

Track II Diplomacy in South Asia Limits and Possibilities for Regional Cooperation

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Introduction

Over two-decade of inter-state regional cooperation in South Asia² is marked by high expectations and moderate achievements. The official process of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is muddling through its own cautious mood and measured pace and seeking to bridge the gap between the legitimacy of goal expansion and institutional effectiveness of its performance. Non-political factors are taken as a beacon of self-improvement, cooperation and peace. The void created by the repudiation of "contentious bilateral issues" in the inter-governmental deliberation of SAARC has been filled by the "informal bilateral talk" during retreat of summit leaders and rationalization of free wheeling trade and commerce for the harmony of interests. Still, it has sustained the political commitment to create South Asian community of political interests based on sovereign equality in which decision is reached by consensus. The common interest of the general welfare of peoples of the region has synchronized the expectations of member states of uneven size, power potential, historical complexes and different speeds of development. It is the Track II intermediary actors of the region which are using alternative political channel of communication and pulling the cooperation of Track I decision-making political leaders and Track III micro actors, the advertisers and distributors of benefits accruing from cooperation to the larger society. They are critical to redress development imbalances, transcend the old tradition of natural law and draw strength from the diversity of regional societies governed by multitude of passions.

Track I process refers to the diplomatic communication, constructive engagement and interaction of government officials at the higher level of authority representing national interest who seek to foster self-preservation, common welfare benefits and resolve bilateral and multilateral problems and conflicts. The success of this track largely depends on the existence of a strong political will of the statespersons of the region, a will defined as the positive virtue necessary to fulfill SAARC's collective vision of "peace, stability, amity and progress" through the adherence to the equitable principles of the UN Charter, non-alignment and code of international law and muster moral strength to overcome structural barriers stemming from smoldering nationalism and sub-nationalism of resentment that prevents in pooling national sovereignties for the cultivation of collective regional vision. The constitutionalization of SAARC principles can socialize state-centric laws and actors to international regime bound by reciprocal obligations to resolve the problems of collective action. Higher level of institutional cooperation has a positive bearing on regional peace in the same way as does civil sovereign which abolishes the state of nature. But, an effective promotion of cooperation demands regional division of labor and distribution of benefits to compensate for states' lost capacity in some functional areas, such as security, mobile capital, control over national economy, management of environment and containment of diffused threats. For example, global warming and the rise of sea level are threatening the survival of Maldives and parts of Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka. The cross-border terrorism, proliferation of small arms and rise of non-state actors in India, Nepal, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka are creating costs for transactions. The Track I actors have to develop a collective position, like they do on WTO, to defend the space and environment and contain the spoilers of peace.

Track II actors involve the interaction of unofficial or semi-official channel through business elites, major media figures, professors, retired government officials, think tanks, political leaders, legislators, research scholars and socially and culturally eminent persons cobbled together to provide new ideas, shape public opinion and provide lobby for policy adjustment on mutually beneficial cooperation. The guiding principle of this track is class-bridging horizontal network, association, partnership and linkage building than domination, control and maintenance of power hierarchy. The

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² South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation comprises eight member states—Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. It was established on December 8, 1985. In an organization of states very unequal in size and power hierarchy, and with widely varying national histories, it requires cautious handling of distribution of benefits and the resolution of differences.

members of this track in South Asia demonstrate a manifest ability of social learning and adaptation to changing circumstances to accelerate the process on shaping common future. The large-scale multi-track dialogues, such as Shaping South Asia's Future and South Asia 2010: Program of Action and formation of Group of Eminent Persons and the Citizen Commission for South Asia have defined the long-term integrated vision of South Asian cooperation, highlighted the ways to mediate the differences of inter-governmental bodies and legitimized the dense web of interests of Track III actors working on joint projects as a means to overcome historically evolved restrictions and create virtuous cycle of cooperation. This track has also prevented the possibility of dangerous polarization between the political interest of state leaders, entrepreneurs, bureaucracy, official media elites and establishment intellectuals for regional economic integration and their lack of active interest in egalitarian thrust for social integration, social charter and social solidarity for creating level playing field for the under classes of society. Only recently, various civil society groups of the region through the initiative of South Asia Center for Policy Studies (SACEPS) prepared Citizens Social Charter through a bottom-up participatory process (Khatri, 2007: 3) and complemented the social deficits of inter-governmental process. It has provided the regional leaders to reconsider the value of accountable politics. Growing gaps in the commitment of principles and policy outcome have evoked an element of pessimism as to whether the Track I SAARC effort will take off from its indolent stage. The emergence of a vibrant South Asian public (Dahal, 2004:2) at the Track II level has nullified this pessimism as it has conceptualized the necessity of deepening regional cooperation as an inescapable option, providing policy inputs to the summit leaders and engaging the heterogeneous Track III leaders of society to enlist their effective support for cooperation from below and circulate the feedbacks to multiple audience.

Track III actors represent dense array of grassroots groups, enlightened persons, cultural minorities, networks and popular movements who have marginal clout on decision-making power and unable to achieve requisite social change without external help. This track tries to influence government policies indirectly by transnational media advocacy, lobbying, citizen activism and anti-systemic challenges to society's dominant values—feudalism, paternalism, caste and class hierarchy, patriarchy, over exploitation of nature, excessive centralization of political and economic power and authoritarian rule. Rejection of prejudiced past is based on the formation of a new identity and articulation of alternative worldview. Women's movement, for example, is constantly changing gender relations in terms of roles, values, images and structures. This is an important aspect of fostering social equality and political empowerment through regional institutional mechanisms and expression of worldwide demonstrators and conferences. The emancipatory spirit of social movements of Dalits, social and cultural minorities, indigenous people, trade unions, artists, poets and human rights groups respect each other's immediate priorities and articulate alternative vision. They have formed a core of human networks worldwide to exert social pressure to contain selfish tendency of ruling elites, minimize the causes of social conflict and invent the concept of distributive justice. These movements have been crystallized beyond the conventional thinking about people as passive recipient of welfare assistance to active agents of change. The civic solidarity underlying the movement offers structural incentives for regional dialogues, cooperation and peaceful social transformation. Conflict transformation at the grassroots level lies with the peoples and communities directly affected by it (Lederach, 2003: 21).

The enormity of external funding and services for the activities of Track II actors has made them mobile, resource rich and entrepreneurial in activities. The dramatic increase of their international linkages has made them highly influential in bringing pressure to shift the state-oriented international relations to society-centric global ties (Dahal, 2007:34-35). Ironically, the capacity of Track II civil society actors to generate demands from the society is too high beyond the ability of the statespersons to absorb and fulfill. The rise of volunteerism at Track III has partially compensated this deficit, bridged the institutional divide, shored up popular mobilization for cooperative action and enlarged the urban-centric view of SAARC into rural areas. The inter-governmental process has chosen the theme for 15th SAARC summit, "Partnership for the People of SAARC" to bridge this gap between official privileges and necessary condition of basic internal change.

The most frequently asked questions are related to this thin line. In this shifting paradigm, how is it possible to reconcile the general social interest concern of civil society with the national interest concern of the state? Should civil societies take national interest as the collective expression of the democratic process or just remain rights-oriented and self-justifying bodies? How can the

sectoral social action of the civil society contribute to the larger strategic public action of the state for the promotion of collective goods, such as security, order, peace, rule of law and welfare? How do they derive their legitimacy and become responsible to local, national, regional and global interests? More relevantly, do civil societies have the political will to build a coalition and effect a coordinated response for conflict prevention and conflict transformation in the region? The aim of this paper is to highlight key regional concerns, macro and micro perspectives on cooperation, rationale of Track II, shared identity, peace dividend and the contribution of external actors in South Asian cooperation.

Regional concerns

The founding of SAARC has helped the region escape the historical patterns of inter-state warfare. The construction of region has nourished the concept of general will, the preservation and welfare of the whole and rendered war as a means to resolve conflict impossible. Conflict occurs when actors refuse to accept the systemic ties with the cooperation scheme. Still, South Asia presents an array of complex, multi-polar and hierarchical conflicts. These conflicts invariably crop up along seven basic patterns—interstate conflicts, ideological conflicts, democratic deficits causing governance ineffectiveness, distributional struggle of under-classes of society, authority and legitimacy conflicts, identity conflicts stemming from positional differences of actors, and sub-national conflicts for national self-determination affecting the state and inter-state relations. Regional problems require associative thought and regional solutions. In all the South Asian states, democracy has come to mean majority rule at the cost of a wider popular sovereignty and a number of the excluded groups are either alienated or have become non-state armed actors as they nourish a feeling that rule of law is a mere reflection of relations of power and increasingly challenge the security of property rights. Their activities have cross-border implications which cannot be solved by the efforts of national governments. Democratic shortfalls have also evoked popular revulsion among minorities and weaker sections of the society.

There is a basic disjunction between the Westphalian state system based on a legitimate monopoly of power and political aspirations of subjugated citizens to share this power and sovereignty to address the growing sense of structural injustice—exclusion, poverty, inequality, injustice and violence. South Asia shares one fifth of the total world population but has only 2 percent of the world's Gross Domestic Product. It records weak human development profile and about US \$ 1 daily per capita income. It is also predominantly rural as only 29 percent of population lives in urban areas. Unlike China and Southeast Asia this region is incredibly under-banked. Slow economic growth has delayed the transformation of societies. The region is too diverse but this diversity is poorly mirrored in the public sphere—education, economy and governance. Poor saving rate and productivity of capital have increased its dependence on foreign aid to liberate its status as the largest concentration of the world's poor. Intra-regional trade accounts less than 4 percent of the region's total trade. This is an indication of low level of official economic cooperation.

The level of militarization of this region is high as defense expenditure is about 4 percent of national income. Reduction in defense expenditure, internal democratization of political parties and strengthening of parliaments can rectify some of these structural defects, exonerate Track I SAARC process from bureaucratic and technocratic inertia and sustain political will for long-term harmonization of interests. Only the consciousness of common future and prospect for sharing benefits can enlist the support of minorities and marginalized to the will of majority. The human and resources potential of South Asia is enormous. For example, it has the largest concentration of scientific personnel. There is, however, also a need to institutionalize the dialogue of media persons, opposition parties, parliamentarians and election commissioners of South Asia to nourish political socialization, maintain institutional memory of cooperation initiatives, overcome resistance as well as muster legitimacy for needed structural reforms.

Track II regional civil societies have been demanding a strategic shift from the subordination and conformity of diverse citizens to the state's sovereignty to a negotiated social contract and are demanding that the states reflect the collective will of all sections of citizens. The formation of collective will is essential to nurture citizens' identification with the state, perception of belonging, opportunities for common ecological, social, economic and political projects and a shared commitment to end poverty in a generation in the future. The failure of mono-centric governance (state) to cope with new conflict issues caused by the pluralization, regionalization and globalization of the political economy disconnects citizens from nationality and links them to post-national constellation (Habermas, 2006: 78-82). As a result of disharmony between the state and society (and

or economy), human rights struggle of citizens for liberation, entitlements and social opportunities largely remain unfinished in the region. The politics of Track III civil society actors in the region, therefore, involves the contestation of subjugation of citizens, creation of a rational ordering of the monopoly of power over society, socialization of citizens towards democratic principles, means and solidarity for a peaceful transformation of the public space.

Linking Macro and Micro Perspectives

International regime is essential to overcome the anarchy of international system through shared goals, institutions, means, behavior and proportional sharing of benefits so that even smaller states and weaker societies feel sufficient stake in its maintenance. The erosion of the autonomy of states has embedded them into the networks of regional and global civil society. In response to the changing global conditions and complexity of tasks, the SAARC Secretariat in Kathmandu has provided affiliation to many horizontal organizations of businessmen, lawyers and accountants as the apex bodies. This affiliation provides them information, visibility, linkage, access and recognition. Thirteen regional civil society organizations of media, architects, university women, management development institutes, state insurance organizations, town planners, diploma engineers, teachers, writers and literature, cardiac society, radiological, surgical, dermatologists, venerologists and leprologists society, etc, provide space for articulation of different, partly competing and conflict interests, complement the official willingness to foster people-to-people relations and build regionalism from bottom-up (Behera, 2008:2). These civic bodies, several United Nations agencies, International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) and NGOs are complementing the functional needs of regional states initially defined by SAARC as Integrated Program of Action (IPA) and now working to realize poverty alleviation through regional strategies, poverty reduction strategy paper and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The initial impetus for regional cooperation in South Asia has been provided by four major Track II initiatives: the Committee on Studies for Cooperation and Development in South Asia (CSCD) which identified complementarities of interest for the justification of cooperation into a number of soft areas, Independent Group on South Asian Cooperation (IGSAC) defined as to how cooperation can move into core economic areas, Coordinating Group for Studies on South Asian Perspectives (CGSSP) conducted multi-thematic studies focusing on the role of democratization, payment and monetary issues, transport and communication linkages, confidence building between government and people, media, technical and professional education, employment and poverty alleviation, enhance collective self-reliance and negotiating strength for deepening cooperation and a series of South Asia Dialogues (1991-1997) were organized by civic bodies to mobilize public opinion and rationalize the goal of securing a South Asian community (Khatri,2007).

Most of the studies have highlighted higher benefits than costs in cooperation and sensitized the decision-makers and public about the global, regional and national imperative of cooperative action. The Coalition for Action on South Asian Cooperation (CASAC), for example, was instrumental to combine Track I and Track II by involving ministers, the former and serving secretary-generals of SAARC, Directors and related ministries for policy inputs, implementation of concrete ideas, task expansion and recommendation about reform in the institutional structure of SAARC and enlisted the cooperation of international community. Scholars and think tanks from other regions, such as the European Union and Association of South East Asian Nations were also invited to share their historical and comparative experience on the burden and benefits of maintaining an international regime. The recent Track II initiative for the establishment of a South Asian university is expected to produce a critical mass and contribute to knowledge innovation, socialization, policy contribution and rationalization of regional cooperation.

Many environmental groups of South Asia, such as South Asian Watch on Trade, Economy and Environment (SAWTEE), PANOS-South Asia, Consumer Unity and Trust Society of India (CUTS), Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SPDI), etc continue to organize significant dialogues and publications to raise environmental consciousness and its linkage with economics of poverty, scarcity and conflict. They demonstrate the regional character of environmental problems and advocate the benefits of cooperative solutions in managing population pressure, climate change, depletion of natural resources, desertification, water scarcity, havoc of flood and cyclone, pollution, ecological stress and depletion of valuable genetic resources. The rising price of energy is seriously undermining the regional order and, therefore, civil society groups are suggesting their governments to utilize alternative energy sources. One of such initiative is the Trans-Boundary Water Discussion

which organized a number of dialogues between Bangladesh, India and Nepal for cooperative natural resource management. The environment protection movement, especially to protect the ecological system of Himalayas and Hindu Kush, will run up against the institutional constraints of state as they will surely act in terms of the system as a whole to avoid the growing risks of conflicts over food, water, energy and the rights of indigenous communities to natural resources. Many ecological movements of this nature are the conduits of local peoples for active participation in development as they redefine the relationship between nature and production patterns to maximize the sustainability of resources.

Rationale of Track II

Globalization is breaking the boundaries of disciplinary knowledge compartmentalized into economics, political science, sociology, culture, literature, etc; disciplinary constitution and institutions based on hierarchy of power; and the disciplinary structure of society based on social, economic and gender division of labor. This breaking process has dismantled the historically evolved social contract between capital and labor, deregulated economy from constitutional control and restructured organizations around the network of financial flows to bridge the gap between investment needs on access to land, water, seeds, credit and technology for the poorest and domestic resources. It is also compelling the horizontally formed South Asian public to think in inter-subjective and international perspective and create open space for the net-works of civil society groups to meet and organize joint activities to cope with the globalization challenges and rectify structural inequity of global economy. A number of horizontal forms of micro-credit institutions, such as Grameen Banks and Self-Employed Women's Association illustrate good examples of providing poor women access to requisite resources for business transactions.

The post-cold war order has made governance polycentric where neither order, security, development and peace are the sole prerogative of the state nor is conflict exclusively confined to the inter-state domain. With the transfer of sovereignty from the mono-centric governance of the past to disparate groups of citizens organized into various federations and institutions, such as the state, the market and a myriad of voluntary associations, networks and movements that constitute the civil society, governance has become a process of redistribution of power among them. It has challenged the monopoly writ of state--the traditional forms of mixing liberty and the legitimacy of power. In other words, the responsibilities of socializing tendency of heterogeneous civil societies have increased in policy making, advocacy, mediation of power and the management of distributional conflicts. The states are subject to common external constraints of international laws. But, the performance of core state functions pertaining to national security, rule of law and collective national welfare remains with the states.

The current crisis in the world economy is the reflection of the profound crisis in knowledge management and the ways of life and cannot be resolved by measures of economic deregulation and labor flexibility. The skewed institutional mechanism of prevailing governance risks social polarization and therefore, inspires the poor to fight for state control against global regime. It is, therefore, vital to implement sound understanding of the evolving normative principles, values, rules and order of SAARC charter to govern the behavior of actors of all tracks and increase the scope and effectiveness of cooperation for development synergy. Development is neither a linear process nor embodies epistemic unity among development actors about its precise definition. It aims to create economic surplus (Desai, 2004:310) in society to dynamize the production process and creates condition for transformation. South Asia is rich in natural resources especially land, rivers and forest and their optimal utilization can be the key to eliminate poverty and hunger and guarantee food sovereignty. The recent decision of SAARC to set up a food bank for ensuring food security is a safeguard against market uncertainty. The region is labor surplus and the beneficiary of remittance the workers bring from various parts of the world to boost life to rural economy. The execution of free trade area underlined in SAFTA and the gradual suppression of tariffs are rooted in the doctrine of harmony of interests and principal guarantee of peace in the region. Promotion of security of movement of persons, goods and services and livelihood are the areas where Track II and Track III have to engage in so that upward integration of economy does not create social polarization at the level of people. The 15th SAARC summit in Colombo on August 2-3, 2008 focused on greater connectivity and meeting food security and growing demand for energy. Preventing strategies must be formulated to insulate the region from the emerging global financial crisis.

Presently, the state no longer monopolizes the security function. It has to share its responsibilities with the public, private and voluntary civic associations, even for its own self-defense. The main security challenges can be found on the domestic than on the international level (Wagner, 2006:110). Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal need measures to stabilize the states, establish public lawful condition and strengthen their capacities for service delivery. This requires the Track II civil society organizations to act maturely and in a responsible manner to avoid the conflict of adjustment between defense and development needs which generated the security dilemma. This actor transformation has also led to the transformation of discourse, context, issues and rules of the game. New issues such as ecology, gender justice, human security, controlling terrorism, human trafficking, and peace have broadened the concept of security. To overcome the moral failure of South Asian ruling classes entailed the coordination of law-enforcing agencies in the region. The domain of politics has also marked a shift from high politics-- war, security, diplomacy, power, influence and foreign policy to low politics that deals with the conditions of daily life--such as basic needs, identity, social movements, democracy, human rights, good governance, cultural interactions, etc. Modern politics is couched in the language of rights (Tuck, 1999:1). Participation rules have also marked a shift from top-down elite to a bottom-up stakeholders' participatory process. The coming of humanism has altered the freedom of ancients embedded in the collective power of *civitas* to a set of individual rights. As a result, there are countless thematic forums and networks at the horizontal level in the region and abroad formed by natives and diasporas to work for the well-being of the region.

The multi-layered identity of South Asian citizens, defined by region, religion, language and culture does not restrict the regional government in resolving their common challenges. Multi-polar and multi-layered engagements of Track II actors have increased new opportunities for the citizens of South Asia to build access to policies and garner benefits from the resources of states and international community. For example, Indo-Pakistan Track II dialogues on strategic issues contributed to build confidence among key actors of both the countries. The Indo-Pakistan Bus diplomacy that followed the travel of people from both sides has become an emblem of the hope for peace and friendship between two countries born in a spasm of religious hatred in which about one million Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs died. Although this initiative has been hamstrung by militants, there are hundreds of Track II and Track III conferences, dialogues, seminars and civic activities that have fostered conference diplomacy and social capital for public communication, consultation, cooperation and peace. One of them is Nimrana Initiative that tried to resolve the issue of Kashmir.

Many regional dialogues conducted by Track II civil society actors, such as CASAC, SACEPS, Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), Center for Policy Research (CPR), Center for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Institute of Strategic Initiative (ISS), etc have contributed to trust building, opportunity for network activities, foci for connections and provided policy-relevant inputs to the inter-governmental level of decision-making for multi-structured communication and corresponding feedback loops between state components and network-based civil society. Track II actors have sufficiently identified solutions of the regional problems, alerted the media and policy makers and packaged their recommendations in a timely and dramatic way to draw public attention. What is needed is their implementation. Similarly, South Asian Free Media Association (SAFMA) through its campaign, education and publication is generating regional consciousness for economic integration. It offers critical information to various stakeholders to learn and adapt to changing circumstances. Track II actors perceive the current weariness of regional governments as a chance to cautiously complement their interests without overstressing the mandate of SAARC. This has made the summit leaders receptive to the creative ideas springing from Track II initiatives.

The linkages of civil societies across national borders have grown exponentially along with the post-national constellation of the state and market forces. The growing shift in basic conditions, actors, rules, issues and processes have rendered the logic of collective action heterogeneous. Still, foreign, defense and monetary policies are the prerogative of the national state and it will continue to retain considerable authority and legitimacy over them. Civil society organizations, on the other hand, have to recognize this legitimacy even while they take up the responsibility that is their due. This is an area that needs tact and wisdom in tackling the system change. But, many of the Track II initiatives suffered discontinuity and a lack of institutionalization due to the shifting nature of fund, emergence of new issues and the rejection of club model of the groups which prevented the induction of fresh blood into their initiatives. There is also a competition among key donors for supporting their ideological priorities. Many of the initiatives proved less credible as they maintained a distance between vibrant discourse and practice and failed to concert action on key priority areas.

Shared identity

A common fear of marginalization from international political economy has provided South Asian elites a sort of common purpose to work together on matters of mutual interest. This has relativized their perception of geopolitics of national assertiveness. Similarly, Track II civil society actors are fostering a strong regional consciousness and multi-layered identity rooted in the appreciation of others in their own otherness. Their participation in regional initiatives is expanding the domain of pre-political form of state based on religion, culture, history and language to cosmopolitan citizenship, shared identity and enlarging the communicative space without threatening the core of statehood. In the political form, the power of state is shared by various functional groups of society and international regimes. The incipient regional identity upheld by South Asian civil societies, especially those specializing on policy areas, human rights, environment, trade unions and women mirrors their perception and adoption of post-state-centric policies so that conflict arising from the actual and perceived weakness of the state is contained. Economic societies of the region are better organized and have evolved a cooperative strategy of long-term rationality of economic integration—free trade, monetary union and South Asian community.

The SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI)'s pro-active engagement with Track I actors contributed to the signing of South Asian Free Trade Area and WTO. But, their roles across the region are glued by pre-state economic needs for capital, labor, infrastructure development, communication, transport and trade than post-state democratic needs— such as civilization imperatives, human security, environment preservation, social justice and peaceful resolution of conflict. Fair competition in markets requires level playing field for weaker states and classes of people. The regional investment strategy for economic growth and the effective utilization of SAARC Development Fund are critical issues for poverty alleviation, social development, uniformity in the mode of production and reduction of national differences concomitant with the technological and economic condition of modernity. But, obligations, interaction and information sharing among civil societies across national boundaries must be coherent and conceptualized to nourish a sense of shared political destiny among South Asian citizens. The vision of South Asian community can be shaped together by a single market founded on convertibility of currencies, free movement of goods and people and freedom of commerce.

The soft-state nature of South Asia (Myrdal,1972:52) renders its ties with the society very weak as the states depend on the fragile consent of citizens manufactured by periodic elections, media and the vibrant public sphere shaped by cosmopolitan values. The statespersons, on their part, consider civil societies fragmented, sectoral, egoistical and competing with each other for donors favor rather than developing the practical capacities of the states for welfare delivery. The challenge for South Asian leaders is to remove the disjuncture between the states' need for security and stability and civil societies' demand for greater democratization to minimize the private ambition of leaderships to stick to power life-long and even evolve a dynastic succession. The propensity of the states, the markets and civil societies to construct often dissimilar, interest-bound knowledge, goals and institutional means have yet to be synthesized to set the links between ideas and policy outcomes. Similarly, these actors should be properly coordinated so that they can work together for the common good of citizens of the region. Coexistence and collective action have to be stabilized by means of pursuing commonly acceptable democratic and development policies for the consolidation of international regime.

South Asia Forum for Human Rights (SAFHR) and SAARC People's Forum are seeking to change the value system underlying governance. People's Forum for SAARC, a coalition of popular organizations, networks and movements of the region, is engaged in environment, development, human rights, gender, trafficking of women and children, livelihood security, food sovereignty and visa-free movement of peoples and aiming "Towards South Asian Union." South Asian Trade Union Council (SARTUC) and South Asian Finance Sector Union Council (SAFSUC) often articulate the concerns of ordinary public about corporate social responsibility for sustainable communities and the moral unity of regional peoples. These regional civil societies are also trying to reshape the growing shift in the medium of power, from the political to the economic and technological and pressing for a common political space for the fundamental politicization of collective decision-making. To them, egalitarian distribution of factors of production would ameliorate the condition of poor and end the existing social and economic crises.

Political ethics needs to be reformulated to achieve human governance at all levels of society from individual to the world and connect purpose with values. The willingness of South Asian governments and civil society to take action in acute emergencies, such as earthquake in Pakistan, tsunami in India and Sri Lanka and flood disasters in Bangladesh and Nepal, demonstrates the synergy of collective action. The South Asian Diasporas and workers have become life-blood for the economic resilience of the region. The Track II actors have recently recommended the SAARC leaders to form a Task Force on South Asian Migration in order to identify problems, protect and monitor the rights and social security concerns of regional workers abroad. The migration of South Asian workers in the Gulf region has created a win-win situation as it maintains supply-demand equilibrium. The outside actors, such as Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), Ford Foundation and Japan Foundation have shown a greater interest in the confidence building, social and economic cooperation scheme and are supporting Track II and Track III actors to harmonize media laws, deepen economic integration, seek social stability and contribute to a South Asian Community based on democracy, human rights, social justice, peace and ecological balance.

Peace dividend and human security

Common fear of insecurity and common problems faced by South Asian citizens demand a collective rationality of public good that binds all the tracks of cooperation by shared values rather than exclusive self-interests. Many Track II actors, such as Institute of Foreign Affairs (IFA), Center for Policy Research (CPR), Regional Center for Strategic Studies (RCSS), etc are fostering the concept of cooperative security in South Asia. Democratic peace requires equality before the law and, therefore, adjudication of conflict should be based on the merits of the case rather than strength and bargaining position of powerful actors. Because of their non-hierarchical networks of organization and communication, civil society actors continue to play a special role in seeking a lasting solution of violent conflict by means of integrating the interests of diverse stakeholders of the society and creating a legitimate space which underpins social and cultural transformation. The role of Track II civil society lies in communication, mediation and coordination of demands, payoffs and actions of conflicting parties. Only collective rationality can transform geopolitical, direct, structural, perceptual and cultural conflicts of the region into durable peace. Conflict resolution in the divided societies of region requires a rational, comprehensive, cooperative and non-traditional perspective on the part of each state so that each includes the perspective of others to reach to an understanding, consensus and social contract and learns to think as a member of the same South Asian community.

The remarkable proliferation of civil societies and social movements in South Asia is a response to the national and global social crises. They are pressurizing the regional states towards the conceptualization of the new security perception, the "human security" perception that can transcend the traditional security dichotomy— between regime and national and achieve a reflective equilibrium based on their reciprocity and synergy. Contrary to the political realist's overriding concern to replace the 'state of nature' by the reason of state, civil societies tend to project societal interests into political power by enforcing transparency and accountability in the latter in its dealing with human needs, freedoms and entrenchment of property rights. Negotiating a new social contract requires a new mode of conflict resolution that is not imperial, muscular and hegemonic, but genuinely democratic rooted in what Immanuel Kant called the objective conditions of perpetual peace (Hastie, 1891:xxxv). It should be equally counter-hegemonic, especially with regard to the neo-liberal global order and transformatory in nature. Relying on polycentrism, the loosely organized Social Forums of South Asia contradict hegemonic vision, debate on common human security issues and organize political action for governance reforms. Subsuming caste, gender and ethnicity as complex composition of classes, the Coordinating Group of Maoist Parties and Organizations in South Asia is articulating anti-institutional "inversionary discourse" (Apter, 1993:44) and visualizing a new federation of South Asian people in the region. These mechanisms are, however, ideological in underlying the need for cooperation. Many of its components, including Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) are already participating in state politics. These groups, however, highlight the system's unfairness and accord primacy of the justification for collective choice over the purposive rationality of individual preferences.

Inter-religious dialogues and peace movements of civil societies in South Asia have a manifest desire to end insurgency and counter-insurgency operations in the region. Adherents to these movements have been mobilizing public opinion and opposition political parties, religious societies, school children and volunteers and mustering strong popular support among the victims of conflicts

to turn the region into a peaceful community. These movements have laid the foundation for a region-wide opposition against direct, structural and latent violence and mainstreamed conflict sensitivity and peace building into a range of Track II and Track III civil society projects. The South Asian cooperation needs inter-regional institutional mechanism for crisis-prevention and conflict resolution. The retreat organized during the SAARC summit for the regional leaders to discuss on bilateral disputes is essential for confidence building but not sufficient to resolve them unless institutional mechanism at the regional level is created to sustain this process.

External Actors

The diverse and pluralistic societies and states of South Asia have opened the possibilities for contact, communication and cooperation with external actors. Securing peace, social justice and human rights based on cooperation requires a shared political culture grounded in human rights. The geopolitical realities of South Asia have offered an opportunity to external actors for strategic cooperation for avoiding security risk, building confidence, participation in growing economy, environment management, democratic transformation, good governance, social adjustment and justice among states. It abuts China, Central Asia, South East Asia, Middle East, the India Ocean and the Arabian Sea. All the observers of SAARC—the US, the EU, China, Japan, South Korea and Iran—agree on diplomacy to avert security risks—nuclear, conventional, religious and manifest in the region. Myanmar and China are willing to join as full member of SAARC while Russia, Australia, South Africa and Mauritius are eager to participate as observers as they find sufficient legitimacy of their cause.

Comprehensive security and development without the commitment of these powers for the economic and technological cooperation is virtually impossible to maintain. The growing interest of external actors to participate in the South Asian developments can contribute to beef up favorable macro political environment for confidence-building and cooperation. But, it has to develop a sort of ASEAN Regional Forum in fostering dialogue and consultation on political and security issues of common interest at multi-track level and reorient them to regional priorities. The US primacy on energy and security, the EU on development, environment and social adjustment, Iran on energy, Japan and South Korea on joint investment and China on trade and cooperation complement the efforts of SAARC but policy coherence and coordination must be made to avoid duplication, competition and conflict among them.

Conclusion

SAARC is founded on the principle of national sovereignty than constitutional and ideological affinities. Inter-societal, inter-state and inter-people cooperation facilitated by regional states, markets and civil societies has generated hopes for the institutionalization of democratic peace. Integrated and coordinated studies and response of civil societies to the conflicting parties have amply demonstrated the costs of conflict and the benefits of peace. It is, however, important to synthesize the various types of disciplinary knowledge and perceptions produced by the states, the markets and civil societies and prepare a common ground for addressing the structural causes of conflicts in the region. The sphere of civil societies is located in the opinion forming, early warning and response system. In this sphere, community life, experiences, grievances and needs are articulated and conflicts are mediated and resolved through peaceful communication and negotiation.

South Asian Track II civil society actors have been instrumental in protecting openness for social groups, associations and networks for competing needs, aspirations, opinions and representation of the diversity of voices. And, basic constitutional guarantee of a public sphere also provided the space for the radicalization of rights and transformation of people into public. The lines of convergence between societal self-organization and the organization of state power are, however, still significant enough to enable the Track I political class to convince the society of its aims and create harmony between themselves for a peaceful South Asian public order founded on the institutional incentive for reciprocity and deliver a proper account of its principles to govern regional peace.

A number of multi-track initiatives are relevant for deepening regional cooperation in the region: a) The SAARC secretariat must be strengthened by legislative and executive powers if it is to foster a community capable of assuming regional development initiatives and executing political decisions; b) Common negotiating position of SAARC countries should be formed not only trade, economy and environment but also on security and monetary questions; c) there is an urgent need for the creation of SAARC Task Force on Migration of regional workers and harmonization of position of

regional governments through the foreign ministry and ministry of labor; d) the regional governments and economic actors should create a mechanism for ensuring basic needs and energy and effective implementation of Social Charter; e) capacity building of Track III is essential to implement the recommendations and articulation of demands emerging from the South Asian public; and f) strengthening the role of regional media is an imperative in socialization about the benefits of cooperation and dissemination of success stories of social development projects of individual countries for learning, reflection and replication.

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