



S A A P E

South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication

Ms. Neena Gill MEP
Chair of Delegation to countries of SAARC
European Parliament
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Wednesday, 31 January 2007

Dear Neena Gill,

Draft CSPs for the SAARC Region

We are happy to hear that the European Parliament is currently reviewing the Country Strategy Papers (CSPs) for the SAARC region and we wish you well with this great responsibility.

After the adoption of the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) Regulation by the European Parliament in December 2006, the time has now come to deliver on the commitments the EU has made. While the DCI lays out the broad legal framework for the EU's engagement in South Asia and other regions in the world, detailed activities are defined in the CSPs. SAAPE has received the draft CSPs for the relevant countries and has asked its members to comment on these. This letter is the result of their contributions.

As you may know, for South Asia to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), many things remain to be done and many challenges need to be addressed. In many of the countries where SAAPE is active, poverty and under-nourishment continue to be the pressing issues, with every third person in India living below the national poverty line and 20% of the people in Pakistan being undernourished. At the same time low literacy rate persist, with approximately only half of people between 15 and 24 in Bangladesh being literate. Gender equity is another issue that needs to be addressed properly in the region, given that most of the countries rank extremely low on the Social Watch Gender Equity Index (GEI) (*figures taken from Social Watch Report 2006*).

The CSPs need to address the above mentioned issues to meaningfully contribute to the overall goal of eradicating poverty and the achievement of the MDGs by 2015.

Having read the draft CSPs of SAAPE countries, we want to point out several concerns that we have identified in these documents:

Consultation with Civil Society – Consultation with Civil Society during the process of drafting the CSPs is essential for ensuring that the demands and requests from the people actively working on poverty eradication in the countries are sufficiently taken into account in the Country Strategy. The DCI supports this notion and requires that civil society is properly consulted when CSPs are drafted. However, none of our members or partners of SAAPE have received any information that such consultations took place. Continuous requests for more information to the EC delegation were declined on the grounds that the CSPs were not yet ready and would be discussed later - Nepal being a case in point. Furthermore, none of the draft CSPs we have read so far could provide conclusive evidence (agenda, list of participants, etc.) that such consultations were held. We are therefore concerned that civil society was not effectively consulted and therefore the draft CSPs do not reflect the experiences, priorities and aspirations of people living and working at the grassroots level.

Gender – While gender inequality persists in many South Asian countries where SAAPE is operational with women being most affected by poverty, discrimination and violence of different forms, the draft CSPs do not adequately address this issue. Only in the draft CSP of Bangladesh is a specific programme and a related indicator identified with the intention to strengthen women’s empowerment. In all the other draft CSPs, gender is only treated as a cross cutting issue with a standard sentence. The draft CSP Bhutan does not even mention the issue at all. CSPs should include a detailed analysis of the gender situation in each country and identify specific programmes to address the shortcomings. If gender is included as a cross-cutting issue in any programme, a clear and reliable indicator needs to be developed in order to be able to assess progress.

Child Labour - South Asian countries have one of the highest numbers of child labourers in the world. A case in point is India where recent statistics suggest that around 50% of all children between the age of 6 and 14 years are not attending schools. A high proportion of these can be found in hazardous work instead. Yet, only the CSP of Bangladesh has concrete actions addressing child labour. If the CSPs are to promote the eradication of poverty and the achievement of all MDGs, the issue of child labour must be addressed. In Article 5, the DCI even requires the CSPs to include action against child labour in order to fight one of the greatest obstacles of children’s access to their fundamental human rights, particularly the right to education and health. We strongly believe that the fight against child labour needs to play a bigger role in the current CSPs.

Food Sovereignty – The concept of Food sovereignty is not properly recognized in the CSPs. To give farmers the freedom to choose which crops they want to grow and where they want to trade their products, a broad range of activities needs to be initiated, including economic, social and environmental measures. First and foremost, the issue of poor farmers itself needs to be addressed. The majority of food producers in South Asian countries are living in poverty and thus appropriate pro-poor measures

need to be taken to decrease the economic pressure on them and to give them the space to make their own decisions. This includes support to the development of local markets for small scale farmers, without fear of international competition. Moreover, the EU should reform its policy on agricultural subsidy and promote fair trade for the promotion of agricultural products of South Asian farmers.

Having considered all the deficiencies identified above, we are worried that the CSPs in their current form may not be able to support the overarching objective of poverty eradication. In addition, apart from the aforementioned thematic concerns, it is imperative that the CSPs should also spell out and ensure just and democratic governance, right to employment for ensuring livelihoods and sustainable peace to further complement development efforts in the region. With 7 July 2007 approaching quickly, we are almost passed the mid-post for the MDGs 2015 and a concentrated effort by the EU and other donors is necessary to ensure their achievement. We, therefore, urge the European Parliament to seriously reconsider the draft CSPs before they can be adopted.

Warm Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Arjun Karki', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Arjun Karki, PhD
Regional Coordinator

cc. Members of the EP SAARC Delegation
Ana Gomes MEP, Chair of Working Party on South Asia