

Preface

The SAAPE 2016 Poverty Report is both a descriptive account of the resistance movements of South Asia and a critical examination of the structures and processes that created them. This is a narrative of people's experience of what the multiple development trajectories and histories have been through the policies of states and their successive governments. We record here, the voices that seek to redress the keen sense of material deprivation and the loss of freedoms—of life and livelihood, of expression and association, of identity and belonging as well as entitlements of resources and opportunities. All this and much more lie at the heart of democratic polity and point toward non-realisation of full and equal citizenship in South Asia today.

This poverty report comes in the wake of unfolding multiple crises, not just in South Asia but across the world. Political systems are distorted and torn asunder. There is an exclusive sense of nationalism, and a climate of right-wing extremism pervades the atmosphere. The varying forms of repression of citizens are taken as routine politics; violence and the violation of rights have become disturbingly regular. There is a denial of the commonality of experiences, and universalism of ideals is questioned due to the crises in the international order. Today in many parts of the world, the discourse is of aggression, war and savage trade expansionism. The rise of financial capital, the presence of taxation policies and advancement of trade negotiations of the developed world in a world of asymmetric economic

conditions, the idea of surveillance of data and tracking people are the products of the neo liberal growth model that many countries of the world have adopted. Invariably this economic model also has resulted in the progressive erosion of rights, be it economic, social and cultural.

The two leading questions in this report are those of widening inequality and the nature of economic growth. The inequality that we feel around the world is not just of wealth but also of rights of vulnerable sections of the population like the migrants and informal workers. Particularly, women living in poverty in patriarchal climate are at the receiving ends of the disastrous effects of globalisation. The recent US election and Brexit point to the rejection of the experience of over three decades of imperialist globalisation even by the people of the developed world. The problem is that of failed capitalism and there is fear and concern that governments in many parts of the world are calling for right-wing solutions which is insular and excludes many people.

One of the threads of arguments that run through the report is the question of interpretation of growth especially K. N. Raj's idea of 'growth through justice' as opposed to mere 'growth with justice'. The process of the resolution of the problems ensuing from inequality gain importance when seen in this context. At this juncture, the resolution of the problems can only be done by returning to the people's movements and searching for alternatives which strengthen the collective bargaining

powers of the affected, consolidate peoples' alliances, their critique of the dominant orders and bring them centre-stage, against dominant elite political solutions to the issues. This brings an urgency and immediacy to the discussions of cooperation and shared futures that the report places for debate and introspection for the region.

The comparative perspective that this report brings goes beyond the limited paradigm of national particularities. There have been remarkable similarities in the way neo liberal policies were adopted by the South Asian countries nearly a quarter of a century ago that brought enormous changes in the economic sphere. Yet, the structural transformation of institutions that neo liberal policies, has brought in South Asia have impacted spheres beyond economics. Constitutional values and norms in democratic countries in the past sought to support equality of citizens endowed with fundamental rights. These rights are under attack in different ways that ultimately affect the agency of citizenship. We face assault on our identity as citizens with the tolerance of unacceptable levels of hunger, often mildly referred to as malnutrition, insufficiency of health care access and utilisation, inadequacy of primary education, the continued presence of bonded and child labour, land acquisition and forced migration, sex trafficking, rising violence against women and systematic lowering of subsidies for people living in poverty. New problems of violence and explicit violations exist today along with old ones- persisting poverty, unfulfilled elementary needs, violation of basic political freedom as well as worsening threats to environment, minorities under

siege and widespread corruption. The welfare state is withering away and with it the security of rights that protected people from the vagaries of markets is disappearing.

There have always been questions and concerns regarding the growth and nature of development strategies of nation-states all over the world and especially in South Asia. The twentieth century was a period of immense resistance to imperial and colonial projects, political and civil rights for many sections of the society, and social, economic and cultural rights that made freedom and citizenship whole and indivisible for all citizens. Much of what we achieved in the twentieth century seems to be eroding away- the idea of state responsibilities, acceptance of plural identities, equal access to entitlements and rights of women and other genders, workers, farmers, artisans and indigenous peoples. Some of our struggles that were left unfinished have acquired a new urgency in the wake of increasing conflict and deprivation- for instance, the fight for indivisibility of rights.

Movements for Self-determination and Justice

At the heart of the report's argument is people's *raison d'être* for struggle by peaceful means, within the democratic ideals of just social and political arrangements- be it the struggle for reclaiming land by Pakistani peasants in North Western Frontier Province, fishing waters and means of livelihood by Sri Lankan fishing community in Pasadena, cultural and traditional rights by the indigenous people of Niyamgiri, India,

protests for the right to live by the Chars in Bangladesh or rights of life and labour by Kamaiyas (bonded labourers) of Nepal. The questions they raise are of choices between alternatives available, reimagining people as agents of development, enhancing their capabilities and increasing accountability to them as agents of power. The report also seeks to place these plural visions and view points as building blocks for ideas of development; indeed it is important to acknowledge differences and divergent points of view. Among us, some societies have just come out of decades of war like Sri Lanka, some have striven to give themselves a Constitution like Nepal, some have established norms and processes like India, some are looking for a transformation like Pakistan- but all have been affected by the same processes and troubled by similar impacts. This report also records how people have used inspiringly, their sense of analytical reasoning and within the reasonableness of social resistance, articulated the principles of justice by developing and deriving a new economics of distribution and renewed politics of participation.

Reading this Report

This report is divided into five chapters for ease of accessibility. Each chapter deals with a defined theme but the content of the chapters flow into one another. The report begins by critiquing the neo liberal reforms adopted by the governments of South Asia with its attendant structural adjustment. The report brings out how this wrought havoc both in economic and political spheres in all the countries of South Asia.

The SAAPE 2016 report differs from intergovernmental and national level reports in several significant ways. It records development processes of South Asia in the light of neo liberal reforms, the rationale of economic growth and structural transformation, capitalist mode of development, increasing inequality and new forms of poverty. The methodology the report uses is both empirical and causal, with linkages to socio-economic reasons as well as legal components of struggle. The use of descriptive case studies adds a qualitative element to the robustness the statistics provide. The report also focuses on macro perspectives within the region that is analytical and objective along with micro studies of cases and events that bring out the lived experience of the struggle. This report complements the other periodic reports on human development and in a way, completes it by returning to the people.

SAAPE has produced triennial poverty reports since 2003. This triennial report is an outcome of SAAPE's commitment since its foundation to examine people's struggle for realisation of their full citizenship through democratic means of protests, campaigns, inputs into policy making as well as connecting peoples across borders toward a common cause. SAAPE is a platform for politics of a direct kind involving people and their causes directly through campaigns, facilitating a space for dialogue and learning through meetings and conferences, and disseminating the work through the poverty and vulnerability report. The objective of the report is to help create an independent voice of the struggle and experiences of South Asian

people, recognising normative principles that build ideas about citizenship and democratic politics, and the use of multidisciplinary analytical lens to the problems and prospects of South Asia. It aims at creating a culture of evidence-based policy intervention from grassroots that articulates a methodology that uses both robust quantitative data but also oral histories and case studies as narratives that question policy outcomes, discourse of development imposed from above and the role of state, civil society and social movements. This work highlights the best practices in policy interventions as well as successes in collective action by the people that attained the desired objective, be it trade union struggle or land rights movement. The report also brings out the richness of such mass movements, both old and new, traditional and innovative methods, that have creatively used democratic spaces to espouse a cause. The report, we hope, will bring a new dimension in the discourse of policy making but also question the received wisdom on development impacts and governance that are circulated in the South Asian region today. The novelty of the report is in the harmonious and yet critical coming together of academics, policy makers and activists that SAAPE has always tried to facilitate.

This is the fifth in the series of regional reports. The regional report is a product of eight country reports that teams from each of the eight South Asian countries have contributed to. Each country team was headed by a lead author and ably assisted by other writers. The team was

a judicious combination of activists and academics nominated by the country processes of SAAPE in the eight countries. The preparation of report took eighteen months. The editorial process comprised of two editorial meetings in March and August of 2016. The first meeting widely discussed the contemporary regional situation in South Asia and selected the theme of this report. This was conveyed to the country authors who compiled the country reports in the light of editorial guidelines and deliberations. All the country reports are available online in the SAAPE website along with the regional report. The preparation of the report benefitted from the vision and exceptional leadership and counsel of advisory board.

The report conveys the voice of peoples' struggles primarily led by leaders and social activists on the ground. Beyond the primary audience, the report has analytical insights for planners and policy makers working for national governments or in international organisations as well as academics and researchers working on development in South Asia. Beyond sectors of specific readership, the report sets the foundation of a broad discussion on development and peoples' struggle in capturing the discourses of social justice. Looked in this manner, the report also aims at public discussion on the issues of power and politics, growth and development, poverty and inequality, human rights and social justice beyond the boundaries of nation states. The arguments are accessible for the non-specialist reader and this report is written in line with the view that public

discussions from the peoples' perspective is a vehicle for social change beyond mere acknowledging the spirited struggles of resistance.

We need new stratagem and a holistic paradigm that enlightens us on the interrelatedness of seemingly unrelated causes and forge resistances that are comprehensive-against a system of structures not just of institutions but more fundamentally of ideas and ideals. This requires two kinds of movements-the horizontal free transfer of ideas and the fight against the vertical hierarchy of systems and constituencies. The globalisation that we have been subjected to is not just to be of trade, commodities and services, but also of people, thought processes, knowledge systems and

languages of resistance. As revolutionary leader Fidel Castro trenchantly remarked, 'There is often talk of human rights, but it is also necessary to talk of the rights of humanity. Why should some people walk barefoot, so that others can travel in luxurious cars? Why should some live for thirty-five years, so that others can live for seventy years? Why should some be miserably poor, so that others can be hugely rich? I speak on behalf of the children in the world who do not have a piece of bread. I speak on the behalf of sick who have no medicine, of those whose rights to life and human dignity have been denied.' We hope this report encourages a widespread and open discussion on issues like these and the larger questions that lie behind the development story that South Asia has experienced so far.

The Editorial Board
December 2016