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CONTENTS

OPINION IN LEAD

Time to work towards regional cooperation on international waters

With no recognized political boundaries for international rivers, South Asia is trying hard to cope with the growing tension over trans-boundary water claims and frequently arising water conflicts. History has it, political divisions created between riparian States have been the root of contention to the trans-boundary rights for the river systems where several country claims are long pending to get resolved and many hibernated claims have cropped up demanding immediate action as a matter of national security. Trust deficit, coupled with the strict classification of water as a “sovereign” issue as per political and bureaucratic setup of different countries have always paralysed South Asia in framing a regional water governance framework. Till date, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has not been successful in forming a regional water commission for the efficient sharing and management of international waters.

The three mighty river basins of South Asia—the Indus, the Ganges and the Brahmaputra—support the river systems, lakes and aquifers between Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Pakistan. Millions of people in the region depend on the river basins for access to water to support agriculture and other socio-economic practices. While agriculture sector is the largest consumer of water resources in the region, energy is another sector that has demanded a sudden surge in water usage, with many hydropower projects mushrooming in international rivers to meet the energy requirement of rapidly growing regional economies.

Considering the dependence of many South Asian countries on common water sources, the pertinence of emphasizing stronger regional cooperation in the water domain is becoming more coherent and vociferous in the region. However, whether this desire for a regional water governance framework will materialise in the near future is a question that has long been anticipated by water experts. Nonetheless, South Asia is at a critical juncture where water management needs to evolve from unilateral or bilateral frameworks to a regional framework.

The current state of water management in this region is overpowered by complex fragmented institutional structures that are poorly governed and have inefficiently adopted the model of Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM). Moreover, only Bangladesh, India and Nepal have made national commitment to IWRM. In most of these countries, various ministries and departments are responsible for different uses of water (viz. irrigation, environment, energy, sanitation, health, water supply, *et al.*) and in some cases the tasks of individual ministries and department overlap.

In addition, existing water policies are not comprehensive and most of these countries lack an all-encompassing policy. Furthermore, the extent to which the element of trans-boundary water cooperation is addressed in the national policies is elusive and not in-depth. In the case of India, the National Water Policy 2012 has made recommendation on the formation of adequate institutional arrangements at the central level for implementing international agreements; but the task seems overwhelming as water is a State subject and States’ interests often conflict with that of the central government. The conundrum on signing of the Teesta water sharing treaty between Bangladesh and India is an example of the never-ending drift between the interest of the States and the central government in India.

In Bangladesh, the National Water Policy (1999) starkly highlights the need of trans-boundary cooperation on water sharing and management for it is a downstream riparian entirely reliant on water flowing through India. Similarly, Nepal’s National Water Plan (2002) does mention international cooperation on water management, but looking at the history of Indo-Nepalese water sharing agreements and the ambiguities in the interpretation of Mahakali treaty, more coherent national policy is needed to effectively manage and implement cooperation in the international water systems.

Signed in 2003, Bhutan's Water Policy has satisfactorily addressed the issue of trans-boundary water sharing and management. A point on trans-boundary water sharing states the need for sharing of information on flood warning and disaster management, and appropriate technology in water resources development. Since Bhutan has a congenial political relation with India, this is one of the successful models on bilateral cooperation and coordination in water sharing. Meanwhile, in Pakistan, the Draft National Water Policy has been in the process of approval since 2005, which if approved will strongly stress the need for trans-boundary cooperation. However, the challenge lies in resolving internal water conflicts, mainly between the provinces of Punjab and Sindh, and devising polices in tandem with the national water agenda.

Despite the clear mention of trans-boundary cooperation on water sharing and management in the National Water Policies of many South Asian countries, the issue has not been the top most priority in the national and regional policy agenda. But with the rising concerns over the multifaceted nature of water and its intimate nexus with the other two most important means of sustenance—food and energy, time has come to devise coherent water polices and back them up with strong and effective regional collaborations with strong enforcement capacity.

Kofi Annan has rightly quoted on World Water Day 2002, *"Fierce national competition over water resources has prompted fears that water issues contain the seeds of violent conflict…If the entire world's peoples work together, a secure and sustainable water future can be ours."*

Trust is the key in achieving regional cooperation in the water domain. Given the complexities in the working culture of the region, combined with the shrewd hydro-diplomacy, South Asia should understand the importance of shared benefits as well as shared costs for achieving trans-boundary water cooperation. This can be done by bringing together the relevant stakeholders into the mainstream discussion on water and making them aware of their pay-offs if trans-boundary cooperation on water is achieved.

Institutional determinants play a pivotal role in influencing co-riparian water relations. Hence, South Asia needs to formulate and effectively manage joint bodies (such as river, lakes and aquifers commission) with a strong enforcement capacity for ensuring good cooperation between the government and various ministries working under them. Importantly, the region needs to look beyond SAARC for resolving water issues as the role of China is imperative in influencing policy decisions within SAARC. A South Asia regional institution on water governance will only become a reality if all the stakeholders come together and frame a commission/framework that covers all the aspects of water governance with a robust, binding resolution mechanism. The Mekong River Commission and the Nile Basin Initiative can be looked into as successful models in this regard.

ANALYSIS

Strong commitment to business regulatory reform still absent in South Asia

Much of the current global economic policy debate revolves around fiscal measures, monetary interventions and welfare programmes, while less attention is given to the private sector—the engine of economic growth of any world economy. The ease with which it is possible to do business, trade and invest is key to facilitate the growth of the private sector and foster entrepreneurship.

According to the latest *Doing Business Report 2015: Going Beyond Efficiency*—the flagship report of the World Bank, 123 economies have implemented at least one reform in the areas measured by the Report and in total implemented 230 reforms in 2013/2014. More than 63 percent of these reforms reduced the complexity and cost of regulatory processes, while the others strengthened legal institutions.

The *Doing Business Report* benchmarks the regulations that affect private sector firms, in particular small and medium-size enterprises. It provides quantitative measures of regulations for starting a business, dealing with construction permits, getting electricity, registering property, getting credit, protecting investors, paying taxes, trading across borders, enforcing contracts and resolving insolvency.

Among the 189 economies covered in the Report, Singapore tops the global ranking on the ease of doing business, followed by New Zealand, Hong Kong, Denmark, Korea, Norway, United States (US), United Kingdom (UK), Finland and Australia. More importantly, the report finds that economies in South Asia have taken steps to improve the business environment, though the share of economies in the region implementing at least on reform in 2013/14 was down from the share in the previous year. Specifically, only four out of eight regional countries implemented a total of 6 regulatory reforms. While India implemented three such reforms in the areas of starting a business, getting electricity and protecting minority investors, including through the adoption of the new Companies Act of 2013, three countries—Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan—focused their efforts on adopting modern electronic systems to facilitate business activities.

According to the report, Sri Lanka continues to outperform other South Asian countries in the ease of doing business, and has recorded the region's largest improvement in the distance to frontier score between 2013 and 2014. In fact, Sri Lanka is ranked 99 out of 189, followed by Nepal (108th), the Maldives (116th), Bhutan (125th), Pakistan (128th), India (142nd), Bangladesh (173rd) and Afghanistan (183rd). However, Sri Lanka has made paying taxes more costly for companies by increasing the reduced corporate income tax rate for qualifying small and medium-size enterprises. Furthermore, limitation to freedom of contract and the lengthy time taken to resolve standardized disputes through the courts have made doing business harder in Sri Lanka. Consequently, Sri Lanka has slipped down fifteen positions in the overall ranking of ease of doing business.

Similarly, South Asia's largest economy, India, has slipped down eight positions, and is way behind most of its South Asian neighbours. Though India has made starting a business easier by reducing the registration fees, the new requirement to file a declaration before the commencement of the business operations has made it more difficult to start a business. Moreover, it is among the worst performers in South Asia in four indicators: starting a business (158th), dealing with construction permits (184th), enforcing contracts (186th) and paying taxes (156th). Nonetheless, the ease of doing business in India is still better than in Bangladesh, although Bangladesh has introduced the Automated System of for Customs Data (ASYCUDA) system for customs data management. Likewise, Pakistan has also introduced a fully automated, computerized system (the Web-Based One Customs system) for the submission and processing of export and import documents, which has made trading across borders easier.

Meanwhile, Nepal has implemented a new electronic building permit system, which has helped the country climb up one spot in the overall ranking. But unfortunately, Nepal's improved performance has been limited to the dealing with construction permits, registering property and enforcing contracts. Notably, Nepal's still ranks 104th in starting a business and 171st in trading across borders for it still takes 17 days to start a business, and takes over a month to export and import. Concomitantly, Afghanistan—the worst regional performer—has made starting a business more difficult by increasing the publication fees and prolonging the time required for registration, but still only takes 7 days to start a business.

The Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan and the island nation of Maldives have both failed to implement any reforms to facilitate the ease of doing business. Consequently, both Bhutan and Maldives have dropped down a few positions in the overall ranking of ease of doing business.

Though South Asian countries have implemented regulatory reforms to improve the overall business environment in their respective countries, major regional players like India and Pakistan have been unable to keep pace with the reforms and improvements made by smaller regional counterparts. Moreover, four South Asian countries did not implement even a single regulatory reform aimed at improving the business environment. Such poor performance of many South Asian countries, including that of India and Pakistan, in the ease of doing business is likely to dampen economic growth of the region and prevent the region from exploiting its entire economic potential. Considering that sound business regulations in the 10 areas measured by the *Doing Business Report* tend to benefit small firms, which account for the largest shares of job creation and the highest growth in sales and employment in developing economies, all South Asian countries should fully commit to improving the business environment by working to develop better regulations in the areas mentioned in the Report.

Based on Doing Business Report 2015.

NEWS

Three separate SAARC agreements to be signed

Three separate agreements among SAARC member states will be signed during the 18th SAARC summit to be held in Kathmandu on 26-27 November.

According to Nepalese Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mahendra Bahadur Pandey, Nepal is making all necessary preparations to sign the SAARC Railway Agreement, SAARC Motor Vehicle Agreement and SAARC Framework Agreement on Energy Cooperation during the summit. Foreign Minister from each SAARC member state will be signing the agreements in the presence of their respective head of the government.

This comes in the line with the agreement made during the 17th SAARC summit held in Addu, Maldives to conclude the regional railways agreement and to convene the expert group meeting on the Motor Vehicles Agreement before the next session of the council of ministers, and to direct the early conducting of a demonstration run of a container train (Bangladesh-India-Nepal).

"Deeper Integration for Peace and Prosperity" has been set as the theme for this SAARC summit. Though agreed in the previous SAARC summit, experts say the agreements will be equally relevant in line with the theme of the 18th SAARC summit that aims at further deepening integration among member states for peace and prosperity.

Addressing the parliamentary committee on international relations and labor on 2 November, Foreign Minister Pandey informed that a 31-point draft declaration of the SAARC has already prepared and circulated to all member states through the SAARC Secretariat for their feedback and suggestions. He mentioned that issues such as trade, investment, infrastructure development, South Asian Freed Trade Agreement, SAARC Development Fund, youth employment, reduction of telecom tariff in the region, regional connectivity, promotion of innovative and reliable technology, social security for elderly people, fight against terrorism, eradication of illiteracy from the region and transforming SAARC into South Asian Economic Union by 2030 have been included in the draft.

Source: www.myrepublica.com, 03.11.2014.

India scraps plant quarantine test for Nepal-bound goods

India has removed the provision requiring a plant quarantine test for Nepal-bound goods imported from third countries. Under the rule which has been in force for the last one and a half months, Nepali importers had to clear the quarantine test at Kolkata port.

Chandra Kumar Ghimire, Consul General of Nepal in Kolkata, said the Kolkata Customs' Commissioner and the Office of the Nepal Consulate General (ONCG) officially agreed to remove the plant quarantine rule. According to him, both the ONCG and importers had been pressurizing the Indian authorities not to implement the provision unilaterally without amending the Nepal-India transit treaty.

There is no provision for implementing the quarantine test in the Nepal-India Transit Treaty as well as Indian laws. "However, the Indian side had enforced the rule arguing that imported plant products passing through Indian territory could spread communicable diseases there," Ghimire said.

Due to the provision, importers of agriculture and forest-related products had to undergo a lot of suffering at Kolkata port which is the only route for Nepal-bound cargo coming from third countries. Nepali traders had also been complaining that it increased their costs due to delays in transportation, administrative hassles and increased demurrage. Meanwhile, the Indian authorities have asked for implementation of the rule requiring cargo to be covered with tarpaulin as mentioned in the transit treaty.

Likewise, Nepali importers will have to state “Nepal” as the import destination while obtaining sanitary and phytosanitary certification from the source country. Earlier, importers had been putting down “India” as the import destination while importing goods from third countries.

Similarly, the Indian authorities have agreed to simplify the process of customs clearance at Kolkata port. Previously, all the containers were kept in a long queue if any were found with tampered seals. If the seal on any container was found to be broken, all the other containers would have to wait until an enquiry was completed. This used to result in heavy demurrage for importers. But according to Mr. Ghimire, an agreement had been reached to allow containers with intact seals to pass.

Last year, traders imported 35,000 containers of goods through Kolkata port while the figure has reached 22,000 as of September this year. Similarly, imports of open and bulk cargo have swelled significantly. Nepal imported 351,000 tonnes of such shipments through Haldia port in the previous year. Industrial raw materials like coal, iron and chemical fertilisers, among others, fall under this category.

Source: www.ekantipur.com, 17.10.2014.

Nepal, China sign pact to develop ICD in Rasuwagadhi

Nepal and China have inked an agreement for a detail feasibility and technical study of Inland Container Depot (ICD) at Timure of Rasuwagadhi district, outlining necessary contents of ICD to be constructed with grant assistance from Chinese government.

The Ministry of Finance (MoF) will sign the grant-assistance agreement with the China government on the estimated cost following the completion of detail feasibility study and technical study to pave the way for construction of the project.

“After the feasibility study is approved by the Chinese government, exchange note on project establishment will be signed between the two governments,” according to the agreement signed.

Ministry of Commerce and Supplies (MoCS) has said that China would be responsible for building all the required infrastructures for the ICD. China will bear all the costs involved in the construction of the ICD, excluding the land. The Nepal government has already provided five hectares of land for the construction of the ICD at Timure of Rasuwa district.

There had been a long dispute between the Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation (MoFSC) and MoCS about acquiring land for ICD. The MoFSC had initially refused to provide the proposed land, which lies inside the Langtang National Park, citing negative environmental impact. But the Cabinet had intervened and provided the land for ICD construction.

Kerung to Rasuwagadhi is known as the second largest trading route with the northern neighbour, which will be linked with China’s railway project in the future. The Chinese government has also informed that it will soon operate well-equipped customs services, including immigration services from Kerung border. Nepal government has also prioritised upgrading the Syafrubesi—Trishuli road section to boost trade from this route.

Source: www.thehimalayantimes.com, 16.10.2014.

EU removes yellow flag from Pak mangoes

European Union (EU) has removed the yellow flag on Pakistani mangoes. According to the statement issued by the Ministry of Commerce in Pakistan, last year, 237 consignments of Pakistani mangoes were rejected by the EU authorities, mainly due to fruit fly infestation. The situation was worse for India, as the EU banned the import of Indian mangoes. Meanwhile, Pakistani mangoes were placed under strict observation and the critics feared a similar ban on the export of Pakistani mangoes to EU.

The Ministry of Commerce and Ministry of National Food Security quickly came into action and took necessary measures to ensure pest free export of mangoes to EU. The government made it obligatory for mango exporters to follow hot water treatment procedures to free the mangoes of fruit fly.

Department of Plant Protection started registration of mango orchards, which followed all the standard practices to remove the remnants of any pests. Resultantly, this year, the occurrence of fruit-fly infestations in the exported mango to EU reduced from 237 to 2, the export rose by about 10 percent as compared to the previous year and the exporters received higher per unit price.

Ministry of Commerce has decided to lease out imported Vapour Heat Treatment (VHT) plant in a transparent manner so that it may be made operational before the start of the next mango export season. Some high-end markets like Japan only allow vapour heat treated fruits, which are not yet available in Pakistan. With the government-imported VHT plant in place, the exporters will have a great opportunity to enhance their profits. This will also prompt the private sector to invest in this advanced treatment technology.

Source: www.thenews.com.pk, 14.10.2014.

India to develop Bangladesh port

India is to develop a river port in Bangladesh to ferry essentials, foodgrain and heavy machinery to northeast region from different parts of the country and abroad.

“To develop the Ashuganj port over river Meghna, India would provide necessary funds. Both northeastern states of India and Bangladesh would be benefited if the river port's necessary infrastructures were developed,” India's Deputy High Commissioner in Dhaka Sandeep Chakravorty told reporters. He added that the Water, Power Consultancy Services Limited (WAPCOS) is preparing a Detailed Project Report to develop the port.

Ashuganj port over river Meghna in eastern Bangladesh is around 40 km from Agartata, Tripura. India has taken the first steps to construct an INR 70 crore (US$11.5 million) bridge over the Feni river in Tripura to access Bangladeshi ports for transporting goods and heavy machinery from other parts of the country to the landlocked northeast and to boost trade and tourism.

The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) too has started preliminary work to extend its network up to the Bangladeshi border town and railway station of Akhaurah, just six kilometers from the Agartala railway station. Transportation via Bangladesh is much easier as surface connectivity is a key factor for the mountainous northeastern region, which is surrounded by Bangladesh, Myanmar, Bhutan and China. There is only a narrow land corridor to the northeastern states from India through Assam and West Bengal but this route passes through hilly terrain with steep gradients and multiple hairpin bends. For instance, Agartala via Guwahati is 1,650 km from Kolkata and 2,637 km from New Delhi, while the distance between Agartala and Kolkata via Bangladesh is just about 350 km.

Chakravorty said that the Bangladesh government is also keen to provide access of Chittagong international port to India.

Source: www.business-standar percentd.com, 07.10.2014.

Led by India, South Asia economic growth to accelerate World Bank

Economic growth in South Asia is forecast to accelerate to 2016 led by an increase in activity in India, the biggest economy in a region that has the world's largest concentration of poor people, a World Bank report said.

In the twice-a-year South Asia Economic Focus, the World Bank said the region's economy will expand by a real 6 percent in 2015 and by 6.4 percent in 2016 compared to 5.4 percent this year, potentially making it the second fastest growing region in the world after East Asia and the Pacific. The Indian economy, 80 percent of the region's output, is set to grow by 6.4 percent in fiscal year (FY) 2015/16 after 5.6 percent in FY2014/15.

Reviewing the risks facing South Asia's economies, home to a fourth of mankind, the report notes that all developing economies are vulnerable to the effects of monetary tightening in a recovering U.S. economy and of stagnation in the weaker Euro zone. However, bigger effects on the fortunes of the region could come from domestic developments. Political turmoil and non-sustainable fiscal policies could undermine stability and investor confidence, whereas sound macroeconomic policies and economic reforms could spur faster growth.

Countries in the region should build on this strength. As East Asian labour costs increase, South Asia has an opportunity to become the manufacturing hub of the world; but achieving this will require boosting competitiveness.

India is benefiting from a "Modi dividend", the report said, with economic activity buoyed by expectations from the newly elected government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Over the next year or so economic growth should be supported by the recovering U.S. economy that would provide a market for Indian merchandise and service exports. Private investment is expected to pick up thanks to the government's business orientation, and declining oil prices should boost private sector competitiveness. But economic reforms will be needed for India to achieve its full long-term growth potential, the report argued.

The question for Pakistan, as the region's second biggest economy, is whether recent political turmoil had damaged investor confidence and thereby weakened growth prospects. According to the report, it is still too early to assess the impact of events this year but an early estimate suggests short-term losses equivalent to 2.1 percent of Gross Domestic Product. Economic growth is forecast at 4.4 percent in FY2015 after 4.1 percent this year.

Regaining political stability and with a renewed focus on growth, Bangladesh is forecast to grow by 6.2 percent in FY2014/15 and 6.1 percent the past fiscal year. Remittances are expected to finance higher domestic consumption, while infrastructure investments will support strong aggregate demand. Sri Lanka is expected to continue its strong growth, at 8.2 percent in 2015 rising from 7.8 percent this year. Afghanistan is on a more fragile path, dominated by security and political concerns, after having grown by a modest 1.5 percent in 2013.

Source: www.business-standard.com, 06.10.2014.

Sri Lanka has the least number of hungry people in South Asia

Sri Lanka has the least number of hungry people in South Asia and the number of people going hungry has steadily declined, according to the 2014 Global Hunger Index (GHI) released by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Welthungerhilfe and Concern Worldwide on 13 October 2014.

With a score of 15.1, the country has secured 39th position in the GHI. Among other South Asian countries, India made some progress this year in reducing poverty level ranking 55th out of 76 countries ahead of Bangladesh (57th) and Pakistan (57th), but behind Nepal (44th) and Sri Lanka (39th). Last year India was at 63rd position in the GHI, behind both Bangladesh and Pakistan.

The 2014 GHI examines levels of hunger in 120 countries and scores them based on three equally weighted indicators: the proportion of people who are undernourished; the proportion of children under five who are underweight; and the mortality rate of children under the age of five.

South Asia saw the steepest absolute decline in GHI scores since 1990, amounting to more than 12 points. The region reduced its GHI score by three points between 1990 and 1995—mainly through a decline of almost nine percentage points in underweight in children—but made considerable progress again since 2005. “The decrease of more than five points in South Asia’s GHI score since 2005 can be largely attributed to recent successes in the fight against child under nutrition,” says the report, which excludes higher-income countries with low prevalence of hunger and countries with GHI score of less than five.

According to the report, significant progress has also been made in the fight against hunger globally, especially since 1990. Yet, the number of hungry people in the world remains unacceptably high, says the report, adding, in 2012 to 2014, about 805 million people were chronically undernourished.

What is also alarming is the case of hidden hunger, which, according to the report, is a critical aspect of hunger that is often overlooked. To eliminate hidden hunger, governments must demonstrate political commitment by making fighting it a priority, notes the report. “Governments and multilateral institutions need to invest in and develop human and financial resources, increase coordination, and ensure transparent monitoring and evaluation to build capacity on nutrition.”

Governments must also create a regulatory environment that values good nutrition, adds the report. “This could involve creating incentives for private sector companies to develop more nutritious seeds or foods.”

Source: www.ifpri.org.

Activities

National Stakeholders' Dialogue on upcoming 18th SAARC Summit: Nepal's perspectives on climate change, agriculture, food security and disaster risk reduction

South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE) organized a National Stakeholder's Dialogue on "Upcoming 18th SAARC Summit: Nepal's perspectives on climate change, agriculture, food security and disaster risk reduction" on 16 October 2014 in Kathmandu in collaboration with Oxfam in Nepal. 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 sixty five participants representing the government, civil society organizations, private sector, academia, and the media.

In the opening session, Ms. Noreen Khalid, Interim Country Director, Oxfam in Nepal highlighted the need to move forward with proper collaboration between civil society organizations and the government of Nepal in mitigating and adapting to climate change effects and disasters. Subsequently, 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. Dr. Govinda Nepal, Member, National Planning Commission, further stressed the need for the 18th SAARC Summit to convert prior commitments into reality. Concluding the inaugural session, Dr. Posh Raj Pandey stated that the issues related to climate change, agriculture, food security and disaster risk reduction should be tackled by formulating policy measures through national and regional initiatives by taking vulnerable and poor people into account.

The remaining part of the programme was divided into three thematic sessions. The first thematic session on climate change highlighted the need for South Asian countries to strive to mitigate the negative effects of climate change. Participants suggested taking a regional initiative to address major climate change issues in the upcoming United Nations Climate Change Conference (UNCCC). However, participants stated their doubts on SAARC for taking a common position on climate change in global platforms stating that individual countries will have different interests.

The second thematic session on agriculture and food security focused on the role of SAARC to attain food security in the region. Participants were of the view that declining situation of agriculture production should be improved. The participants further stated that the issues related to agriculture and food security should also be analysed from a political perspective and due priority should be given to women and small farmers while making policies. The session also stressed the issue of land management as the majority of people in South Asia are landless and are highly dependent on agriculture.

In the last thematic session on disaster risk reduction, participants stressed the need for the establishment of a SAARC-level disaster information centre. It suggested knowledge and information sharing among member states to strengthen public-private-partnership to mitigate and adapt to disasters. The session elaborated that disaster risk reduction should incorporate prevention, preparedness and mitigation within a broad context of development. The participants recommended that the governments and development partners invest in the area of cost-effective disaster preparedness and research rather than only focusing on disaster response.

The participants further highlighted the need for more research involving universities and academia along with an effective monitoring and evaluation mechanism and a single window policy for information and knowledge sharing in the region.

Hiramani Ghimire, Executive Director, SAWTEE, concluded the dialogue stating that climate change, agriculture, food security and disaster risk reduction are interrelated, so comprehensive efforts are needed to address the problem. He also stated that the prior commitments made in these areas should first be implemented rather than enlarging the list of new commitments.

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