



Report On

Inception Meeting of NGO Representatives of SAARC Member Countries for Exploring Possibility of Formation of SAARC NGOs Forum for Drug Abuse Prevention New Delhi, 12th to 13th June 2008



**NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL DEFENCE
MINISTRY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE & EMPOWERMENT
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA, NEW DELHI**



A two day workshop on the formation of SAARC regional forum or Drug abuse prevention was organized by the National Institute of Social Defence (NISD) at New Delhi between June 12-13, 2008. Welcome speech was delivered by Dr. Arbind Prasad, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

Inaugurating the workshop Dr. Kheya Bhattacharya, Joint Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs, said that drug abuse, women and child trafficking and terrorism are the three important areas of concern for the SAARC Countries. She

emphasized on the fact that, the strategies should be profoundly constructed and effectively implemented by the member states regarding drug abuse and women and child trafficking. Talking about the strategies for combating drug-abuse, she pointed out the need to have a standard operating protocol between member states and a toll free number between the SAARC countries. She threw light on the SAARC Drug Monitoring Cell that is being run in Sri Lanka. It is still in a primary stage but making its strong presence felt in combating drug abuse. She concluded her speech by emphasizing the member states to focus on effective recommendations and strategies which can be practically implemented by all the member states.

Mr. Hassan Shefau, Director, SAARC Secretariat, welcomed all the members and thanked the Govt. of India and NISD for taking the initiative in conducting this workshop. He highlighted Article 9 of the Social Charter mentioned in the SAARC. He discussed various issues related to the seriousness of drug abuse, women and children trafficking. He also talked about solutions to these problems. He emphasized the importance of bringing together various stakeholders. He expressed happiness that these kinds of workshops were bringing in various civil society organizations together to fight against problems like Drug abuse, HIV/AIDS, Trafficking etc. He also dealt with the issue of HIV/AIDS which is transmitted through infected injecting drug users. He appealed to all the member participants to come up with an effective strategy to combat this.



Dr. Arbind Prasad, supported the idea of collaboration and effective implementation of programmes by the member states in combating drug abuse and trafficking. He also added that civil societies and NGOs had played a major role in the field of reducing drug abuse and trafficking He asked the member states to focus on drug demand reduction, treatment and rehabilitation to those who have been victims of drug abuse . He also emphasized on the peer education, peer learning, support and experience sharing along with peer evaluation and monitoring so that proper steps can be taken in the direction of combating drug use. He appreciated the role played by FINGODAPin bringing together the civil societies and the NGOs

under one roof in fighting against drug abuse. He emphasized that peer group mechanism is very important and fruitful for the reduction of drug abuse.

At the end of this session, Vote of Thanks was given by Dr. Zeenat. She thanked all the SAARC participants for their participation and all the guests and resource persons for taking this initiative. She



appealed all of them to come up with a vision so that they may emerge victorious in fighting against drug abuse and trafficking. In the next session,

Dr. Anju Dhawan, Dept of Psychiatry, AIIMS made her presentation on "Substance Abuse in South Asian Region." In her presentation she discussed the various aspects of SAARC countries like population density, literacy, economy, public expenditure on health, use of alcohol and narcotic drugs in various regions of the SAARC states and also the morbidity rate of various regions etc. She cited changing life style, growth of media, social change,

geographical area, availability of drugs, porous borders, trauma, conflicts etc., as chief reasons for drug abuse. She made important observations from UNODC Report about common trends of drug users, their profile and types of drugs used. She also highlighted the statistics from the SAARC countries in which she discussed about the services provided to the drug users, research conducted, availability and use of drugs, role of the government, and some study reports. She highlighted the impact of drug abuse that results in accidents, domestic violence, crime, drug deaths, and many other social problems. She made observations about International Harm Reduction Report 2008 on HIV infection and mentioned that 90% of opium and 60 % of cannabis, including other pharmaceutical drugs like sleeping tablets etc. were highly used by the drug users. She observed that mostly the vulnerable and the illiterate sections of society are involved in drug abuse. Lastly she highlighted the role played by the civil society in advocacy, treatment and rehabilitation, including harm reduction to drug users and to those who suffered HIV/AIDS. Outlining the contours of an effective strategy she felt that sharing information

among member states, promotion and use of scientific technology, situation assessment and documentation. effective forum for advocacy, strengthening capacity building of various groups, availability of treatment and rehabilitation, early treatment seeking and harm minimization were some of the essential steps in this direction.



A participant wanted to know why alcohol and tobacco were not included in the drug-demand reduction programmes. Few

comments were made on impact of globalization, changing global scenario, exposure of media and

increasing disparity between the rich and poor by the delegates. According to them these were results of various social problems which had emerged as a negative impact of globalization.

This was followed by country-wise presentations. In his concluding remarks Dr. Hassan Shefau said that Drug Abuse was the problem of all the countries and people must come together in reducing drug abuse. He also discussed SAARC Forum of networking of NGOs, its operationalisation, institutionalization and working methodology.

Programme of the 2nd day was started by Mr. Sunil Kumar of NISD. First session of the day was the group session which was chaired by Dr. Atul Ambekar. Groups of the respective countries started with their presentations on "Vulnerability and Resource Mapping" in which they discussed about the needs and resources available to the drug users and its harm reduction.

In the next session Dr. Zeenat talked about the "Networking of NGOs." In her presentation she emphasized that networking should take place at the global level. According to her, civil society is a people's movement and NGOs are the bridge between people and government. NGOs, therefore, should give their best and quality services. She held that NGOs play a very important role in advocacy which was the key to networking. She added that there should be transparency and accountability in the works of NGOs. The NGOs should produce their best under their available resources and capacities. She said that team spirit is the most essential thing for the success of any NGO.

Further she said that networking provided big opportunities to the mentors and the peer groups. It helped in developing better skills and forming better policies for any program. By this networking forum of NGOs, SAARC has given a very big recognition to the civil society organizations of its member countries.

Soon after this presentation Dr. Rajesh Kumar, Director, FINGODAP asked all the SAARC delegates to divide themselves in groups randomly and sit together to discuss various recommendations related to the SAARC Regional Forum for drug abuse prevention. The participants were given half an hour time for this discussion. There were four groups and they were assigned the following topics relating to the SAARC Forum:

- (I) Purpose of SAARC Forum.
- (II) Relevant structure and the need of SAARC Forum.
- (III) Evaluation and monitoring the processes of the SAARC Forum.



(IV) Areas of capacity building and advocacy of the SAARC

Forum. After the group session, delegates discussed the relevant points and prepared the final draft of their recommendations to the SAARC Regional Forum.

In the post-lunch session, Mr. Tushar talked about the concept of E-networking of the NGOs. E-networking also plays a very important role in peer group mechanism and peer group learning, he said.

It keeps various civil society organizations and NGOs well informed and well connected.

Final presentation of the draft-recommendation to the forum was done by Ms. Deepali before the panel of the forum which included Dr. Kheya Bhattacharya, Mr. Hassan Shefau, Mr. Satyendra Prakash, Mr. Arbind Prasad and all the participants of the member states. It was suggested that the forum may be named as 'SAARC Regional NGO Forum'.

Dr. Kheya Bhattacharya announced the adoption of the proposed recommendations and congratulated all the member participants for their remarkable efforts in coming up with the recommendations to the SAARC



Regional NGO Forum. The main points of the recommendations were as follows:

Strengthening the networking of the NGOs

Sharing of the best programs between the member states

Sharing of the appropriate and updated information

Advocacy

Capacity building of the various Groups

Exchange Programs

Program Convergence



In the valedictory session, Dr. Kheya Bhattacharya presented her views on the final outcome of the workshop. She said that the auditing of the forum will be done by SAARC Secretariat itself because it will be funded by SAARC. Mr. Hassan Shefau said that India's work was recognized throughout the SAARC states. He pointed out that some new issues such as synthetic drugs and pharmaceutical drugs

were coming up which posed a new challenge. He added that such challenges have multi-dimensional effects.

