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Focus : **SOUTH ASIAN ASSOCIATION FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION**

(SAARC)

Responses, Articles

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Qualifications

M.A. (Economics), Delhi School of Economics, Delhi University, 1992

B.Sc. (Economics), Serampore College, University of Calcutta, 1989

Key skills

Political Economy of Trade & Development; Trade in Agriculture; Institutions & ProPoor Growth

Experience and skills

Expertise in Project development & fund raising, project management, Development research, Civil society mobilization & Capacity building, Strategic review & Planning.

Response to Questionnaire

1. How should the balance sheet of Three Decades of SAARC be prepared?

By reviewing the impact of various SAARC agreements and decisions such as the Agreement on South Asian Free Trade Area, the decision on SAARC Seed Bank.

2. Do you agree with the view that SAARC progress was slow because individual members prefer to walk alone rather than exploring new opportunities for engagement?

Yes, I agree and that is where the leadership role comes in. SAARC needs strong leaders to take forward its agenda and the SAARC Secretariat is to be strengthened.

3. What role SAARC can play in Achieving Peace through Economic Integration ?

Through better implementation of the Agreement on South Asian Free Trade Area, and by providing the necessary emphasis on physical and institutional connectivity as well as people -to-people connectivity. Border tourism should be allowed and encouraged for the betterment of people -to-people connectivity.

4.The organization was not alive because there was no economic convergence among member states.Do you share this assessment of SAARC?

True to a large extent and it is reflected in not having common positions in international negotiations. For regional public goods such as trade, food security, there should be common positions at international negotiations. It is good to note that SAARC countries are exploring a common position on climate change negotiations.

5.It is often stated that most of the South Asian countries have uncertain economic outlook . And mega regional trade blocs need to be exploited for regional integration. Your comments.

True and such uncertainties are to be addressed through better economic cooperation. SAARC countries should realise that if there is growth in one country, there will be positive spill-over effects in a neighbouring country. Mega regionals will have some negative impacts on SAARC countries and they need to do more trade and investment among themselves to mitigate such impacts.

6. Do you subscribe to the view that the possibility of intra -regional trade has increased and there is a marked change in the field of investment and has better prospects?

While the possibilities of the enhancement of intra -regional trade is always there, it has to be realised through policy changes, particularly with respect to the betterment of connectivity as procedural barriers are one of the key factors hindering intra-regional trade. There should be greater emphasis on investment in service sectors so that intra -regional trade can get reinforced.

7.Do you agree with the view that SAARC as an institution has failed to achieve the goal of poverty eradication in South Asia by 2012

even though this particular goal was high on the agenda of SAARC since the 6th Summit in Colombo in 1991?

Yes and that is because there was no coordinated efforts on the part of SAARC countries. A number of good initiatives are being implemented in several countries. There should be a mechanism at the regional level to learn from each other's experience and apply them appropriately by taking into account local factors.

8.Should we still rely on SAARC that it would bring the region towards betterment and would fulfill all its stated objectives. Alternatively, there remain apprehensions that "should we consider it a failed organization and look for any other platform?"

The time has come to take a hard view on SAARC as it has failed to deliver. BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi -Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), consisting of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Thailand and Sri Lanka, could be another option where things are expected to move faster.

9. Do you believe that under the new leadership in India, there was a possibility that the SAARC would be revitalized?

Yes but there should be full reciprocity on the part of other members too.

10.Summing up the key takeaways from the recent summit, Indian spokesman underlined that the Kathmandu summit has shown that the SAARC is not about India and Pakistan, but it's about the whole of South Asia.Do you share this optimism?

I do share a cautious optimism. Let us see how the energy agreement will be implemented and by when the SAARC members will sign the motor vehicle agreement.
