

The Role of Regional Cooperation in Changing the Lives of South Asian People

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Summary: *With faith in the power of regional cooperation, this article serves to explicitly conclude through a coherent analysis as to how regional cooperation can play its utmost role as a stimulator in changing the lives of people in South Asia.*

I've stepped into the ocean twice in my life, once as a 9-year-old and again as a 23-year-old. When we were little, our elders made us tightly hold onto each other's hands while riding the waves in the ocean. That saved us from slipping and getting pulled into the waters. When we became older, it wasn't as vital to grip so hard to stay firmly on our feet when the waves hit. But still, we were ordered to hold hands because that made it safer. Of course, being a grownup, I could've probably held my balance on my own. But I found it wiser to stick together. I see greater regional cooperation in South Asia as something exactly like the scenario of riding waves. It's better for the South Asian countries, especially at their developing stage, to opt to grow together instead of walking alone.

Only through a united approach, can there be hope of bringing about the much-needed change in the lives of the people in South Asia. And only when regional cooperation can bring about such change, will it be worth pursuing. Despite the steps already taken, stronger steps are now direly required. Besides rescuing the present generation, focus should be laid on saving the future generations from falling into the same traps as their predecessors. Regional cooperation is the only stimulator that will strengthen the potential sectors and direct them towards the path of betterment.

If there's anything that can change peoples' lives, it's education. Education has the power to change the fate of a man's family by ensuring that his children and grandchildren get an opportunity to stand on their own feet, despite the man being illiterate himself. An education has the potential to build a stable society

through enlightenment of children⁵⁴ (Friedman, 1962). Believing that like charity, 'Everything, be it good personality or bad habits, begins at home⁵⁵' and because the importance of parents' education in shaping the future generations has been proved to be indispensable (Gratz, 2006) - growing up in the care of educated⁵⁶, moral parents could be the magic ingredient in the recipe of development we are searching for in South Asia.

But education itself should mean more than literacy and it should be understood that these days there is a difference between 'education' and 'graduation'.⁵⁷

As income and employment generating platforms, Health and Tourism are two sectors that hold prospect. The combination of access to health care, proper education and the utilization of the tourism prospect in South Asia will help build human capital; which will then bring about a breakthrough for the habitants of South Asia (Todaro, 1980). In visualizing improvement in the health and tourism sectors of South Asia, a crucial thing to remember is the importance of human resource development through proper training and education in these fields to obtain efficiency in jobs and sufficient profits from both these industries. The lack of experience, technical competence, training, communication skills of people involved in the health sector has led to the perpetuation of medical malpractice (Rogers et al., 2006) (Huntington & Kuhn, 2003); and the tourism sector of South Asia also needs trained people in order to function well enough to be a standard destination for tourists coming from all over the world. Proper knowledge and training of people in services is a must, especially training for the use of a common language such as English. For the benefit of tourists and patients from other countries in the region and also from anywhere outside of the region, it's imperative that people working in the health and tourism sectors have a minimum ability to comprehend English properly.

It's now time to construct schemes that incorporate education, health, and tourism more strictly through greater regional cooperation. 'THE' scheme, which stands, as the abbreviated form of 'Tourism, Health and Education' is one such scheme I'd like to propose is. This would be a long-term plan, whose functioning would involve starting with the tourism and then moving towards the health sector. The paramount

importance among these three sectors would be given to education, whereas the other two sectors would be the two most important building blocks needed on the journey towards development. By gradual improvement of these two sectors, and in the meantime by accumulating a certain amount of start-up cost to take on the education part of the scheme, adequate implementation of this scheme would require the unity of South Asian nations.

'THE' scheme	Aims and agendas
Tourism	By relaxing the visa regulations among South Asian nations for visiting tourists, this project will aim to put forward package deals for touring these nations at reduced fees. There should be a 'THE' fund, which will be built by saving to accumulate enough funding to support development of tourist spot infrastructure and facilities. In development of tourist locations, there will be an opportunity for employment generation by introducing complementary tourism facilities such as taking photos, food stalls etc. Such tourism packages at lower cost and easier border-crossing regulation will surely attract many tourists and generate revenue. This revenue, can then, be used for further improvement in the tourism and health sector and later in the education sector.
Health	Combining the attributes of health and tourism seems like an appealing deal that will catch the eye of many foreigners. Training of doctors and nurses is an important step here. There is also a large scope for creating more jobs since there is a shortage of properly trained health technicians, paramedics and nurses in most South Asian nations. The fundamental issue of doctor-nurse and doctor-patient confidentiality should be taken into account and all these issues should be dealt with diligence. For example, training programs could be started in each of the countries where a team of reputed physicians from all the countries would give briefings as part of a tour to increase the quality of healthcare. Reduced fees could be introduced for people of this region desiring medical attention. Revenue from 'THE's projects and help from the monetary fund of 'THE' could be used for medical research and medical technology development and should also be directed towards creating easier transportation facilities between the countries. An accreditation system could be recognized within the South Asian nations as a process of certifying a level of quality for healthcare providers and programs. Joint training tours and programs will ensure efficiency in the jobs.
Education	After building up the tourism and health sectors and the 'THE fund', the education part of the scheme should kick into action. For improvement in the education sector, 'THE' scheme will emphasize on the targets of ensuring standard education for every child and also increasing the quality of education. Leaving the religion studies and country-centric studies out of the ambit of the scheme, some common subjects of English, Mathematics, Science, Geography etc. should be taught up to college level in a similar way at reduced fees so that under-privileged children can take part. In every educational institution, this particular system could be introduced and educational material could be funded by the 'THE scheme'. Students studying under this system could get a uniform basic education at affordable fees and existing classrooms in educational institutions could be used for classes after school/college hours under other systems. In that way, destitute children that earn livelihood by day could participate in this system even on evenings. On the

other hand, THE scheme could use its accumulated funds to set up institutions all over the South Asian nations, in every village and remote area there is. Having gotten an education from 'THE' system will verify the knowledge base of students from any of the eight South Asian nations and after college there could be a generalized standard test⁵⁸ which will give them a place in any of the universities in South Asia at decreased fees. All the existing universities could have 20-30 seats for students from this system and through passing the standardized tests, students of this 'THE' system could qualify for a university education anywhere in South Asia. In doing so, 'THE' scheme would be harmonizing higher education in South Asia. A university-ranking list should be created amidst South Asian universities and the results of the standardized test would indicate a place in these institutions accordingly. 'THE' system would certify that more and more students get an education and most importantly- without dropping out every student completes education until graduating from university. This will assure security for the students in the job market, which in turn will help them, bring themselves and their family out of poverty. 'THE' could use its funds and resources in improving the access to technology and knowledge sharing among the South Asian nations. For example, an 'E-library' for South Asian students to access and share available information among the nations would be a good step of both regional cooperation and education. 'THE' will basically advocate higher education and will pave the way for many students who are deprived of such opportunities. Similar to the concept of relaxed border crossing regulations for tourists, students of 'THE' system will have facilities of travelling easier without visa, visa fees or related formalities. So, through greater regional cooperation- the South Asian nations will make it easier for both students (of THE) and tourists to enter and travel within this region.

Being a long-term plan- the 'THE' scheme will change peoples' lives by creating income sources and jobs for insolvent people of the current generation- who in turn will give priority to making sure the next generation gets the proper education needed. And so, each of the South Asian nations will have incentives to join in 'THE' scheme as there are scopes of better prospects through all or any of the three sectors of tourism, health and education.

A game theory approach can be taken to verify whether there is a Nash equilibrium and evidence that any of the South Asian countries would be interested in this scheme.

Let, C= benefits from joining in 'THE'; and D=no extra benefits and continuing with the prevailing systems in education, health and tourism. Thus it is assumed that $C > D$, which indicates that 'C' is a better pay-off than 'D'.

Country with one of the four lowest HDI among the eight South Asian countries [Country 2] (Bangladesh/Nepal/Pakistan/Afghanistan)		Country with one of the four highest HDI among the eight South Asian countries [Country 1] (Sri Lanka/Maldives/India/Bhutan)	
		Participates in 'THE'	Doesn't participate in 'THE'
	Participates in 'THE'	C,C	D,C
	Doesn't participate in 'THE'	C,D	D,D

Here, [C,C] is a Nash equilibrium, because participating in 'THE' scheme is the best response of each country in spite of whatever decision the other country is making. This validates that each South Asian nation would be interested in the scheme as long as the benefits are viable.

The three sectors of focus in 'THE' have been given great importance to all around the world. Today, transnational education is an endeavor being strongly pursued. It's no wonder that European Union (EU), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), African Union (AU) have given great priority to education in their strategies and have also given extreme importance to enrichment of their tourism and health industries.

With all these real examples as inspiration, the idea of 'THE' scheme is something I believe in. I believe that if researched and implemented, a scheme of this sort could be a breakthrough for South Asian change. Because, while it's necessary to immediately help people in trouble, it's more important to find out ways to pull them out of their hardships. That's where the aspects of education, health and tourism could truly make a difference and could be 'the right steps in the right direction'.

Regional cooperation is a stepping-stone to a better future. In a family, the stronger the bond, the better the upbringing and strength of each person. The same holds true for greater regional cooperation between countries. Sharing the same sort of backgrounds, common goals and problems makes South Asia a family. Therefore, it's high time we start acting like one and move past our issues so that we can venture towards a stronger and brighter tomorrow together.

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