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# ANALYZING THE ROLE OF COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS IN IMPLEMENTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN BANGLADESH

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***Abstract:** In this globalized world, countries are highly inter-dependent for socio-economic development. It is more important for developing countries like Bangladesh because of the multidimensional nature of development issue that requires support from different corners particularly after being graduated to middle income country. Collaboration and partnerships expedite development process, enhance mutual trust, and build strong relation to explore new areas for assistance. This partnership is necessarily required when countries adopt global agenda. The agenda 2030 is a holistic approach that philosophizes the well-being and prosperity of humankind. In order to realize the benefits of this agenda and implement all 17 goals and its 169 targets, country needs support from various stakeholders. Apart from the public and private sectors from within, global actors including international organizations, different nations must act together to bring the benefit for all. This paper aims at analyzing the necessity of collaboration and partnership among the states and assessing how partnerships can help implement Sustainable Development Goals. This review article is prepared based on the secondary data collected from the various research articles, government publications, UN reading materials. The study finds that Bangladesh needs to strengthen regional and global partnership for all SDGs specially after graduation to middle income country.*

**Keywords:** Sustainable Development Goals, South Asia, Cooperation, Challenge

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## Introduction

Cooperative relations and partnerships are vital for the economic and social upliftment of the impoverished people. It is more important for the South Asian region because of association with the multi-dimensional development issues such as poverty, inequality, social structure and caste system, diversity of religious practices, low level of education. Data say that most of the poor of the world live here. South Asia comprises of countries like Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The economies of the South Asian region are not globalized by world standard especially when compared to neighboring Southeast Asia or China. In this age of cooperation and competition it is an irony that South Asian economies are fighting their battles individually and independent of each other because of political tensions. Challenges to Regionalism Issues of terrorism, religious radicalism, assertion of ethno-national identity have made the states adopt a cautious policy towards the issue of regional integration (Kumar, 2005).

Researchers comment that the progress of a country and regions depends on the shared sense and values of the history that helps nurture the regional identity and uphold the fate of regional partnership. It is found that sense of shared history is absent in case of South Asia that makes difficult to shape the regional identity (Pattanaik, 2011). However, people of the region often refer them as the people of sub-continent that becomes irrelevant because of individual national identifies.

Although the notion of regional partnership and economic integration is not a new idea, there have been many deals on various issues of common interests and concern among the state since the modern state system came into being and being preferred rather than functioning as self-contained units.

Systematic studies have been conducted to assess the need for South Asian partnership in implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), keeping in mind the rapidly changing geo-strategic climate that affects the inter-state relations (UN, 2015a). Against this backdrop, this research intends to recommend the right perspective for the South Asian countries reflecting the geo-strategic reality and dynamics. Sustainable Development Goals, adopted by all United Nations Member States postulates a shared blueprint that advocates for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future<sup>6</sup>. Because of the nature of SDGs and materializing the philosophy of the agenda, the global partnership is mandatorily required.

Since its inception, the SDGs have been aligned with the national planning strategies and efforts are being made to localize SDGs (UN, 2015). The Government of Bangladesh has constituted National Data Coordination Committee (NDCC) to identify data gaps, to ensure the availability of quality data and to monitor the domestic and international commitments (Un, 2015b). The success stories of SDGs implementation will help preparing the SDGs components of the 8<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan and assist devising strategies for SDGs implementation in the flagship Plan document.

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<sup>6</sup> The United Nations General Assembly adopted the *Resolution No. A/70/L.1: Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2015.

Bangladesh has shown its significant rise in GDP growth from 5.1 Per cent in 2014-2015 to 6.91 in 2018-2019 (GED, 2020). However, this growth is encircled by significant uncertainties because of the recent outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic and to offset this international partnership can be beneficial.

## **Problem statement**

The key philosophy 'leave no one behind' is the central issue of 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets. These goals and targets are universal, inseparable and interlinked in terms of nature and means of implementation (Karim, 2021a). The goal 17 states to strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development encourages enhancing North-South, South-South, regional and international cooperation for implementing the SDGs (UN, 2015b). Revitalizing the global partnership is deemed to facilitate a comprehensive global engagement for collective implementation and making a common platform for governments, civil society, NGOs, private sector, UN systems to work together and mobile available resources. It is often underscored that middle-income countries will face significant challenges to achieve sustainable development (Karim, 2021b; UN, 2015; 2015b). It is also suggested that efforts to address the ongoing challenges should be strengthened that requires the the exchange of experiences, effective coordination, and better and focused support of the UN development system, the international financial institutions, regional organizations, and other important stakeholders (UN, 2015a). Recent data signifies the poor achievement in SDGs that South Asian regions is far from way to achieve some goals and is in opposite direction for some (SDG Index and Dashboards Report, 2020). Researchers at CPD noticed encouraged to widen the ownership of SDGS and issue-based politics in order to essentially get most out of targets. They also remarked that these targets may remain as targets only unless these goals are owned by the top-level political leaderships in the region (CPD, 2016). In order to provide useful opportunities for mutual learning, including through voluntary reviews and share best practices and discussion on shared targets, appropriate follow-up and review at the regional and sub-regional levels are widely suggested. This process intends to mobilize support to overcome challenges and correctly identify emerging issues. This is a universal agenda and important to address on mutual trust and understanding among all states (UN, 2015b).

Bangladesh needs to overcome a few challenges to receive further international cooperation (GED, 2020). Firstly, there is a lack of data for indicators for monitoring the progress on SDG targets, especially those related to international cooperation. Secondly, there is insufficient domestic spending on key areas such as social protection (SDG 1), health (SDG 3) and education (SDG 4). Thirdly, the absorptive capacity of different line ministries impedes disbursement of funds despite donor commitments. Fourthly, the executing agencies lack adequate capacity and need significant capacity building. In this context, international cooperation in several areas including FDI, promoting bilateral free trade areas (FTAs) and other trade agreements with potential countries, trade and private sector development, identifying and removing barriers to investment, preventing tax avoidance and evasion are pronounced more as Bangladesh moves forward. Bangladesh is active member of several regional (e.g., BBIN, BCIM,

SAARC, BIMSTEC, APTA) and international organizations (e.g., WTO, WCO) and initiatives. However, achieving the SDGs largely depend on meaningful international partnership and availability of resources including external resources. The ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) is thought as an example of using potentials opportunities. Their development mechanism can be followed to accelerate the process of regional integration.

## **Rationale of the study**

There are some gaps in research on South Asian Partnership, especially for implementation of the SDGs. One of every five people in the world lives in South Asia and it is the home to one of the oldest civilizations in the world. Historically South Asia has served as a melting pot of cultural, social, racial, ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversities that has bred a sense of tolerance and amity in the region. South Asia has also witnessed innumerable armed conflicts, social turmoil, and widespread violence resulting in the rise of communalism and fundamentalism creating intra-state and inter-state conflicts of many manifestations. Disputes on sharing of natural endowments of the region and the region's inability to derive economic advantages by harnessing factors of proximity and contiguity have aggravated regional harmony. Though in today's concept of global economy there are opportunities to take, the ongoing conflicts have inhibited the full exploitation of the enormous potential of the region to promote political and social harmony and economic growth for the greater benefit of the peoples of the region. In the economical ambit relations have improved but geo-strategic competition remains unabated. The future peace and prosperity of South Asia hinges on accelerated regional cooperation bonded to peace and development. Therefore, this research intends to assess the need for South Asian partnership in implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in that prism, in support for appropriate policy formulation.

## **Objectives of the study**

The objectives of this study are:

- a) to assess the opportunities for South Asian partnership in implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
- b) to identify the challenges confronting South Asian partnership and collaboration.
- c) to recommend the way forward for forging a mutually benefitted collaboration and partnership.

## **Methodology**

The research employed qualitative methods for data collection gaining insights and understanding on underlying reasons and motivations. Secondary data was collected from the published books, journals, reports of international organizations and different ministries/divisions of Government of Bangladesh, augmented by personal recollection from different sources. Using the qualitative approach based on interpretative and

participatory perspective (Merriam, 1998) the researcher extracted the experiences, perceptions, and understandings of the respondents. This qualitative data collection approach is effective when the researcher has little knowledge about the area of research (Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005). Collected data was categorized and analyzed manually using qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2000) to generate pertinent themes. The researcher intends to present the thematic analysis dispassionately purely on factual reporting.

## Limitations

The researching issue attracts attention for enhancing collaboration through partnership. However, there is a dearth of sufficient secondary sources, particularly research on South Asian partnership. Data were collected during COVID-19 outbreak that inhibited to collect primary data.

## Discussion and Analysis

Although there are some similarities and difference in undertaking policies, strategies, and approaches for utilizing aid and developmental cooperation, South Asian nations have common interest to explicitly support and committee to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through strengthening the global partnership for sustainable development. The SDG 17 articulates the means of implementation – namely finance, technology, capacity-building, trade and systemic issues. It also aims to enhance North-South and South-South cooperation by providing support for implementing national plans to achieve the targets. Strengthening finance, technological knowledge sharing and facilitation mechanisms; enhancing international support for capacity building; an open, non-discriminatory, and equitable trading system, and improving global macro-economic stability are powerful tools for the achievement of SDG 17.

*Figure 1: Inter-linkages of SDGs*



Countries from this region should work jointly to their contribution for implementing SDGs through sharing of knowledge and information, integrating cooperation to enhance development process, promotion of multi-stakeholders' involvement and adoption of innovative approaches and best practices. They should also prioritize areas for integration and align with their national agenda. In this paper, the researcher presents the findings under following categories:

- (a) Bangladesh's experience in development cooperation for attaining SDGs;
- (b) Global and regional trends and opportunities for collaboration and partnership, particularly for South Asia in implementation of the SDGs;
- (c) Issues and challenges confronting development cooperation in South Asia;
- (d) Recommendations to enhance regional and global cooperation to achieve SDGs.

## **Bangladesh's experience in development cooperation for attaining SDGs**

The analytical and comprehensive study on international cooperation for achieving SDGs conducted by Bangladesh government identifies the provision of cooperation, potential areas of development partners where they can contribute and provide assistance to Bangladesh. The major areas are as follows:

### **Financial Strategy**

The study "SDGs Need Assessment and Financing Strategy: Bangladesh Perspective" estimates an additional amount of investment by public sectors with an average of US\$ 66.32 billion per year. The total cost would be worth of total 19.75 per cent of the total GDP that would require across the period of 2016-17 to 2029-30 (UN, 2015a). It also estimated that Bangladesh will face the big investment gaps in some important areas such as poverty alleviation, sustainable energy, ICT and public service delivery and climate change adaptation. The effective development cooperation mechanism can only minimize these gaps.

*Figure 2: Financing of SDG*

	Baseline (2015)	Current Status
Net ODA to Bangladesh	3.00 billion US\$	4.96 billion US\$ (ERD, 2018)
Government Revenue as % of GDP	9.6%	12.45% (FY 2019)
Budget funded by Domestic Taxes	63%	65.44% (FY 2019)
FDI as % of GNI	1.1%	1.23% (FY 2019)
Remittance as % of GDP	6.74%	5.4% (FY 2019)

## **Technological support**

Although the government's vision 'Digital Bangladesh' has brought the balance between growth and equity, and created the ICT-induced enabling environment, Bangladesh needs to have global partnership to build a knowledge-based society in line with the advancement of the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution (4IR) because the country still is entirely dependent on other country's technology and is far away of self-sufficient homegrown technology (UN, 2015b).

## **Capacity development**

The project titled "Enhancement of Public Administration Skills to Achieve Sustainable Development Goals" has been approved by the government in order to enhance the capacity of public administration. It is totally funded by government and targets to increase the capacity and efficiency of the public employees so that their capacity helps achieve SDGs. The head of the government, honorable Minister had the special attention to undertake this project for the government employees (UN, 2015a).

## **Trade and commerce**

After graduation from LDC to MIC, Bangladesh needs to take special attention on trade and commerce as the preferential treatment would not get. As an LDC, Bangladesh was entitled to get preference in four categories which are (a) various WTO provisions providing special and differential treatment (SDT) (b) autonomous, non-reciprocal initiatives through various countries' Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) schemes (c) preferential market access initiatives of various regional trade agreements (RTAs) (d) bilateral trade initiatives (UN, 2015b). These facilities gave Bangladesh advantage for preferential market access which would be a competitive one. Against backdrop, cooperation with the developed countries is needed for sustaining and expanding trade capacity that is necessarily linked to SDGs implementation.

## **Policy and Institutional Coherence**

The Social Security policy that of comprises the broader Social Development Framework (SDF) by the government must be treated as a core element of the other policies and programmes for fulfilling the key philosophy of the agenda 2030. Recently approved second Perspective Plan 2021-2041 is an important policy document to guide the SDG implementation (UN, 2015b). It clearly outlines the pathways of achieving the vision of Upper Middle-Income Country (UMIC) status by 2031, and High-Income Country (HIC) status by 2041 with an emphasize on eliminating the extreme poverty. Moreover, the government is committed to incorporate and achieve most the targets stated in the 8<sup>th</sup> FYP (GED, 2020).

## **Multi-stakeholder Partnerships**

Achieving SDGs is not an issue of government alone because of its multiplicity of nature and mammoth tasks for proper implementation and realize the benefit. It

requires multi-stakeholders' involvement incorporating both public and private sectors by and large. It likewise necessitates the partnerships and collaboration of NGOs, development partners. A collaborative framework has been devised on four pillars (UN, 2015b). Evidence informed policy making, financial security and prioritization, acceleration of policy implementation and fostering a whole-of-society approach are the four pillars that may be at the center of meaningful partnership which can be implemented through effective action plan for various projects, programmes, and activities.

## **Localization of SDGs in the context of Bangladesh**

It is important to mobilize and engage local bodies in order to realize the benefit of SDGs and implement the initiatives locally. Researchers often emphasized on localizing the SDGs where government is also on the process particularly at District and Upazila level. In this regard, the Cabinet division has approved 40 (39+1) priority indicators for localization of SDGs; 39 indicators from 17 goals which are crucial for the local level of our country and implementation of whom would have reinforcing effects on other targets as well. 'Leave no one behind' stated as the rest one (+1) has been emphasized for some specific districts having different targets because of the socio-economic context and ground reality of geographical locations (GED, 2020; Islam, 2020; UN, 2015a, 2015b).

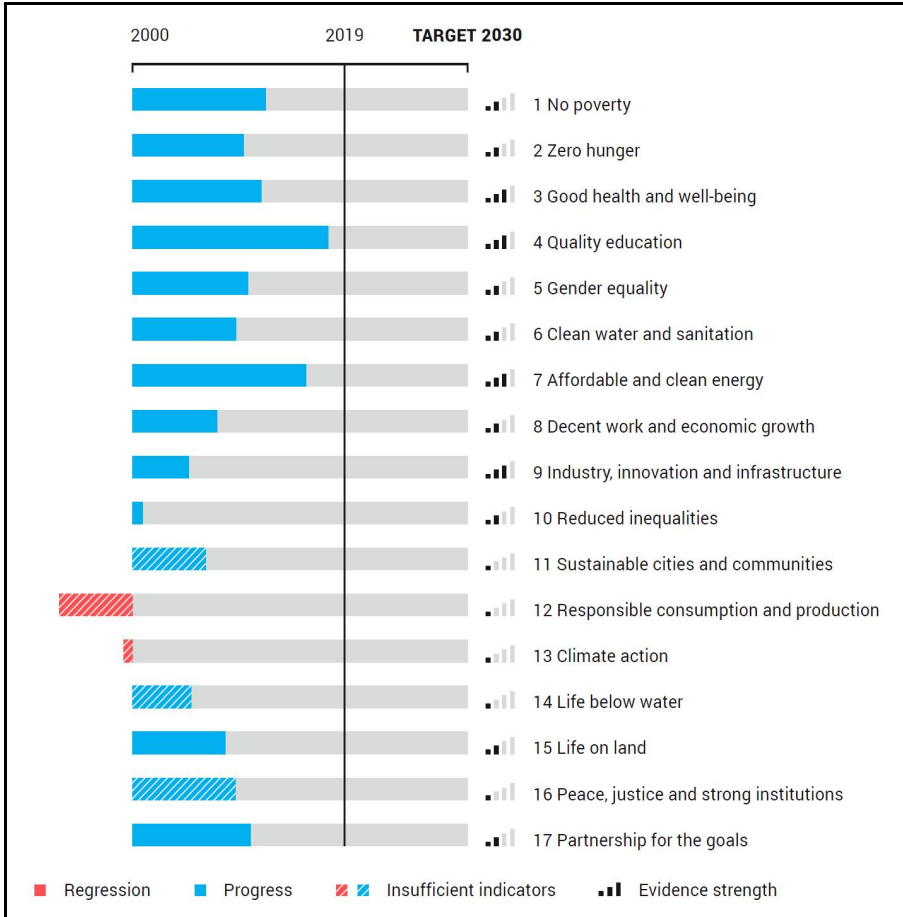
## **Key Areas of International Cooperation for Bangladesh**

Government continuously reviews achievement of SDGs targets and the provisions of global cooperation. A number of potential areas has been identified needing partnership for achievement of SDGs. Tax reform and decentralization of revenue collection is considered as one of the important means of SDGs implementation. However, the process needs policy reforms, implementation mechanism with technical and technological advancement that requires assistance of partnership. For ODA, international cooperation is needed to develop capacity of the implementing agencies to efficiently utilize the funds. Similarly, in terms of FDI, Bangladesh needs to identify potential areas for utilizing it, particularly for investment in business and industrialization in massive scale in order to boost economy. Private sectors must be engaged with the global multi-national companies to attract invest for booming private sector investment (UN, 2015a). It is argued that Bangladesh needs to monitor debt service for debt sustainably that can be carried out with the association of development partners. Since Bangladesh is changing its transformation from the concessional finance to finances of more commercial nature that involves much higher debt service liabilities. The partnership support should act as an early warning system to help avoid any possible systemic shock to the Bangladesh economy. The study suggests Bangladesh to adopt reference benchmarks to assess performance in order to scale up the South-South cooperation. Developing a central database for common reference is needed so that systematic data tracking can be used for effective understanding of the extent of the cooperation and further engagement. The most vital issue is the trade



where Bangladesh needs active and effective engagement in negotiation in various issues newly raised because graduation to middle income country. This cooperation demands in some sectors particularly apparel industry and necessitates to diversify export basket non-RMG products and destination outside USA and EU (Karim, 2020; UN, 2015b).

**Figure 3: Snapshot of SDG progress in 2019 in the Asia-Pacific region**



Source: UN ESCAP Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report, 2020

## **Global and regional trends and opportunities for collaboration and partnership particularly for South Asia in implementation of the SDGs**

South Asia as region has all potential to take the leverage of the synergies and externalities between economic, social, and environmental development. However, UNESCAP observes that the region suffers from the inability to exploit these externalities alongside significant structural imbalances. South Asia lags behind other sub-regions in several indicators of development and the international development partners suggest seven key policy priority areas of intervention for the SDGs in South Asia:

### **Industrialization and business for creation of jobs**

Industrialization (SDG9), which is termed as booster for economic growth is highly linked to creating job opportunities (SDG8) that ultimately contributes to poverty alleviation (SDG1). The study suggests that the South Asian region can promote more than 56 million additional jobs that may lift about 71 million people out of poverty. This shows the importance of South Asian partnership particularly for establishing a sustainable industrialization to leverage the spillover effects. Partnership is also expected to create productive capacity, maintain value chain, and enhance business growth. Moreover, this needs to accelerate sustainable infrastructural development specially transport infrastructure (SDG9), health and sanitation (SDG6), electricity (SDG7) and most importantly ICT.

### **Provide universal access to education and health to harness the youth bulge**

To optimize the demographic dividend of the youth population of South Asia, emphasis should be given for higher investment in health coverage (SDG 3) and quality education with due emphasis on vocational training opportunities (SDG 4). In addition, more investments are needed to address the projected skills deficit of the region. The region also needs to emphasize the importance of the rights-based approach to universal education while ensuring the availability of quality education and training.

### **Ensuring food security**

Addressing food security and hunger are two core concerns and development challenges of the South Asian countries. SDG 2 addresses food security and the eradication of hunger. South Asian countries can further strengthen the collective food security of the region by operationalizing the SAARC Food Bank, liberalizing intra-regional food trade, and designing collaborative research and development (R&D) on agricultural productivity.

## **Promote gender equality and women's entrepreneurship**

Gender equality and gender mainstreaming are two of the most critical development challenges of the region. Over the years, some major improvements have been noticed in terms of achieving gender parity in education, but the region still lags in terms of economic and political empowerment of women and gender equality (SDG 5) (Islam, 2020; UN, 2015b). New and innovative policy instruments need to be installed to develop women's entrepreneurship through gender-responsive policies, create gender-based budgets, install one-stop advice centers, incentivize credit schemes, and support innovative use of capacity-building to consolidate the empowerment process of women.

## **Enhancing environmental sustainability**

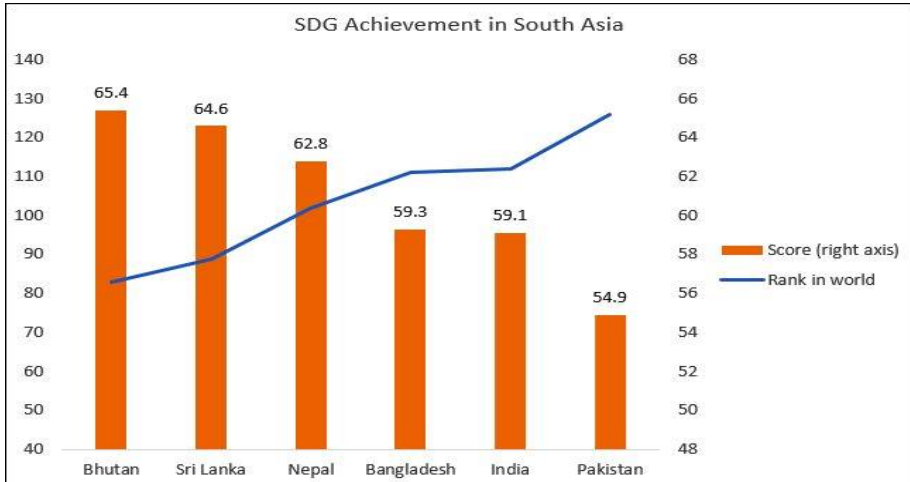
South Asia, like many other regions of the world, suffers from environmental sustainability challenges which directly affect growth and widen development gaps (UN, 2015a). As a policy intervention, the region demands environmental sustainability through the increasing shift towards the use of renewable energy sources and cleaner gas-based fuels, and introduction of new technology to reduce emissions from conventional electricity generation. Industries also need to be encouraged and brought under legal frameworks to mandate the use of pollution free energy, recycling, and cogeneration approaches. Wider campaigns need to be initiated to encourage a change in lifestyle towards the principles of "3 Rs" - reduce, reuse, and recycle.

## **Issues and challenges confronting development cooperation in South Asia**

The corona virus pandemic underscores the profound unsustainability of today's world. It exposes the chronic underinvestment in human health and well-being and the consequences of relentless exploitation of biodiversity and the natural environment. Probably, one of the biggest impacts of COVID-19 will be on the international cooperation and partnership (SDG 17) due to rise of conservative ideology that will prevent countries from benefiting from increased trade, technology transfer, investment, and foreign aid (UN, 2015b).

Based on the current rate of progress, according to UNESCAP (2019) estimates, Asia and the Pacific will not be able to attain any of the 17 SDGs by 2030 despite significant improvement. For example, although notable progress has been made in the areas of SDG 1, 4 and 7, this will not be enough to reach targets. For at least eight SDGs, including SDG 2, 9–11, 13–16, progress is slow or stagnant. Three SDGs 6, 8 and 12 have regressed. ESCAP (2019) also highlighted the lack of progress attaining SDG 17, which may undermine progress towards the attainment of all other SDGs. This assessment should be an early warning for global and regional leaders in Asia and the Pacific. At the same time, it is also important to note that these estimates are based on insufficient data. Data gaps exist for at least two-thirds of the indicators, particularly those concerning environmental and social areas.

**Figure 4: South Asia is performing poorly on meeting the SDGs, Source: SDG Index and Dashboards Report**



Even with the best practices emanating from the region, there are issues and challenges that deserve attention, including how to: improve effectiveness in development cooperation; increase transparency and data availability; address the bias towards the economic sector – all of which have been compounded by a lack of institutionalized regional cooperation mechanisms.

It is argued that conventional wisdom based on new trade theory can hardly foster intra-regional trade because trade barriers. These barriers include high transportation costs, poor infrastructure in cross border areas, poor institutional mechanism that penalizes trade integration among the region UNESCAP (2018a). Thus, the regional partnership shows its importance and necessitates formulation of new policies to benefit the region.

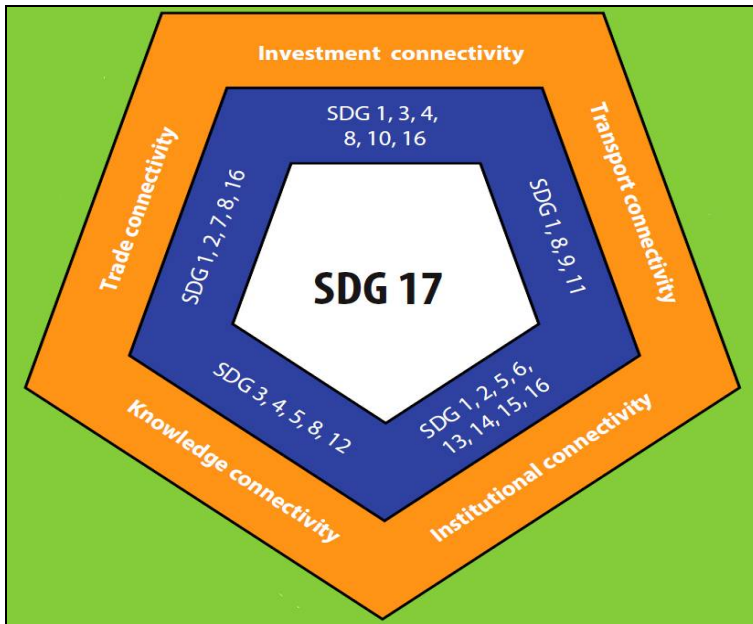
## **Recommendations to enhance South Asian cooperation to achieve SDGs**

Many of the SDG targets are not only interconnected but also transnational. For example, goal and targets on climate change are not possible to be achieved without regional and global efforts. While SDG 13 is the specific goal on climate change, there are many targets and indicators in other goals, which are connected to climate change including SDG 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 14, 15 which are linked to basic needs of people. Therefore, two points are quite clear: (i) it is not possible to achieve some SDG targets without considering some other targets; and (ii) it is not possible for individual countries to achieve some SDG targets without cooperative and concerted efforts from other countries in the region and the world (Islam, 2020).

## Regional priorities

As the global discourse on the 2030 Agenda continues, it is becoming evident that due to varying levels of past progress, different regions of the world are now facing diverse problems and have distinct priorities. For the countries of the South Asian region, seven key policy priorities have been identified (UNESCAP, 2018a). These are: (i) generating employment; (ii) developing infrastructure; (iii) ensuring universal access to education and health; (iv) providing universal social protection and financial inclusion; (v) guaranteeing food security; (vi) establishing gender equality; and (vii) environmental sustainability (UNESCAP, 2018a). In addition to these shared regional priorities, several other emerging and longstanding regional issues are critically important for implementing the SDGs in South Asia, especially from the vantage point of Bangladesh. These include: (i) the influx of more than one million Rohingyas from Myanmar into Bangladesh (SDG 10.7); (ii) the cross-border drug trafficking (SDG 3.5); (iii) the equitable sharing of rivers that flow from India into Bangladesh (SDG 6.6); (iv) the protection of endangered species of birds and animals in the Sundarbans to prevent their extinction (SDG 15.5); and (v) the evolving regional security risks and terrorism threats (SDG 16.a). Bangladesh needs to make full use of the momentum of the discourse on the 2030 Agenda and carry forward the discussions on these serious issues (Islam, 2020; UN, 2015; UNESCAP, 2017).

*Figure 5: Regional Priorities & Connectivities*



The regional priorities for SDG implementation in South Asia can be addressed by making use of connectivities as regional instruments. In this context, five key connectivities need to be considered: (i) trade connectivity; (ii) investment connectivity; (iii) transport connectivity; (iv) institutional connectivity; and (v) knowledge connectivity. Using the Five-connectivity Model of Regional Cooperation, it is possible to address all the seven regional priorities facing South Asia, as well as expedite the implementation of all 17 SDGs.

## **Regional organizations**

In Asia, regional cooperation organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is actively working to coordinate the implementation process. ASEAN has integrated the SDGs with its vision for development “ASEAN Vision 2025”. One point of similarity and complementarity between the ASEAN Vision 2025 and the SDG 2030 Agenda is that both aim for the ideology of ‘leave no one behind’ (UNESCAP, 2017). ASEAN has also emphasized institutional capacity building to attain the ASEAN Vision 2025. (Karim, 2021a)

Unlike ASEAN, SAARC has not made any significant effort towards implementing the SDGs at the regional level due to internal management and organization issues. However, there are opportunities for SAARC to initiate regional strategies towards implementing the SDGs. For example, SAARC could support initiatives to promote cooperation by providing public goods such as regional transport, connectivity, information, communications technology, energy, and infrastructure, and by supporting food security. SAARC could additionally coordinate follow-up and review mechanisms at the sub-national level, which would add value to the SDG Asia-Pacific follow-up and review mechanism under the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) (UNESCAP, 2017).

## **South-South Cooperation**

Bangladesh has tremendous success in some areas particularly ICT-enabled systems such multi-media classroom, e-health, e-payments, ICT training, digital signature which are attracted by neighboring countries like Maldives and Bhutan. They have teamed up with the Access to Information (a2i) project and adopt these initiatives in their countries. Apart from South Asian countries, Peru came on agreement to use Bangladeshi SDG tracker after its successful operation in Bangladesh. Some other countries across South America and Africa such as Paraguay, Tunisia, Brazil, Namibia, Malawi, Nigeria, Colombia, Morocco, Uganda and Ecuador have shown their interest in doing the same. This collaboration utilizes the benefit of the South-South Network for Public Service Innovation (SSN4PSI) that launched in 2017 by the UN Office for South-South Cooperation. This collaboration network serves as not only opportunity for building rapport with fellow developing countries but also allows Bangladesh to take lead to forge various partnerships between other South and Southeast countries.

## **South Asia Economic Union**

In this globalized world, most regions move forward for greater economic integration while South Asian countries lag behind. Collaboration particularly South Asia Economic Union needs to be formed to ensure transformation of the region to a peaceful, stable prosperous region. South Asia is found in the new regim of regional integration with four processes for example, (i) market integration through trade in goods and services; (ii) growth integration which is economic growth processes of the region; (iii) investment integration through promotion of regional investment and trade nexus; and (iv) policy integration can be done through harmonization of economic and trade policies. It is noticed that economic collaboration enhances bargaining power among the state for trade potentials, creating appropriate strategies, effective and clear roadmap of development. ASEAN is found as the better cooperation model as the strong partners tend to take care of their weaker ones in many ways. ADB's SASEC is the most discussed South Asia Growth Zone model that is based on four 'Key pillars'. The model advocates to invest in cross border infrastructure, to eliminate financial obstacle, to invest in higher trade and to increase regional public goods.

## **Conclusion**

South Asia as a region is one of the farthest behind in the world in terms of sustainable development. There is a clear rationale for cooperation among the countries of this region. Unfortunately, some of the South Asian institutional mechanisms for cooperation could not be successful due to lack of political will. As a result, South Asian countries could not benefit from such alliances. However, for the 2030 Development Agenda to be successful, countries have to come together. The success of such initiatives will largely depend on the active participation of all countries in the region and their willingness to implement the SDGs successfully.

The achievement of the Agenda 2030 necessitates numerous actions and activities enumerating more than the sum of national actions. It seeks attention for collaborative efforts to address both regional and global issues. Regional action can support national plans and is essential to address trans boundary challenges (Karim, 2021a; 2021b). Although realities significantly vary region by region, there is a common need for enhanced regional action to avoid the reversal of gains made during periods of economic growth and achieve the scale of change necessary to build resilient and inclusive societies. Equipped with robust intergovernmental mandates, the UN Regional Commissions are ideally positioned to assist Member States in pursuing their national development objectives, by supporting monitoring efforts, designing integrated and evidence-based policy responses, and building the necessary partnerships and technical capacity for effective implementation.

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