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TECHNICAL COOPERATION (TC) AMONG THE SAARC COUNTRIES : PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

1. INTRODUCTION

Technical cooperation has been recognized as a form of economic cooperation which envisages to increase the administrative, managerial, technical and research capabilities of the concerned organizations/ institutions/enterprises of the participating agencies in both public and private sectors. It helps to strengthen the institutional capacity and increase organizational efficiency within a particular time frame to support the development activities/efforts undertaken by a recipient agency of assistance under technical cooperation. Technical cooperation is different from other forms of economic cooperation in its very nature. It is basically a short-term cooperation with limited resources which does not require any capital investment for increasing the physical capacity for production. But it serves to increase efficiency and capacity for the productive use considering the fact that overall higher technical efficiency raises the level of production from the same combination of labour and capital. The scope of technical cooperation is multifarious. The United Nations Development Pro-

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gramme (UNDP) considers the following components for the technical cooperation:¹

- development of human resources;
- preparation of development plans and strategies and pre-investment or feasibility studies;
- transfer of technology;
- development of institutional infrastructure;
- development of pioneering programmes to solve serious and persistent problems such as illiteracy, mass poverty and unemployment.
- support of pilot plants for the purpose of experimenting on innovating processes or establishing their feasibility.

It has been clearly spelt out by the UNDP that projects aiming at producing or manufacturing goods do not fall within the scope of technical cooperation.²

The activities which come under the range of technical cooperation are implemented by external sources. The technical assistance, as defined by the Government of Bangladesh, is the assistance external to the recipient institution, opposed to the financial assistance, which may be national or international.³ The elements encompassed the technical cooperation, as declared by the Government of Bangladesh, are as follows:⁴

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1. *Manual for National Project Directors (Draft)*, Economic Relations Division (ERD), Ministry of Finance, UNDP, Dhaka, 1993, p. 3.
 2. *Ibid.*
 3. General Instructions and Guidelines on Planning, Programming, Processing and Implementation of Technical Assistancy (AT), *Hand Book*, Economic Relations Division (ERD), Ministry of Finance, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, October 1992, p. 261.
 4. *Ibid.*

- transfer of knowledge and technology, skills and technical know-how and capacity building within national institutions to undertake development activities;
- improvement of the country's human resources, institutional support, management efficiency and national capacities; and
- ensuring better and efficient utilization of machinery and equipments by introducing new techniques to existing personnel.

But technical cooperation does not necessarily have to be limited to all these elements.⁵ Feasibility study, institutional infrastructure i.e., computer networking, library development, laboratory set up, etc., short of construction also come within the scope of technical cooperation.

It is apparent from the above that technical cooperation mainly deals with two major areas: human resource development (HRD) and institution building. They are usually achieved through basic education, training, research and development (R&D), building and strengthening the institutions, improving general health standard, etc.⁶ This has a great impact on rational utilization of domestic resources and external assistance, leaving positive impact on the economy. Thus, the potentials of technical cooperation are enormous. But in most cases they remain largely untapped. South Asia is a case in point.

This is not to suggest that the South Asian countries lag behind in cooperation. They are making persistent efforts to ameliorate their abject poverty and stark economic problems within their respective political and economic systems and limited resources. The socio-economic problems of South Asian countries are almost similar which prompted them to work hand in hand for alleviation of poverty and

5. *Ibid.*

6. Report of the Task Forces on Bangladesh Development Strategies for the 1990s, *Managing the Development Process*, Vol. 2, Dhaka 1991, p. 290.

unemployment and development of their economy. This brought the seven countries of South Asia, namely, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, together under the banner of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 1985 after five years of intensive efforts as an economic forum. At the beginning, the member countries gave much emphasis on the short-term economic cooperation which, in fact, illustrated prospects of technical cooperation. The members of the Association also gave much stress on human resource development and institution building with special focus on strengthening the capacity of their national institutions. They have admitted that technical cooperation can play a significant role in this respect and provide support for achieving their long-term goals of their economic development. They have agreed for short-term economic cooperation on the selected areas already identified by themselves. But the form of such cooperation is yet to be agreed upon.

In this paper, technical cooperation is being considered as one of the most vital forms of economic cooperation among the members of SAARC due to its proven significance in the economy of the developing countries. Hence, the main purpose of this paper is to identify some of the important issues of technical cooperation which may be pursued among SAARC nations. The South Asian countries are all developing countries having less institutional capacity and poor efficiency to support their development programmes. Technical cooperation can fulfil this necessity because of its intrinsic advantage in this respect. Since the idea of long-term cooperation is yet to take deep roots among the SAARC nations, technical cooperation can be a substantive form of cooperation among them. The progress in respect of technical cooperation among the SAARC countries is insignificant and the issues are less explored and not addressed properly. It would, therefore, be appropriate, at this stage, to examine the nature and pattern of problems of technical cooperation among SAARC nations.

2. TECHNICAL COOPERATION IN SAARC PROCESS

The SAARC member countries identified the major areas of possible economic cooperation before the official launching of SAARC in 1985. These included Agriculture, Rural Development, Meteorology, Telecommunication, Scientific and Technical Cooperation, Health and Population Activities, Transport, Postal Services, and Sports, Arts and Culture. These areas were brought under the framework of Integrated Programme of Action (IPA) for preparing specific programmes.⁷ Later some critical areas like Prevention of Drug Trafficking and Drug Abuse, Women in Development, Audio Visual Exchange, Prevention of Terrorism, Tourism, etc. were also included in the list of cooperation. They agreed to have short-term economic cooperation in these identified fields. This was expressed in many occasions since the formation of South Asian Regional Cooperation (SARC) in 1981. The elements of this short-term cooperation in the identified areas were also formulated from time to time to draw up a comprehensive programme of action which would include exchange of data and information, journals, periodicals, etc.; exchange of experts, training facilities, research facilities, scholarships, etc.; and organization of seminars, workshops, etc. on a regional basis.⁸ These elements of short-term cooperation pave the way for technical cooperation among the SAARC countries in all the identified areas. In agriculture, the programme for short-term cooperation envisaged exchange of data and information including journals, periodicals, booklets, etc.; exchange of germplasm and prototypes; exchange of expertise and consultancy and training. Modalities of implementation, coordination and monitoring and moda-

7. Joint Communique issued at the Conclusion of the First Meeting of Foreign Ministers, New Delhi, 1-2 August 1983, *From SARC to SAARC, Milestones in the Evolution of Cooperation in South Asia, 1980-1988*, Vol. I, Kathmandu, 1988, p. 61.

8. Joint Communique Issued at the conclusion of the Second Meeting of Foreign Secretaries, Kathmandu, 2-4 November 1981, *Ibid*, p. 23.

lities of funding were also identified.⁹ Likewise, in rural development, meteorology, telecommunications, science and technology, health and population, transport, postal services, etc., similar elements were recommended for short-term cooperation.¹⁰ In some of these areas the technical cooperation and its mode of funding and modalities of implementation were specifically mentioned. But in practice except some seminars and meetings, no specific project activities were undertaken by the member states of SAARC. The ideas remained at the identification stage. Nevertheless, this may be viewed in a positive frame as well since this was a beginning.

The original proposal for South Asian Regional Cooperation envisaged the idea of technical cooperation.¹¹ The leaders of South Asian countries realized the fact that their stark economic problems could be addressed with their own resources and expertise under the institutional umbrella of SAARC for achieving self-reliance. This was emphasized by the late President of Sri Lanka, Ranasinghe Premadasa, at the Seventh SAARC Summit as he stated that the success of the endeavours of SAARC would depend on their own efforts towards achieving self-reliance as technological expertise of a high order was available in South Asia.¹² He maintained that SAARC could develop a regional venture on exchange of expertise, that this would be a venture to which each member could contribute according to its ability and each could draw according to its need. He reiterated that "initially the SAARC Secretariat can function as a bureau for such exchanges. Later on, it can be expanded into a South Asian Technical Co-operation Department in SAARC".¹³ This makes clear that the

9. Working Group on Agriculture, Summary of Recommendations, *ibid.*, p. 32.

10. See, *ibid.*, pp. 36, 38, 41, 43, 46, 48, 51.

11. A Paper on the Proposal for Regional Cooperation in South Asia, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dhaka, November 1980, *ibid.*, pp. 7-12.

12. Address of His Excellency Ranasinghe Premadasa, President of Sri Lanka at the Seventh SAARC Summit, Dhaka, 10 April 1993, pp. 5-6.

13. *Ibid.*

SAARC leaders understood the critical and catalytical value of the technical cooperation for development and recognized it as a vehicle for institutional development and qualitative improvement of functional capability by capacity strengthening of the concerned organizations in the identified areas. This is also found in the declaration of the Heads of State or Government of SAARC countries that they were convinced that technical cooperation would contribute significantly to strengthen the functional capacity in the identified areas.¹⁴

But, unfortunately, about a decade has already passed since the inception of SAARC and little has been done in terms of undertaking action programmes for exchanging experts, organizing training programmes, etc., to realize the ideas of technical cooperation among the SAARC countries. This is partly because of the fact that the member countries of SAARC adopted a very cautious approach towards any practical and realistic cooperation from the very beginning of the organization, and as a result the progress has been slow. The other fact is that 'despite a shared political commitment to cooperate and despite reasonable progress made in institutionalizing the process of regional cooperation, the member states of SAARC have remained more concerned over issues in their bilateral relations than programmes and activities of SAARC'.¹⁵

One of the important reasons for failure in realizing technical cooperation is the chronic mistrust among the SAARC nations despite their agreement to work jointly to find solutions of their common problems in a spirit of friendship, trust and mutual understanding and to the creation of an order based on mutual respect, equality and shared benefits.¹⁶ The root of non-cooperation in implementing any

14. Charter of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, p. 96.

15. Iftekharuzzaman, "Bilateral Impediments to SAARC: The Indo-Sri Lanka Crisis over IPKF Withdrawal," *BIISS Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 3, July 1989, p.1.

16. Dhaka Declaration of the Heads of State or Government of the Member States of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, 8 December 1985, *From SARC to SAARC... op. cit.*, p. 99.

economic programme lies in the existing inter-state political dissensions, chronic bilateral tensions and occasional hostilities in the region. The other likely reasons hindering such cooperation are the shortage of resources and experts and inadequacy of institutions and technology providing technical services. The pace of development in South Asia is not equal. India tops the list in terms of number of experts, institutional support, technological development, etc. This may make others skeptical about India's supremacy in the field of technical cooperation as her neighbours are in disadvantageous position. Besides, absence of proper coordination and relevant information among the members is one of the factors of the failure of undertaking project proposals for technical cooperation under the auspices of SAARC.

The members of the Association have agreed to exclude bilateral and contentious issues from the deliberations.¹⁷ Nevertheless, bilateral tensions adversely affect other issues like economic cooperation. It will take longer time to resolve the bilateral contentious issues of the SAARC member states. Under the circumstances, the economic cooperation among SAARC members cannot be interrupted considering the recent global economic changes. Different countries of the world including the South Asian countries are, now, moving towards liberalization and regions towards unification of their economies. Under such global changes, despite the presence of bilateral contentious issues, short-term economic cooperation like technical cooperation can be made possible since there is a commitment for such cooperation among SAARC nations. The leaders of the SAARC member states have already expressed their willingness to forge cooperation in areas of common interest as found in the statement of the Indian Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, who said: "We must purposefully forge cooperation in areas of common interest and which

17. Joint Communique Issued at the Conclusion of First Meeting of Foreign Secretaries (Colombo 21-23 April 1981), *From SARC to SAARC op. cit.*, p. 9.

are of more profound relevance to the well-being of our peoples."¹⁸ Now the political impediments which impede the economic cooperation should be removed to make SAARC a viable institution.

It is apparent from the above that SAARC could not play substantive role to develop intra-regional economic cooperation and could also not make any success in technical cooperation mainly because of political reasons in the identified fields in both public and private sectors which, again, shows its inability to reach the desired objectives as agreed upon and declared by the Heads of its member states.¹⁹

3. PROSPECTS OF TECHNICAL COOPERATION IN SAARC

Although the SAARC countries could not progress substantively in respect of technical cooperation except identification of some major areas and commitments, they have come to realize its prospects in such areas as human resource development, poverty alleviation, transfer of technology and equipments, consultancy services, etc., and for such purposes bringing about the qualitative changes in strengthening the functional capacities of the organizations in both public and private sectors and also in non-government voluntary organizations.

3.1. Human Resource Development (HRD) in SAARC countries through technical cooperation

Technical cooperation contributes to HRD as "the maximization of the human potential as well as the promotion of its fullest utilization for economic and social progress".²⁰ The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) has recognized the dual dimension of human resources as both catalyst and beneficiary of development.²¹ Notwithstanding the programmes for poverty allevia-

18. Address by P.V. Narasimha Rao, Prime Minister of India, Inauguration of Seventh SAARC Summit at Dhaka, Bangladesh, 10 April 1993, p. 4.

19. See, Charter of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, *From SARC to SAARC...op. cit.*, pp. 96-97.

20. See, "Human Resources Development: Issues and Implications", *Report of the Administrator*, UNDP DP/1986/10. p.

21. ESCAP, *Annual Report*, 1986 E/1986/32, E/ESCAP/536, p.34.

tion, improving productivity, manpower planning and training, services, etc. are viewed as integral components of HRD,²² it is basically achieved by training. Technical cooperation envisages HRD by training.

It is considered as an important tool for capacity strengthening of both the institution and the personnel. It is difficult to quantify/measure the immediate outcome of training, but it has a long-term effect on institutional development. It gives more impetus on the increase of productivity by increasing the technical capacity.

The SAARC countries have identified several spheres of activities for optimization of HRD. These are: (i) promotion of data base; (ii) identification of linkages *interse* between various sub sectors and exchange of information and undertaking of studies in regard to beneficial linkages between various sub-sectors; (iii) evolution of planning methodologies for regulated development of inputs, facilities and institutions; (iv) study and identification of cost effective and innovative strategies and institutions adopted/promoted by different member Governments to achieve well recognized goals; and (V) overall exchange of information.²³ They agreed to fill up the skill gaps by imparting appropriate training in the identified areas. It was proposed to prepare an inventory of technical and vocational training facilities in the region which would cover particularly training institutions geared to skill formation and facilities for training of trainers and to share and exchange technology, research and development experiences in adopting labour intensive technologies to optimize labour use especially in rural areas.²⁴ The member countries

22. A.B.M.M. Azizul Islam, "The Role of Human Resource Development in Developing Countries", *Asian Affairs*, Vol. X, No.III, July-September 1988, p. 24.

23. Report of the Third SAARC Meeting of Planners, 1-2 November 1988, *From SARC to SAARC, Milestones in the Evolution of Regional Cooperation in South Asia (1983-1988)*, Vol. II, Kathmandu, 1988, p. 81.

24. *Ibid.* p. 82.

of SAARC advanced their agreement in this respect to assess the need for widest popular participation and effective delivery system actuated by a sense of compassion.²⁵

However, no specific programme has been taken yet for facilitating training. The main reason is the lack of coordination in formulating a definite programme among the member countries. The other reasons may be the inadequacy of training facilities and lack of sponsorship for training in many sectors. In some sectors already identified by SAARC countries, acceptable training and research facilities are prevailing, for example, in rural development, there are as many as 25 Integrated Rural Development (IRD) institutions in this sector in Bangladesh, 35 in India, 18 in Pakistan, 9 in Nepal, and 8 in Sri Lanka.²⁶ But these are underutilized due to the lack of proper coordination.

The SAARC countries may be benefitted by formulating a comprehensive training policy which would harmonize their training programmes. The programmes must concentrate on selected objectives and be formulated on the basis of necessity. Consideration must be given to selective training programmes which are common in training institutions of the SAARC member countries. The governments, the NGOs, the private sector, all must come forward to be active partners to decide priorities.

The importance may be given on the action-oriented training programmes with professionally sound designing, exchange of ideas and experiences with regard to formulating and implementing those programmes, clear criteria for imparting training and exchange programmes on study tours, courses, seminars or workshops for the purpose of learning processes, organization and ways of performing functions through direct observation and discussion for subsequent

25. *Ibid.*

26. See, for details, *Directory of IRD Institutions in CIRDAP Member Countries*, CIRDAP, Dhaka, November, 1987.

application and/or adaptation in the respective country. These are required to be explored by the concerned authorities and the training institutions. Attention must be given by the recipient country towards proper utilization of trained personnel by reassigning their relevant jobs. There is a lot of potentiality to arrange degree programmes at bachelor's, master's or doctoral levels under the technical cooperation among the SAARC countries.

The framework of HRD must accommodate the impact of new technology. Recent scientific and technological progress, particularly in the fields of information, biotechnology, electronics, material sciences, energy, etc., underscores the need to adapt human resources to these realities to take advantage of the development potential of science and technology. In this connection, the generation of manpower for promotion of science and technology to serve the development needs and utilization of science and technology to upgrade available human resources are important. This requires more technical and vocational training rather than a continuation of the traditional stress on general education. Technical cooperation offers such training along with the demonstration and transfer of technology and equipments which should be justified among the SAARC countries. The only thing which requires to be sorted out is the problems of transferring and utilizing of equipments. The ownership of equipments to be transferred should remain with the respective cooperating agency, and if the equipments are not needed for that particular agency, these may be transferred to another cooperating agency in the form of projects/programmes.

It is, therefore, evident from the above that for HRD in the identified sectors in the SAARC countries, comprehensive training programmes are essential to implement. HRD implies a major stress on poverty alleviation. They are complementary to each other. Hence, technical cooperation also deals with poverty alleviation.

3.2. Poverty Alleviation in SAARC countries through Technical Cooperation

The South Asian countries fall within the low-income group of the world's economy.²⁷ Poverty is the major hindrance to their development efforts. But the leaders of SAARC countries have affirmed that the South Asia's poor, which comprise of self-employed subsistence farmers, landless labourers, sharecroppers, artisans, and others mostly involved in the informal sector, can constitute a huge and potential resource provided their basic needs are met and they are mobilized to create economic growth.²⁸ That is why they have accorded the highest priority to the alleviation of poverty by empowering and irreversibly linking the poor with the mainstream of development and set up a commission on poverty alleviation, namely, 'Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation', consisting of eminent persons from each member-state to conduct an in-depth study of diverse experiences of the seven countries in this respect.²⁹

The 'Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation' which submitted its report in November 1992 estimated that between 330 to 440 million people of South Asia constituted approximately 30 to 40 percent of the total population of 1.1 billion in the region in 1991 live below the conventional poverty line.³⁰ "How much creativity and energy will be released if these poor people are mobilized into the creation of assets?" asked the late Sri Lankan President, Ranasinghe Premadasa in the Independent Commission

27. For details of the average per capita income for 1992 and percentage of average annual growth from 1980 to 1992, see, The World Bank, *World Development Report 1994*, Infrastructure for Development, p. 162.

28. The Colombo Declaration, *Sixth SAARC Summit*, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 21 December 1991, p. 10.

29. *Ibid*, p. 11.

30. *Report of Independent South Asia Commission on Poverty Alleviation, Meeting the Challenge*, Kathmandu, November 1992, p. 1.

meeting.³¹ He continued, "the creative capacity of 450 million of our people has been crippled by poverty".³² So he reiterated, "our goal must be the elimination of poverty in all our countries by the end of this century".³³ This demands devising appropriate strategies and formulating relevant programmes for sustained and accelerated growth along with gradual reduction of poverty in South Asia. The 'Report of the Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation', mentioned that the magnitude and complexity of the problems of poverty in South Asia is staggering, but it can be eradicated by the year 2002 through social mobilization and structural adjustment adopting pro-poor programmes leaving only a residual number of poor who would need social welfare programmes.³⁴ The stress of transforming the poor into creative assets is also revealed from the words of Bangladesh's Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia who declared : "We have pledged to take bold initiatives to eradicate poverty from our countries within the shortest possible time. We have agreed to explore new avenues of cooperation to move steadily towards greater SAARC cooperation on hardcore economic issues."³⁵

As seen from the above, the SAARC countries have realized the essence of empowering and mobilizing the poor into creation of assets by alleviating poverty. The reflection of the pressing poverty syndrome in SAARC countries is revealed in their separate experimentation with many targeted approach to poverty and in the proliferation of special programmes in both the government and non-

31. See, Address of President Ranasinghe Premadasa of Sri Lanka in the SAARC Independent Commission meeting on 31 March 1992 in Colombo.

32. See, Address of His Excellency Ranasinghe Premadasa, President of Sri Lanka at the Seventh SAARC Summit, Dhaka 10 April 1993, p. 3.

33. *Ibid.*

34. Report of the Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

35. Statement by Her Excellency Begum Khaleda Zia, Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, at the Closing Session of the Seventh SAARC Summit, Dhaka, 11 April 1993, p. 2.

government sectors. Such efforts revealed limited scope of leading the target groups to incomegenerating activities with higher productivity. But, unfortunately, no specific concerted effort has yet been taken to formulate a comprehensive programme due to the absence of initiatives and lack of coordination. Funding of such programmes may be traced in the internal and external sources.

Technical cooperation can successfully address the problems of capacity strengthening of the organizations dealing with the poverty alleviation and self reliance of the poor groups by imparting training, transferring equipments and exchanging new ideas and experiences. A concerted and coordinated effort in this respect among the SAARC countries can provide people-centred development with "a process for evolving a capacity to influence one's own future".³⁶ Technical cooperation can eliminate the antagonistic elements of the institutions involved in the process of poverty alleviation making them more efficient. This indicates enhancement of institutional facilities and services to deal with the related problems of poverty alleviation as well as the prospects of investing in human beings to raise their capabilities in shaping their own future.

3.3. Consultancy Services in SAARC countries through Technical Cooperation

One of the important objectives of the technical cooperation is to promote and support consulting industry. The governments of the South Asian nations have given much importance to the consultancy services in the areas of cooperation already agreed upon and modalities of such cooperation have also been identified in some fields, for example, agriculture.³⁷ But to date no practical step has been taken till now to materialize such cooperation.

36. C. Bryant and L.G. White, *Managing Development in the Third World*, Colorado: Westview Press 1982, p. 19.

37. Working Group on Agriculture, Summary of Recommendations, *From SARC to SAARC... op. cit.*, Vol. I, Kathmandu, 1988, p. 34.

Consultancy can be a means to accelerate intra-regional cooperation among South Asian nations. They can explore the possibilities of using the consultancy services in the areas where expertise is available within their own capacity through technical cooperation for both investment-related and institutional supported projects/programmes. The expatriates under technical cooperation among SAARC nations may be guided by a common policy of cooperation which is required to be substantive with shared responsibilities. The arrangements of such cooperation may be reflected in a memorandum of understanding between the participating agencies so that their performance is evaluated by the user agency on the basis of such Terms of Reference (TOR) as specified in the memorandum. Under technical cooperation, consultants and expatriates in different fields from different countries of SAARC may be enlisted for conducting feasibility studies for development projects/programmes and for other relevant purposes. In this connection, a project may be undertaken for exploring the possibility of experts in different fields in the member countries of SAARC. The Sectoral Ministries/Divisions/ Agencies in general, and the key agents in particular, of SAARC member countries can identify areas in their respective fields in which knowledge and skills/expertise are available within each member states of SAARC and earmark areas for their possible use. The allocation of person-month consultancy services of the SAARC expatriates can be determined on the basis of multilateral or bilateral agreements. As mentioned earlier that the purpose of technical cooperation is to increase the technical, managerial, institutional and research capacity of the recipient agency, it can be adopted as a component of a capital investment project independently to strengthen human or institutional capacity of the concerned organization.

Design of Technical Assistance (TA) projects among SAARC countries involving consultancy seem to be cost effective and suitable for them due to the geographical proximity, similarity of the problems and experiences, availability of appropriate technology and expertise,

etc. Reciprocal collaboration among consultants of SAARC nations may strengthen their national consultancy capacity having long term impact on their development.

The SAARC countries have the opportunity to maintain an open and flexible policy regarding exchange of experts and hiring of consultants from the member countries under technical cooperation to strengthen the technical competence of national human and organizational resources. Expatriate consultants from the SAARC countries may also be welcomed on the areas where new technologies are involved and where new methods are developed. On the whole, the essence of consultancy under technical cooperation among the SAARC countries emerges to develop technical skills and knowledge, human resources and institution-building.

The SAARC countries have the potentiality to offer consultancy services in widely divergent fields of rural development and poverty alleviation. These may be categorized as designing of credit system, credit management, self-employment programmes, selection of investment areas, skill development, entrepreneurship development, project management, and a large number of fields which are related with social development and poverty alleviation.

3.4. Adoption of TCDC (Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries) Model in SAARC Countries

The SAARC countries can adopt the model of TCDC for developing technical cooperation among themselves. The idea of TCDC as a programme emerged in the second half of the 1970s with the objectives to promote and implement technical cooperation among developing countries. In 1978, a global conference on TCDC, held in Argentina, adopted the Buenos Aires Plan of Action (BAPA) for developing the TCDC modality among developing countries for national and collective self-reliance through need identification and capacity building and broadening the base for international technical

cooperation.³⁸ For the purpose of achieving these goals, TCDC, as a programme, has adopted some specific objectives and strategies. The specific objectives of TCDC modality, *inter alia*, include : (i) broadening the quantum and quality of international cooperation; (ii) adding to the variety of tools for implementing technical cooperation (rather than replace traditional technical cooperation methods); and (iii) reinforcing the capacity of developing countries to manage their own development.³⁹ The basic features of the TCDC activities are : (i) sharing of expertise, experience, technical know-how and facilities; (ii) cooperation on an institution-to-institution basis in the public or private sector; (iii) management by government or cooperating institutions of developing countries; and (iv) arranging finance by participating developing countries as primary responsibility.⁴⁰ The BAPA was endorsed by the United Nations through a number of resolutions, notably, ECOSOC resolution 1992/41, High Level Committee decisions 25-28 48/172 (01 December 1993), and General Assembly resolution 48/172 (01 December 1993). The UNDP has been entrusted with the lead role to promote TCDC in the developing countries and support efforts to promote the use of the TCDC modality in technical cooperation activities financed by the United Nations Development System (UNDS).⁴¹

The TCDC modality possesses the properties for application in the developmental projects/programmes for (i) more sustainable project activities; (ii) greater relevance of methods used in other developing countries; (iii) quicker adaptation of TCDC experts/consultants to new cultural, institutional, climatic environments; (iv) cost-effective exper-

38. *TCDC Capacities and Needs Matching Document on Rural Credit and Poverty Alleviation*, Final Consultation Meeting, BARD, Comilla, 18-22 September 1994, p. 5.

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

tise and services; relevant context and content of training programmes; and (v) sharing of facilities in developing countries.

From the aforesaid TCDC modality, this is fair enough to ask that if technical cooperation is considered globally, why can't it be considered regionally? SAARC, as a regional organization, can undertake common development projects/programmes of sustainable activities with relevance of methods used among the member countries since they have a uniformity/similarity in cultural, institutional and also climatic environments. The main constraint to implement such a programme does not seem to lie in the hands of the specialists, but in the hands of the leaders of the SAARC member countries. Firm political commitments and decisions are required among the leaders of the SAARC nations to prepare and implement such a programme irrespective of contentious bilateral political differences. Only then the specialist can work out the need-based and realistic programme of action. The TCDC model can help a lot to develop such a programme. For financing such a programme, the international funding organizations who are engaged in financing technical assistance projects, as for example, UNDP, can be explored. There may be other options like creation of common fund for such programmes or mutual funding arrangement on bilateral basis under the auspices of SAARC. Technical cooperation can also be reciprocal among the SAARC countries under the patronage of SAARC.

4. PROSPECTS OF TC IN SAARC COUNTRIES AT MICRO LEVEL

The prospects of technical cooperation in the SAARC countries can be envisaged at the micro level among the concerned organizations of its member states in both public and private sectors. The participating organizations in the technical cooperation may be categorized into 5 categories, namely, (i) government, (ii) semi-government/autonomous bodies, (iii) cooperatives, (iv) non-government organizations, and (v) private sector organizations. By the

nature of jobs performed the participating organizations may be the controlling bodies/Ministries, research/action research institutions, training institutions and programme/project implementation agencies. These organizations are required to be independent to make such cooperation without the government control and guided by the specific policies. Such a programme of technical cooperation should be different from the similar programmes at the government level. Such programmes must be based on need of the concerned organizations and independent. These programmes must not be big like the government's programmes and are required to be promoted by SAARC, at least for the purpose of contact. The objectives of such cooperation must be institutional and human resource development. The following strategies may be pursued to achieve these objectives:

- sensitize technical cooperation among different organizations in both public and private sectors within the framework of SAARC;
- articulate the national technical cooperation policies to promote and enhance a favourable environment for its application at the micro level;
- formulate database on the capacities and expertise existing in different institutions/ organizations of the SAARC member states;
- mobilize and allocate more resources for expansion and promotion of technical cooperation for promotional and advocacy roles, for studies and evaluation and for the dissemination of experiences and technologies among different organizations and institutions of the SAARC countries;
- consider networking and twinning arrangements among institutions as a means of facilitating sustained and institutionalized exchange of expertise, experiences, services and facilities;
- prioritize development programmes/projects to use technical cooperation among the institutions;
- support to the identification of common concern and the formu-

lation of common policies and approaches based on relevant and tested experiences of the institutions through technical cooperation.

While planning for identification of specific activities for technical cooperation at the organization level in the SAARC countries, priority has to be fixed up and attention should be given to the activities and projects that (i) promote networking and twinning arrangements, and that address common problems; (ii) directly focus on the transfer of specific skills; (iii) provide opportunities for launching projects through the matching of needs and capacities; and (iv) build and improve data and information on capacities.

Demonstration and pilot projects may also be undertaken to test new approaches and refine novel initiatives at the level of organizations. Better information support (periodic seminars to share experiences), training of trainers, creation of working environment with modern facilities, etc., can be provided through technical cooperation at the level of the organizations in SAARC countries. The consultation mechanisms for matching needs and capacities should be a major instrument for sharing expertise, facilities, and know-how by applying a modality of concrete cooperation activities. This is where the constraints lie in. The SAARC countries has not been able to find out such a mechanism.

The project proposals or activities to be undertaken by the organizations of SAARC countries for technical cooperation should satisfy some specific criteria which may be as follows:

- They should emanate from or through governments or institutions (public or private);
- They should facilitate, for the purpose of building capacity, the exchange of experiences, expertise, technology and the sharing of facilities among themselves;
- The implementing agency should remain responsible for implementation of such projects;

The projects should be promotional and catalytic in nature in the sense that they may have further linkages with larger development activities.

At micro level organizations rural development may be considered as one of the most important areas of technical cooperation. A vast majority of population of SAARC countries live in the rural areas who are engaged in on-farm and off-farm activities, e.g. poultry raising, goat rearing, beef fattening, pond fisheries, cottage industries, bee-keeping, sericulture, processing, preservation and marketing of agricultural products, etc. Most of them live below the poverty line having no means and ability to alleviate their poverty. Technical cooperation at the organization level can successfully address the constraints remaining in fostering their on-farm and off-farm income generating activities.

Short-term rural development projects are now preferred for development of rural institutions, rural industries, marketing, management of rural credit programmes, rural environment, rural women, etc., for the purpose of achieving the long-term goal of poverty alleviation. Technical cooperation offers the services of consultancy, on the job training, short-term group training, exchange of ideas and experiences to the interested organizations engaged in these activities. The fields of training among the SAARC countries in this reference may be grouped broadly into the following categories:

- a. Credit administration (Rural savings, credit designing and development, credit management, etc.);
- b. Management of poverty alleviation oriented activities (e.g. poverty focussed rural development, group formation, group management, financial management production management, etc.);
- c. Improvement of the capability of service deliverers (e.g. Training of Trainers, Rural Development Service Oriented Training Courses, Techniques of Selection of Beneficiaries, etc.);

- d. Enabling the beneficiaries to get out of poverty situation (e.g. skill development in income generating activities, training in quality control to technicians and craftpersons, etc.);
- e. Social development of beneficiaries (e.g. gender specific analysis and development programme, training to women on group formation, accounting and book-keeping, education, health education and family planning, etc.); and
- f. Country and organization specific capacities and needs (e.g. experiences in managing clients' accounts, village bank administration, regional training for managers of agricultural companies and cooperatives on market economy, management and agricultural marketing, etc.).

The needs of training, especially short-term group training in the SAARC countries, are wide. But the capacities do not commensurate with the needs. The efforts of the governments of the SAARC countries can not encompass all these requirements. This gap is partly filled up by the activities of Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) and the private initiatives. Still some more efforts are needed to strengthen the capacities of the SAARC countries in this respect through technical cooperation among themselves. Technical cooperation offers the opportunity to procure equipments like vehicles, computer, training materials and equipment, copier machines, etc. for capacity strengthening of the receiving organizations of such cooperation.

Thus, the technical cooperation at the organizational level of the SAARC countries both in public and private sectors may increase the functional capability and strengthen the capacity of the participating organizations. Such technical cooperation can be made possible only through concerted and coordinated efforts among themselves.

5. BANGLADESH AND TECHNICAL COOPERATION AMONG SAARC COUNTRIES

The Fourth Five Year Plan (FFYP) of Bangladesh emphasizes human development both as an end in itself and as a strategy for

achieving growth.⁴² The Plan objectives are derived in part from the country's longer-term Perspective Plan (1990-2010) which stresses growth, poverty alleviation and self-reliance. The achievement of these long term goals of Bangladesh depends on the adoption of appropriate policies and proper implementation of those policies which again depends on the functional capabilities of its organizations. Technical cooperation is considered as a tool to play promotional and catalytical role in increasing such functional capabilities. Priority areas concentrated in the FFYP are: human resource development with focus on management and training; sharing and adaptation of technology; development of information network, etc. Special attention has been given in the Plan document to the problems of environment and to the participation of women in development in all the activities to be supported. Technical cooperation can effectively address the problems which hinder the promotional activities of the concerned organizations in these priority areas and make tangible contribution to their development.

Bangladesh, as a member of SAARC, has the potentiality and prospect to have technical cooperation in many areas, especially in the areas already identified. Dozens of organizations of Bangladesh in public and private sectors and NGOs are in position to accept and offer technical cooperation in different fields like research and development, training, banking, rural credit, promotion and development of poverty alleviation, human resource development, consultancy, etc.⁴³ In the changing circumstances of the world economy, Bangladesh has also the prospect to go for technical cooperation with her other partners of SAARC in the matters of common interests like structural adjustment, debt management, urbanization, agriculture, food security, etc.

42. See, *The Fourth Five Year Plan (1990-1995)*, Planning Commission, Ministry of Planning, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Dhaka, June 1990, pp. 1-5, 10.

43. See, *Bangladesh TCDC, Capacities and Needs Matching Exercise on Rural Credit and Poverty Alleviation*, Final Consultation Meeting, BARD, Comilla, 18-22 September 1994, pp. 9-10.

Bangladesh can benefit from such cooperation by inviting cost effective expertise and services. She can also utilize the facilities of training institutions of other member countries of SAARC for human resource development and poverty alleviation. On the other hand, Bangladesh may render a significant service to develop relevant context and content of training programmes in this respect among SAARC countries. It can take a notable part to broaden the quantum and quality of cooperation offering technical assistance to the SAARC member countries which will help to reinforce the capacity to implement and manage their own development programmes. Thus the technical cooperation among SAARC countries may be reciprocal and Bangladesh may gain from such cooperation by managing her own development and fostering her national self-reliance.

6. CONCLUSION

The emergence of SAARC as a regional economic body for development of South Asian countries is an important event not only for this region, but also for the whole world. It united the seven countries of South Asia for economic cooperation and collective efforts for self-reliance to keep pace with the changes in the global socio-economic system.

The members of SAARC have recognized technical cooperation as one of the vehicles for promoting the economic activities and keeping the pace of changes in the region and in the world. One of the most important problems of technical cooperation among the SAARC countries is the coordination on the matters of technical assistance and creation of a data bank on experts, training and institutional and technological support. A fund may be created to support the technical assistance projects in the SAARC countries and in this respect the international donors like the UNDP may get involved. For coordination and information on the matters of technical cooperation, a Cell may be created in the SAARC Secretariat from where the specific needs of the member states will be examined and approved for funding. This will promote both the national development of the SAARC countries and the regional development of South Asia.

Technical cooperation among SAARC countries will enable them to strengthen their organisational capacity to perform the economic activities more efficiently. The SAARC countries are at different stages of their socio-economic development, and at the same time, they are facing generic development constraints. The conditions of common problems produce opportunities for productive application of technical cooperation in the fields already identified by the members of the Association. They can firmly address many fundamental and common problems of the capacity strengthening, human resource development, training, poverty alleviation, transfer of appropriate technology, etc. through technical cooperation which involves the execution and management of development activities. These are the sharing of expertise, experience, technical capacities, know-how, relevant methods and facilities and conducting cooperation on an institution-to-institution basis in public or private sectors.

The SAARC countries may be benefitted through the application of technical cooperation in the form of achieving national and collective self-reliance essential for their socio-economic development, particularly in achieving sustainable development through national capacity building. The advantage of technical cooperation among the SAARC countries is in the application of appropriate expertise and technology from themselves within the region involving the participation of both the public and private sector organizations including the non-government organizations or private volunteer organizations. Although the slow progress in economic cooperation has generated skepticism about the future prospects of SAARC, prospects for technical cooperation show optimism about the bonding and harmonizing the future activities of the members of the Association. At present concerted and determined efforts are needed, as foreseen by scholars, to further strengthen and diversify the areas of cooperation.⁴⁴ Technical cooperation is one of the vehicles for fostering such concerted efforts.

44. Sadrel Reza, "Issues in Trade Cooperation in South Asia: A Bangladesh Perspective", *BIISS Journal*, Vol.15, No. 4, 1994, p. 341.