



The Global Educational Policy Environment in Industrial Revolution

Educational Development in South Asia: From Regionalism to Interregionalism [★]

★Sections of this chapter draw from the authors' previous work, namely Bajaj and Kidwai (2016).

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CHAPTER 8

EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH ASIA: FROM REGIONALISM TO INTERREGIONALISM[☆]

Huma Kidwai and Monisha Bajaj

ABSTRACT

This chapter reviews the extent of influence new regionalism has had on the development of the education sector in South Asia. The history of South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) development, and its regional state-supported initiative, the South Asian University, reflect a multitude of local challenges to effective regionalization for cross-national educational development. The chapter describes and distinguishes the various forms of regional efforts for cooperation and integration among government actors, nongovernmental organizations, and local activist groups and forums, to chart certain key regional efforts to consolidate intraregionalism as well as establish interregional

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relations of educational development and policy with countries of sub-Saharan African region. It utilizes the transnational advocacy networks framework to understand and interpret diverse manifestations of interregional cooperation between nonstate partners in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

Keywords: Education policy; interregionalism; regionalism; SAARC; South Asia; transnational advocacy network

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the notion of regionalism and elucidates the processes of regionalization in the context of post-Cold War international relations in South Asia. It critically analyzes the extent of influence *new (or open) regionalism*¹ has had on the development of the education sector in the region (Girvan, 2006; Jules, 2014; Kuwayama, 1999; Robertson, 2010). In describing and distinguishing the various forms of regional efforts for cooperation and integration among government actors, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and local activist groups and forums, this chapter seeks to chart certain key regional efforts to consolidate intraregionalism as well as establish “interregional” relations of educational development and policy with countries of the sub-Saharan African region.

The decision to focus on regional efforts for cooperation comes from the increasing importance of *regions* as arenas for shaping education policy frameworks. Simultaneously, the focus on *new regionalism* is progressively setting the stage for global politics of *interregionalism* (Dent, 2003) in contemporary discussions of foreign aid and educational development. According to Dent (2009) in his analysis of East Asian Regionalism, regionalism and regionalization reflect the processes of globalization, such as, “increasing levels of connectivity, integration and interdependence between different parts of the world economy and society,” (p. 109) at a regional scale period. Regionalism is broadly defined as “the body of ideas, values and concrete objectives that are aimed at transforming a geographical area into a clearly identified regional social space” (Tikly & Dachi, 2009, p. 104). In functional terms, regionalism may be referred to as structures, processes, and provisions that are working toward a greater “coherence within a specific international region” (Dent, 2008, p. 7) for establishing

economic, social, political, cultural, and security linkages. Regionalization and its processes, at the same time, imply the “creation of a regional system or network in a specific geographical area or regional social space, either issue specific or more general in scope” (Grant & Soderbaum, 2003, p. 7). Dent (2008) proposes a simple distinction between regionalism and regionalization wherein regionalism refers specifically to public policy initiatives or state-led trade and economic agreements originating from intergovernmental dialogues and treaties, and regionalization refers to relatively more “micro-level processes” originating from interconnecting private and civil sector activities. However, given the complexity of interactions between regionalism and the regionalization processes, the two concepts are often indistinguishable, as a result of which, many observers use the two terms synonymously. For the purpose of this chapter, we do not invest heavily in the differences between the two concepts and consider regionalization as sublevel processes within the broader progression of regionalism toward interregionalism. *Interregionalism*, in simple terms, refers to the relationship between two separate regions, as exemplified by Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM).²

Successful regionalization and its processes should lead to the transformation of a geographical area from a “passive object” to an “active subject” that is capable of articulating the cross-regional interests of the emerging region (Hettne & Soderbaum, 2003). South Asia, as a region, arguably has attained relatively lower levels of integration, or what Hettne and Soderbaum (2006) term as “regionness.” Reasons for this lack of regional cohesion could be postcolonial conflicts between countries of the region (such as, India and Pakistan), social and political conflict (Afghanistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka), or nations in the regions as sites of geopolitical strategic interest (Afghanistan and Pakistan) (see Bajaj & Kidwai, 2016). Whatever the reason, this lack of integration is reflected in the regional approach to education, which has so far failed to move beyond the rhetoric of regional cooperation.

This chapter commences with a review of the historical and political background of the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC). We argue that in the face of ineffective state-led regionalism, informal pathways forged by nonstate actors (and often supported by intergovernmental organizations and private foundations) shape the nature of regional cooperation for educational development in present-day South Asia. This argument is well supported in policy literature on *new regionalism* that is notionally not confined to formal associations between nation-states, and instead includes informal networks and associations between a

variety of actors in civil society across different levels (Shaw, Grant, & Cornelissen, 2011; Tikly & Dachi, 2009). As Acharya and Johnston (2007) states,

Compared to the earlier regional integration literature, the literature on ‘new regionalism’ viewed regionalism to be a more multifaceted and comprehensive phenomenon taking into account the role of both state and non-state actors, as well as a whole range of political, economic, strategic, social, demographic and ecological interactions within regions. It shifted the focus away from formal institutions toward studying informal sectors, parallel economies and non-state coalitions. (pp. 9–10)

This chapter will discuss some of the educational achievements of SAARC and offer a comparative account of key educational initiatives led by certain informal networks of development actors in the region. The role that these nonstate development actors play will be considered to demonstrate some of the cross-regional efforts for cooperation, particularly with countries of sub-Saharan Africa. The conclusion will elaborate on what the case of South Asian regionalism and interregionalism can tell us in general about the emerging new paradigms of educational transfer and development.

THE HISTORY AND POLITICS OF REGIONALISM IN SOUTH ASIA

Regionalism in South Asia has a long history since precolonial times. The various empires of this region shared a relationship of interdependence established through trade (e.g., the Silk Route), migrations, territorial conquests, intermarriages, and cultural, and religious exchanges. The region is bestowed with, as described by Dash (2008), “common boundaries, rivers, mountains, oceans and ecological cycles; a contiguous land mass, a common colonial past, historical ties, religious and cultural traditions, linguistic affinities, values and social norms” (p. 45). Yet, a number of these factors have often worked more toward dividing subregional interests than toward unifying them.

Most commonly, South Asia is regarded as a contiguous bloc of eight countries³ – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Taken together, these nations comprise one-fifth of the world’s population. With the exception of Afghanistan, Bhutan, and Nepal, a majority of the region was colonized directly by the British up until the late 1940s (see Table 1). South Asia has receded into an “insular post-colonial state-system” in which each country has been fervently

Table 1. Development Indicators, South Asia.

	Afghanistan	Bangladesh	Bhutan	India	Maldives	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
Year of independence from the British rule	Never colonized	1947	Never colonized	1947	1965	Never colonized	1947	1948
Population (millions) 2014	31.3	158.5	0.77	1,267	0.35	28.1	185.1	21.3
Urbanized population (%), 2014	26	34	38	32	44	18	38	18
GDP/capita, PPP (\$US), 2014	1,946	2,948	7,405	5,412	11,657	2,245	4,602	9,738
Pop. below poverty line of US \$1.25/day (%) 2010–2012	–	43.3 (2010)	2.4 (2012)	23.6 (2012)	–	23.7 (2010)	12.7 (2011)	4.1 (2010)
Human Development Index category, 2014	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low	Low	High
Total adult literacy rate (%) 2007–2011, male/female	39.5/12.5	61/52	65/38.7 (2005)	66/60	98.4/98.4	73/48	69/40	93/90
Mean years of schooling, 2012	3.1	4.8	2.3	4.4	5.8	3.2	4.9	9.3
Primary gross enrollment ratio (%) 2008–2011, male/female	114/79	98/ 106 (2004)	110/112	116/116	111/107	–	104/85	99/99
Primary completion ratio (%), 2009/2012, male/female	48/19	62/56	101/105	97/97	111/103	76/63	74/59	101/100
Secondary gross enrollment ratio (%) 2008–2011, male/female	60/30	48/55	69/71	66/60	71/ 75 (2005)	46/41	40/30	90/100
Public spending on education as a % of GDP, 2008–2010	1.8 (1980)	2.2	4.0	3.1 (2006)	8.7	4.7	2.4	4.3

Data Source: UNICEF (2013), UNDP (2014), World Bank (2015).

protective of their sovereignty and independence to make their own foreign policy (Sahasrabuddhe, 2008). This assertiveness to prove and practice independence has been argued by political historians as a key factor in keeping them from evolving a regional approach to global international issues (Dash, 2008; Sahasrabuddhe, 2008). The same was evident, particularly, in the inconsistent approach of the region's countries toward the Cold War and rivalry of then-superpowers.

Regional conflicts prove to be a tremendous barrier to cooperation across borders. In the case of India and Pakistan and later, Bangladesh, hotly contested borders from the time of the subcontinent's partition in 1947 have fueled wars and conflicts that persist to the present. One of the central issues in India and Pakistan's conflict is their dispute over the issue of which nation should control Kashmir and cross-border militancy. According to Dash (2008), the baggage of colonialism has overwhelmed the possibility of the natural development of mutual interest and benefit in the region. Additionally, it has been argued that India's assertion for bilateral relations with its neighbors, despite the rhetoric of multilateralism in global international affairs, has been a significant challenge to effective regionalization processes (Sahasrabuddhe, 2008). Consequently, the process of regionalization in postcolonial South Asia has lacked the necessary "impetus" and the region is not only a "late starter," but a "reluctant" one at that (Sahasrabuddhe, 2008).

In the 1980s, as a response to the global trend of regional political and trading blocs, a few nations of the South Asian region voiced the need to create a legitimate institutional mechanism for cooperation. Although the then-President Zia-ur-Rahman of Bangladesh had been proposing the formation of a South Asian regional bloc since the mid-1970s, it was after the USSR began to intervene in Afghanistan in 1979 that the process accelerated. The officials of foreign ministries of seven core countries in the region met for the first time in Colombo, Sri Lanka in April 1981. Bangladesh's proposal for a regional trading bloc was promptly endorsed by Bhutan, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Nepal, but India and Pakistan had their reservations. The Indian concern with the proposal's reference to security matters came from the fear that smaller neighboring countries could regionalize on bilateral issues and join Pakistan to "gang-up" against India whose policies on nonalignment and protectionism differed from Pakistan's approach at the time. On the other hand, Pakistan was believed to suspect this regionalization effort as an Indian strategy to take over the regional market with Indian products thereby maintaining its economic dominance in the region (Dash, 2008). After almost six years of debates and consultations,

in December 1985, efforts to regionalize culminated in the formation of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), an economic and geopolitical organization of seven countries. Afghanistan was added to the list in 2007 during the fourteenth annual SAARC summit. Since its formation, the broad policy aims of SAARC have been to promote welfare economics and collective self-reliance among the countries of the region. An important goal of the association was to encourage and sponsor cultural exchange within the region, especially by promoting distinctive arts of South Asia, such as music, dance, fine arts, craft, poetry, and literature. Over the years, SAARC has developed an extensive structure of diplomatic relations with the European Union and the United Nations, as well as several other multilateral entities.

Many scholars and analysts argue that the political differences and bilateral disputes between the member nations constrain the political will of South Asian leaders to move beyond the rhetoric of regional cooperation into concrete action as other regional mechanisms have (e.g., the European Union, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), and Mercado Común del Sur (MERCOSUR)). According to Saez (2011), in his political analysis of SAARC and its effectiveness as a regional entity, the core of the problem lies in the implementation of agreements designed during SAARC conventions. He posits that the introduction of domestic law to implement SAARC initiatives is the biggest challenge to the effectiveness of SAARC. With conventions repeatedly failing to garner support from all domestic regulatory bodies, SAARC presents a rather “superficial common front” (Saez, 2011, p. 93). Nevertheless, as it is widely concluded, given the incredibly complex and turbulent nature of the region, any institutional effort to promote regional collaboration should be welcome.

THE EDUCATIONAL COMMITMENTS OF SAARC AND THE SOUTH ASIAN UNIVERSITY (SAU)

The need for cooperation in education was acknowledged early on by SAARC member nations. It was added to the SAARC agenda with the establishment of a technical committee on education in 1989. In 1997, at the ninth SAARC summit in the city of Male in the Maldives, the regional heads recognized that illiteracy was one of the major deterrents to the development of human resources of South Asia and a major factor contributing to the region’s economic and social imbalance. The SAARC Social Charter, which was signed by the regional governments during the twelfth

summit in Islamabad in 2004, reaffirmed the importance of attaining the target of providing free education to all children between the ages of 6 and 14 years, echoing regional commitments to global Education for All targets and Millennium Development goals. The member states agreed to share their respective experiences and technical expertise to achieve this goal. At the following SAARC summit held in Dhaka in November 2005, the leaders note regional achievements during recent years in the area of primary education and stress that to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century, member states need to make important strides in the areas of science, technology, and higher education. At the invitation of the government of Sri Lanka, the first meeting of the SAARC Ministers of Education/Higher Education was held in Colombo in March 2009, where matters relating to SAARC–UNESCO Cooperation in the field of higher education were considered.

The educational component of the SAARC Social Charter details four goals. These include improving: (i) access to primary and secondary education for all children with no gender disparity; (ii) primary completion rates; (iii) literacy rates among young adults; and (iv) the quality of learning at primary, secondary, and vocational levels (SAARC, 2014). At present, SAARC is managing a number of education programs: fellowship and scholarship programs, open and distance learning programs, efforts to standardize curricula, mutual recognition and accreditation of higher education courses, transfer of credits across accredited universities in member countries, and formation of teachers' forums for the exchange of educational ideas and values across the region. However, an education initiative that best represents the ideological potential of SAARC has been the establishment of the South Asian University (SAU) in New Delhi.

The university opened its door to students in August 2010 and currently offers graduate and doctoral programs open to citizens of all SAARC countries in Mathematics, Biotechnology, Computer Science, Development Economics, International Relations, Law, and Sociology. As a SAARC regional-level initiative, SAU envisions three core objectives: (i) to build a culture of understanding and regional consciousness; (ii) to nurture a class of liberal, bright, and quality leadership; and (iii) to build the regional capacity in science and technology (SAU, 2015). The university guidelines elaborate that no less than 80 percent of faculty positions must be filled by teachers from the eight SAARC countries with the remaining posts open to faculty members from other countries. Currently operating at a temporary campus, SAU is expected to move to a 100-acre campus and increase its student numbers to 7,000 and faculty to 700 by 2017. However, the media

has reported numerous criticisms of the initiative in the ways it has been carried out and of the educational potential it has in the existing political context of SAARC countries.

The South Asian University (SAU) as a microcase mirrors the contested political and economic interrelationships among the SAARC nations. India is the largest contributor to the capital and operational costs of the university with Pakistan following its lead. Reportedly, there are numerous problems with the financial position of the university with delayed release of funds from member countries (Mitra, 2014). To complicate things further, Pakistan and India have repeatedly defaulted on their payments (Mitra, 2014). Other smaller countries of the region have made their payments on time, which may be a reflection of their history of relatively greater interest, conviction, and strategic investment in the principles of SAARC.

The issue of nonalignment between the course offerings of SAU and the ideological objectives of SAARC has been pointed out as a broad critique. Mishra (2012) argues that the courses offered in the university are not designed in a way that fosters cross-border understanding. More importantly, the diversity of the student body presents an immense challenge, especially when the university does not have the necessary provisions to deal with it. The academic backgrounds and linguistic proficiencies of students coming from various SAARC countries are a substantial challenge (Mishra, 2012). The politics of cross-border movement presents critical challenges to the success of the SAU initiative. For example, given the restricted movements of population between India and Pakistan, students from Pakistan find it very difficult to get their visa application approved. This presents a serious disincentive for Pakistani students from applying to and enrolling in the university. Nevertheless, it is believed and hoped that the SAU will over time develop a shared understanding of the region and pool resources and academic opportunities for research. In exploring the *regionness* of South Asia, an institution like SAU offers a potential model of a safe space within which possibilities of a “dialogic South Asian ethos can be experimented” (Kumar, 2014, para. 2).

Overall, SAARC’s relevance can be understood in terms of the cooperation built between member countries in the form of an exchange of experiences to address various issues. SAARC, hence, should not be evaluated from the point of what it has and what it has not done with regards to regional cooperation in education *per se*. It provides a notion of regional identity, and its importance lies for the countries individually in enhancing their national prestige and managing bilateral relations (Murthy, 2000). This becomes particularly clear when the expectations of the member

countries at the time of joining the association are examined, which were not strictly limited to the desire of regional cooperation (Murthy, 2000). Hence, despite the symbolic importance of SAARC, how each nation views membership in SAARC instrumentally offers important insights for regional development broadly, and in education more specifically.

REGIONALISM AND TRANSNATIONAL ADVOCACY NETWORKS

Albeit gradually, the SAARC member countries have adopted certain collective goals vis-à-vis education, which are incorporated in their national plans. In responding to global standards of educational development, SAARC has set its own regional standards and encouraged their member nations to raise their development indicators. Intraregional activities and competition in meeting educational targets (as long as indicators are not inaccurately reported intentionally to look good in international meetings), can offer a positive component of regional cooperation related to setting and working toward greater educational expansion and achievement. In some ways, subregional rivalries can be seen to provide national-level motivations for raising development statistics.

A seemingly more positive feature has been the development of close linkages between NGOs in SAARC countries that draw on regional affiliations to advance their goals across borders. A useful framework for understanding and interpreting the diverse manifestations of regional cooperation in South Asia is the relationship between transnational advocacy networks (TAN) and regionalism, as proposed by political scientists Keck and Sikkink (1998). The authors explain TANs as “networks [that] include those actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and service” (Keck & Sikkink, 1998, p. 89).

In their conceptualization, the authors argue that TAN may be key contributors to the convergence of social and cultural norms that form the basis for regional and international integration. By creating new connections among civil society actors, nation-states, and international organizations, advocacy networks increase the prospects for dialogue and exchange. Activist networks are significant for the processes of regionalism as they include actors who are primarily motivated by values rather than by material interests or professional norms (Keck & Sikkink, 1998), and

hence liberated from the diplomatic hurdles of formal regionalization. Nation-states may express initial reluctance toward the efforts of such networks, but pressure from civil society actors in their own country who have powerful transnational alliances with international organizations and global solidarity movements can impel governments to adopt education policies that align with regional and international expectations. [Keck and Sikkink \(1998\)](#) largely speak of international human rights being advanced by “norm entrepreneurs” in various countries through transnational networks. In the field of education, [Mundy and Murphy \(2001\)](#) have explored “the emergence and evolution of non-governmental organizational forms and actors engaged in transnational advocacy” to advance education for all (p. 125). Mundy and Murphy (2001) cite various reasons for this rise, such as, new entrants into the field of education, new coalitions among local and global organizations, and “unprecedented levels of interaction...between nongovernmental actors and intergovernmental bodies like UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank” (p. 126). While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to trace the genealogy of educational policies and the diverse influences upon them in each South Asian nation, it is of significance to note the multiple roles and influences of civil society actors, donor organizations, intergovernmental agencies, and national discourses on educational policy-making ([Bajaj & Kidwai, 2016](#)).

Transnational efforts in South Asia toward educational accountability and the right to education particularly for marginalized youth offer examples of how coalitions across borders have brought about shifts in government attention and policies through international and intraregional efforts. As smaller South Asian nations often feel the ripple effects of policy shifts of their larger neighbors, cases of cross-learning among South Asian countries on policy related to educational rights are on the rise. For example, the Department of Education in Nepal has been actively collaborating with the National University of Education Planning and Administration (NUEPA) in India in devising plans for effective decentralization ([Singh & Jensen, 2006](#)). In the realm of civil society, the Bangladeshi NGO, the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), the largest NGO in the world, has been active in designing flexible and adaptable schooling for marginalized and conflict-affected communities in Afghanistan and Sri Lanka in the region – as well as in East Africa – building on their over 40 years of success in improving educational outcomes in Bangladesh. Furthermore, vibrant sections of civil society in India and Pakistan have been making an attempt to create avenues for cross-learning on development issues. The education communities in the two

countries have been recognizing the similarities in their cultural and historical contexts of schooling, particularly through dialogue and communication about shared challenges and possibilities (Bajaj & Kidwai, 2016).

While the right to education and educational access are a key area of horizontal collaboration in South Asia, there is considerable cross-learning in the area of accountability as well. One such example of a civil society partnership is the work of the ASER⁴ (the Annual Status of Education Research) Centers in India and Pakistan that conduct comprehensive research on educational processes and outcomes to support evidence-based advocacy for education rights and quality. Such collaboration is greatly facilitated by donor aid. The horizontal dimensions of educational policy-making and the sharing of tools for state accountability – utilizing foreign aid and public support – is a particularly clear example of the “boomerang effect” of how TAN operate in South Asia (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). The international instrument – developed in one South Asian nation but circulated and exported to another country in the region through international aid and advocacy linkages with private foundations, the World Bank, and other donors – is utilized by subnational actors to pressure their own governments for reform and change. For example, the enactment of the Right to Education Act in India (2009) has intensified local campaigns and advocacy groups for similar constitutional provisions in Pakistan (Butt, Butt, & Ullah, 2013).

Similar attempts at linkages and the creation of regional advocacy networks have been made to connect across borders by India and Bangladesh. In 2011, during the Global Action Week in Bangladesh, education practitioners from India and Bangladesh exchanged their experiences with opportunities and challenges in implementing their respective Right to Education Acts (CREATE, 2011). Increased TAN on the subcontinent – regionalizing Keck and Sikkink’s (1998) boomerang concept – utilize similar reform and accountability language and provide a useful example of how new coalitions and networks are connecting and growing in innovative ways on the South Asian subcontinent (Bajaj & Kidwai, 2016).

Internationally, the rising presence of South Asian student–faculty groups and regional societies in universities of the United States and the United Kingdom, is an example of ways in which transnational networks operate for regional development outside the region. South Asian student bodies present easier and more amicable avenues for collaboration and development discourse. DISHA (Development in South Asia), a student organization at Teachers College – Columbia University is one of the many examples of such initiatives. The organization focuses on

educational practices, policy, and research in South Asia, and works to promote dialogue and discussion among the community of students, researchers, educators, and activists in the field (DISHA, 2015). Among its multifaceted activities, the organization has since its inception in 2010, organized numerous lectures and workshops, as well as given an international forum for South Asian bureaucrats, scholars, artists, activist groups, and NGOs, to present their development work and idea. Further, the organization attempts to connect South Asian diaspora to the issues in the region (DISHA, 2015). Additionally, such organizations allow students studying overseas the chance to network across countries of the region and forge a pan-South Asian identity as opposed to their national sense of belonging. By learning about efforts in different countries of the region, and establishing contacts and understanding, upon their return, many of these students who will occupy high ranks of educational policy-making in their home countries may bring new insights, experiences, and regional commitments.

Overseas student networks are also forging new interregional partnerships. Recently, members of DISHA have been working toward a non-profit initiative called DISHAA⁵ which stands for Development in South Asia and Africa. South Asia has long been a site of interest and comparison for the African anticolonial and postcolonial experience (Soudien, 2009). The organization envisions to provide a platform for scholars and practitioners to collaborate on mutually beneficial projects pertaining to educational development in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa (DISHAA, 2015). With affiliations to the development needs of their region and their location outside, student organizations like DISHA provide an important linkage between domestic and international discourse on education policy and research. At the core of these networks is their immense ability to amass and mobilize information, deconstruct issues, create new categories, and influence policy and foreign aid priorities. [Former members of DISHA at Columbia University Teachers College have participated in the drafting of the UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report as well as participated heavily in developing post-2015 frameworks, offering further evidence of the potential for regional and international influence initiated in student organizations.] As students move out and back to their regions, their transnational networks add to the social capital of their nation and raise the potential and possibilities of formal and informal processes of regional- and inter-regionalization.

SOUTH ASIA TO AFRICA: REGIONALISM TO INTERREGIONALISM

Analysis of interregionalism, and more specifically South–South cooperation, needs to be understood in relation to the increasing prominence of local civil society actors that link South Asia with other regional entities. Regionalism in South Asia, like its counterpart elsewhere, includes formal and informal networks such as NGOs and the private sector. In this case, we find that informal networks may often lead to greater impacts on educational development than formal networks do. Informal regionalism has been increasingly possible because of the networks primarily created by nongovernment organizations rooted in South Asia. For example, Pratham and BRAC are two of the many South Asian NGOs that first expanded their educational vision and projects beyond their national borders in India and Bangladesh respectively to their neighboring countries, and then extended their work and influence to countries of other developing and underdeveloped regions, most particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. The RIVER Institute – a NGO that has catalyzed educational reforms around activity-based and learner-centered pedagogy throughout India – has also in recent years explored collaborations and trained educators in Sri Lanka (regionally) and in Ethiopia (interregionally). Given their size, international influence, and integration into TAN around education reform, we will focus on Pratham and BRAC as exemplars of how interregionalism has operated between South Asia and nations of sub-Saharan Africa drawing on substantial donor funding and international support.

Pratham, one of the largest NGOs in India, focuses on designing and implementing high-quality and low-cost scalable interventions to address inequalities in the educational system. Pratham has developed several techniques for accelerated learning and raising community participation in schooling. The organization was established in 1995 to address the educational needs of children in the slums of Mumbai; it has since then grown into an international organization. One of the many examples of Pratham's global influence on education is the ASER model of educational data collection. ASER willingly lends its survey and assessment tools to other organizations and countries which has led to the initiative being implemented in several countries of the South Asian and African region (Pratham, 2015). ASER has demonstrated that it is possible to use simple but scientifically sound methods of sampling and data collection on a large scale to demonstrate gaps in educational achievement. With its extensive outreach

approaches, Pratham has established an important role in building local participation at a national level. The simplicity of the language of its reports and research publications ensures wide use of organizational data at the domestic and international level. In sub-Saharan Africa, ASER tools have been used in Mali, Ghana, Kenya, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, Uganda, and Tanzania. The “theory of change” for ASER whether used in India where it was originally developed or in other countries of South Asia or sub-Saharan Africa where it is widely used, is the following:

- Stage 1: Annual Assessments of Country-Wide Learning
- Stage 2: Communicate Findings Widely and Foster Broad Public Debate
- Stage 3: Shift from Schooling Inputs to Learning Outcomes
- Stage 4: Learn, Monitor, and Evaluate (Uwezo, 2015)

Similarly focused on advancing educational quality, BRAC has been sharing its nonformal primary education model with governments and NGOs of the global South for the past twenty-five years (Chabbott, 2009). With UNICEF as one of its primary donors, BRAC’s institutional sharing activities have been encouraged and well received worldwide. Within South Asia, BRAC has been running education programs in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and more recently in Afghanistan related to girls’ education and education of hard-to-reach populations. BRAC started its first international operation in Afghanistan in 2002, soon after the attacks of 9/11. Their program approach is comprehensive and currently the organization is addressing diverse development issues in the country, reaching out to over 4.72 million Afghan children with basic services and reconstruction projects. In utilizing the BRAC model of education, as it evolved in Bangladesh, the organization has set up over 5,700 community-based schools for Afghan girls. At present, they are supporting over 6,000 government school teachers and 4,000 peer mentors with capacity development programs for greater community participation and innovative teaching–learning practices (BRAC, 2015).

Over the years, BRAC has successfully branched out to sub-Saharan Africa in providing short- and long-term technical assistance. While some exchanges were facilitated under the sponsorship of UNICEF, most organizations interested in utilizing their model initiated contact on their own (Chabbott, 2009). BRAC education projects are currently being run in five African countries – Liberia, South Sudan, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and Uganda. While there are mixed opinions on the extent to which the BRAC nonformal primary education model has been successful as a scalable

option for Africa, these exchanges elevated the status of Bangladesh as a “provider rather than a one-way recipient” of international assistance (Chabbott, 2009, p. 207). Some argue that organizations like BRAC that send Bangladeshi technical experts to countries like Uganda receive less resistance given that they are from the global South and do “service delivery at scale and low cost, free of the colonial baggage and expat culture of northern-based international NGOs” (Oxfam, 2010, para. 9). By reaching out to a wide range of South Asian and sub-Saharan African countries, BRAC has established pathways for effective cooperation and aid led by civil society movements in each of the participating countries. This civil society multilateralism can be regarded as a significant accomplishment in the South Asian context where formal state-led processes of interregionalism have primarily been of bilateral nature.

Bilaterally, India has been most forthcoming in nurturing its development relationship with sub-Saharan African nations. With the pivotal position of India’s alignment in international economic institutions and its historic ties with Eastern and Southern African nations during the non-aligned period of postcolonial international relations, India is increasingly presenting itself as a “bridge between developed and developing countries” (Pollio, 2010, p. 223). By adopting and spearheading the policy of “non-alignment” in response to Cold War politics, India grasped attention and interest in the growing activism in Africa during anticolonial movements (Pollio, 2010). It is, hence, not surprising that India is sub-Saharan Africa’s fourth largest trading partner after the European Union, China, and the United States, and a significant investor across the continent (Standard Chartered, 2012). On the educational development front, India shares a long history of technical aid and student scholarships to countries of sub-Saharan Africa. Annually, hundreds of African students are sponsored by the Indian government to receive college education in India. In the 2011 India-Africa Summit in Addis Ababa, the then-Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh pledged a sum of U.S.\$5 billion as aid to Africa’s development, of which U.S.\$700 million was dedicated to education and skill development in the continent (Taylor, 2014). This brings us to question the extent to which relations of dominance insinuate themselves into the relationships between the regions. Just as relationships between the nations of the South Asian region are marred with inequality and asymmetries of interests and power, do processes of interregionalism emerging from South Asia carry along with them notions of supremacy? The widespread racism faced by African students studying in India suggests at least at the cultural level, notions of superiority are prevalent if not as

pronounced in the political realm (Nelson, 2014). When researchers released the results of the multidimensional poverty index in 2010 that showed that there were more absolute numbers of people living on less than U.S. \$1.25 per day in 8 states of India (421 million) than 26 poorest African countries combined (410 million), the outrage in India – particularly along the large middle-class and elites – suggested racial undertones and feelings of superiority that permeate how relations of aid are structured along paternalistic lines (Ali, 2010; Suroor, 2010).

Drawing from the theories on knowledge transfer and dependency, leading International and Comparative Education scholar Soudien (2009) in his analysis of the India–South Africa relationship comments on the Indian attitude of development work in Africa:

... India imagines itself and takes on the identity of an intact, coherent, single new metropole in relation to an equally coherent, homogenized, and comprehensible African satellite ... One sees in the Indian conceit ... an uncritical appropriation of the racialized discourses of difference that emanate out of dominant North American and European sociologies and histories. (p. 238)

While the partnerships at the civil society level suggest genuine cooperation and shared learning, at the government and bilateral level particularly in the regional superpower India, foreign aid is often fraught with political interests and desires for international recognition as a budding international player.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The above discussion leads to the conclusion that varied modalities of regionalism and interregionalism are emerging from South Asian nations amidst the pressure to respond to globalization on the one hand, and to compete with subregional entities on the other. The varied and stratified nature of domestic strife facing the member nations of SAARC casts a shadow over their respective political ability to work positively toward creating sustainable structures for cooperation and integration generally and in the education sector in particular. Formal educational approaches such as the SAU evidence a step forward, but are reflective of the contested politics of regionalism. Consequently, in discussing regionalism and interregionalism we have extended our frame of reference from the role of nation-states and state agencies to the role of civil society organizations located in countries of the South Asian region, suggesting that their partnerships intraregionally

and interregionally with sub-Saharan Africa offer more evidence of dynamic new regionalism than official activities and mandates through SAARC and its member nations.

Over the course of the last couple of decades, civil society partnerships that have catalyzed TAN have grown in number and influence. We argue that these instances of cooperation provide greater promise of the region's contributions to partnerships for educational development and reform than the official state agencies that are fraught with ongoing political and economic conflicts. It is important to note that NGOs, such as, Pratham, BRAC, and RIVER that are active regionally and interregionally also have had substantial inroads in reform with state and national governments in their respective countries. The argument we make is that official efforts toward regional partnerships in education have been lackluster across borders despite pockets of dynamism of educational authorities in South Asian countries responding to educational movements and accountability demands from within.

The deep experiences with regional and interregional cooperation among South Asian civil society actors provide evidence of the democratic space opened up in many South Asian countries in the postcolonial period for NGOs to effectively influence educational expansion and achievement within and across the borders of the nation-state. Regional entities like the SAARC can learn from and enhance efforts of regional and interregional cooperation already underway and spearheaded by NGOs like Pratham and BRAC. The possibility for national actors to take regionalism to scale and formalize efforts to create new regional identities requires political will and shared interest in advancing the structures and mechanisms of cooperation. Better integrated regional efforts may improve the educational prospects of one-fifth of the globe's population living in highly unequal conditions across the South Asian region and scholars would do well to pay more attention to these trends and developments.

NOTES

1. *New regionalism* is sometimes used interchangeably with "open regionalism" (Jules, 2014; Kuwayama, 1999). This chapter does not specifically distinguish between the two usages.

2. Currently ASEM comprises of European Union (EU), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and 51 additional countries from Europe and Asia, including India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh (ASEM, 2015).

3. While the SAARC and the UN include Afghanistan in the block of eight South Asian countries, agencies such as the World Bank and SAFTA often leave Afghanistan out of such groupings.

4. A nongovernmental organization in India, the ASER Centre, which is part of the larger educational organization Pratham, developed a learning tool for language and mathematics to assess the quality of learning (as opposed to just rates of access). “Aser” means “impact” in Hindi and also stands for the Annual Status of Education Reports conducted by the organization. These annual reports have found that less than 50 percent of 5th standard (grade) students are able to read a simple standard two-level passage. Since launching the first annual report in 2005, ASER’s model has been replicated in other parts of South Asia, such as Pakistan, and sub-Saharan Africa, offering communities greater information about how government schools fare. Citizen activists and policy-makers then have the ability to use this information for interventions and reform, which many have begun to do (Russell & Bajaj, 2014).

5. The authors are currently associated with the organization DISHAA; Monisha Bajaj is an Advisor to the team, and Huma Kidwai is a core team member.

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