Report on

National Stakeholder's Dialogue on
Upcoming 18th SAARC Summit: Nepal's perspectives on
Climate Change, Agriculture, Food Security and Disaster
Risk Reduction

16 October 2014, Hotel Radisson, Kathmandu

Jointly organized by South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE) and Oxfam in Nepal





Prepared by: South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE)

South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE), in collaboration with Oxfam in Nepal, organized a National Stakeholder's Dialogue on the "Upcoming 18th SAARC Summit: Nepal's perspectives on climate change, agriculture, food security and disaster risk reduction" on 16 October 2014 in Kathmandu. The major objective of the dialogue was to identify and discuss issues important for Nepal in areas of climate change, agriculture, food security and disaster risk reduction. The dialogue was attended by 65 participants representing the government, civil society organizations, private sector, academia, and the media.

At the opening session Ms. Noreen Khalid, Interim Country Director, Oxfam in Nepal, highlighted the need to move forward with good collaboration between civil society organizations and the Government of Nepal in mitigating and adapting to climate change effects and disasters. Mr. Nirmal Kafle, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, acknowledged the vulnerability of South Asia to climate change and stressed the need for collaborative efforts, especially in terms of financial cooperation and knowledge sharing. In view of the upcoming SAARC Summit, Dr. Govinda Nepal, Member, National Planning Commission, talked about how SAARC has taken initiatives on issues of climate change, food security and disaster risk reduction. However, he mentioned that these initiatives have mostly been "decorative" as they have been more in the form of commitments and less in terms of implementation. He stressed the need for the 18th SAARC Summit to convert these commitments into reality. Concluding the inaugural session, Dr Posh Raj Pandey, Chairman, SAWTEE, stated that in the next few decades, climate change is going to drastically reduce crop yields. Hence, the poor will be affected the most by climate change, which must be taken into account while formulating national and regional initiatives and policy measures.

The remaining part of the programme was divided into three thematic sessions, namely on climate change, food security and disasters.

Thematic session 1: Climate Change

The first thematic session focused on climate change from domestic and regional perspectives with highlights on previous SAARC commitments. Mr Ajay Mani Dixit, Executive Director, Institute for Social and Environmental Transition (ISET), started the discussion by pointing out that in South Asia, there are significant social, humanitarian and economic costs of erratic climate, changing pattern of precipitation and energy dynamics. The poor and vulnerable population of the region is going to suffer the most due to these challenges. Thus, to overcome them, he stressed the need for South Asian countries to strive to mitigate the negative effects of climate change and to find pathways of low carbon growth.

Identifying Nepal's vulnerability to climate change as a combination of geo-climatic, social, economic and political factors, Dr. Smriti Dahal, Senior Programme Officer, SAWTEE, explained the impacts of increasing temperature, variation in precipitation and melting of glaciers in the country. She applauded the Government of Nepal's efforts in putting in place the National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA), Local Adaptation Plan of Action (LAPA) and National Climate Change Policy, but stated that implementation of these policies on the ground seem to be weak. Stating climate change as not just a national but a regional issue, Dr. Dahal highlighted some of the initiatives SAARC has taken on climate

change. Although environmental issues have occupied important space in SAARC Summits, there have been no commensurate outcomes. She further stated that in the future, SAARC needs to challenge its current framework and structure and ensure regional cooperation in addressing knowledge gaps and capacity development in the region. She also added that South-South technology transfer and initiation of a regional climate change fund is necessary for climate change adaptation in South Asia.

Dr. Madhav Karki, South Asia Chair, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), cautioned the possible negative effects of climate change to Nepal by mentioning that the Mustang district might warm by more than 10 degree Celsius in the near future. He further stressed that temperature in Nepal is rising more than the global average, and this portrays an alarming forecast for our country. Thus, he specified the need for Nepal to be committed to the adaptation plan and to implement the national disaster risk management strategy, which has been devised but not put into operation. He further suggested that Nepal needs to take an integrated approach for proper coordination, real time information sharing and knowledge exchange between countries. He pointed out that so far, the SAARC Development Fund (SDF) has not been used to fund climate change projects. Therefore, the SDF's remit should be expanded to include climate change projects. Furthermore, he suggested pursuing a regional initiative to address major climate change issues in the upcoming United Nations Climate Change Conference (UNCCC).

Mr. Arjan Dixit, Regional Climate Change Coordinator Asia, CARE International, opined that climate change should not only be taken as an environmental issue alone but should also be related with issues such as politics, economics, growth, financing, livelihood, development, well-being, food security and disaster risk management. He was doubtful about SAARC taking a common position on climate change in global platforms, stating that individual countries will have different interests. He suggested SAARC to be more committed towards investment in research/forecasts and to create an information hub for sharing information. He further stressed that the information provided from such centers should be relevant for making important decisions at the national, local, household and personal level, for instance: devising early warning systems for climate change and planning of agriculture risk management strategies.

Floor discussions

Participants were of the view that there should be an analysis of also the positive aspects of climate change. For example, chilly cultivation has become possible in a mountainous district like Jumla as a result of temperature rise, which could be one of the positive effects of climate change in that particular region. Therefore, participants stressed the need for more research on the subject. They further stated that involving universities and students for such research purpose would be more effective. It was also suggested that there should be an effective monitoring and evaluation mechanism at the country level and the regional level for proper mitigation and adaptation. Likewise, participants highlighted the need for a single window system for information access/sharing and the need for coming up with a clear national agenda for climate change before going to the SAARC platform.

Theme2: Agriculture and Food Security

The second thematic session started with a presentation by Dr. Krishna P. Pant, Fellow, South Asian Network for Development and Environmental Economics (SANDEE). Dr Pant talked about the issue of food insecurity in the country and the role of SAARC to help attain food security. Comparing the situation of food insecurity in different South Asian countries, Dr. Pant stated that although there is an improvement in the condition of food insecurity in Nepal, it is still a grave issue for the country as 15 percent of its total population is severely food insecure. According to him, the main reasons for the state of food insecurity in the country are low agriculture productivity, food price volatility, climate change, etc. Further, talking about Nepal's agenda for regional cooperation on food security in South Asia, Dr. Pant added that there is a need to facilitate technology transfer, especially for a country like Nepal, to address food insecurity. Talking about climate change and its impact on food productivity, he stressed the need for South Asian countries to cooperate on weather forecasting and to operationalize the SAARC Food Bank. He further stated the need to strengthen SAFTA, standardize food products across the region and facilitate signing of mutual recognition agreements to ensure food security in Nepal and South Asia as a whole.

Ms. Yamuna Ghale, Senior Programme Officer, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) focused her deliberation on the issue of declining agriculture sector in the country and increasing dependency on agriculture imports. She stated that agriculture and food security should also be analyzed from a political viewpoint by having a clearer role assessment on the part of government, private sector as well as the development sector to identify gaps and opportunities for its proper advocacy. Talking about the formulation of the food mechanism plan, she stressed that it should be devised from a people's centric approach targeted especially for vulnerable groups such as small farmers and women.

Recognizing the need for women in the agriculture sector to rise above subsistence farming, Mr. Jagat Deuja, Executive Director, Community Self Reliance Centre (CSRC), highlighted the need to empower women through training and awareness programs in modern farming practices especially for women engaged in the agriculture sector. He further emphasized the need for proper management in the farming system and proposed to take an appropriate farming approach -commercial farming, sustainable farming or family farming that is suitable for more productivity in the context of Nepal. He further mentioned that land management agendas should not be ignored since the majority of people in South Asia are landless and are dependent on agriculture for subsistence.

Mr. Pradip Maharjan, Chief Executive Officer, Agro Enterprise Centre, Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI), stated that since India has been showing its willingness to establish and strengthen the food testing laboratories in Nepal, Nepal's government should take the necessary steps forward and cooperate with the Indian government to work on this opportunity. He further mentioned that there are still more challenges that needs to be addressed in the context of mutual

collaboration and recognition within SAARC, but first Nepal needs to discuss in-house to get a clear picture on the kind of mutual recognition that needs to be executed.

Floor Discussions:

Participants highlighted the importance of involving youth/students in the agriculture sector. They stressed the issue of labour shortage in the agriculture sector and the need for the government to find possible solutions to lessen out-migration of Nepalese youth from the country. Farmer representatives complained about the difficulty in accessing finance. They said that the facility in place for agriculture loan from different banks is being used mostly by businessmen involved in agriculture trade rather than by small farmers. Participants also opined that in the present scenario, agriculture productivity can be achieved only through industrialization and modernization in the agriculture sector. Thus, , they requested to introduce trainings and awareness programs for the farmers towards better farming practice that would enable them to understand the difference between the conventional agriculture and the new agricultural system, and to understand how the new system could improve their lives. They pointed out that strategies need to be developed on enhancing the efficiency of agriculture through technology transfer which can be incorporated in both family-based farming and commercial farming. It was also suggested that issues related to food price volatility and export promotion of agricultural products should be taken forward in the summit.

Theme 3: Disaster Risk Reduction

In the last thematic session, Dr Meen B. Poudyal Chhetri, President, Nepal Center for Disaster Management, started his presentation with some major causes of disaster at the global level and their impacts in the form of loss of lives, livelihoods and economies. In the context of Nepal, Dr. Chhetri cited weak policies, legislation and law enforcement as a hindrance to Nepal's disaster risk management. He further added that absence of disaster management policy, and timely updates of Acts, codes and rules, mainly due to political instability, were the main weaknesses in disaster risk management in Nepal. Citing the example of how typhoons in India have had adverse impacts on the lives and infrastructure in Nepal, Dr Chhetri stressed the need for regional cooperation to lessen the adverse impacts of disaster. He recommended the establishment of a SAARC regional information centre, consisting of civil society, academia, corporates and community members, in order to build a network of partnership for disaster management throughout the region.

Mr. Surya Narayan Shrestha, Deputy Executive Director, National Society for Earthquake Technology Nepal (NSET), commented that Nepal has also been doing well in disaster risk reduction and that some of its programmes like community-based disaster risk management and school safety disaster risk management programmes have been taken as a model by other countries. However, he stated that the Nepal's efforts in disaster risk preparedness are still not enough when compared to the scale of the problem. Thus, he suggested learning from other countries that have that have a well developed system in place. Furthermore, he highlighted the need to institutionalize, scale up and prepare cost-effective measures for disaster risk reduction programmes.

Mr. Bimal Gadal, Programme Manager, Oxfam in Nepal, also agreed that Nepal should take a proactive approach and should show its interest in preparedness as its main strategy. He further stated that the preemptive strategy for preparedness would be a cheaper option rather than only focusing on the management of the aftermath of a disaster. Citing a World Bank Report, he stated that Nepal could reduce post-disaster cost by up to 15 times if risk management is planned earlier.

Moreover, Mr. Yadav Koirala, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of Nepal, elaborated that the government still has a weak position in implementing action plans on disaster prevention and preparedness and that the policies are not sufficient. He proposed taking adaptive-policies that are robust enough to be useful in taking account all the uncertainties and the dynamics of the problems being addressed. He further stressed the need for Nepal to have a cohesive and a strategic voice for raising the funds for the disaster risk management in the upcoming summit.

Floor Discussion:

Participants pointed out the need for more research, preparedness and advocacy plans regarding climate change and disaster risk management. They stated that good practices should be replicated in similar situations for risk reduction and that the donors, government and aid agencies need to invest in the area of cost-effective disaster preparedness and research rather than only focusing on disaster response.

Dr. Hiramani Ghimire, Executive Director, SAWTEE, concluded the dialogue by saying that the three components: climate change, agriculture/food security and disaster risk reduction are interrelated, so comprehensive efforts are needed to address the problem. He was of the view that prior commitments made by SAARC leaders in these areas should first be implemented rather than enlarging the list of new commitments.

Annex1: List of Participants:

List of Participants: National Stakeholders' Dialogue on
"Upcoming 18th SAARC Summit: Nepal's perspectives
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16th October 2014

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