

REGIONAL COOPERATION NEWSLETTER – SOUTH ASIA
January - February 2011

In this edition:

South Asia emerging as an economic power house

South Asian Countries worst affected by climate change

Safety net to women through micro insurance and micro finance schemes

USA suspends inter-country adoption of children from Nepal

President Rajapaksa announces political solutions for peaceful life in Sri Lanka

South Asia emerging as an economic power

South Asia has a history of being mostly protective imperialistic, feudal and authoritarian. The modern political culture of democracy was introduced on the advent of socialism

The growth of a region depends on economic equality, social equality, social protection and political freedom. Economic equality is related to moving towards unperfected markets that function in accordance with supply and demand pressures. Social equality means breaking free of the restrictions placed on individual behavior by traditional and social structures including cast systems, superstition, oppression of women, lack of basic living facilities, education and health care.

Social protection is an offshoot product of human rights. The first International Law of Human Rights was established in 1948 with the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). This is the first document which enshrined the principles of equality to justice and rights. Many South Asian countries have introduced legalisation to protect human rights.

In the political context, there should be political freedom, freedom of speeches, freedom of expressions, right to life and right to liberty. Based on these factors, all South Asian countries have adopted democratic parliamentary systems protecting the rights of individuals.

South Asian countries are tackling the major problems that haunt the growth of the region such as widespread poverty, political infighting, corruption and gender issues. The growth rate socially and economically is showing an upward trend. This process of economic development, liberalisation of individual freedom and social freedom is leading to the creation of South Asia as an economic power house that will make its mark globally.

South Asian countries worst affected by climate change

Climate change is not tomorrow's future menace; it is today's growing problem. This human crisis is already being felt in parts of the world especially in South Asian countries.

Bangladesh

This year, entire communities in Bangladesh are being forced to leave their homes due to rising sea levels. Women in drought-ridden parts have to walk miles and miles a day to collect water.

Maldives

Maldives is a nation that lies only 1.5 meters above sea level. It is on the verge of submersion due to climate change and resulting high tides. The Maldives government held a cabinet meeting underwater to illustrate the stark reality facing the nation. Maldives has already initiated action to cut CO₂ emissions by 25%. Maldives has signed an agreement to build a 75MW wind farm for power supply to the capital city Male, the international airport and 24 luxury tourist resorts.

Nepal

Glacial melting in the Himalayas is affecting the ecological system of Nepal including changing crop patterns, rice growing in average temperatures and decrease in agriculture production.

India

Glacial melting in the Himalayas will increase water levels in Indian rivers and surrounding oceans. Temperature increase will affect agriculture and food production. About 1.3 billion people in Asia depend on water from the Himalayan glaciers and as temperature rises the supply of water will be

reduced. In many coastal villages in India especially Orissa and West Bengal a large number of villages are submerged under water. Fish catch has reduced alarmingly because of severe cyclones. The pattern of rainfall and changes in temperature has resulted in droughts and at least a 5% yearly drop in crop yield.

Developed and developing countries have to work together to cut CO2 emissions and deforestation to arrest increase of temperature. Sufficient funds are needed to finance projects for economic growth in developing countries in their effort to cut CO2 emissions and to introduce renewable energy.

Safety net for women through micro insurance and micro finance schemes

Micro finance is a system of small loans directed to the poorest people, (particularly women without collateral) for income generation activities.

For poor women and households in most of the developing countries especially South Asian Countries, micro insurance coverage is an important safety net. Women comprise of 70% of the world's poor. They earn less than men. They have less control of property and face higher levels of physical vulnerability and violence. They are often care givers, home makers and increasingly household resource managers and income earners. Considering this combination of vulnerability and responsibility for the welfare of their families, women have a unique and pressing need to manage risk.

Traditional risk management strategies that women use to cope with crisis involve long term sacrifices that reinforce the cycle of poverty. They are use business profits to deal with emergencies instead of using them for long term investments, selling productive assets such as live stock, or equipment and pulling children out of school which not only stunts children's social and intellectual growth, but also severely curtails their long term earning potential.

Micro insurance is a promising alternative for poor women to manage risk and to use their assets more productively. The challenge however, is to create micro insurance programmes that meet the needs of poor women with minimum operating costs and with affordable premiums.

Poor women have specific needs that need to be matched to the design of profitable insurance products. Few of the existing schemes include health micro insurance programmes excluding pregnancy. Micro insurance companies in meeting the needs of the poor of rural villages have developed health insurance projects with maternity cover with a minimum insurance annual fee. Another programme that meets women's unique needs in a sensitive, sustainable way is the rural bank which offers loans to its clients. And to all self-employed poor women a choice for three micro insurance schemes covering health, assets and death. Also all the children in one family are covered by one premium. Another innovative component of the scheme is linking insurance to savings accounts. Clients use their accrued interest to pay premiums.

Another method of providing micro credit to non-profit organisations catering to the needs of people below the poverty line is through grants from international companies as part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR). Such non-profit organisations can use their expertise to create new innovative schemes to cater to the needs of the poor. An example of such a donation is the contribution from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation of Rs. 38 million to Action International in January 2010 to provide micro finance for poor people in India.

Micro insurance is a new form of development and the best alternative to manage risk by women.

Reference: Why poor women needed micro insurance. World of work No. 69 – August 2010 issue of ILO

USA suspends inter-country adoption of children from Nepal

The US Department of State has suspended inter-country adoption of children from Nepal. The US department has found unreliable many documents relating to child adoption submitted from Nepal orphanages. Unreliable documents include children's birth certificates and other documents presented to prove the children offered for adoption are abandoned. Police and orphanage officials refused to cooperate with consular officers' efforts to confirm information provided from official police and orphanage records. *Source: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2010/08/145767.htm>*

President Rajapakasa announces political solutions for peaceful life in Sri Lanka

President Rajapakasa who was elected in November 2010 for his second term has announced political solutions for the development of the nation. He wants Sri Lanka to be a hub of development of knowledge, energy, commerce, naval transportation and aviation. His immediate aim is to develop the country and to see Sri Lanka as an undivided country. He wants the whole nation to benefit and the benefits not confined to one area of the economy.

To make Sri Lanka a hub for the development of knowledge he is soliciting support from international communities.

The content of this Regional Newsletter may be freely reproduced or cited provided the source is acknowledged. The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily the policy of ICSW.

Please distribute this newsletter as widely as possible.

Newsletter Editor: A. S. Shenoy: National President ICSW, India
Link Heritage, 6A, Chittoor Road, Kochi -682 018, Kerala, India
+91 484 4023436

Sub-Editor, Dr. Bala Raju Nikku, Nepal
Email: nikku21@yahoo.com

Regional President: A.S. Shenoy, India
Email: shenoyas2006@yahoo.com
Tel: +91 9995440154

[If you wish to cease receiving this newsletter, please click 'here' and give us your name and email address.](#)