



Tenth South Asia Economic Summit (SAES X)

Deepening Economic Integration for Inclusive and Sustainable Development in South Asia

14-16 November 2017
Kathmandu

Guiding issues and questions

Plenary I

HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE ON SOUTH ASIAN INTEGRATION: COLLAPSE OR REJUVENATION?

Despite over 30 years of regional cooperation initiatives, South Asia remains tragically weakly integrated. For example, travelling the distance of 1,350 kilometres from Islamabad to Kathmandu takes somewhere between 12 hours to 24 hours due to a lack of connectivity through India. Effective regional integration—through trade, investment and transport connectivity—holds tremendous potential for the economic transformation of the subcontinent, home to 1.8 billion people. This calls for political will at the highest level to take actions to unlock the possibilities of shared prosperity.

This session seeks to bring forth perspectives of legislators, top policymakers and leading thinkers of South Asia. Some issues/questions for discussion include:

- What are the challenges to achieving deeper economic integration in South Asia?
- To what extent is it possible to salvage the regional integration agenda from geopolitical tensions and rivalries?
- What sort of political commitment is needed for deepening economic integration in South Asia?
- How can national development strategies be effectively linked with the regional integration agenda?
- What regional actions can contribute towards achieving the targets set out in the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030?

The dialogue will follow a Davos-style format. Each speaker makes a 5-minute introduction, followed by discussions in the panel and with the audience. The moderator will initiate the dialogue by suggesting issues and questions for discussion.

Plenary II

WHITHER SAARC? THE FUTURE OF REGIONAL COOPERATION IN SOUTH ASIA

Envisaging regional integration as one of the means to achieve shared prosperity, seven South Asian nations formed the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 1985. Over three decades since its formal creation, SAARC, now an eight-member association, struggles to even hold annual summits due to contentious bilateral relationships. South Asia remains one of the least economically integrated regions of the world, despite cultural and linguistic similarities. Countries in the region are increasingly opting for bilateral, subregional and transregional mechanisms for economic integration and connectivity.

The session aims to discuss the following issues/questions, among others:

- Why is SAARC in a comatose state? What initiatives could be undertaken—at domestic and regional levels—to reinvigorate it?
- Given the slow progress on trade integration, can South Asian Economic Union become a reality?
- Is the SAARC charter and architecture in need of reforms to take SAARC forward? If yes, what type of reforms is needed? What kind of institutional setup/mechanism is needed?
- What are the implications of growing subregional initiatives for the regional cooperation agenda under SAARC? What are the prospects of creating synergy between the two?

The keynote speaker shall have 20 minutes to deliver his/her speech. The panellists shall have 6 minutes each to deliver their views. This will be followed by a discussion among all the participants.

Plenary III

EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL ROLE OF SAARC OBSERVERS IN REGIONAL INTEGRATION

SAARC has at present nine observer states. Some of the observers are global economic powerhouses, and major sources of investment and aid as well as trade partners for member states. The possibilities of leveraging these bilateral relationships and engagements to advance regional integration goals have not been adequately explored, although in the 18th SAARC Summit Declaration leaders “directed the Programming Committee to engage the SAARC Observers into productive, demand-driven and objective project based cooperation in priority areas as identified by the Member States”. Member states have differences, stated or unstated, over the permissible breadth and depth of observers’ engagement in SAARC activities. As SAARC ponders its future, it is pertinent to deliberate how these observers can best be tapped.

The session aims to discuss the following issues/questions, among others:

- In what ways can SAARC observers be tapped to contribute to regional integration (e.g., trade, investment and technology transfer)?
- To what extent and in what areas are observers willing to contribute to South Asian regional cooperation activities?
- What roles can the observers play to bring about improvement in the productive capacity of member countries, including through infrastructure development as well as better intraregional connectivity?
- How do different member states view the potential role of SAARC observers? Is there any prospect of finding a common ground?

The keynote speaker shall have 20 minutes to deliver his/her speech. The panellists shall have 6 minutes each to deliver their views. This will be followed by a discussion among all the participants.

Plenary IV

SPECIAL SESSION IN MEMORY OF SAMAN KELEGAMA: WAY FORWARD FOR REGIONAL INTEGRATION AGENDA

The sudden passing away of the eminent Sri Lankan economist Dr. Saman Kelegama in June 2017 was an irreparable loss for, among others, the research and policymaking community in South Asia and beyond. A widely respected scholar and passionate advocate of regional cooperation and integration in South Asia, he was a key figure behind the launch of the South Asia Economic Summit. In this special session, his friends and colleagues will discuss Saman – the man and the economist – his legacy and vision for a South Asian Economic Union, and the way forward for the regional cooperation agenda. Each speaker is encouraged to focus on one area of cooperation that Saman championed.

The keynote speaker shall have 20 minutes to deliver his/her speech. The panellists shall have 6 minutes each to deliver their views. This will be followed by a discussion among all the participants.

Parallel Session I

THEME: UNLEASHING THE POTENTIAL OF INTRAREGIONAL TRADE

Intraregional trade in South Asia is about 5 percent of its total trade, a far cry from ASEAN's 25 percent. This is the case despite some progress on reductions in tariff barriers achieved as a result of the Agreement on South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA). SAFTA, partly because of its substantial negative list, has been unable to stimulate trade and foster deeper integration as was envisaged when it entered into force in 2006. Besides unsatisfactory progress with regard to tariff liberalization, non-tariff barriers (NTBs) are believed to contribute significantly to lacklustre intraregional trade. The urgency of curtailing NTBs is greater than ever. Another issue highly relevant to the South Asian trade landscape is the prevalence of informal trade in voluminous amounts. The pervasiveness of informal trade reflects the presence of trade barriers and also indicates the potential for intraregional trade. Hence, discussions around the trends and patterns of informal trade in South Asia as well as the necessary policy interventions are also indispensable for unleashing the potential of intraregional trade.

The session aims to address the following issues/questions, among others:

- How do we explain low intraregional trade in South Asia?
- What is the future of SAFTA in the wake of bilateral free trade/preferential trade agreements between member states?
- Addressing non-tariff barriers in South Asia: Progress so far and road ahead
 - Status of NTBs
 - Explaining NTBs: legislative, infrastructural and institutional
 - How effective have SAFTA and SARSO been in addressing NTBs?
 - NTBs as supply-side capacity constraints
 - What can be done?
- Informal trade in South Asia: What do we know and what remains to be known?
 - Status of informal trade in South Asia
 - Drivers of informal trade
 - Are there any changes in the trends and patterns of informal trade amid regional economic integration efforts?
 - What measures are needed to formalize informal trade?
 - What are the knowledge gaps in informal trade in South Asia?

The presenters shall have 15 minutes each to make their presentations. They can use slides (via a projector and screen) or deliver a talk without using slides, depending upon their preference. The panellists shall have 7 minutes each to deliver their views. This will be followed by a discussion among all the participants. The chair will introduce the topic and the speakers, provide inputs when necessary and ensure that the programme schedule is maintained. At the end of the session s/he will summarize the deliberations and conclude the session.

Parallel Session II

THEME: SDGs AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH IN SOUTH ASIA

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at its core, was adopted by Member States of the United Nations in September 2015, including by all South Asian countries. Despite sustained high levels of economic growth in the subregion, poverty, food insecurity and social exclusion persist. South Asia therefore stands to gain much from the transformational opportunity provided by the 2030 Agenda to adopt inclusive and sustainable development pathways that leave no one behind, and harness innovative development practices, partnerships and technologies. Given the significant population of the subregion and its share global poverty, the stakes are high. If South Asia falls behind, then the world cannot achieve the SDGs.

The 2030 Agenda is gaining solid traction in the subregion, with most member states having established mechanisms across multiple agencies to efficiently coordinate the implementation of the SDGs. However, the complexity, scope and level of ambition of the 2030 Agenda call for ever more coordination and collaborative partnerships, in keeping also with Goal 17 on strengthened means of implementation and a revitalized Global Partnership for Sustainable Development. Two years into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the proposed session will review the means to further strengthen implementation efforts of the Agenda and its means of implementation, through deeper regional cooperation and integration and the leverage of existing expertise, innovative and collaborative mechanisms and platforms.

The session aims to address the following issues/questions, among others:

- Take stock of the subregion's progress against the 2030 Agenda, key challenges/gaps and priority actions to address shared vulnerabilities
- Identify the game changers to accelerate broad-based inclusive development and develop more participatory growth models, exploring good and innovative practices from the subregion
- Identify the shared vulnerabilities in the subregion and the key leverage points for priority actions
- Which policies or approach could help expedite progress for the society, the furthest behind, and encourage inclusive and sustainable development models?
- What could be the contours of a regional roadmap for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?
- What are some of the root causes to be tackled/the vicious circles to be broken to achieve greater equality and environmental protection?
- What are the new forms of partnerships required and how to ensure inclusive partnerships for transformational change?

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Parallel Session III

THEME: REGIONAL COOPERATION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change, among the most pressing global policy issues, has been detrimental, cutting across geographies – from the Hindu-Kush Himalayan region in Nepal to the coastal areas in Bangladesh. There is evidence of rising temperatures, salinity due to sea level rise, retreating glaciers and reduced snow cover, among others. The very nature of the environmental transformation is such that no society can stay untouched and unaffected. However, often the poorest and the most vulnerable societies (in terms of geography, and institutional capabilities, among others) are ones with almost no adaptive and response capacity. The environmental transformations due to climate change are impacting the livelihoods of the people in the region – often unpredictable and unprecedented impacts on agriculture, ecosystems and the increased recurrence of disasters – in rather profound ways. Climate change-induced changes in rainfall and availability of water in river systems mean the monsoon-dependent agriculture and associated incomes are highly vulnerable and are laden with uncertainties. While threats are established and real, the initiatives seem half measures.

The session aims to address the following issues/questions, among others:

- Taking stock of regional cooperation on climate change, including the Thimpu Statement on Climate Change
- Black carbon emissions in South Asia: Sources, consequences and ways to deal with them in the regional context
- Impact of climate change on agriculture and food security, and regional cooperation on mitigation and adaptation mechanisms
- How can intraregional trade be an instrument to reduce the impact of climate change?
- Governance of the commons: What could be the appropriate regional institutional mechanisms to manage shared adaptation strategies (e.g., dams)?

The presenters shall have 15 minutes each to make their presentation. They can use slides (via a projector and screen) or deliver a talk without using slides, depending upon their preference. The panellists shall have 7 minutes each to deliver their views. This will be followed by a discussion among all the participants. The chair will introduce the topic and the speakers, provide inputs when necessary and ensure that the programme schedule is maintained. At the end of the session s/he will summarize the deliberations and conclude the session.

Parallel Session IV

THEME: ASSESSING E-TRADE READINESS IN SOUTH ASIA

Information and communications technology (ICT) is bringing about economic transformations the world over. Electronic trade is a potential catalyst in expanding the scope for businesses—mostly small and medium enterprises—in developing countries. According to a recent report released by UNCTAD, the value of eTrade reached US\$25.3 trillion in 2015, a staggering US\$9 trillion above the 2013 figure. Although a major part of eTrade (over US\$22 trillion) represents business-to-business transactions, the business-to-consumer segment, which reached close to US\$3 trillion in 2015 and is rapidly growing, also holds enormous potentials.

Exporters using eTrade and digital platforms, evidence shows, are found to have outperformed conventional exporters. However, adopting eTrade is not an easy feat for developing countries given the state of technology and regulatory frameworks. Developing an effective electronic marketplace would require reliable internet infrastructure, up-to-date payments systems for transaction settlements, bankable delivery logistics and legal and regulatory frameworks in place. Equally important is having necessary skills and sufficient finance to run eTrade in these countries. Against this backdrop, this session will explore the eTrade readiness of South Asian countries.

The session aims to address the following issues/questions, among others:

- What is the potential of eTrade in South Asia and how can South Asia participate in and benefit from this development?
- Do the countries in South Asia possess technological skill and infrastructure, including payment system to support eTrade? What kind of regional trade rules are needed to promote intraregional eTrade?
- What kind of regulatory and legal framework will be needed effectively to support eTrade while preventing abuse?
- What are the implications of eTrade-related proposals tabled at the World Trade Organization for South Asian countries, particularly least-developed ones?

The presenters shall have 15 minutes each to make their presentation. They can use slides (via a projector and screen) or deliver a talk without using slides, depending upon their preference. The panelists shall have 7 minutes each to deliver their views. This will be followed by a discussion among all the participants. The chair will introduce the topic and the speakers, provide inputs when necessary and ensure that the programme schedule is maintained. At the end of the session s/he will summarize the deliberations and conclude the session.

Parallel Session V

THEME: UNLEASHING THE POTENTIAL OF INTRAREGIONAL INVESTMENT

Investment flows among SAARC countries are paltry. Intraregional foreign direct investment (FDI) in South Asia is estimated to be less than five percent of the already miniscule total cumulative FDI in the region. Absence of a mechanism for cooperation on investment issues is partly to blame for this situation. The Agreement on South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) excluded investment from its purview. Similarly, the SAARC Agreement on Promotion and Protection of Investments, although drafted in 2007, is yet to come into effect. Besides establishing a regional platform for investment promotion and cooperation, complementary policies in improving transport and logistics and implementing other trade facilitation measures, reducing transaction costs and encouraging investments from local small and medium enterprises are also necessary for boosting intraregional investment in South Asia. Thus, there is an urgent need to acknowledge the constraints impeding intraregional investment and undertake swift measures to promote intraregional investment which can ultimately lead to greater economic integration in South Asia.

The session aims to address the following issues/questions, among others:

- Why is intraregional investment in South Asia low? Why do investors prefer to invest outside the region?
- How can intraregional investment be boosted?
- How can successful implementation of the SAARC Agreement on Trade in Services help boost services-related investment in the region? What are the roadblocks to it?
- How can the proposed draft SAARC Agreement on Promotion and Protection of Investments contribute to promoting intraregional investment?
- What is the potential for synergy and conflict between the proposed regional investment cooperation mechanism and the existing bilateral investment and protection agreements (BIPPAAs)?
- What other complementary initiatives and measures are required to boost intraregional investment?

The presenter shall have 30 minutes to make a presentation. The presenter can use slides (via a projector and screen) or deliver a talk without using slides, depending upon his preference. The panellists shall have 7 minutes each to deliver their views. This will be followed by a discussion among all the participants. The chair will introduce the topic and the speakers, provide inputs when necessary and ensure that the programme schedule is maintained. At the end of the session s/he will summarize the deliberations and conclude the session.

Parallel Session VI

THEME: REGIONAL COOPERATION ON DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

South Asia, among the most disaster-prone regions, mainly due to its geo-climatic characteristics, has had a major earthquake (2015 Nepal earthquake that killed almost 9,000 people and destroyed around 800,000 homes) while recent floods have led to over 1,000 deaths. While the Nepal earthquake ravaged livelihoods in the Himalayan foothills, the recent floods in southern Nepal, Bangladesh and Eastern Bihar wreaked havoc in deltas and plains. Disasters are understood to be exacerbated by climate change and ‘optimal development pursuits’, among others. Amid few success stories such as the community-driven water-level alarm reporting in Mihipurwa, UP (India), located on the banks of Ghagra (called Karnali in Nepal) that has averted loss of life in floods, credible institutional initiatives that require transborder cooperation remain few and far between. The SAARC Disaster Management Centre remains largely underutilized. Reducing disaster-induced risk in itself is extremely complex and encapsulates a host of dimensions—tackling climate change, multidimensional and interdisciplinary analysis of growth and development pursuits and building disaster management capabilities, including institutional capacity to respond in real time to crisis such as rebuilding.

The session aims to address the following issues/questions, among others:

- Climate change in South Asia and its impact on disasters: Credible mapping of the most vulnerable geographies and communities
- Impact of disasters, especially floods, on agriculture and other vulnerable forms of livelihoods: Is a credible assessment even possible when climate change appears to worsen the nature of disasters such as more severe episodes of droughts?
- The regional cooperation dimension in reducing the risk of disasters: Are functional institutional arrangements a possibility? Can we adopt a regional approach to infrastructure development to reduce disaster risks? If so, what should be the financing arrangements? What can make regional cooperation work in managing disasters and reducing risks of disasters given that all countries actually have incentives to cooperate?
- Capacity building dynamics in disaster risk reduction: Intraregional exchanges for learning

The presenters shall have 15 minutes each to make their presentation. They can use slides (via a projector and screen) or deliver a talk without using slides, depending upon their preference. The panellists shall have 7 minutes each to deliver their views. This will be followed by a discussion among all the participants. The chair will introduce the topic and the speakers, provide inputs when necessary and ensure that the programme schedule is maintained. At the end of the session s/he will summarize the deliberations and conclude the session.

Parallel Session VII

THEME: SOUTH ASIA'S POSITION IN UPCOMING WTO MINISTERIAL

As the Eleventh Ministerial Conference (MC11) of the World Trade Organization (Buenos Aires, December) approaches, discussions are rife as to what it is likely to deliver. South Asia is an amalgamation of countries at different levels of development and with varied geographies—fast-developing countries, least-developed countries, small island economies and landlocked countries. Even as there are sharp differences between developed and developing members of the WTO over the future of the Doha Development Agenda, new issues concerning, among others, electronic commerce, investment facilitation and micro, small and medium-sized enterprises are also being debated.

The session aims to address the following issues/questions, among others:

- State of play of WTO negotiations in the run-up to MC11
- Status of implementation of major decisions taken in the Bali and Nairobi Ministerial Conferences (e.g., service waiver, trade facilitation, implementation of duty-free and quota-free market access) and potential implications for South Asian countries.
- What are the issues of interest and concern to developing countries of South Asia?
- What are the issues of interest and concern to least-developed countries of South Asia?
- Can South Asia as a region take a collective position for the MC11?
- Future of the Doha Round

The presenters shall have 15 minutes each to make their presentation. They can use slides (via a projector and screen) or deliver a talk without using slides, depending upon their preference. The panellists shall have 7 minutes each to deliver their views. This will be followed by a discussion among all the participants. The chair will introduce the topic and the speakers, provide inputs when necessary and ensure that the programme schedule is maintained. At the end of the session s/he will summarize the deliberations and conclude the session.

Parallel Session VIII

THEME: TRADE FACILITATION, TRANSIT AND CONNECTIVITY ISSUES

South Asia's intraregional trade has been severely constrained by the high cost of doing trade in the region. At 112 per cent, the ad-valorem cost of intraregional trade in South Asia is over twice that of East Asia, among the most connected regions of the world. Hard and soft infrastructure constraints in transport and transit contribute significantly to such costs. Addressing these constraints has gained salience in the context of falling tariff barriers and the imperative of being part of global production networks for achieving manufacturing-led structural transformation. Transport facilitation along cross-border land transport corridors is critical for realizing South Asia's trade potential, estimated at more than three times the actual figure. While existing international carriageways and land transport infrastructure are getting crowded with increase in trade, putting upward pressure on marginal cost of transportation, missing links, heterogeneous transport regulations and the requirement of transshipment at borders have been limiting the development of land transport corridors. In addition to these challenges, issues of inadequate transit facilitation measures further diminish the trade prospects of landlocked countries in the subregion.

The session aims to address the following issues/questions, among others:

- Synergies of SAARC corridors with BIMSTEC, SASEC and other overlapping multilateral corridor development projects in South Asia as well as with the Asian Highways and Trans-Asian Railway networks promoted by UNESCAP;
- Infrastructural projects such as the Integrated Check Posts (ICPs) equipped with cargo complexes, parking spaces, immigration services and other facilities;
- Customs modernization and other trade facilitation reforms—paperless trade, single window, electronic payments, harmonization and mutual recognition of certifications and tests, banking facilities at border posts—in the region, including through the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement;
- Subregional transport facilitation agreements such as the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal Motor Vehicle Agreement (BBIN MVA)
- Transit issues and special requirements of landlocked countries in the subregion. Can transit arrangements be concluded at the regional level and shielded from political events?
- Safety and security concerns of cross-border cargo transport: Developments such as Electronic Cargo Tracking Systems (eCTS), ICT and its role in trade facilitation, using geographical information systems (GIS) technologies

The presenters shall have 15 minutes each to make their presentation. They can use slides (via a projector and screen) or deliver a talk without using slides, depending upon their preference. The panelists shall have 7 minutes each to deliver their views. This will be followed by a discussion among all the participants. The chair will introduce the topic and the speakers, provide inputs when necessary and ensure that the programme schedule is maintained. At the end of the session s/he will summarize the deliberations and conclude the session.

Parallel Session IX

THEME: EXPLORING THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FROM INTERNATIONAL LABOUR MIGRATION AND REMITTANCES

It has long been established that international labour migration can have crucial impacts on economic and social development of both the sending and receiving countries. There is growing consensus that well-designed policy interventions are needed to realize the immense potential of international labour migration and remittances. International labour migration can benefit the country of origin through remittances and the country of destination through increased human capital, among other avenues. However, it also presents substantial challenges, such as vulnerability to shocks, abuse of workers, and unequal distribution of benefits caused by exorbitant recruitment fees and low wages. The opportunities and challenges from international migration and remittances are especially prominent for South Asia, which has one of the highest outflows of migrant workers and where remittance inflows play a significant role at the macroeconomic as well as microeconomic levels.

The session aims to address the following issues/questions, among others:

- State of flow of migrant workers and remittances in South Asia
- What measures can help optimize the developmental impacts of migration?
- What can be learned from good practices in the region and in other countries?
- How can the international governance of migration be strengthened through regional initiatives?
- Strengthening SAARC diplomacy to reform international labour migration systems to reduce exploitation of migrant workers
- Avenues for SAARC cooperation on maximizing the benefits of international labour migration and remittances as well as on efficiently dealing with the challenges
- Policy reforms to reduce dependency on remittance inflows

The presenters shall have 15 minutes each to make their presentations. They can use slides (via a projector and screen) or deliver a talk without using slides, depending upon their preference. The panellists shall have 7 minutes each to deliver their views. This will be followed by a discussion among all the participants. The chair will introduce the topic and the speakers, provide inputs when necessary and ensure that the programme schedule is maintained. At the end of the session s/he will summarize the deliberations and conclude the session.

Parallel Session X

THEME: GOVERNANCE OF INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY FOR PLANTS IN SOUTH ASIA

The importance of creating intellectual property protection for plants is mandated by Article 27.3 (b) of the 1995 *Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights* (TRIPS) of the World Trade Organization (WTO). With the goal of creating commercial incentives for plant breeders, the Article obliges all WTO member countries to protect plant varieties either by patents or by an effective *sui generis* (of its own kind) system or by any combination of the two.

So far, out of 164 WTO members dozens of developed and developing countries have implemented TRIPS-compliant national legislation to protect plant varieties by intellectual property. Some countries, especially the developed ones, have adopted either one form or a combination of different intellectual property to protect plants – for instance, patent protection and/or a different system of granting plant breeders' rights over plant varieties. Similarly, a number of developing countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand have also introduced national legislation for plant variety protection. However, most South Asian countries have not yet implemented any law to protect plant varieties through an intellectual property system. In fact, out of eight South Asian countries only India and Bhutan have put in place TRIPS-compliant legislation to protect plant varieties. In countries such as Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, plant variety protection laws are still under negotiation for review among stakeholders.

Although there are criticisms against the WTO, there is a growing realisation that TRIPS allows member countries to craft a law that should accommodate their domestic needs. In light of such realisation, recent scholarship focuses more on exploring “unused policy space” that developing and least-developed countries need to address their local interests while fulfilling their intellectual property obligation under Article 27.3 (b) of TRIPS. The idea of exploring “unused policy space” in the TRIPS Agreement is rooted in the realisation that a truly *sui generis* system of plant variety protection could be developed for countries that protect the interests of both plant breeders and smallholder farmers. An example of a country that has capitalized on “unused policy space” to implement a law that protects the rights of both plant breeders and farmers is India. Some scholars are of the view that India's Plant Variety Protection and Farmers' Rights Act – while creating intellectual property and farmers' rights over plant varieties – facilitates breeders and farmers to access and use plant varieties for plant breeding and food production. Some other scholars do not, however, support the idea of creating any kind of exclusive rights over plant varieties. Instead, they argue that “open access principles” need to be advanced to counterbalance the impact that intellectual property rights could have on the access and use of plant varieties.

In the light of these scholarly discussions and policy developments, this session aims to explore the evolving dynamics of plant intellectual property laws in South Asia; and the lessons that can be derived from “open access models” for effective plant variety protection laws in the region.

The presenters shall have 15 minutes each to make their presentations. They can use slides (via a projector and screen) or deliver a talk without using slides, depending upon their preference. The panellists shall have 7 minutes each to deliver their views. This will be followed by a discussion among all the participants. The chair will introduce the topic and the speakers, provide inputs when necessary and ensure that the programme schedule is maintained. At the end of the session s/he will summarize the deliberations and conclude the session.

Parallel Session XI

THEME: STRENGTHENING RURAL ECONOMIES THROUGH INNOVATION AND SMEs

Even though urban and rural economies are more intertwined than ever, there are still inherent differences that necessitate a unique approach to strengthening rural economies. The major challenges confronting rural economies are a lack of innovation systems, few large firms, unproductive farming techniques, remote locations with poor infrastructure, lack of market access, unavailability of skilled workers, and the threats posed by climate change, among others. Against this background, successful strengthening of rural economies will require smallholder farmers and small and medium enterprises to innovate and adopt innovations. Since its inception in 2016, *Feed the Future Asia Innovative Farmers Activity (AIFA)*, a USAID project implemented by Winrock International, has been collaborating with key stakeholders, including South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), to increase food security, improve smallholder income and encourage environment sustainability by facilitating agricultural innovation and technology diffusion across South and Southeast Asia. This session will offer insights into how rural economies could be strengthened through innovations and participation of SMEs, drawing on experiences of the AIFA project, among others.

The session aims to address the following issues/questions:

- Elevate the importance of innovative agriculture technology in addressing rural economic development and food security
- Supporting innovators in South and Southeast Asia, beyond the traditional agriculture sector
- Need for new ways of thinking about agriculture technology innovations
- Importance of youth in the sector
- Identifying and addressing key market access barriers that hinder agriculture technology transfer
- Call to conference participants to identify local innovations that could be included in the AIFA

The presenters shall have 15 minutes each to make their presentations. They can use slides (via a projector and screen) or deliver a talk without using slides, depending upon their preference. The panellists shall have 7 minutes each to deliver their views. This will be followed by a discussion among all the participants. The chair will introduce the topic and the speakers, provide inputs when necessary and ensure that the programme schedule is maintained. At the end of the session s/he will summarize the deliberations and conclude the session.

Parallel Session XII

THEME: ISSUES IN ENERGY COOPERATION

Given the importance of energy in daily lives and as a key input to production, energy security, mostly in the form of reliable electricity supply, has always been on top of the agenda of every country. The scarcity and growing demand for energy makes it imperative for South Asia to rethink its existing energy management policy. South Asian countries are endowed with diverse energy generation sources and there is seasonal complementarity in demand for and supply of energy among the countries, making the region ideal for energy trade and cooperation.

The session aims to address the following issues/questions, among others:

- An assessment of the existing status of and potential for energy cooperation, including implementation of the SAARC Framework Agreement on Energy Cooperation
- How can energy security of the individual countries as well as that of the region be ensured? What kind of energy governance at national and regional levels is required for regional energy security and a move towards greener energy?
- Role of energy trade and connectivity in energy cooperation and regional energy security

The presenters shall have 15 minutes each to make their presentations. They can use slides (via a projector and screen) or deliver a talk without using slides, depending upon their preference. The panellists shall have 7 minutes each to deliver their views. This will be followed by a discussion among all the participants. The chair will introduce the topic and the speakers, provide inputs when necessary and ensure that the programme schedule is maintained. At the end of the session s/he will summarize the deliberations and conclude the session.

Parallel Session XIII

THEME: HARNESSING THE POTENTIAL OF REGIONAL VALUE CHAINS FOR EMPLOYMENT GENERATION

Creating jobs remains a major challenge for governments in South Asia. In a densely populated region with low arable land-to-population ratios, labour-intensive manufacturing sector expansion, evidence suggests, is among the policy prescriptions. Agriculture already employs on average almost half the labour force. For the sector to keep employing such numbers, commercialization via, for example, sustainable intensification is key. Given greater industrial, technological and managerial capabilities among the relatively industrialized countries in the region, regional value chains offer major employment generation opportunities (in both manufacturing and agriculture) where laggards in the region too benefit from regional linkages. Regional value chains signify activities required to bring a product from conception, through different phases of production, to final consumers—all being carried out in the region. While regional sourcing of inputs—for example, Bangladesh's apparel sector sourcing cotton and textiles from Pakistan and India—is already a reality, which indeed creates jobs in all three countries, sizable development of linkages along regional lines has not occurred.

The session aims to address the following issues/questions, among others:

- An assessment of the role of the industrial sector in South Asian economies and employment generation, and the role of regional value chains in industrial development
- Mapping and assessing regional value chains and linkage opportunities, especially the labour intensive ones
- Identification of enabling factors that promote regional value chains—trade, transport and transit facilitation, technology transfer, investment cooperation, business strategies, buyback arrangements, among others
- Support for less developed countries of the region for building productive capacities for participating in regional value chains
- Mainstreaming promotion of regional value chains into the SAARC economic agenda

The presenters shall have 15 minutes each to make their presentations. They can use slides (via a projector and screen) or deliver a talk without using slides, depending upon their preference. This will be followed by a discussion among all the participants. The chair will introduce the topic and the speakers, provide inputs when necessary and ensure that the programme schedule is maintained. At the end of the session s/he will summarize the deliberations and conclude the session.

Parallel Session XIV

THEME: IMPROVING ECONOMIC MEASUREMENT

Properly capturing with data different dimensions of development is challenging, more so in developing countries. South Asia is no exception. Pervasive informality of economic activities, underreporting of earnings in the formal sector, data gaps and inconsistencies, among other things, create scepticism over available data and/or make tracking progress towards subnational, national, regional and global development goals difficult. Technological advancements have helped make available new sources of data as well as data collection and processing methods, such as nightlight intensity, cellphone traffic and internet scraping. Researchers and policymakers are yet to fully appreciate the prospects these hold for better measurement of socio-economic outcomes and improved policymaking. Facilitating access to these data for the benefit of the wider public and minimizing the risks arising from the very availability of such data will become important issues. Even with standard approaches to data collection, the range and the quality of surveys are uneven across South Asian nations, suggesting a potential for knowledge sharing.

This session will address the following issues/questions, among others:

- What are the opportunities and challenges presented by big data and technological advancements for improving the measurement and understanding of socio-economic developments and outcomes?
- Where does South Asia stand in exploiting these new opportunities and what are the critical barriers?
- What are the options for ensuring fair and equitable access to and use of big data, for the benefit of the wider public?
- How are national statistical agencies approaching the possibilities offered by (potential) new sources of data? What constraints do they face in collecting data in general (including through established methods, e.g., household survey, enterprise survey, population census, manufacturing establishment census) and big data in particular?
- What are the ways for addressing data gaps for better tracking of progress towards, and hence implementation of, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)? What are the avenues for effective stakeholder participation towards that end?
- What could be the possible avenues of cooperation among South Asian nations on data collection in general and leveraging big data in particular?

The presenters shall have 15 minutes each to make their presentations. They can use slides (via a projector and screen) or deliver a talk without using slides, depending upon their preference. The panellists shall have 7 minutes each to deliver their views. This will be followed by a discussion among all the participants. The chair will introduce the topic and the speakers, provide inputs when necessary and ensure that the programme schedule is maintained. At the end of the session s/he will summarize the deliberations and conclude the session.