

# Impediments to the Efficacy of SAARC — Prospects and way forward

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### Introduction

Thesis statement The identity of the SAARC has been in jeopardy due to several ills in the region. South Asian countries have not fully utilized the potential of SAARC. However, this organization has positive aspects that can be acquired by applying stem preventive measures, so its effectiveness can resort.

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### An overview of SAARC

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c.

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The changing apparatus of the globe has created reconciliatory bodies. It is an immutable fact that globalisation has made nations interdependent. No nation can survive alone. However, the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was formed to enhance trade among the nations of South Asia. Unfortunately, many hurdles are causing trouble for the celebrity of the institution. South Asia is one of the most unintegrated region in the world. The leading cause is frozen political conflicts because of India's will to dominate the region. In addition, terrorism, water disputes, and no people-to-people contacts are the obstacles that have weakened the SAARC. Moreover, prospects for SAARC depends on its effectiveness, and there is a dire need to make SAARC an effective body for regional peace and harmony. It can be possible while correcting structural flaws, change in functional approach, and equal distribution of power. Therefore, SAARC has been in jeopardy due to several ills in the region. South Asian countries have not fully utilized the potential of SAARC. However, this organization has positive aspects

that can be acquired by applying stern preventive measures, so its effectiveness can resort.

In the era of the Cold War, Bangladeshi President Zia-Ur-Rehman floats the idea of SAARC. In 1985, SAARC was formed to protect economic integration and promote social and cultural collaboration between the seven countries of South Asia — Later Afghanistan added in 2007. South Asia Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SACCI), under umbrella of SAARC, aims to increase commercial activities between the nations, such as trade, transport, industry, banking, and investment. In addition, the South Asian Regional Standard Organization (SARSO) was formed to export the best quality products across the globe. The initial achievement of SAARC is free trade with minimal tariff or no tariff through South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA). Moreover, SAARC Food Bank was assigned to ensure food security in extraordinary situation, such as natural disaster, war, and economic instability. It is clear from the above illustrated facts that regional

players have ignored SAARC's  
# potential since its inception.

Frozen political conflicts are the first hindrance for the SAARC to produce desired results. South Asia regional issues are hot topic before and after the formation of SAARC. Whether it is Pakistan and India's conflict over Kashmir; Afghanistan and Pakistan issue over the demarcation of durand line, or the water issue between Nepal and India, the region has been shrouded with martial series of events for more than 75 years. These are the main reasons which have initiated political rift between countries. While international platforms have tried multiple times to solve disputes, they have failed. Unfortunately SAARC became the prey of conflicts while ceasing its merits of melting ice between the nations.

Terrorism is another obstacle that has affected SAARC's efficacy. It is the foremost reason that has enshrouded the relationships between the states. Each country accuses another of cross-boarder terrorism in South Asia.

There are multiple tiers of terrorist outfits, such as on the international level ISIS, regionally Al-Qaida, nationally TTP and Tamil Tigers. Moreover, these non-state actors are present in South Asia, and neither country is willing to solve the issue of terrorism collectively. In addition, SAARC's next session will be held in Pakistan. India withdrew from session while blaming Pakistan for proxy in Jammu and Kashmir. Thus, regional players are playing a blame game that has streamlined the SAARC.

Along with terrorism, water disputes are another problematic irritant for SAARC. Almost all South Asian countries are agrarian, and skirmishes often happen due to the high water demand. India has a plus point in its geographic location, and it has built many dams on the upper side that have caused stoppage for lower region. However, as per Indus Water Treaty between India and Pakistan, arbitration by World Bank, India got control of the upper riparian rivers, namely Sutlej, Beas, and Ravi, with few restrictions of not

building high ~~st~~ storage reservoirs. and Nevertheless, India has violated the treaty while building dams, namely Kishanganga dam, Patal pul, and lowe kalai. In the light of water disputes, SAARC has become a toothless tiger.

While SAARC is confronting above all impediments, the last is zero people-to-people contact. The boarderline habitants are not incompatible, but samelar culture has created same product base need. However, India and Pakistan have had no trade since the abrogation of article 370 of Jammu and Kashmir in 2019. While a sport is a platform that creates closeness, India and Pakistan have not played a single series since 2011. It clearly shows the frozen ties between both. Hence, People's interaction compels the state to work multilaterally; however, SAARC has the challenge of overcoming the hurdle.

The ingredients for stability, peace, and harmony can be used

worldwide by negotiations, compromises and amendments. After discussing obstruction, a few recommendations are listed below to make SAARC an effective body.

Firstly, there is necessary to correct the institutional structural flaws of SAARC. It is only a social and economic cooperation forum, while South Asia is in the middle of security threats, proxy wars, and territorial disputes. For example, Pakistan and India ought to refrain from skirmishes and find coherent solutions on Kashmir. Both countries can normalize relations, while fueling the engine of SAARC with peace and stability. It can only be achieved by transforming and reforming the institute structure, similar to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Therefore, the platform should change its system, allow nations to engage in political dialogues, and sort out the differences.

Secondly, SAARC's functional is run by politicians alone. The

Organization should change its system, ~~allow~~ give targets to experts under the supervision of politicians, where experts lead the issue — like the European Union (EU). Functionalism independence is present only in water disputes, where the country's bureaucrats interact, but without any field experts. Therefore, governments of member state should come on one page and adopt a neo-functionalism approach.

Third, the hegemonic approach of India is a drawback to SAARC's phenomena. <sup>For example</sup> Germany has a giant economy in the EU, and France has largest military. As a result, there is a balanced framework, while in SAARC, an imbalance is present. India has 70 percent SAARC area; 85 percent GDP; the largest army; 75 percent of population. These factors compel India to dictate other member states. In comparison, multi-lateral forums are formed to work collaboratively without any hegemonic voice. So, a balance framework approach is the essence of SAARC's efficacy.



Lastly, on some topics of ASEAN, SAARC has similar approach in decision-making process. While ASEAN framework is working smoothly, SAARC is facing bureaucratic hurdles. For example, secretariat work is only to do coordination. However, the upper apex body is a rubber stamp and cannot execute or impose any policy on members. Every state is free to abide by or not. If SAARC implements the EU model, as per men's power, India is the beneficiary. One-state-one-vote model is fruitful for all, but India's objections are visible not to give small states equality. In these scenarios, there is a dire need for SAARC to reform its decision-making process, which compels the state to accept the policies and agreement. Therefore, the solution lies to build SAARC transparent, and a change of power alternatively among the states is a viable option to resort if usefulness.

In a nutshell, the identity of the SAARC has in jeopardy due to several ills in the region. South Asian countries have to

utilize the potential of SAARC fully. However, this organization has positive aspects that can be acquired by applying the stern preventive measure mentioned above, and its effectiveness can be sustainable. SAARC is the organization that represents the world's 40 percent population, so the concreteness of all is breakable if nations unite and think collectively.