

REGIONAL COOPERATION IN SOUTH ASIA: NEW DIMENSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES



Edited by
Shaheen Afroze

Regional cooperation in South Asia within the framework of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) stands at a crossroads in the post-Cold War era, more so at the beginning of the new millennium. The book *Regional Cooperation in South Asia: New Dimensions and Perspectives*, takes a stock of institutional and programmatic aspects of SAARC and examine what shape SAARC is expected to take in the light of emerging domestic, regional and global realities in the new millennium. It looks beyond SAARC at different levels - extra-regional, sub-regional and civil society levels - to explore how multiple layers and levels of cooperation could synergically complement the process of regional cooperation in South Asia. The book also draws on the experiences of successful regional groupings like ASEAN and EU with regard to their management of different forms and modalities of cooperation.

Editor

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FOREWORD

This book contains the edited version of the papers presented in the International Conference on 'Regional Cooperation in South Asia: Interfacing New Dimensions and Perspectives' held during 22-24 October 2000 in collaboration with the German Embassy in Dhaka.

The process of regional cooperation started quite late in South Asia. Since its coming into being in 1985, the performance of SAARC has been compared to other regional groupings such as ASEAN and EU and found to be wanting. The expectation of regional cooperation that SAARC engendered specially among smaller states of South Asia continues to be unrealized. There have been attempts to go beyond SAARC and bypass SAARC to overcome some of its evident shortcomings, but without much success. Considering the importance of regional cooperation in resource endowed but poorly performing South Asian economies, governments have become more receptive to ideas coming from non-official initiatives. In BIISS, a leading think tank of Bangladesh, the progress and problems of SAARC has been studied with great interest which led BIISS to take the initiative in partnership with German Embassy in Dhaka, of organizing the international conference that was the first of its kind. With Germany playing an active role in EU and after a successful BIISS-German Embassy collaborative program in October 1999¹, it was considered an appropriate subject to continue the collaboration.

¹ BIISS and the German Embassy organized a two-day Roundtable on **Development Policy on the Threshold of the Year 2000** on October 6-7, 1999, with participation of seven German participants from Bonn, the papers of which are being published in book form.

The participants came not only from the member states of the SAARC but also from other regions in Asia and Europe. Their valuable papers along with the wealth of knowledge, acumen, experience, and expertise of the learned participants in respect of other regional systems vastly enriched the deliberations of the conference. The present volume containing the papers prepared for the conference will hopefully generate interests in the circles of scholars and policy makers as well as all those who are interested in the SAARC and other regional systems of cooperation.

I wish to thank the authors of the papers for their thought provoking and insightful contributions. I express my sincere gratitude to H. E. Mr. Uwe Schramm, former Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Bangladesh for his generous support in organizing the conference and publishing the book. I also wish to thank Dr. Shaheen Afroze, Senior Research Fellow, BIIS for coordinating the Conference and editing its proceedings in a book form.

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