



Sustainable Development Policy Institute

Monograph Series: **M-024**

**Future of Sustainable
Development in South Asia**

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19 February 2014



Monograph # 24

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By

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Sustainable Development Policy Institute

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Sustainable Development Policy Institute is an independent, non-profit research institute on sustainable development.

First edition: November 2013

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Future of Sustainable Development in South Asia

by *Abid Q. Suleri*

Abstract

Six 'mega trends' have been observed in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal: individual empowerment; demography and urbanisation; diffusion of power; cultural changes and consumerism; agrarian transformation; and climate change. Each of these mega trends can either be a boon or a bane for these South Asian economies depending on how 'game changers' like state of the regional economy; frequency of natural and human-made disasters; openness and transparency; violent conflicts; new technologies; governance and energy availability impact them. While these game changers can pose a serious threat to the overall stability of the region, there is still potential for a sustainable, peaceful and prosperous South Asia, given the current level of advancement in mega trends and two possible scenarios for a new regional order.

Introduction

Danish Nobel Laureate in Physics Niels Bohr once said, 'Prediction is very difficult, especially about the future.' Fortunately, he did not say the same thing about hopes and dreams even when these two have the same relationship with the future as predictions – all are premised on factors found or missing in the past and the present. Any talk about the future of sustainable development in South Asia, in the same vein, has to be a combination of predictions, with

apologies to Mr. Bohr, as well as of hopes and dreams. And like all predictions, futuristic hopes and dreams are based upon factors which we already see around us. These factors are divided here into 'mega trends' and 'game changers'. While the former are phenomena which are visible and verifiably present in all countries in South Asia, the latter are essentially natural or human-made circumstances which may determine whether the mega trends lead to positive change in the region or they produce negative outcomes to the benefit of no one and to the loss of everyone.

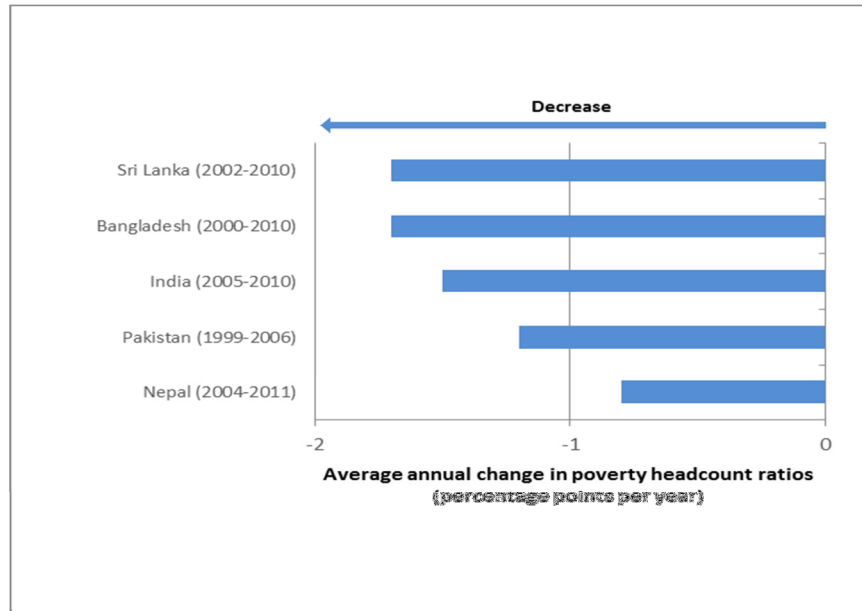
The world in a few years would be radically transformed and no country-whether United States (US) or China would have hegemonic power. The empowerment of individuals and diffusion of power among states and from states to other actors within states would have dramatic impact on the discourse of power in the world, largely diverting power corridors from the West to the Asian region (USNIC 2012).

Mega Trends

Individual Empowerment

A South Asian individual, whether a man or a woman, is more empowered today due to recent developments that have taken place in the region compared to twenty years ago. For instance, percentage of people living below the poverty line has definitely decreased across the region even when the absolute number of poor people living in poverty remains staggeringly high. Figure 1 shows the average annual change in national poverty rates across South Asian countries. In Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, poverty levels are decreasing at much greater speed than their neighbours.

Figure 1: Average Annual Change in National Poverty Rates



Source: World Bank n.d (a), 'DataBank-Poverty and Inequality Database'.

In many countries, especially India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh this has been accompanied by a steady rise in the number of people in the middle class.¹ A recent study reveals that 51% of Indians (close to 600 million citizens) define themselves as middle class (Silk Road Associates 2013). Making a conservative

¹ Who is the middle class? It is slippery term that differs markedly by country. It is often used to describe the segment of population between the working class and wealthy. Based on average per capita GDP of US\$ 1514, 50% of Indians define themselves as middle class (Silk Road Associates 2013).

estimate, I argue that the combined size of South Asian middle class is now easily close to 450 million people which are roughly equivalent to the total population of all the 27 countries in the European Union (EU). The reduction in poverty levels and increase in the size of the middle class have led to many more South Asians having come out of subsistence level existence and slave-like economic conditions than in the past.

Secondly, print, electronic, social and alternative media, as well as information and communication technologies have penetrated almost all South Asian societies like never before. Television and radio are now ubiquitous – in Pakistan close to 12 million households have access to a television set (PEMRA 2010); in India, the number of satellite television channels is 850 (MIB 2012), and if we include the cable channels operating in all cities of India, the figure would be somewhere in the range of 2500 to 3000; in Nepal, there were 404 FM radio stations in 2011 (Infoasaid 2011). The number of FM radio stations proportional to its population is perhaps the highest in the developing world.

Almost every South Asian seems to have access to a mobile phone (Figure 2)– this has led to increased social and economic mobility, especially among women and the marginalised groups who, as for instance in Bangladesh, are running small businesses using mobile phones as their offices, portable shops and their bankers all rolled in one. The Grameen Bank member women (who are the poorest among poor)...

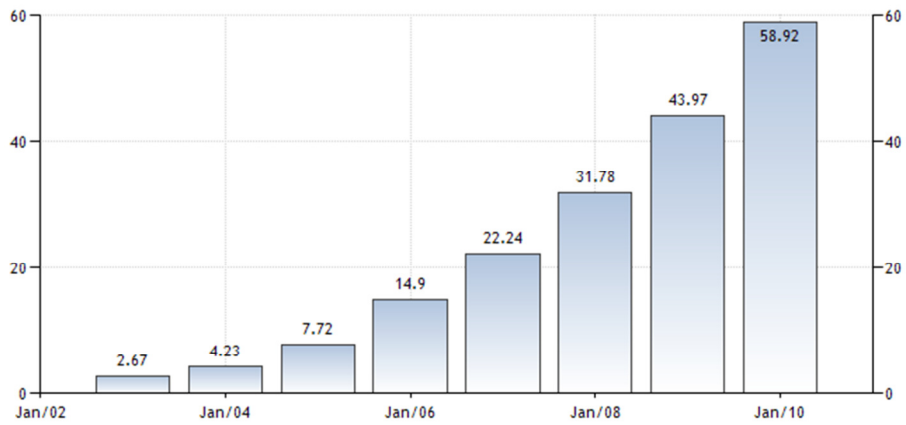
.....'have entered the age of information technology by leasing and purchasing cellular phones. The mobile phones not only create new business opportunities for the poor, but

also bring access to information, market, health and other services to the remote rural areas of Bangladesh. With Grameen Bank financing, a borrower buys a mobile phone to become the 'Telephone Lady' of the village. She provides telecommunication services to the village, while earning profits for herself. By the end of 2011, there were about four hundred sixty four thousand village phone ladies who have together taken loans amounting to BDT 2.68 billion², (Grameen Bank 2011).

Computers and the internet are expanding rapidly (Figures 2 and 3) and so is social media which together let people raise all kinds of questions about every individual or institution and create networks for any imaginable cause. Coupled with laws and constitutional provisions, the right to information, has helped people expose the corrupt, make the powerful responsive and answerable and barge onto everyone's computer and/or mobile phone screen to highlight the plight of the sick, the suffering and the suppressed.

² US\$ 0.03 billion as of September 2013's exchange rate.

**Figure 2: Mobile Cellular Subscriptions (per 100 people)
in South Asia**



Source: International Finance Corporation 2013.

Figure 3: Internet Users (per 100 people) in South Asia



Source: Trading Economics n.d.

Similarly, South Asia today is more educated than in the past: school enrolment figures are improving in every country even when they lag behind those in the second and first world nations. South Asians are also living longer than they did twenty years ago- mortality rates at birth are decreasing and the number of health care professionals and health care facilities per unit of the population is increasing.

Individual empowerment of South Asians can be seen in Nepal's Civil War (1996-2006) to overthrow the monarchy; in Pakistan's judicial revival movement (2007-09), and in protests against Hazara community killings in the Balochistan province (2012) which forced the former Pakistan People's Party led government to depose its Chief Minister; and in India's anti-corruption movement led by social activist Anna Hazare (2011-12). All these trends are indicators of empowerment and depending on game changers these individuals can play a constructive or destructive role in reshaping South Asia.

Demography and Urbanisation

South Asia is home to more youngsters than any other region in the world (Euromonitor International 2012).³ They are also migrating both within their own countries as well as to other parts of the world. Within country, people are moving from villages to cities turning Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Dhaka, and Karachi among the top 10 urban agglomerations in Asia and the Pacific countries

³ In 2012, India had the youngest population in terms of size with the number of people aged below 30 at 704 million, whereas Pakistan had 124 million people in this age bracket.

(UNESCAP 2011). People are also leaving their countries for work in the West, Persian Gulf countries and now increasingly Australia. These include highly educated professionals as well as skilled and semi-skilled menial workers. As a result, South Asians form the biggest diaspora after the Chinese.⁴ India, Bangladesh and Pakistan are among the top remittance receiving countries. In 2010, India topped the list of remittance receiving countries with US \$55 billion, Bangladesh was 7th with US \$11.1 billion and Pakistan stood at 11th with US \$9.4 billion (World Bank 2011). In 2012, Pakistan received US \$13.92 billion in remittances (SBP 2012). The influence of South Asian diaspora is not only visible by the record amount of annual remittances received, but also by the role these emigrants are playing in the socio-political arena of their host countries. On the domestic front, educated and often urbanised youth are proving quite influential in challenging traditional power centres.

Diffusion of Power

New centres of power are emerging in South Asian countries and the state's traditional monopoly over power is facing challenges from multiple new claimants. In Pakistan, for instance, the military's single-handed hold on power is now replaced by a number of new players – the parliament, the superior judiciary, corporate owned media and, after the 18th and 19th Amendments in the Constitution,

⁴ According to the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, there 25 million Indian overseas, the second largest diaspora after China. See more at MOIA n.d <<http://moia.gov.in/accessories.aspx?aid=10>>, accessed 1 October 2013.

provincial governments and provincial assemblies. The 18th Amendment has provided autonomy to the provinces, and 19th Amendment's major contribution is right to information. There is also emergence of new political players, for example, results of the 2013 General Elections in Pakistan saw Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) emerging as the second biggest party in terms of votes received. The overall voter turnout in the 2013 General Elections was recorded at 55.02% — a much higher percentage than elections since the 80s (ECP 2013).

The media has also emerged as a major power centre in South Asia. India is the first country in South Asia to grant electronic media freedom where the total number of satellite television channels in 2012 was 850 (MIB 2012). There is also a quantum leap in the number of television channels in Pakistan which has increased from 4 in 2003 to 85 in 2010⁵ (PEMRA 2010, p.16). Likewise, 138 private radio channel licenses were issued till 2010 (Ibid. p. 46).

In India, big business, media, civil society, regional parties and state governments as well as Maoists and other rebels in some areas like the Northeast have challenged the state's monopoly over power – in many cases quite successfully. In the electoral sense, coalition governments with the support of provincial/sub national parties seem to have become a norm both in Pakistan and India – validating the contention that the days of a single player dominating the entire playing field are over. In Bangladesh, the civil society led by social enterprises like Grameen, Brack, etc. has as much money and power as the ruling elite – or perhaps more. In Nepal, it was

⁵ This is the number of licences awarded till 2010.

the loss of state monopoly over power which led to its abolition, but one of the many reasons why a new state structure is failing to emerge is the empowerment of erstwhile marginalised communities and smaller ethnic groups through elections and their consequent demand of power sharing. I argue that the weakening of traditional Kathmandu-based parties like the Nepali Congress and Communist Party of Nepal – Leninist Maoist is indeed symbolic of the diffusion of power across the political and ethnic spectrum. One country that seems to have bucked the trend is Sri Lanka where the centre seems to have regained monopoly over power through the use of force but, without the political and constitutional resolution of the perpetually simmering ethnic, regional and even religious tensions, runs the risk of boiling over again in the near future.

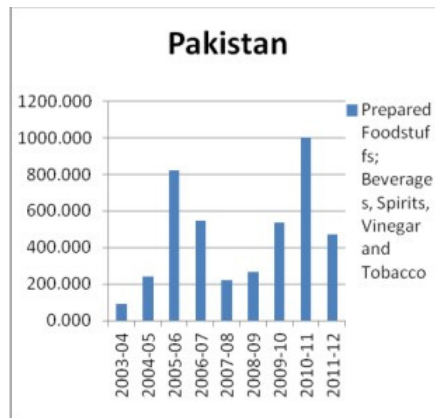
Cultural Changes and Consumerism

There are some visible cultural changes taking place across the South Asian region. Growing middle class, access to information and technology, and improved literacy has led to consumerism. Cost of consumer goods is an important component of the import bill in all the countries of South Asia. Businesses are responding to the consumer culture and redefining the social fabric, at least in urban centres. For example, a decade ago Valentine Day was considered taboo in Pakistan, but now it is a major event in all its urban hubs. Similarly, despite growing extremism and sectarian intolerance in Pakistan, special transmissions on Christmas and New Year on Pakistani cable channels are a manifestation of the changed cultural trends in the country.

Influence of the Bombay Film Industry (Bollywood) is another visible trend in South Asia. While South Asia may be divided along possible fault lines, they seem to be united when it comes to their love for Bollywood cinema which is rapidly making Hindi/Urdu a widely understood language. Compared to two decades ago, when neighbouring countries were portrayed as enemies, Bollywood movies are increasingly promoting regional peace.

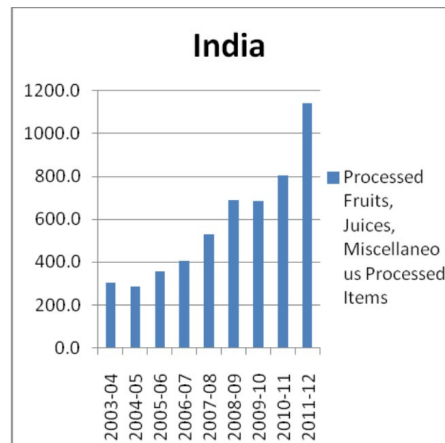
Consumerism in South Asian countries is also manifested through imports of consumer goods, processed food and beverages as well as items like chocolate and food items containing cocoa and milk; and cream and milk products (excluding cheese and butter). Figure 4 shows the imports of prepared food stuffs, beverages, spirits, vinegar and tobacco for Pakistan: there is significant increase in imports from 2003-04 when these imports were US \$89 million and reached US \$1,000 million in 2010-11. Figure 5 shows the imports of processed fruits, juices and miscellaneous processed goods for India from 2003-12. It is observed that in 2003-04, the import of these goods was US \$305 million which reached US \$1104 million in 2011-12. Figure 6 shows the imports of only milk and cream for Bangladesh, which shows a four time increase in these items from 2003 to 2012. Figure 7 shows the imports of consumer goods for Sri Lanka, in 2003, these items amounted to US \$1367 and in 2010 this figure increased to US \$2870 million dollars. Increase in import of these commodities is reflective of change in consumer behaviour in South Asia.

Figure 4



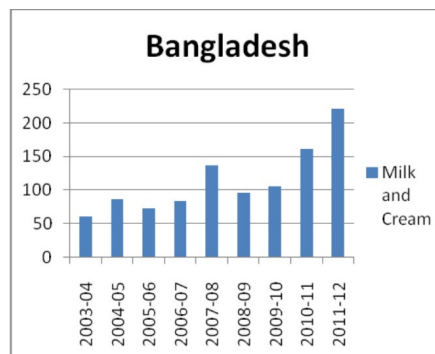
Source: Calculated from State Bank of Pakistan dataset. All figures in million US\$.

Figure 5



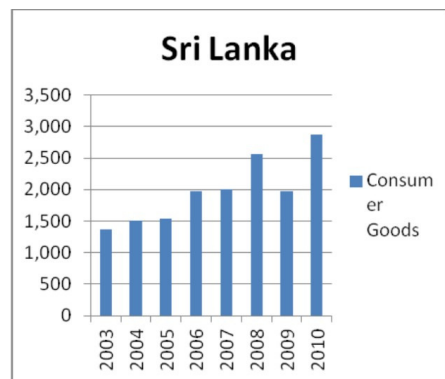
Source: Calculated from Reserve Bank of India dataset. All figures in million US\$.

Figure 6



Source: Calculated from Bangladesh Bank Economic Data. All figures in million US\$.

Figure 7



Source: Calculated from Central Bank of Sri Lanka. All figures in million US\$.

Agrarian Transformation

In South Asia, more than 75% of the population depends on agriculture for daily subsistence and livelihoods (FAO 2013). However, the above mentioned trends are rapidly transforming agriculture in the region. Peri-urbanisation is eroding into cultivable land; hence the focus is on intensive cultivation, to grow more in the shortest possible time so that land can be utilised for the next crop. High responsive varieties have been introduced, but they only give high yield in response to increased inputs like fertilisers, water and pesticides. The indiscriminate use of chemicals is not only leading to pest resistance against pesticides, but also contaminating the ground water, thus making it unsafe for human consumption. Likewise, indiscriminate ground water extraction is lowering the water table and also causing water salinity. On the other hand, despite all transformation, agriculture value added as a percentage of GDP in the South Asian region is decreasing, contributing 22% to the regional GDP (World Bank 2009). The share of agriculture in GDP is being taken by the services and manufacturing sector.

Climate Change

Human activities, policies and practices are held responsible for climate change. South Asia with its varied geography, high population density, rapid urbanisation and pollution is proving to be very vulnerable to climate change. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)'s fourth assessment report, climate change is expected to have severe impacts on South Asian countries due to increased floods and

droughts (Cruz et al. 2007). Transformation in agriculture is leading to a situation where water, food and energy are becoming interdependent, and effects of climate change are exacerbating. This is perhaps most acutely visible in Pakistan where water needs for agriculture, therefore for food, are competing with needs for power production through hydro-electric power plants. To keep the plants running, river water storage for irrigation has to be curtailed or to ensure the availability of water for crops the production of power has to be compromised. All this is just one part of the problem emerging from climate change which is upsetting weather patterns and thereby impacting ecology, crop patterns, energy requirements as well as production and consumption of food.

Game Changers

Each of the above mentioned 'mega trends' can either be a boon or a bane for South Asia depending on how the following 'game changers' impact them:

State of the Regional Economy

Take regional economy, for instance. Even when the rest of the world, especially Europe and the United States, were facing recession in recent years, most South Asian economies, with the exception of Pakistan, were doing rather well. This has helped the mega trends move in a positive direction – poverty and illiteracy levels have come down, health indicators are improving and more people are joining middle income bracket each year; economies doing well are putting youth bulge to a good use with more hands to earn and fewer mouths to feed; urbanisation is able, in most parts of the region, to assimilate and provide jobs to people pouring in from the rural areas and expatriate South Asians are sending

money back home to buy houses and make other capital investments. The increasing size of the economic pie is helping emerging power centres like media, middle class and ethnic and fringe groups to claim, and in some cases get, better, open and transparent economic and political governance and a larger share of the pie; and lastly, economies doing well are allowing most countries in the region to take care of food and energy shortages at the same time, though water woes and climate change problems are worsening.

Now reverse the situation and you will see how a poorly performing economy is affecting the mega trends in a negative way. One can see it within various regions of each South Asian country, but its manifestation is very clear in Pakistan: Less than desirable growth has increased the percentage of poor people in the country as compared to mid-2000s; illiteracy remains the highest in comparison to other states in the region; the scale and standard of healthcare is decreasing; an emerging middle class is getting squeezed due to increasing cost of living, poor service delivery and deteriorating law and order; and fewer job opportunities run the risk of turning youth bulge into a problem rather than an opportunity; flight of capital is far higher than the remittances and aid money coming in; and urbanisation is leading to ethnic, economic and political conflicts in already cramped urban spaces like Karachi.

How an economy performs has a direct bearing on its commitment towards improved service delivery, especially in the field of education and health. Pakistan's slow economic pace, high illiteracy rate, and little public expenditure on education have a vicious nexus. To some extent the same is true for Bangladesh too. Nepal and India on the other hand, spend more than 3% of GDP on

their education. Sri Lanka has always performed well in terms of literacy and currently has the highest literacy rate (97%) in the region. It spends 2% of GDP to sustain it.

Table 1: Public Spending of Education (% of GDP)⁶

Country/Years	Pakistan	Sri Lanka	India	Bangladesh	Nepal
2003	1.9	×	3.6	2.4	3.1
2004	1.9	×	3.3	2.2	3.2
2005	2.3	×	3.1	×	3.4
2006	2.6	×	3.1	2.5	3.6
2007	2.8	×	×	2.6	3.5
2008	2.9	2.1	×	2.4	3.8
2009	2.7	2.0	3.2	2.2	4.7
2010	2.4	2.0	3.3	×	4.7

Source: World Bank n.d (b), Development Indicators.

Thus, economic growth and resultantly public sector development expenditures are important game changers to determine whether the mega trends would lead to societal coherence or to an increased perception of exclusion and marginalisation. This perception of marginalisation may turn into a struggle between have and have nots in countries like Pakistan, where close to 50% of the country is food insecure (WFP-SDPI-SDC 2010) and energy

⁶ Missing figure for a particular year indicates that data for this year is not available on the World Bank Data Set.

shortages have peaked,⁷ while per capita water availability is going drastically down and threats of environmental disasters loom large.

It is important to note that societal perception of exclusion and marginalisation bring impatience and restlessness in emerging power centres such as media, middle classes and regional stakeholders. One can observe that in Pakistan these actors, instead of becoming a part of the solution by providing political and intellectual leadership in driving the economy and the country out of troubled waters, are making the situation worse with half-baked ideas and less than practical demands.

Frequency of Natural and Human-made Disasters

Similarly, if natural and human made disasters start taking place more frequently than they do now, it goes without saying that they will have a negative impact on all the mega trends. Different studies of South Asian countries show that climate change is going to impact the overall economic activity in these countries.

'Kumar and Parikh (2001) show that even after accounting for farm level adaptation, a 2 °C rise in mean temperature and a 7 % increase in mean precipitation will reduce net revenues by 8.4% in India' (as cited by Kelkar and Bhadwal 2007).

⁷ During summer 2013, energy demand was 21000 MW, while on certain days production was only 16000 MW.

'For Pakistan, wheat yields are predicted to decline by 6-9 % in sub-humid, semi-arid, and arid areas with 1 °C increase in temperature' (Sultana and Ali 2006 as cited by Kelkar and Bhadwal 2007).

For Sri Lanka, Wijeratne (1996) shows that... 'an increase in the frequency of droughts and extreme rainfall events could result in a decline in tea yield, which would be the greatest in regions below 600 metres' (as cited by Kelkar and Bhadwal 2007). According to Karim, Hussain and Ahmed (1996), there will be 'net negative effect on the yields of rice, the staple food of the population in Bangladesh' (as cited by Kelkar and Bhadwal 2007).

The disasters responded to with inappropriate policies and practices lead to wrong prioritisation of resources by states and the result is individual insecurities, thus, turning the positive tide of mega trends negative.

Openness and Transparency

While openness and transparency are generally seen as forces for permanent good, their champions have shown the tendency to put them even above elections and democracy. Such simplistic insistence on these values, no matter how important, can lead to discrediting of the political class with dangerously destabilising consequences for the polity. Attempts to realise openness and transparency in isolation from democracy, or rather at the expense of democracy, may let the dark forces of dictatorship emerge all over the region. Even in India, analysts like the former editor of the Times of India, have talked about the rise of middle class fascism

on the twin issues of corruption and transparency which may succeed in toppling India's democracy which so far has proved to be the only guarantee for the country's continued survival (Padgaonkar 2013). The January 2013 long march of Islamic cleric Tahir-ul-Qadri in Pakistan for transparency in the electoral system (especially accountability of candidates), before the country's General Elections created serious doubts that the elections being postponed (AFP 2013). The thirst for openness and transparency is a major game changer which may alter the direction of mega trends.

Violent Conflicts

Distributive justice is a prerequisite, both for peace as well as sustainable development. In its absence, the growth process in South Asia would be less inclusive. Once the marginalised get a collective identity-be it creed, ethnic, national, or any other identity-they immediately find a group or a country who is usurping their rights and that is what leads to conflict between the 'have and have-nots' at societal level, and trans-boundary, natural resource conflicts at the regional level (Suleri 2010). Countries, like Pakistan, which face continuous threats from external and internal militants and instability, are also a big issue for the region.

New Technologies

The impact of new technologies (for example the mobile and internet usage by the countries mentioned earlier) definitely warrants some attention. These technologies are positively

contributing to individual empowerment, social and demographic mobility, diffusion of power to the marginalised communities and ethnic groups and management of natural resources like water. They, however, have time and again proved to be sources of trouble for all the mega trends – for one, they lead to atomization of power, making it impossible to understand and locate the sources of trouble generated. They have also had negative impacts on social and demographic mobility as in the case of recent riots in the Indian state of Assam between the Bodo tribesmen and local Muslims (Aljazeera 2012) when panicked text messages led to the exodus of thousands of Bodos from southern states like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala (Sialo 2012).

Democratization of new technologies has, indeed, led to the diffusion of power to an unmanageable extent and consequently demands for natural resources have reached such unprecedented levels that no state and society in the region has the capacity to even listen to them all, let alone sufficiently and satisfactorily address them.

Protests in Pakistan about a controversial anti-Islam movie that was uploaded on youtube inflicted a loss of around Rs. 76 billion⁸ (Mughal 2012) to the economy of Pakistan; meanwhile, the damage done to the lives of people and the way life stopped in many cities of the country is immeasurable. Pakistan saw worse impacts during similar protests a few years back when a Danish cartoonist had drawn the caricatures of Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him).

⁸ US\$ 71 million as per September 2013 exchange rate.

Governance

One can go on and on about the impact of various game changers, but ultimately the latter are shaped by policies and processes we adapt, in other words facets of governance. Contrary to the general definition of governance, i.e., planning and decision-making by the state and its institutions, there is a societal notion of 'governance' too which includes how decisions are made within a certain society or nation; who is involved in these decision-making processes and who has which powers to decide. On which evidence is planning based and which planning documents are taken as the basis for decision-making? How are conflicting views dealt with? (Geiser and Suleri 2010) Answers to these questions not only determine the quality of governance, but can help in understanding whether the mega trends would prove a challenge or opportunity for South Asia.

Energy Availability

Finally, energy is another game changer which can directly affect the mega trends. Sustainable development in any part of South Asia would be defined by its energy mix. It is not only about the availability of energy, but also about the availability of eco-friendly energy at affordable price and for a sustained period of time. South Asian countries need to develop strategies and infrastructure for lower carbon emitting growth. As in case of Pakistan, the additional financial needs for mitigation for a cleaner development future range from between US \$ 8 billion and US \$ 17 billion (Khan et al. 2011). In a recent poll by SDPI and HBS published in Herald Magazine (2013) on socio-political preferences, Pakistanis ranked

the energy crisis higher than terrorism and corruption. The top four economic issues highlighted were unemployment (21%); energy shortage (19%); currency devaluation (13%); and both inflation (12%) and foreign debt burden (12%).

Leaving aside the business as usual which we all experience in its best and worst forms and know well through our first hand experiences, let us first see how the worst case scenario can materialize in one or more parts of the region, but in the end to the detriment of everyone in South Asia. Collapsing economies, uncontrollable and unmanageable demographic changes, withering away of the traditional centres of power, food and water shortages combined with environmental disasters may – either in tandem or separately – lead to the disintegration of the state in countries like Afghanistan, Nepal, Pakistan and even parts of India where a Maoist insurgency rages on. Consider Afghanistan first: A failed Afghan state, totally or partially under Taliban control after the withdrawal of international forces could give impetus to Islamic militancy not just in neighbouring Pakistan but also in India, Bangladesh and even Sri Lanka, sucking the entire region into religious violence and conflicts. A crumbling Pakistan will have immediate impact on India, possibly leading to or resulting from a war between the two countries involving the dreaded use of nuclear arsenal. If the state in Nepal fails, India might have to send its armed forces there to stop the trouble from spreading into northern Indian states as well as to stem the out-flux of Nepalis migrating into Indian cities.

The Silver Lining: A New Regional Order

Given the bad news above, it might seem difficult to envision much good news. But there is a silver lining and I call it the 'new regional order' for the lack of a better term, for a model sustainable, peaceful and prosperous South Asia:

1. South Asia remains a highly militarized zone where militaries have been used against one's own people, rather than foreign forces. A sustainable, peaceful and prosperous region will require a drastic reduction in the number of military personnel in all the countries. In fact, there needs to be a paradigm shift in the way conflicts are resolved in South Asia. We have seen time and again that the use of force within states and amongst them has, indeed, led to worsening of conflicts, rather than their resolution. Wars have failed to solve any issues between India and Pakistan; India has failed to quell unrest in Kashmir and its northeast, despite deploying an army there in large numbers; Pakistan has failed to tackle the militancy in its tribal areas and Balochistan in spite of several operations. Is it not about time to give diplomacy, politics and negotiations a chance – if not as a replacement for the military operations then at least as a mandatory corollary to them?
2. Economies in the region are more integrated with the rest of the world than they are within the region. This makes them vulnerable to external shocks; but a regionally integrated South Asian economy may have a better chance to withstand outside pressures and overcome internal

bottlenecks and shortcomings. Together the region is endowed with unparalleled human resources and each country has something productive to bring to the table of cooperation. India can chip in with information technology and healthcare; Pakistan with cement and textiles; Bangladesh with garments; Sri Lanka with expertise in how to universalize literacy; Nepal and Bhutan together have the potential to produce more electricity than the entire region will need in the next twenty years (Thapa, Sharma and Gupta 2007) and Afghanistan can serve as the much desired gateway to Central Asia and China, two huge but unexplored markets sitting right next to South Asia. In an atmosphere of peace and cooperation, it is also highly likely that South Asian states will be able to manage natural and human-made disasters and natural resources, both internally and in the region, in a more sustainable and equitable manner.

3. The choice is ours- we may not have control over the mega trends. However, we can certainly influence the game changers, influence them in a way that they affect the mega trends in a positive manner. This is the common dream of many South Asians and indeed a pathway to sustainable development in the region.

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