example, the following RTAs have been collectively reached by ASEAN countries through their common platform: ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand, ASEAN-China, ASEAN-India, ASEAN-Japan, and ASEAN-South Korea (WTO 2011 online). An important lesson from ASEAN could be to collectively trade with the outside world through RTAs negotiated by SAARC. This will not only put the SAARC countries in a better bargaining position, but will also reduce their competition with each other, as they trade a few similar goods mainly to the developed world, such as rice, sugar and cotton.

As discussed in Chapter 5, the level of intra-regional trade in South Asia seems to have stagnated around five percent per annum of the region's total exports, but it reflects the rather immature state of the economic cooperation via SAARC. In contrast, the processes in ASEAN are well developed as evident through the number of ASEAN RTAs with its member states' major trading partners. The volume of intra-regional trade in ASEAN is 25 percent (Sinha 2010 online), which is also a reflection of the involvement of more players in Southeast Asia than in South Asia/SAARC. The US has been the backbone of increasing FDI in Southeast Asia, and, according to an estimate, the "cumulative" US investment in the ASEAN region is greater than in China, Japan or South Korea (Sinha 2010 online). South Asian countries need to broaden their horizons in the area of economic cooperation, especially via SAARC, by involving more actors in this process.

It is evident through the trade under SAFTA that the volume of intra-regional trade is steady but at a very low level, and is far behind the levels estimated by some studies (see Chapter 5). However, since 2009, there have been some positive indications that the volume of trade under SAFTA will further increase because of India's keen interest in SAFTA/SAARC. Also, major concerns over trade-related matters between India and Pakistan, such as Pakistan granting MNF status to India, have been resolved. Another lesson from ASEAN for SAARC is to keep politics aside from economic cooperation. This is vital in order to exploit the full potential of intra-regional trade.

The Asian way of regionalism has built economic cooperation leading to development, in the hope that this would bring incentives for greater cooperation in other important areas, such as

security (Naidu 2000:2). There are indications that it has worked for ASEAN; therefore, it might also work for SAARC.

9.5.2 Conflict management

Resolution or management of bilateral disputes is one of the areas in which both ASEAN and SAARC have faced difficulties and received criticism for their passive roles within their particular regions. Both organisations have employed informal approaches for dealing with contentious bilateral issues among their member states. The informal processes of both regional forums have proved their worth by calming bilateral tensions between member states, at least whenever required (see Chapter 4). ASEAN's approach to conflict management is embedded in the 'ASEAN Way', as this is where the key principles play vital roles in not only sustaining the organisation, but also in promoting greater cooperation among the member states.

ASEAN and SAARC have promoted cautious or quiet diplomacy, especially in dealing with bilateral issues between member states. On this, a SAARC Secretariat official (2009, pers. comm.) divulged, "We are digging up sensitive issues, but we will not share this information with other countries." A detailed analysis of 'informal' conflict management has already been presented in this chapter; however, this sub-section digs deeper into the ways ASEAN has succeeded in managing conflicts between its member states.

On several occasions, the affairs of these organisations have been constrained by bilateral disputes. Therefore, by considering the limitations of their agendas, the institutions had to invent their own ways of dealing with intra-regional conflicts. The informal deliberations on the sidelines of regional multilateral forums have been found fruitful in ASEAN and SAARC. However, informal channels of ASEAN have been credited for being more productive in comparison to those of SAARC.

The ASEAN approach is somewhat inspired by the principles of *Maphilindo* which were based on the socio-cultural and political context of Southeast Asia. As mentioned before, the ASEAN Way is about non-interference in the internal affairs of member states, face-saving and consensus. The backbone of the whole ASEAN process is perhaps the agreement among member states on the principle of *musyawarah* (consultation) for settling bilateral disputes (Goh 2003:114), which they perceive suitable in their socio-political context.

The issue of conflict resolution is important to South Asia because improvements in bilateral relations will boost the process of regionalism. According to Beg (2001:11), a conflict resolution mechanism has to be institutionalised either as an adjunct body to SAARC, by considering the ASEAN case, or “dove-tailed” into the existing structure of SAARC. There is a “trust deficit” in South Asia, which might not let conflict resolution become a formal mechanism under SAARC. Karmacharya further elaborates on this factor (2009, pers. comm.):

There is a trust deficit due to some historical factors, for instance one country does not trust the other in South Asia. Like in ASEAN, somehow, the trust has been established among the members. Thus, the first requirement is to build trust among the member countries towards the common goal. The second stage maybe is to keep aside the politics and economics and to deal it differently. SAARC could be like ASEAN to keep the politics aside.

It seems that the SAARC members have gained some lessons from the history of ASEAN. As mentioned before, ASEAN is the final product of two previous failures to form a regional body: the Association of Southeast Asia (1961), and Maphilindo (1963). The conflict in Malaysia and the security divergences of member states defeated the precursors of ASEAN. Therefore, SAARC member states have taken greater care to quarantine bilateral issues so that they do not derail the Association. However, bilateral issues have occasionally stalled the SAARC process.

In mechanisms of Asian regionalism, conflict management has been preferred over conflict resolution by regional organisations, mainly because of their limited mandate to engage in bilateral disputes between their member states. This has been the case of both ASEAN and SAARC – regional institutions resorting to informal ways of managing conflicts. Thus, the ASEAN way of regionalism has been complimented for its ability of managing intra-regional conflicts (Jetly 2003b:53). Some aspects, if not all, of ASEAN’s approach to conflict management could be emulated in the SAARC context because there are some visible similarities in their approaches to dealing with contentious bilateral issues.

ASEAN has often been exposed to bilateral disputes between its member states. When it erupted, the conflict over Sabah between Malaysia and the Philippines was seen as being as severe as the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan (Sabur 2003:91). During the initial stages of ASEAN in 1968, the organisation had to deal with the Sabah dispute, which had almost brought the two countries to a war. ASEAN, as a regional forum, made no direct

efforts to intervene in this bilateral matter, but ‘informally’ the forum was used for mediation. Ultimately, Jakarta played a crucial role as a mediator in the conflict over Sabah (Sabur 2003:90). Another, intense situation for ASEAN was the period of conflict between Indonesia and Singapore over the Singaporean decision to execute Indonesian marines in 1968. At that point, Indonesia-Singapore relations reached their lowest ebb, and the situation created a period of crisis for ASEAN. At the same time, the conflict demonstrated a positive Indonesian approach to dealing with the conflict – a non-hegemonic way of transforming its former impression of being a troublemaker in the ASEAN region (Sabur 2003:90-91).

In accordance with the ASEAN approach, both of the above-mentioned conflicts were resolved bilaterally. In fact, it was the ASEAN diplomatic channels that ultimately led to President Marcos dropping the Philippine claim over Sabah, during the 2nd ASEAN Summit (Kuala Lumpur, 1977) (Sabur 2003:91). However, the ASEAN region has been home to bilateral tensions, some of which remain unresolved until now; for example, the territorial disputes between Malaysia and Indonesia, and Malaysia and Singapore. Both through ASEAN and bilateral channels, dialogue has continued to resolve these conflicts, and these processes have restrained ASEAN members from engaging in fully-fledged wars. Nonetheless, ASEAN members have been engaged in occasional cross-border clashes, and an example of that is the border dispute between Cambodia and Thailand. The Cambodian-Thai clashes over Ta Krabey temple resulted in the displacement of more than 5,000 locals. Again, Indonesia was given the task by ASEAN to facilitate talks between Cambodia and Thailand (BBC 2011c online). The clashes have ended, but the territorial dispute has not, which means the violence might erupt again. It seems that ASEAN members have agreed to use the strength of Indonesia in mediations between its member states, an expression of accepting its power and influence in the region.

In the SAARC region, both bilateral and multilateral channels were blocked during times of tensions between the member states, leaving no scope for SAARC to play its role. However, whenever provided with opportunities the Association has proved to be a worthwhile forum for conflict transformation through sideline or informal meetings between the heads of state.

9.5.3 Political & security cooperation

ASEAN has been successful in providing a platform for member states to maintain the territorial status quo – “a suitable assurance against fears of Indonesian expansion” (Buszynski 1987:764). In comparison, SAARC has been suffering from long-standing disputes involving major regional powers, India and Pakistan. This could be because India, unlike Indonesia, is geographically located in the middle of the region having international borders with all SAARC members with the exception of Afghanistan.

Even though divergent security interests led to the failure of ASEAN’s precursors (ASA and Maphilindo), the existence of a common external threat – communism – had strengthened cohesion among the ASEAN founding members (Buszynski 1997), at least through the foundational years of the Association. The SAARC members do not share a common threat from an outside power; therefore, for cooperation on security issues the countries have to rely on a model suiting their regional circumstances. Nevertheless, some lessons can be learned from ASEAN.

The following five key initiatives have strengthened cooperation in the area of regional security among the ASEAN members: The ASEAN or Bangkok Declaration of 1967; the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) or Kuala Lumpur Declaration of 1971; the associated ZOPFAN Blueprint; and the Declaration of ASEAN Concord and ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), both ratified at the Bali Conference of 1976 (Narine 1998:197).

In the beginning, ASEAN’s role in regional security, although strong rhetorically, was limited to certain agreements. For example, ZOPFAN and TAC were signed with greater emphasis on respect for sovereignty and non-interference because of being the products of intra-regional conflicts involving Indonesia, Malaysia and Philippines in the 1960s (Katanyuu 2006:826). The ASEAN Foreign Ministers adopted ZOPFAN in 1971, which emerged as a Malaysian policy seeking intra-regional solutions for bilateral security problems (Hamzah 1991:3). These agreements provided a comfortable space for the growth of regionalism in Southeast Asia reducing the risks of intra-regional security threats.

The gradual expansion of ASEAN has largely brought an end to the animosity that had dominated relations between ASEAN countries and Indochinese countries since 1975 – the

end of the Vietnam War, which resulted in the spread of communism in all three countries (Amer 1999:1037). However, the bilateral relations between Cambodia and Thailand are an exception because both countries clash from time to time over territorial issues (Languepin 2011 online). In SAARC, the only new member, Afghanistan, has a territorial dispute with Pakistan. Except for the era when the Taliban were ruling in Afghanistan, Kabul-Islamabad relations have been overshadowed by mutual mistrust but no clashes, especially regarding the long-standing border dispute over the demarcation of the Durand Line. Through SAARC, the leadership and officials of both countries have another forum to develop a better understanding of each other's concerns, though informally.

The growing inter-dependency in handling new challenges, such as economic and environmental ones, has pushed ASEAN members to discuss such issues openly, even though they could be directly related to one country (Katsumata 2004:251). Another cause of this subtle change in the organisation's approach was due to the ASEAN's inability to address the 1999 crisis in East Timor (Jetly 2003b:54). However, either by directly addressing the challenge or by sidelining some issues, ASEAN has progressed in many ways.

Since the 1990s, ASEAN's key principle of non-interference has undergone a serious transformation towards a flexible interventionist approach into the domestic affairs of member states. This is evident through 'open discussions' during informal retreats. The first ministerial retreat was held in 1999, but since then it has been a regular feature of high-level ASEAN meetings (Katsumata 2004:238). The change occurred mainly with ASEAN's exposure to challenges presented by the financial crisis of 1997/98, and the environmental problem caused by the Indonesian pollution haze in 1997. The haze affected Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei and the Philippines, thereby ensuring that the destruction of forests in Indonesia no longer remained a domestic issue (Katsumata 2004:240-241). SAARC could also consider expanding the scope of its informal deliberations beyond bilateralism, which could be way of a smooth transition to perhaps institutionalisation of this process.

There were many lessons that the ASEAN members learned from the 1997/98 economic crisis, and one was to engage in greater economic relations with non-member states, such as China, Japan and South Korea via the new ASEAN+3. SAARC could consider this option, as countries in the region have no collective mechanism of cooperating in a meaningful way with the rest of the world, especially with China, Southeast Asia and Central Asia.

Similar to SAARC, ASEAN encountered some initial hiccups due to bilateral tensions among its member states. In this regard, it is important to recall the tension between the Philippines and Malaysia over the possession of Sabah in 1968.¹¹³ Also in the same year, Indonesia was furious over the issue of the Singaporean government executing two of its marines (Hagiwara 1992:36). In its early years, ASEAN often encountered tensions among its member states, such as those between Malaysia and its neighbours (the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand) over territorial claims or cross-border interventions. As these issues were kept outside the mandate of ASEAN, the Association survived through this turbulent stage by continuing on the path of regional cooperation. Bilateral relations between ASEAN member states, especially the big players (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore) have improved significantly, and the cordial environment adds more value to the steadily growing regional cooperation (Narine 1998:195).

The dynamics of South Asia are different to those of Southeast Asia because it is dominated by India. Other SAARC members have advocated the principles of sovereignty and non-interference into the domestic affairs of member states. As is the case in ASEAN, in the SAARC region, countries depend on each other to tackle the emerging problems of environmental security and transnational crimes. With this in mind, SAARC members could follow the example of ASEAN and adopt a more flexible attitude regarding intervention into member states' domestic affairs.

Due to its mode of operation, ASEAN has managed to nurture greater understanding among its member states. Indorf (1992:88) stresses that the existence of ASEAN and "its practice of consultation, have conditioned regional leaders to be more sensitive to the interests and commitments of their neighbours." This is one of the important achievements of ASEAN because since its inception the bilateral conflicts within the region have remained dormant. According to a Pakistani analyst of South Asian affairs, Rahman (2009, pers. comm.), the knowledge of ASEAN is valuable for SAARC. He explained:

From ASEAN experience SAARC members could learn that regional cooperation is a win-win game. The contentious issues are there in the ASEAN region and they have not been able to resolve them, but ASEAN has been able to brush them under the carpet so that the level of cooperation reaches the point where continuing fighting becomes irrelevant.

¹¹³ Sabah is one of the states of Malaysia. Until today, Sabah remains a disputed territory between the Philippines and Malaysia because the former continues to claim much of the eastern part of Sabah.

The original idea for a multilateral security mechanism in the Asia Pacific was proposed by Australia and Canada in the 1980s, but then the idea was deemed premature by ASEAN members (Katsumata 2009:53-57; Naidu 2000:2). However, the end of the Cold War exposed ASEAN countries to extra-regional threats, such as the tension in the Taiwan straits, uncertainties in the Korean peninsula, conflict in the South China Sea, and the growing India-Pakistan rivalry in South Asia. In addition, there were growing concerns in the region, particularly from China, over the US military deployment in Asia, especially in the Philippines. To deal with such extra-regional and intra-Southeast Asia threats, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) was formed in 1993. ARF has fostered greater understanding among the member states with the main aims, including confidence-building measures, preventive diplomacy and approaches to conflict resolution, a reflection of the ASEAN way of consensus-building. The ASEAN's schema of dealing with political issues might not work for ARF because its membership is wide with the 'great powers' participating in the Forum (Narine 1997:962), and thus this could be a major hurdle for the Forum as far as producing expected outcomes is concerned. The Forum's potential to establish meaningful preventive diplomacy mechanisms is likely to remain severely limited unless it departs from the approach of the 'ASEAN Way' of institution building (Yuzawa 2006:785).

In the security sector, ASEAN has shown hints of direct engagement, for example in the 1970s during the Cambodian-Vietnamese War. Even then, ASEAN faced difficulties in achieving a settlement and consequently the assistance of the UN was obtained (Naidu 2000:6). The ASEAN approach has not been to become a mediator as an organisation, but to nominate one of its member states to do the job, which was the case of Indonesia's involvement in the 2011 confrontation between the troops of Cambodia and Thailand. Nonetheless, on occasions ASEAN has failed to respond to intra-regional security problems, for example in East Timor in 1999, and this has dampened faith in the organisation (Naidu 2000:7). ASEAN, though directly facing a security threat from instability in the Northeast, has been unable to handle challenges in neighbouring countries since Taiwan is not a member of the ARF. Also, Taiwan has not been a subject of ARF deliberations because China has banned Taiwan (Frost 2008:137; Naidu 2000:6).

Following the creation of ARF, there were disagreements over the membership of North Korea. However, in 2001, North Korea became the 23rd member of the Forum. In this case, ASEAN's approach of dealing with political matters is seen as insufficient (Narine

1997:962).¹¹⁴ Consequently, ARF has not been able to produce significant results, yet. Therefore, Yuzawa (2006:785) believes that “the Forum’s potential to establish meaningful preventive diplomacy mechanisms is likely to remain highly limited unless it departs from the rule of the ‘ASEAN Way’ of institution building.” Nevertheless, to deal with security issues beyond the Southeast Asian region, it was important for ASEAN to expand the scope of ARF by including global powers like the US and China. The ARF platform and security cooperation in ASEAN is likely to remain slow or unproductive for the foreseeable future, mainly due to the different interest of the great powers in the ASEAN region, and the diverse security perceptions and interest of the ASEAN members (Narine 1998:195).¹¹⁵

The ASEAN countries have also understood the value of a strategy of “agreeing to disagree”, which has protected the Association from serious disagreements (Sabur 2003:91). According to an estimate, ASEAN organises over 400 meetings per year, and most of them at its secretariat building. All ASEAN members participate in ASEAN meetings, even when the issue is not directly related to them, to symbolically support other members. For example, the ASEAN members participated in a dialogue on territorial disputes in the South China Sea (Frost 2008:135). This may also be the case for SAARC, if the organisation continues regular meetings for officials at all levels, but then the responsibility lies on the shoulders of the political leadership to sustain their commitment for greater cooperation through SAARC. The SAARC process has gained some momentum evident through roughly 180 meetings per annum, but on occasions, not all members take part in its activities, with Afghanistan rarely participating (see Chapter 4).

After the achievements in the area of economic cooperation through continuous progress in intra-regional trade, the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) Blueprint was produced in response to a decision reached at the 12th ASEAN Summit held in the Philippines (Cebu, 2007) to accelerate ASEAN processes for the establishment of an ASEAN Community by 2015. This document envisages that APSC will bring the Association’s political and

¹¹⁴ The current participants in the ARF are the following: Australia, Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Canada, China, the European Union, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, North Korea, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Mongolia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Russian Federation, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor Leste, the United States, and Vietnam.

¹¹⁵ Ever since their independence from colonial powers, countries in Southeast Asia have had divergences in security perceptions. On this issue, the following readings are suggested: Justus M. Van der Kroef 1974, ‘ASEAN’s security needs and policies’, *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 47, no. 2, pp. 154-170; Michael Leifer 1973, ‘The ASEAN states: No common outlook’, *International Affairs*, vol. 49, no. 4, pp. 600-607.

security cooperation to a higher level, as it provides a roadmap for measures in the areas of maritime security, anti-terrorism, anti-corruption, strengthening of cooperation under TAC, ensuring the implementation of South East Asian Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ) Treaty (Bangkok, 1995), promotion of democracy, and collective action against transnational crimes (ASEAN 2009b). The APSC Blueprint was adopted by the ASEAN members at the 14th ASEAN Summit (Cha-am/Hua Hin, 2009) and this should facilitate collective management of internal and external security threats.

There were some developments prior to the ASEAN members agreeing to the APSC Blueprint. There is the mechanism of the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM) which shows that ASEAN is on the right path to creating a politico-security community. Through ADMM, the ASEAN members exchange views on current security matters, and cooperation in this sector has grown since 2006 through the adoption of the concept paper on the “Use of ASEAN Military Assets and Capabilities in Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR)”. The concept paper on “Defence Establishments and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) Cooperation on Non-Traditional Security Issues” was adopted in 2009. Defence ministers from the ASEAN countries have shown a greater level of commitment to addressing some prominent security challenges by signing the Third Joint Declaration on Strengthening ASEAN Defence Establishments to Meet the Challenges of Non-Traditional Security Threats (Pattaya, 2009) (ASEAN 2011a online). ASEAN has reached another milestone on the way to creating a security community by achieving cooperation among the militaries. In July 2011, ASEAN’s first military exercise was organised involving roughly 100 personnel from ASEAN militaries. They conducted joint humanitarian operations in natural disaster response, as per the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (IISS 2011 online). Similarly, in SAARC, there has been an agreement over cooperation among militaries for joint disaster management (see Chapter 6). These developments in both organisations contradict the argument of Solidum (1991:82) who completely rejected the likelihood of cooperation in military affairs for both regional forums. In this area, an important lesson from which SAARC can benefit is the “SAARC Agreement on Rapid Response to Natural Disasters” which encompasses the idea of a joint military exercise to develop a better coordinating mechanism.

Since 1997, cooperation in addressing non-traditional security threats, particularly transnational crimes, has gained prominence in ASEAN. In the beginning, the focus of

cooperation in this area was limited to problems of drug smuggling, and human trafficking. However, the ASEAN members have shown a greater commitment than SAARC to joint ventures against terrorism, especially after the terrorist attack on Bali (2002). Considering terrorists operate with the help of a widespread, almost globalised criminal network, ASEAN has reached counter-terrorism agreements with the EU and China. To further enhance cooperation against transnational crimes, a decision was reached at the 7th Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime to utilise the ASEAN+3 Cooperation Fund for a project entitled “Study on the effective implementation of ASEAN+3 work plan to combat transnational crime” (Siem Reap, 2009). This also shows that there is growing commitment in the region to address these collective non-traditional security challenges. Considering the similar nature of transnational crimes in South Asia, SAARC could also forge working relations with other regional organisations, but for that to happen the Association needs to launch SAARCPOL.

It has been over a decade since the ASEAN countries became engaged in meaningful cooperation to address transnational crimes. In the beginning, the focus was not on terrorism, but more recently, it has been included in the area of cooperation against transnational crimes. It is seen as a separate issue – a non-traditional security threat. In 1998, at the 31st Ministerial Meeting, the ASEAN members signed the Joint Declaration for a Drug-Free ASEAN. There are different ASEAN bodies that promote cooperation in this area, including the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime, ASEAN Finance Ministers Meeting, ASEAN Chiefs of National Police (ASEANPOL), and ASEAN Senior Officials on Drugs Matters. In 1981, the Chiefs of ASEAN Police established ASEANPOL. Since its establishment, there have been regular meetings of ASEANPOL and all ASEAN members are part of this institution. In 2010, the ASEANPOL Secretariat was set up in Kuala Lumpur, which shows that there is a developed mechanism to coordinate actions at the regional level against transnational crimes.¹¹⁶

In the security sector, regional mechanisms do not emerge over night, especially in regions faced with asymmetry among the member states, and bilateral disputes. The difficulty of launching regional cooperation among law enforcement agencies against transnational crimes can be understood from the difficulties faced by SAARC in realising Nepal’s proposal on SAARCPOL. In the case of ASEAN was similar because ASEANPOL was established

¹¹⁶ For more information on ASEANPOL, visit its website: www.aseanpol.org.my

roughly 14 years after the creation of the Association, and its headquarters was only opened in 2010.

While combating transnational crimes, ASEAN has entered into the implementation phase guided by certain action plans, such as the ASEAN Work Plan on Combating Illicit Drug Production, Trafficking, and Use (2009-2015). By adopting this action plan, the ASEAN members aim at making a drug-free ASEAN by 2015. The ASEAN states have also reached an agreement on the ASEAN Convention on Counter Terrorism, which is a positive move in the implementation of the ASEAN Comprehensive Plan of Action on Counter Terrorism (ASEAN 2011b online). The realisation of goals is second to establishing these important targets through consensus, which SAARC has to work on because in areas focusing on cooperation in security matters, the progress is negligible (see Chapter 8).

Thus, it could be concluded that there is much that SAARC can learn from ASEAN, especially in the security sector. Even ASEAN processes are mostly limited to the consensus stage, through either ADMM or ASEANPOL. As far as the creation of a security organisation is concerned, there is not much in ASEAN for SAARC because ARF is not a security body, such as the OSCE. Furthermore, ARF is not purely ASEAN because of its wider membership (Dastgir 2009, pers. comm.).

SAARC, when compared with ASEAN, is found to be lagging behind over the issue of a mechanism for political dialogue. This is due to the limitations placed by the SAARC Charter prohibiting discussions on sensitive political matters. While proposing a South Asian Security Forum, Naik (1999:342) demanded the inclusion of security and political issues in the SAARC agenda.¹¹⁷ As discussed earlier, SAARC has often been criticised for its failure in transforming South Asia into a region of peace and prosperity, often by ignoring the magnitude of the rivalry between two nuclear powers – India and Pakistan. Nonetheless, Thapa (1999:177) recommended that SAARC could consider an agreement similar to the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation to formally add an impetus to informal discussions on political issues. Such a move is likely to give some authority to SAARC in addressing issues of peace and security.

¹¹⁷ Niaz A. Naik was the former foreign secretary of Pakistan and he was also a member of the Group of Eminent Persons set up by the SAARC.

9.5.4 Organisation development

ASEAN has developed to be a relatively better organisational structure with regional institutes and external linkages than SAARC. This could be because ASEAN was formed roughly eighteen years earlier than SAARC. Nevertheless, ASEAN has paid equal attention to building and promoting regional identity in Southeast Asia.

South Asian policymakers were inspired to set up SAARC along the lines of the neighbouring ASEAN. Even in establishing its Secretariat in Kathmandu, SAARC largely followed in the footsteps of ASEAN, but there are some differences in both initiatives. It took ASEAN roughly nine years to open its secretariat, whereas SAARC leaders established their secretariat within the first two years of the organisation's inception (Saksena 1989:89). Secretariats in both ASEAN and SAARC serve as important coordinating bodies; therefore, it was crucial for the latter to open its headquarters in Nepal to better organise its affairs with the member states. All the member states viewed Nepal as a neutral venue, and, most of all, a country willing to host such an institution.

The structures of both organisations are remarkably similar. For example, both organisations have secretariats in addition to several topical centres on agricultural development, energy, environmental security, information and human resource development.¹¹⁸ ASEAN has better mechanisms in place, including committees abroad to foster relations with partner countries.¹¹⁹ These committees are comprised of permanent missions of ASEAN members. Considering that SAARC has recently opened its doors to include observers, and developed guidelines on engaging with observer states, the next step could be to appoint diplomatic missions abroad of its member states as committees (representatives). For example, the High Commission of Nepal in Canberra could serve as a SAARC Committee in Australia. This mechanism would be advantageous because SAARC needs to more effectively engage with its observers on a regular basis.

¹¹⁸ ASEAN has set up the following centres: ASEAN Centre for Energy (Jakarta), ASEAN Centre for the Development of Agricultural Cooperatives (Jakarta), ASEAN Council on Petroleum (Kuala Lumpur), ASEAN Earthquake Information Centre (Jakarta), ASEAN-EC Management Centre (Bandar Seri Begawan), ASEAN Insurance Training and Research Institute (Kuala Lumpur), ASEAN-Japan Centre (Tokyo), ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (Manila), ASEAN Specialised Meteorological Centre (Singapore), South East Asian Central Banks (Kuala Lumpur), and the ASEAN University Network (Bangkok).

¹¹⁹ ASEAN has committees abroad in the following cities: Amman, Ankara, Beijing, Canberra, Berlin, Brussels, Geneva, Islamabad, London, Moscow, New Delhi, New York, Ottawa, Paris, Riyadh, Tokyo, Vienna, Washington and Wellington.

China, Japan and South Korea serve as major funding partners of ASEAN through the ASEAN+3. Recently, the ASEAN+3 Fund has been established to support regional cooperation in Southeast Asia. Except for the case of Japan and China giving direct funds to the SAARC Development Fund (SDF), there is no direct mechanism of channelling funds to SAARC from developed countries or SAARC partners (known as SAARC Observers). This puts a greater load on SAARC members to contribute towards the growing SAARC expenses. This concern was shared by, in particular, the representatives of Afghanistan and Nepal at the SAARC Secretariat (2009, pers. comm.).

The ASEAN countries, either for security or for economic development, have always paid keen attention to other countries and regions. This is also evident in the way ASEAN members have participated in other multilateral forums, such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC).¹²⁰ In addition, ASEAN has shown keen interest in creating interregional forums, such as the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), and the East Asia Summit (EAS). ASEM is a platform for political dialogue, cooperation in security, economic affairs, education and culture. Its members include all ASEAN members, the EU, ASEAN+3, India, Mongolia and Pakistan. EAS has 16 members, including the permanent ten members of ASEAN, and India since 2005.

Both the EU and ASEAN have dedicated professionals working at their secretariats, but so far SAARC has ignored this aspect. The SAARC Secretariat, now more than ever before, is dealing with highly technical issues in the area of trade, food, energy, environment, science and technology and others. Despite the need for relevant experts in this area, the SAARC Secretariat is currently operating with very limited human resources. An official of the SAARC Human Resource Development Centre (Islamabad) elaborated on the professional capacity of the SAARC Secretariat (2009, pers. comm.):

The Secretariat has all bureaucrats from ministry of foreign affairs or external affairs, and they know their job very well, which is about diplomacy. However, they do not know of other jobs. Until or unless SAARC integrates professionals, nothing can be achieved. Probably, diplomats feel it as a threat to them by having professionals surrounding them.

¹²⁰ The following ASEAN countries are part of APEC: Brunei, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. Predominant Muslim countries in ASEAN – Brunei, Indonesia and Malaysia – are members of the OIC.

There are provisions in the MoU on the establishment of the SAARC Secretariat for the recruitment of professional staff (SAARC 1986:2), but as observed during the fieldwork for this study, the Secretariat is home to diplomats from the member states plus general and administrative staff. The recruitment of professionals might also ease the increasing workload on heads of divisions/officials. Such reforms might also change the outlook of the SAARC Secretariat from merely being an inter-governmental organisation to a professional body representing the region.

SAARC, similar to the case of ASEAN, is open to expansion. ASEAN was founded by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Later, its membership was extended to Brunei Darussalam (1984), Vietnam (1995), Laos (1997), Myanmar (1997) and Cambodia (1999). After expanding its membership, ASEAN changed its emblem to represent all member states, something that SAARC still has to do since the inclusion of Afghanistan in 2008. Even though it is a minor issue, it shows that ASEAN regards symbolism as relevant to regionalism.

ASEAN even has a motto, a flag and an anthem, and these play important roles in creating a regional identity. Work is in progress over the issue of regional identity formation at ASEAN, but small initiatives like having a regional anthem are important first steps towards creating a regional identity among member states. Since the development of these would not take much effort, the SAARC Secretariat could also focus on developing symbols to promote a unique South Asian identity. It does seem that SAARC is also keen to promote regional identity, as Basnyat from the SAARC Secretariat (2009, pers. comm.) stated, “Our Secretary General is focusing on the oneness or the brotherhood among the SAARC countries, as once he mentioned that we have to have a ‘SAARC brand’ ... All people in South Asia should feel that it is our organisation, it is our identity.” In the promotion of regional identity, some SAARC institutions are likely to play a pivotal role, such as the South Asian University (New Delhi), and the SAARC Cultural Centre (Mantara).¹²¹

¹²¹ A key objective of the SAARC Cultural Centre is to promote regional unity through cultural integration and intercultural dialogue. Since the beginning of 2011, the centre’s permanent office has been under construction in Mantara, Sri Lanka.

9.6 Conclusion

This chapter attempts to compare ASEAN with SAARC to draw some possible lessons by using regionalism in Southeast Asia as an example, but not as a model for South Asia to emulate.

There is much for SAARC to learn from ASEAN in the areas of political understanding, security cooperation, economic integration, and organisational development. Particularly, in the political sector, SAARC countries should appreciate the value of certain symbolic agreements and build trust in the region by declaring South Asia a zone of peace. However, such significant initiatives do not occur in a vacuum, as there are certain pre-requisites, especially an improvement in bilateral relations. In the economic sector, the most crucial lesson for SAARC is to increase the number of players in the whole process of free trade, both internal and external. Similar to the case of ASEAN, SAARC needs to integrate professionals into its various institutions, in particular into its Secretariat.

It is important to note that both ASEAN and SAARC have survived through turbulent times, mainly caused by bilateral disputes between member states. Nevertheless, bilateral disputes or environments of mutual distrust have made each organisation adapt and develop their own ways of regionalism. Informal mechanisms for dealing with contentious issues, such as a Retreat, have greatly promoted political unity and regional security in ASEAN. If SAARC manages to maintain the current momentum of frequent meetings, then the same level of political cooperation could be achieved to enhance the scope of regionalism in South Asia. Nonetheless, similar to the situation in the early years of ASEAN, the processes have been slow in SAARC, but the organisation has managed to build some level of trust and enter a phase of meaningful cooperation in a whole range of issues, particularly human welfare.

To deal with political matters, both Associations have followed the functionalist approach to regionalism. This scheme has greatly benefited ASEAN by keeping bilateral issues on the sidelines; however, not dealing 'directly' with contentious issues has its own costs in the form of longstanding disputes and slow progress in regional cooperation. Therefore, by choice, both ASEAN and SAARC have been on the slow track of regionalism by firstly waiting for the fruits of cooperation in functional areas before engaging in cooperation on issues of a sensitive nature, such as security matters. SAARC is still far behind in meaningful

cooperation in the security sector, but, from the study of ASEAN, it is clear that the functionalist approach is time consuming. It took ASEAN 14 years to create ASEANPOL, which was without a headquarters for nearly 20 years, and more than 40 years to initiate its first joint exercise between the militaries of the member states (2011). Nonetheless, the key in the ASEAN process has been the success of AFTA with its growing level of intra-regional trade. In a similar vein, SAARC needs to build greater trust through cooperation in trade and other functional areas leading to a relationship where the goal of cooperation in regional security becomes a reality.

CHAPTER TEN

CONCLUSION

“SAARC has provided South Asia with opportunities to work together in a spirit of accommodation, mutual understanding, shared responsibility and cooperation”.

A SAARC Secretariat official (2009, pers. comm.)

Researchers tend to evaluate the progress of SAARC, in comparison to other regional organisations, without considering the unique circumstances and the age of this forum. SAARC was set up 28 years after the birth of the European Community and 18 years after the establishment of ASEAN, and one decade after ECOWAS was created. SAARC is thus a relatively young regional forum whose evolution is far from complete.

While comparing SAARC with other regional institutions, particularly ASEAN, one cannot ignore the fact that it has suffered the most due to bilateral tensions between member states. The initial obstacles for SAARC were created because of the India-Sri Lanka dispute over India's involvement in Sri Lanka's Tamil insurgency. On several occasions, bilateral disputes led to the postponement of SAARC summits and the longest interval was between the tenth and eleventh summit from 1998 to 2002 owing to heightened India-Pakistan animosity. Consequently, in 26 years from 1985 to 2011, SAARC organised 17 summits, instead of one per year. These were not merely the suspension of meetings; the whole process was stalled because the heads of state generally grant approvals for agreements and projects during summits.

There are several inherent challenges to regionalism in South Asia. With reference to history, the legacy of mistrust has been constraining the processes of cooperation and peace in the region. Regional security has suffered due to the consequences of the bloody partition of 1947, the India-Pakistan rivalry, and the Cold War. Consequently, strategic discords in the form of political divergences, patterns of defence and security, and the hierarchical power structure of the region making it India-centric continue to have a bearing on SAARC. Compared to members in other regional organisations, the countries in SAARC are exceptionally diverse. Even between the two big regional countries, India and Pakistan, there are vast disparities in economy, defence, size and population. India's dominant position in the region will continue to have implications for both bilateral and multilateral relations of SAARC members.

Regionalism is quite a fragile process because of its dependency on several factors, particularly through the initial stages leading up to supra-nationalism. In South Asia, one often less cited challenge to SAARC is the ongoing process of nation/state building and its implications for multilateralism. According to Fawcett (2004:443), regionalism in developing regions suffers from the limited institutional capacity as member states give high priority to the principle of sovereignty and non-interference. This argument has merit in the South Asian context because all countries are undergoing nation/state building processes. In contrast, the approach has transformed from non-interference to flexible intervention in the domestic affairs of the member states, such as in the case of ASEAN – an organisation in the developing region – showing that regionalism is an ever-evolving process.

A critique of regionalism in South Asia should be linked to the objectives of SAARC. As demanded by its Charter, the Association has been promoting cooperation in the economic, social, cultural, technical and scientific fields. After this, among many other human security challenges, poverty was identified as a widespread problem confronted by the member states; therefore, it was believed that regional cooperation would be a logical response to common problems. Considering this, the performance of SAARC should be judged with reference to its mandate. Nonetheless, at this stage, social development has less preference than economic cooperation/development at SAARC. This could be because economic cooperation is considered the fastest route to prosperity, hence, is closely connected to the achievement of other objectives, such as human development.

The biggest strength of SAARC and its contribution towards regionalism is the level of consensus-building that the organisation has achieved on a whole range of issues. Considering this aspect and some actions, it could be said that the SAARC process has now matured. Similar to the case of regionalism in other parts of the world, such as Southeast Asia, regional cooperation gained momentum in the post-Cold War era. It cannot be said that the Association has completed its formative phase because that is ongoing, but it has since 2005 entered the implementation phase. A basic success for SAARC has been the foundation for regionalism that it has developed through a long consensus-building process. Thus, SAARC could be considered as an institution that has brought together its members to jointly address their collective challenges, and the organisation reaches agreement through systematic processes, including meetings at various levels. Many of these issues cannot be discussed thoroughly through the UN forums as many countries are involved in deliberations there.

Thus, SAARC is unique because it is exclusively focusing on South Asia. Consensus-building at SAARC has not been a conflict-free option. It should be recognised that the member states have their diverse interests and concerns with regard to the agenda of regional cooperation.

The continued journey of SAARC over the past 26 years is a manifestation of both successes and failures, and both have offered lessons for the growth of the regional forum, which is similar to the case of any such organisations. In each of the thematic chapters, the focus of this thesis was on evaluating SAARC's role in promoting cooperation on issues of human welfare and in security matters, especially since its so-called project implementation phase in 2005.

Economic cooperation, not only in theory but also at the SAARC Secretariat, is considered the backbone of regionalism. Through certain regional trade agreements, SAARC has slowly begun the process of increasing the volume of intra-regional trade among the member states, although such trade, as a percentage of the region's total trade, seems to have stagnated at five percent. The volume of intra-regional trade depends on a lot of factors, the level and stage of cooperation, number of member states and their economic capabilities, and the potential for trade within the region. Due to these factors, the volume of intra-regional trade in South Asia has been small in comparison to the EU and ASEAN. In the European context, it is relevant to recall the case of regional experience. From the Coal and Steel Community in 1951, became an Economic Community in 1957 and eventually an Economic Union or the EU in 1993, more than 40 years after following the first tentative steps of economic cooperation. In contrast, in terms of the level of cooperation, SAARC is yet to fully become a free trade region after the implementation of the SAFTA agreement in 2006.

The process of economic cooperation towards an economic union is a slow process and more so in an asymmetrical and unstable region like South Asia. For example, the India-Pakistan rivalry has been constraining the full implementation of SAFTA. Consequently, trade under SAFTA has fallen short of its estimated potential. Furthermore, the potential for greater economic cooperation among the smaller countries around India continues to be restrained by the fear that their economies will be absorbed by the growing Indian economy. There are plans and agreements on trade in services and energy sectors, but no actions have yet been taken for the above-mentioned reasons. Thus, under the present political environment of South Asia, there will be a gap between the progress and potential (Banerjee 1999:305).

Considering the ongoing difficulties, this might be the case for cooperation in the economic sector until or unless SAARC fully implements its agenda in the areas of transport connectivity, customs and taxation matters, and trade in services and energy.

Considering developments at both bilateral and regional levels, economic integration seems to be progressing in South Asia. By their nature, both bilateral FTAs and SAFTA are complementary to each other as they aim at trade liberalisation to benefit from the potential of trade at respective levels. It is encouraging to see that despite having apprehensions about the strength of the Indian economy, smaller countries (viz., Bangladesh, Bhutan, Afghanistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka) have reached bilateral trade agreements with India. The benefits of these agreements might transform the attitudes of small countries towards economic cooperation with India, especially at the regional level via SAARC. However, this attitudinal transformation is likely to take some time to manifest. Consequently, the process of economic integration will remain slow and the realisation of the dream of economic union in South Asia might face further delays beyond the SAARC Secretariat deadline of 2015.

In terms of learning from lessons, the SAARC process has been evolving. Due to some recent developments, regionalism in South Asia has become more heterogeneous with the increasing involvement of non-state actors. For example, since 2011, there has been the South Asia Forum (SAF), which brings together multiple actors, such as business leaders, public figures, academics, politicians and civil society activists from the region to discuss the future of ongoing economic integration in South Asia. Unlike its approach in the recent past, SAARC is now more open to engaging with NGOs to implement and even to formulate its action plans. However, the Association is still cautious in its collaboration with NGOs and relies on its member states to take the responsibility of selecting NGOs from their respective countries. To depict the level of commitment for projects on socio-economic and infrastructural development in South Asia, the SAARC member states have demonstrated a great deal of seriousness towards regionalism by launching its own funding mechanism – the SAARC Development Fund (SDF). Even though SDF is yet to reach its full volume of US\$300 million because only Bhutan and India have paid their contribution, regional projects on the socio-economic empowerment of home-based workers have taken off through a reputable Indian NGO, the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA).

By virtue of SAARC being able to implement some projects, particularly via SDF, there have been greater engagements of external actors in the SAARC project. In this regard, the support of China for SDF and Australia's support of agricultural development in South Asia is notable. Moreover, South Korea, another SAARC Observer, has been providing valuable training programmes to officials of the SAARC countries. Prior to the so-called implementation phase at SAARC, there was only the engagement of Japan with SAARC, but that could be because the Association then was very wary of any cooperation with external actors. Nonetheless, unlike ASEAN, SAARC lacks an effective mechanism to engage with its observers.

In terms of the evaluation of SAARC's implementation phase, there is more than just an internal funding mechanism – SDF – due to the worthwhile initiative of SAU. The university, still in its infancy, has shown what SAARC can achieve with the desired level of political will in providing the required human and financial resources. In this case, most of the elements of support came from New Delhi, and SAU became operational in 2010. However, there is still a long way to go for the university to fully attain its objectives.

The success of a regional mechanism could be measured through the level of political promise towards regionalism, and that could be seen through the execution of regional projects at local levels, and investment of resources (financial and human). The SAARC process has enjoyed a mixed level of political commitment from its member states. Apart from Afghanistan, the members have shown great enthusiasm in hosting SAARC regional centres and other mechanisms, and even in holding an increasing number of meetings. The case of Afghanistan is unique because the country is entangled by political and economic instabilities. Hosting regular and at times high level meetings requires many resources, both human and financial, but most of the time the members have not hesitated to demonstrate their devotion to regionalism. However, insufficient support is reflected in the form of lack of financial and human resources at most of the regional institutions, and this continues to hamper the progress of those valuable regional institutions.

SAARC regional centres are at different levels of institutionalisation. For example, the SAARC Energy Centre (Islamabad) lacks political support to execute its often over-ambitious project proposals, such as the SAARC Energy Ring. With regard to energy trade, there have been differences on certain project proposals, in particular the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline

project, because of the differences between India and Pakistan on the terms of the agreement and the US opposition to this deal. Then there are regional institutions, especially the SAARC Agriculture Centre (Dhaka) which has been heavily dependent on external support to implement some projects. The SAARC Forestry Centre (Bhutan) has just been set up. Nonetheless, SDMC, based in New Delhi, and SHRDC, based in Islamabad, are regarded as the most active regional centres of the Association due to the frequency of their seminars, training programmes, research projects, and publications. Both SDMC and SHRDC are different from other SAARC centres because they enjoy a reasonable amount of human and financial resources, and they are at an advanced stage of development.

This thesis has attempted to demonstrate that SAARC as an institution has been transformed, and many factors have been working towards this. In its project phase, SAARC demonstrated a great deal of creativity in a whole range of issues and SDF, SFB and SAU are examples of that. Although SFB it is yet to be operational because of Afghanistan's delay in ratifying its charter. Another factor is the momentum shown by SAARC. The Association holds over 180 meetings per year on a variety of topics and this indicates the degree of enthusiasm for regionalism in South Asia. This is arguably the result of the SAARC's project phase. Regular meetings provide opportunities for member states to understand the concerns and capacities of each other.

At the time of SAARC's inception, there were concerns over the involvement of extra-regional powers in the organisation. This mindset was dominated, especially in New Delhi, by the ongoing Cold War. India wanted to control the involvement of external players in the region. Due to this, SAARC remained introvert for a long time, until the organisation finally opened up with not only the inclusion of Afghanistan as a permanent member but also by giving observer status to eight countries and the EU. This understanding of SAARC is crucial because it indicates the circumstances under which the Association has not only endured but also evolved.

The expansion of SAARC by including Afghanistan has had both positive and negative implications. In terms of benefits, SAARC might now be able to realistically develop plans for energy trade with Central Asia, but that depends on the security situation in Afghanistan. There are, however, many negatives associated with the membership of Afghanistan, which is another unstable country. The biggest challenge is to integrate Afghanistan into the SAARC

process as soon as possible, because delays will continue to hamper the progress of regionalism. In addition, it has added another bilateral dimension with reference to pending territorial disputes in South Asia, for example, the Afghanistan-Pakistan conflict over the Durand Line. There are some direct implications for SAARC because due to the country's aid-dependent economy and the political situation in the country, Afghanistan has not been able to keep up with the momentum of regionalism in South Asia.

SAARC, being an inter-governmental organisation, is not free from domestic challenges faced by its member states because it predominantly depends on human and financial resources provided by its members. SAARC has faced challenges, both directly and indirectly, in the form of political and economic crises in some of its member states. For example, the transition from authoritarian rule to democracy and the economic crisis caused by the 2008 global economic recession forced the Maldives to withdraw from holding the scheduled SAARC Summit in 2009. The processes of disaster management and reconstruction have internally occupied Pakistan under the burden of massive natural disasters. Then there is Afghanistan, which is feeling the pressure of the pace of the SAARC process because participation in its meetings and financial contributions towards the organisation's institutions are difficult for the youngest member, being under much economic and political hardship.

The chaotic situations in member states, either caused by natural disasters, political turmoil, ethnic and political disputes, or economic crises, have taken their toll on the SAARC process. Just when there are indications of the Association heading in the right direction, most of the member states have been caught up in their own problems. This could be a reason that no SAARC members, except for Bhutan and India, have yet contributed towards SDF. This might further delay the implementation of some much-needed grassroots level projects in socio-economic and infrastructural development in the region. There is no doubt that big projects need more financial resources and most, if not all, SAARC regional centres are under-resourced to successfully execute many of their creative projects.

Funding from external sources comes for a fixed period; therefore, in some regional centres, little has happened. For example, the SAARC Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS Centre (Kathmandu) was funded by CIDA for three years. However, once the funding ended the centre reverted to its previous state of inactivity. Currently, the SAARC Agriculture Centre in Dhaka has launched some training programmes under a project funded by Australia, but again

this is for a period of only three years. After the initiation of certain projects, it is the responsibility of the SAARC members to sustain those meaningful projects and ideally, this could be done via SDF. It is important to mention that some inter-governmental organisations, such as the UN, World Bank, and Asian Development Bank, have been supporting SAARC over a long period. This support has mainly maintained some level of activity in SAARC institutions, either through training activities or research projects, or both.

An important goal of SAARC has been to promote cooperation among the members in international forums. There are examples of SAARC states presenting their common stands on issues of climate change and global economic recession through their regional forum. The common policy on climate change is strong on rhetoric demanding that developed industrial states bear the burden of climate change in vulnerable regions like South Asia. These are just the first steps towards SAARC becoming a global bargaining power. The impact of such joint policies cannot be measured, as global multilateral dialogues on this issue have not reached a consensus, although the internal processes at SAARC show that it has been instrumental in reaching this level of consensus among the member states. This suggests that the members are beginning to place more value on SAARC. This is contrary to the argument of Prasad (1989:17) who thinks that resolution of bilateral disputes is necessary for cooperation among the SAARC members at global multilateral levels.

The change in the attitudes of the member states towards SAARC has not occurred in a vacuum. Both small and big players to achieve their desired objectives at global levels have guided the agenda of SAARC on climate change. Particularly, on the issue of climate change, smaller countries have found multilateralism useful to make their voices heard. For example, the Maldives is a member of AOSIS to raise joint concerns on global warming and its implications for island states. With reference to SAARC's upbeat agenda on climate change, the role of India, which has many dynamics, cannot be ignored. India is a big player in global negotiations on climate change and to advance its agenda has used multilateral forums, such as the BASIC group. In the context of SAARC, both big and small states have used the regional forum for support at global multilateral levels; therefore, it could be said that the challenges posed by globalisation have produced some positive consequences for regionalism in South Asia.

The reasons why SAARC has survived through all the turbulent times could be that its member states find it a useful forum to achieve their geostrategic objectives in South Asia. Through SAARC, Pakistan has been aiming to limit India's influence in South Asia by establishing closer ties with other SAARC countries. Since Pakistan has joined SAARC, there have been accomplishments for the country in terms of better bilateral relations with Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Another example is of Sri Lanka, which joined SAARC out of economic interests and has benefitted from SAFTA and bilateral FTAs with two major economies in the region – India and Pakistan. India, which under-utilised SAARC for over two decades probably to avoid being perceived as a regional hegemon, has recently begun to take the leading role in providing the Association with much-needed thrust. New Delhi's vision of taking the leadership of SAARC is linked to a long-term goal of becoming a global power, particularly through permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council.

The analysis of the role of India in SAARC and South Asia needs close scrutiny because it is the major regional power and an emerging global player. In recent years, New Delhi has been showing a lot of enthusiasm for SAARC by putting in resources for certain regional initiatives. A plausible reason is its changed economic status and an intention to take the leadership of the region. India's leadership of SAARC is accepted by all the member states. Although Pakistan is apprehensive of the India's growing interest in the Association, it is going with the tide of regionalism. In a way, this reflects that Islamabad also has no direct objection to the Indian dominance in South Asian regionalism. The approach of New Delhi in SAARC has been cautious because it has not thrown its weight around on each issue. For example, India has been a strong promoter of certain human development initiatives, such as SDF and SAU. Also, recently India has shown interest in financially supporting regional projects to address the implications of climate change. Nonetheless, New Delhi desires some serious regional measures against transnational crimes, such as terrorism, but it has not tried to create a supra-national institution within SAARC for this purpose because that approach could have been viewed by other members as exercising its dominance. India has tried to keep a low profile in SAARC – similar to the case of Indonesia in the ASEAN – by often accommodating the concerns of smaller countries. However, India needs to do significantly more to help SAARC achieve its goals for the betterment of the people of South Asia. It is not about India making a U-turn on bilateralism as New Delhi has a right to choose what is in its

best interests, but it would be helpful if she balanced bilateralism and regionalism in South Asia by injecting more resources into SAARC.

With reference to cooperation in security matters, the progress of SAARC has been limited, mainly due to bilateral divergences. On the controversial issue of terrorism, given the bilateral tensions between India and Pakistan, SAARC has managed to only develop agreements in this area. The organisation has generated some consensus for cooperation against terrorism, as evident in the SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism (1987) but has faced delays in implementing its agenda on anti-terrorism. In terms of actions towards cooperation in security matters, there are a few ineffective and under-resourced mechanisms, namely STOMD and SDOMD. The lack of cooperation in this area is also caused by the level of distrust mainly between India and Pakistan. Cooperation in this area demands working relations between security forces, intelligence agencies, and law enforcement bodies (police). With the current level of animosity between India and Pakistan, there is little scope for the desired level of collaboration between their security forces and intelligence agencies. In spite of these roadblocks, the work of SAARC in this area is ongoing and has been lifted from the meetings of police chiefs to the dialogues among the interior/home ministers.

Cooperation in security matters also suffers from lack of political commitment and partially due to the indifferent approach of the SAARC Secretariat. For example, there have been six meetings among the police chiefs to finalise the agreement on SAARCPOL, but no decision has been reached due to deep differences among the members. As far as the issue of human trafficking goes, the Secretariat has a limited approach, considering this a social problem. Therefore, the Task Force is not consulted during meetings of either police chiefs or interior/home ministers. Perhaps this is because it is also comprised of NGOs and SAARC does not want to open the doors to its sensitive discussions to civil society actors.

In South Asia, there has been a strong correlation between human security and traditional security because some countries in the region have bilateral tensions over refugees, illegal economic immigrants, human trafficking and drug smuggling. SAARC's human security approach and its development model is perhaps the only politically feasible regional schema that will suit the countries and the people of South Asia. The development model needs patience and resources to allow SAARC opportunities to benefit South Asians through its actions in the area of human security. This approach will also facilitate the SAARC process

through identity formation, something that is completely missing at this stage. It is also evident that bilateral issues continue to hinder regionalism in South Asia, but attempts at institutionalising conflict resolution are likely to further slow the SAARC mechanism because age-old conflicts might still need decades of negotiations to come to any conclusion. The leadership at the SAARC Secretariat is of the view that the Association is at too immature a stage to take any steps in the direction of becoming a conflict resolution body or a political community, such as Naik's (2004) proposal of SOSA.

The neorealist approach on regional security recognises that common threat perceptions are indispensable for the success of a regional organisation (Vayrynen 2003:35). Although this was the case with ASEAN, this theory does not fit in the South Asian context, if only because of the very existence of SAARC itself. There were different motivations behind the initial moves for regional cooperation in South Asia. For smaller states, grievances against India, a regional power, disposed them favourably towards the SAARC proposal. Others wanted to look beyond India for strategic and economic relations with other South Asian countries not bordering them. SAARC has never been a response to external security threats. This led Inayat (2007:17) to argue that due to the non-existence of an extra-regional security threat, South Asian countries were slow in forming a regional organisation. It is also questionable whether common threat perceptions have to be in the realm of traditional security because the evolution and progress of SAARC validates the point that joint human security challenges can pave the way for regional integration.

This thesis has provided ample evidence to suggest that regionalism in a developing region, such as South Asia, has progressed through inter-related phases in the areas of human security. The leaders have shown a greater commitment to regional cooperation on human security than traditional security. The case of SAARC has proven that a regional organisation created and sustained by a human security agenda is capable of being productive without the perception of a common external threat. South Asia has many problems, such as poverty, malnutrition, disasters, poor health, illiteracy and intra-and inter-state conflicts, without the added stimulus of extra-regional threats to establish a bond.

SAARC in itself is an ongoing producer of CBMs. The forum has been utilised, albeit informally, to alleviate tensions between SAARC member states, mainly those involving India and Pakistan. At SAARC forums, not only the leaders of member states but also foreign

ministers and foreign secretaries along with other officials have been able to meet their counterparts from other member states. This would otherwise not have been possible given the circumstances, such as the ongoing tension between India and Pakistan following the 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai. In the aftermath of the Mumbai incident that derailed the process of bilateral dialogues, the prime ministers of India and Pakistan met thrice at multilateral forums in less than three years, including twice during SAARC summits. By staying within its limits vis-à-vis its agenda, the Association has demonstrated some level of flexibility in addressing the issue of bilateral tensions between its member states. By keeping contentious issues aside, the idea behind SAARC is to pave the way for sustainable regionalism in South Asia. For regional cooperation to be sound and lasting, the regional leadership must not only keep their disagreements on issues and problems separate from SAARC, they must also develop an ideology of cooperation as the chief basis for conflict resolution (Khan 1991:32). This could be done informally, considering that conflict resolution is not on the agenda. ASEAN employs a similar approach to transform bilateral disputes.

It was the vision of the SAARC founders that cooperation in non-controversial areas would create the necessary environment for greater political understanding. At SAARC, it is believed that the functionalist approach is the viable route; functionalism asserts that cooperation on uncontroversial areas will help promote peace and harmony in South Asia. The current leadership at the SAARC Secretariat also shares this perspective. According to SAARC officials, the organisation has reached a point, similar to ASEAN, where its meetings are held in a friendly environment – crucial to developing a consensus on such things as anti-terrorism. Thus, irrespective of its limitations, the functionalist approach seems to have worked in the case of SAARC. Nonetheless, the success of this approach greatly relies on the political relations among the member states.

SAARC, being an inter-governmental and non-supranational organisation, ultimately depends on political decision-making to develop a consensus about promoting interdependence in economic, socio-cultural and security spheres. As inter-governmentalism involves the national interests of countries, policymakers tend to carefully negotiate with other stakeholders to find a common ground for cooperation, without compromising their national preferences (Dash 2008:11). Hence, the journey towards regionalism has been arduous in South Asia. For regional cooperation to be successful, states in a particular region should be convinced that

their national interests will be served better through their regional forum (Brar 2003:32). However, this has been a massive challenge.

Furthermore, this analysis has demonstrated that regionalism cannot be observed in isolation from regional dynamics in both human and traditional security. The separate chapters on human security issues in this thesis have shown that, in terms of the ongoing human costs, the issues of poverty, hunger, natural disasters, et cetera have severe consequences for the member states, often more than inter-state and intra-state conflicts in South Asia. However, conflicts and human security are inter-connected and affect each other. Regional actions on human security have been easier and more achievable, but have also facilitated future cooperation on traditional security in South Asia, for example, by creating goodwill for regional conflict resolution. There are various issues, such as climate change, cross-border migration of people, the global financial crisis, terrorism, HIV/AIDS and others that are beyond the control of individual states; therefore, there has been an increasing interest in multilateralism from developing countries.

Even under the most challenging circumstances, SAARC has been evolving over the course of the past two and a half decades. Since 2005, some realistic, substantial and timely frameworks to address human security challenges have dominated the Association. In some of these areas, SAARC has implemented region-wide projects demonstrating its commitment and the scope of regional outreach. Cooperation in human security areas is yet to reach its full capacity and most of the projects either are in the pipeline or yet to initiated on ground. However, there are some visible indications that cooperation in human security areas has led to some serious deliberations on sensitive issues, such as transnational crime; however, those processes have thus far not produced any results in the form institutionalisation. Nonetheless, as explored during the fieldwork, some SAARC Secretariat officials believe that cooperation in less sensitive areas would prepare the ground for greater cooperation in delicate matters, particularly anti-terrorism.

Over the years, SAARC has become a worthwhile institution, promoting greater understanding and cooperation in the region. There is a slow progress but a sustained interest in the Association. It is important to start with commonalities that transcend any barriers. This has been the mission of SAARC, to address common problems to enhance the scope of regional cooperation. SAARC has been successful in this endeavour because the level of

regional integration is low. Nevertheless, a higher degree of cooperation is a key to sustaining not only a regional organisation but also to moving forward towards regional integration.

In summary, SAARC is making progress in the breadth of issues it addresses on its agenda. For example, the progress made in moving from agreements to the implementation phase and particularly with regard to frequent interactions among the member states has been generating much needed confidence. The various forms of progress are most evident in the less controversial areas of human security, such as poverty alleviation, health and food security, and higher education. In addition, there has been a transformation in the attitudes of the member states towards the Association due to the global, regional and domestic dynamics faced by South Asia.

The expansion of SAARC has offered both opportunities and challenges. The membership of Afghanistan has slowed the progress of regionalism because it faces serious economic and political challenges. This has created difficulties in fully integrating the new member into the ongoing pace of the SAARC process. However, practical relations with observers have proved to be fruitful for the Association in implementing some significant projects.

Assessment of SAARC's progress during its 26-year existence indicates substantial omissions in its agenda, notably in sensitive areas relating to traditional security. Paradoxically, this approach of putting tricky issues on the back burner is in part a key to the organisation's ability to meet and negotiate on other matters of great significance to human welfare in South Asia.

The functionalist approach to regionalism is a slow process and the achievements of certain stages, particularly towards economic integration, have taken decades in other regions, such as the EU. Functionalism is more time-consuming in developing regions home to traditional rivals and greater asymmetry among the member states, which is typically the case of SAARC.

Notwithstanding enthusiastic commitments reflected in agreements and action plans, there is a gulf between rhetoric and implementation. There are still major limitations of substance in the areas where SAARC is working in terms of implementation and outcomes. Insufficient political commitment to regionalism is reflected in inadequate funding and human resources

dedicated to SAARC projects. This means that, despite often being based on bright ideas, SAARC projects are very limited in scope and impact.

The lack of commitment can be explained by several factors. The one most focused on by other analysts is the lack of trust (or periodic outright hostility) between state parties, especially India and Pakistan. This has merit, yet other obstacles are equally pressing; these include: insufficient revenue on the part of poor member states; competing priorities for funds and attention in domestic and foreign policy (SAARC is not perceived as a major vehicle for policy); crisis culture due to natural disasters and/or conflicts; and a remarkable lack of continuity and skills in member countries' staffing of SAARC which affects all sectors.

10.1 The way forward

The idea of this section is to make some general suggestions, not specifically dealt with in the body of the thesis, which contains numerous suggestions in thematic chapters.

All stakeholders have some degree of responsibility to enhance regionalism in South Asia, but India and Pakistan have a greater role to play, being the biggest countries in the region. These two countries also have economic capabilities that can contribute towards a successful regional community. Nevertheless, to benefit from win-win opportunities created by SAARC, each member state has to go through certain reforms in socio-economic, legal and political spheres.

Faith in SAARC depends on the trust of member states in each other, and attitudes in the policy headquarters have to change for the Association to act in an amicable environment. One hurdle in this regard is the perceived, and perhaps real, Indian hegemony in South Asia. Due to this, the smaller countries have shared their grievances against India, and that often through the SAARC forum. Although India does not completely dominate SAARC, it does bully its neighbours in bilateral relations. Since the departure of the British Raj, India has perceived herself as the only great power in the region and thus India has often been found intervening in the internal affairs of smaller neighbours, such as Bhutan, Nepal, the Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. New Delhi needs a policy change to address the concerns of its neighbours.

For SAARC to give reality to the ultimate objective of a South Asian Union, the organisation needs to invest more energy and resources into areas that exist within its parameters, such as the people-to-people contacts and cultural exchanges. This could be done through SAU – crucial for identity formation. The free movement of people within the region is still very restricted due to national visa policies. SAARC's visa exemption scheme has an extremely limited scope. More needs to be achieved to fully connect the region through all modes of transportation, in order to facilitate the movement of people and goods across the borders.

SAARC needs to continue proving its value in maintaining sustainable development and stability in South Asia through more realistic action plans and implementation of its projects, as well as through full utilisation of the existing ones. For example, the facilities of the SAARC Food Security Reserve were never utilised even when the member states were suffering from a severe food shortage. Similar is the case with the SAARC Food Bank, for which all the formalities have been addressed, but to date it has not been operational. With these delays, some of the committed member states might lose interest in these otherwise worthy initiatives.

Bureaucrats serving at their foreign ministries in the SAARC member states are not fully trained to promote cohesion in national and regional policy and implementation. Therefore, SAARC needs to organise training programs in the area of regional cooperation for the civil servants holding positions on SAARC Desks in its member states, and should encourage countries to recommend people from these Desks to the SAARC Secretariat as state representatives. This practice could increase the overall skills and hence the capacity of the SAARC Secretariat and national liaison Desks. The proposed training programmes could be offered through SAU and SHRDC. With reference to integrating professionals into SAARC, the organisation needs to learn from both the EU and ASEAN. The EU and ASEAN have developed systems by which dedicated professionals are recruited by the secretariats and affiliated centres. At the initial stage, the SAARC Secretariat needs to be transformed into a professional body.

10.2 Future research

This study provides a launching pad for future research on regionalism in South Asia. SAARC members have been participating in other sub-regional, regional and global

multilateral forums to achieve their desired objectives in different areas. For example, for security in SCO and ARF, for economic cooperation in BIMSTEC, ECO and ASEAN, to raise concerns on climate change via the BASIC Group, and AOSIS, et cetera. India, being an emerging economic power has been an active member of BRICS along with other emerging powers, namely Brazil, Russia, China and South Africa. As SAARC works on most, if not all, of these issues dealt with by other multilateral forums of which its members are a part, it is important to investigate the impact of those mechanisms on South Asian regionalism or vice versa. This could be done by comparing member states' roles in SAARC against their roles in other multilateral forums: Do they behave differently and if so why?

As the SAARC process is becoming heterogeneous through the increasing involvement of non-state actors, either through SAF or via SDF, there is a need to fully investigate the process of regionalisation in South Asia. Further research could provide some valuable insights into the role of non-state actors in promoting regionalism in South Asia by also suggesting ways in which SAARC could benefit from greater regionalisation.

The recent developments at SAARC demonstrate that the leadership of a capable member state has been required to provide the Association with much-needed stimulus to implement its agenda. In the case of SAARC, the leading role of India has paved the way for the execution of projects, such as SAU and SDF, thereby changing the age-old outlook of the organisation. With India its main financial supporter and showing increasing interest in the organisation, SAARC now appears more active than ever. Considering this, there is a need to thoroughly investigate the role of regional leadership with reference to regionalism in South Asia through a comparative analysis with other regions, such as South America. The role of India in SAARC could be compared with that of Brazil in the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), and Australia in the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF).

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Appendix 1: Research Questionnaire

1. Has SAARC facilitated and improved communication and cooperation among its member states? If so, in what ways?
2. Has SAARC contributed to peace and security in the region? In what ways?
3. What issues have been prominent on the SAARC agenda? Why have these issues been first to be addressed?
4. In which policy areas has SAARC been most successful in furthering regional cooperation? In what ways?
5. Given their significance and transnational nature, could SAARC do more on human security issues, such as food, water and energy?
6. What measures has SAARC adopted to tackle climate change? Could SAARC do more to address climate change mitigation and adaptation? Should SAARC develop a regional position to present at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)?
7. Has SAARC been employed as a means of collective bargaining power in global forums? Has it been effective? If not, should this role be more of a focus for the organisation?
8. What kinds of important issues have been absent from SAARC's agenda to date? What are the reasons for these omissions?
9. What are the key problems, tensions or obstacles constraining regional cooperation in South Asia?
10. What are the key challenges for SAARC at organisational and diplomatic levels?
11. Have the unequal size, power and influence of different member states affected the efficiency of SAARC? If so in what ways?
12. How has the membership of Afghanistan been affecting SAARC?
13. What is the role and impact of SAARC observers such as China, Iran, the EU, the US and Australia, on regionalism in South Asia?
14. Have sub-regional initiatives among select members of SAARC been positive, negative or neutral in their influence on regionalism via SAARC?
15. How have bilateral disputes and conflict between members affected the nature and performance of SAARC?

16. Is there potentially a role for SAARC to promote confidence-building measures between its members to reduce bilateral tensions and conflict? If so, in what way?
17. Is there scope for SAARC to address regional security concerns relating to terrorism, illegal weapons trafficking and other transnational crime? If so what kinds of measures could it promote?
18. Is there scope for SAARC to address the critical problems of religious extremism and separatism within and across member states, and if so how?
19. Is it possible for SAARC to constrain regional proliferation of conventional arms and arms racing? If so, what kinds of measures could it promote?
20. Is there scope for SAARC to constrain regional proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, and to reduce insecurity arising from existing arsenals? If so, what kinds of measures could it promote for non-proliferation and arms control?
21. Have SAARC's socioeconomic initiatives promoted peace and security? Could deeper cooperation on human security pave the way for future cooperation on traditional security issues?
22. What are the prospects for a South Asian union? Moreover, how would you envisage the scope and limitations of such a union?
23. Niaz A. Naik proposed the idea of a Security Organisation in South Asia (SOSA) similar to the EU model (OSCE). Would South Asia benefit from such an organisation? What would be the likely scope and limitations of such an organisation? What are the prospects of realising it? What timeframe would be realistic?
24. How do South Asia's experience and achievements compare with regionalism elsewhere? Why is it different?
25. What lessons can SAARC learn from other regional organisations such as the EU, ASEAN, and GCC?
26. What lessons can South Asia learn from models for regional security organisations elsewhere, such as OSCE, and ARF?
27. Are there any specific projects implemented by your government in the areas of non-traditional and traditional security, and do you think there are any best practices in particular areas that could be shared with the bigger South Asian community, for instance through SAARC?

28. Do you have any concluding thoughts about regional security cooperation in South Asia and how it might be advanced?

Appendix 2: A list of research participants

1. Ahmad, Shakeel, 15 October 2009, Project Associate, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad. Interview duration: 25 minutes.
2. Ahmadzada, Aziz, 10 September 2009, Afghanistan Director and Head of the Division of Media and Integration of Afghanistan, SAARC Secretariat, Kathmandu. Interview duration: 85 minutes.
3. Akhtar, Shaheen, 21 October 2009, Research Fellow, Institute of Regional Studies, Islamabad. Interview duration: 60 minutes.
4. Akram, Sarah, 17 November 2009, Research Fellow, Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad. Interview duration: 20 minutes.
5. Basnyat M. S. Niranjana, 3 September 2009, Nepal Director and Head of the Division of Information & Poverty Alleviation, SAARC Secretariat, Kathmandu. Interview duration: 150 minutes.
6. Cheema, P. Iqbal, 23 October 2009, Dean, Faculty of Contemporary Studies, National Defense University, Islamabad. Interview duration: 80 minutes.
7. Dahal, D. Raj, 12 September 2009, Head, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Kathmandu. Interview duration: 150 minutes.
8. Dastgir, Ghulam, 2 September 2009, Pakistan Director and Head of the Division of Energy, Tourism & Science, SAARC Secretariat, Kathmandu. Interview duration: 130 minutes.
9. _____, 9 September 2009, Director and Head of the Division Agriculture & Rural Development, SAARC Secretariat, Kathmandu. Interview duration: 50 minutes.
10. _____, 8 September 2009, Director and Environment, Biotechnology, SAARC Secretariat, Kathmandu. Interview duration: 180 minutes.
11. Hashmi, A. Saleem, 21 October 2009, Senior Research Analyst, Institute of Regional Studies, Islamabad. Interview duration: 60 minutes.
12. Karmacharya, B. K., 18 September 2009, Consultant on Regional Cooperation, Asian Development Bank (ADB), Kathmandu. Interview duration: 80 minutes.
13. _____, 20 October 2009, SAARC Human Resources Development Centre, Islamabad. Interview duration: 120 minutes.
14. Khan, R. Ahmad, 22 October 2009, Senior Research Fellow, Islamabad Policy Research Institute, Islamabad. Interview duration: 150 minutes.

15. _____, 15 September 2009, Director and Head of the Division of Economic, Trade & Finance, Security aspects & Culture, SAARC Secretariat, Kathmandu. Interview duration: 40 minutes.
16. Murthy, Laxmi, 23 September 2009, Associate Editor, *Himal Southasian*, Kathmandu. Interview duration: 60 minutes.
17. _____, 21 September 2009, Embassy of Pakistan, Kathmandu. Interview duration: 75 minutes.
18. Niroula, S. Prashad, 14 September 2009, Program Officer, South Asian Forum for Human Rights, Kathmandu. Interview duration: 40 minutes.
19. Pokharel, G. Prasad, 23 September 2009, Director, Institute of Foreign Affairs, Kathmandu. Interview duration: 120 minutes.
20. _____, 17 September 2009, Embassy of Pakistan, Kathmandu. Interview duration: 30 minutes.
21. Rahman, Fazal, 16 November 2009, Director, China Study Centre, Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad. Interview duration: 60 minutes.
22. _____, 8 September 2009, Director and Head of the Division of Human Resources Development, Security aspects & Culture, SAARC Secretariat, Kathmandu. Interview duration: 30 minutes.
23. Rana, A. Muhammad, 7 September 2009, Non-Diplomatic Minister from Pakistan to Nepal, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu. Interview duration: 20 minutes.
24. _____, 22 October 2009, Director, SAARC Energy Centre, Islamabad. Interview duration: 15 minutes.
25. Sattar, Noman, 23 October 2009, Head of Department of Nuclear Politics & Strategic Studies, National Defense University, Islamabad. Interview duration: 60 minutes.
26. Sharma, S. Kant, 15 September 2009, Secretary General, SAARC Secretariat, Kathmandu. Interview duration: 20 minutes.
27. _____, 15 September 2009, Personal Assistant to Director India, SAARC Secretariat, Kathmandu. Interview duration: 20 minutes.
28. Shifau, Hassan, 4 September 2009, Maldives Director, SAARC Secretariat, Kathmandu. Interview duration: 70 minutes.
29. _____, 19 November 2009, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamabad. Interview duration: 15 minutes.

Appendix 3: List of SAARC Summits from 1985 to 2011

Number	Year	Host country	Location
First	1985	Bangladesh	Dhaka
Second	1986	India	Bangalore
Third	1987	Nepal	Kathmandu
Fourth	1988	Pakistan	Islamabad
Fifth	1990	Maldives	Malé
Sixth	1991	Sri Lanka	Colombo
Seventh	1993	Bangladesh	Dhaka
Eight	1995	India	New Delhi
Ninth	1997	Maldives	Malé
Tenth	1998	Sri Lanka	Colombo
Eleventh	2002	Nepal	Kathmandu
Twelfth	2004	Pakistan	Islamabad
Thirteenth	2005	Bangladesh	Dhaka
Fourteenth	2007	India	New Delhi
Fifteenth	2008	Sri Lanka	Colombo
Sixteenth	2010	Bhutan	Thimphu
Seventeenth	2011	Maldives	Addu

Appendix 4: Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) of SAARC with international organisations, as of 2008.

1. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) 1993;
2. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) 1993;
3. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 1995;
4. United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (UNESCAP) 1994;
5. United Nations Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) or currently the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) 1995;
6. European Commission (EC) 1996;
7. International Telecommunication Union (ITU) 1997;
8. Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) 1997;
9. World Health Organisation (WHO) 2000;
10. United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM) 2001;
11. Physikalisch-Technische Bundesanstalt (PTB) 2003;
12. World Bank (WB) 2004;
13. Asian Development Bank (ADB) 2004;
14. Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) 2004;
15. South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP) 2004;
16. Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) 2004;
17. Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre (ADPC) 2006;
18. Japan Special Fund (SJSF) 2006;
19. Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP) 2007;
20. United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) 2007;
21. United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN/ISDR) 2008; and
22. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) 2008.

Source: SAARC. 2008, *A brief on SAARC*, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Secretariat, Kathmandu.

Appendix 5: Major export items of SAARC countries

Country	Major export items
Bangladesh	Jute and jute products, tea, leather and leather goods, ready-made garments, fertilisers, newsprint, spices, frozen fish and shrimps, vegetables and seafood.
Bhutan	Timber, dolomite, spices, calcium carbide, gypsum, electricity, cement, fresh and canned fruits, juices, and alcoholic beverages.
India	Agricultural products, pearls, jewellery, clothing, machinery, vehicles, metal products, tea, mate, iron core, cotton products, petroleum, precious stones, and handicrafts.
Maldives	Dried skipjack, canned fish, frozen skipjack, shark liver oil, salted dried skipjack and reef fish, apparel and clothing accessories, and red coral.
Nepal	Cotton garments, woollen goods and carpet, oil seeds, pulses, hides and skin, Niger seeds, jute and jute products, handicrafts, few food products (noodles and beverages).
Pakistan	Raw cotton, rice, cotton cloths, cotton yarn, synthetic textiles, garments, hosiery, carpets and rugs, leather, leather products, fish and fish products.
Sri Lanka	Tea, rubber, ready-made garments, gems, marine, foods, semi precious stones, coconut oil and coconut products.

Note: This table has been taken from the following source: Guru-Gharana, K.K. 1997, 'SAARC Preferential Trading Agreement (SAPTA): Problems and Prospects', in *South Asia Economic Cooperation: Problems and Prospects*, S.S. Rana (ed), Academic Research and Development Action Council, Kathmandu, pp. 51-52.

Appendix 6: SAARC Development Goals (SDGs) 2007-2012

Livelihood SDGs

- Goal 1 Eradication of Hunger Poverty
- Goal 2 Halve proportion of people in Poverty by 2010
- Goal 3 Ensure adequate nutrition and dietary improvement for the poor
- Goal 4 Ensure a robust pro-poor growth process
- Goal 5 Strengthen connectivity of poorer regions and of poor as social groups
- Goal 6 Reduce social and institutional vulnerabilities of the poor, women, and children
- Goal 7 Ensure access to affordable justice
- Goal 8 Ensure effective participation of poor and of women in anti-poverty policies and programmes

Health SDGs

- Goal 9 Maternal health
- Goal 10 Child health
- Goal 11 Affordable health-care
- Goal 12 Improved hygiene and Public health

Education SDGs

- Goal 13 Access to primary/communal school for all children, boys and girls
- Goal 14 Completion of primary education cycle
- Goal 15 Universal functional literacy
- Goal 16 Quality education at primary, secondary and vocational levels

Environment SDGs

- Goal 17 Acceptable level of forest cover
- Goal 18 Acceptable level of water and soil quality
- Goal 19 Acceptable level of air quality
- Goal 20 Conservation of bio-diversity
- Goal 21 Wetland conservation
- Goal 22 Ban on dumping of hazardous waste, including radio-active waste

Source: SAARC 2007, *SAARC Development Goals (SDGs) 2007-2012*, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Retrieved 10 March 2009 from <http://www.saarc-sec.org/?t=2.12.5>