

Draft speech

Mr. Chairman,

Excellencies,

Distinguished participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen

South Asia has the highest concentration of poverty and hunger in the world. It is also highly vulnerable to the ravages of climate change. The majority of the people in the region depend on climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture and fisheries for their livelihood. Climate change is expected to exacerbate food insecurity and make the implementation of national- and regional-level commitments on food security further challenging. South Asian countries have recognized trade as an engine of growth, and now they have to also consider how trade intersects with climate change and food security concerns.

Over the last two decades, South Asian countries have been increasingly integrated into the global economy as well as pursued regional economic integration, albeit far less successfully. Despite South Asia being an agrarian region, and there being considerable potential for intra-regional agricultural and food trade, the role of intra-regional trade in addressing food security concerns has not been explored, and such trade remains highly restricted by tariff, para-tariff and non-tariff barriers.

On climate change, the SAARC secretariat has to take seriously its observer status at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. While there are naturally some differences in the interests and priorities of South Asian countries, given the region's diversity, there are more commonalities than differences, and the strategy should be to first concentrate on the commonalities. Adequate technology transfer and climate finance on favourable terms and conditions have unfortunately not been forthcoming from the developed world despite pledges galore. At the same time, South-South cooperation, including within South Asia, must be seriously explored and promoted in the area of technology transfer for climate change adaptation. The outcome document of the Rio+20 Summit has considered green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication as an important tool for achieving sustainable development. South Asia must now strategize and act to seize the opportunities arising from the global attention received by green economy.

In a welcome move, the SAARC Seed Bank Agreement has been signed. SAWTEE had played a crucial role in lobbying for a regional seed bank. Now the operational modalities have to be

worked out keeping in mind the possible difficulties at the implementation level and taking cognizance of equity considerations: issues such as adaptability of seeds to different climatic conditions in different countries; the challenge posed by intellectual property right protection of commercial varieties in the event they are more productive than local seeds; the challenge of transferring seed to farmers in the right time given the seasonality of sowing and the impact on yields of delay in sowing; and the determination of a member country's mandatory contribution to the regional seed bank.

Effective operationalization of the SAARC Food Bank is yet to be achieved. Even five years since its establishment, food reserves under the food bank have never been utilized despite the fact that the region has suffered from a number of natural disasters. This calls for serious thinking on the food bank's operationalization.

Progress on the liberalization of environmental goods and services has been slow at the multilateral level. A critical concern of the developing world, including South Asia, is the definition of environmental goods and services. The list must also duly reflect the export interests of developing and least-developed countries. International and regional support measures to address the supply-side constraints facing particularly the least-developed countries will be critical.

I am happy that SAWTEE in collaboration with Oxfam Novib is organizing this regional consultation on trade, climate change and food security in the context of South Asia. I hope that this event will help disseminate to a wider audience the findings of the researches under the regional programme undertaken by SAWTEE as well contribute to further work in this area.

I wish you all a fruitful discussion, and participants from abroad a pleasant stay in Nepal.

Thank you.