

# **Self Reliant Growth and Alleviation of Poverty through NGO's (Building Bridges of Development in South Asia)**

---

*Note: This is a welcome address by Shri S.P.Ahuja, then Chairman, SID South Asia Committee, delivered at Karachi at the South Asia Meeting organized by the Karachi Chapter of SID in November, 1988 \**

---

It gives me pleasure to offer my remarks as President of South Asia Committee. This region constitutes one-fifth of humanity and is faced with challenges posed by poverty, under-development, and unemployment. Yet the region displays dynamics of development through indigenous resource use both of men and materials not only for poverty alleviation but also for improving the quality of life through organised efforts by NGO's and others.

It is only appropriate that Pakistan is hosting this Conference which is being held prior to SAARC summit meeting. The winds of change are very much perceptible and need to be consolidated. In this context I must welcome this timely gesture of goodwill on the part of Karachi Chapter of Pakistan which is holding the SID South Asia Regional Conference with the theme "Building Bridges of Development in South Asia: Self Reliant Growth and Alleviation of poverty through NGO's". I congratulate Mr. Huda, his colleagues, and all supporters and organisers of this conference not only for the organizational arrangements but also for the choice of time and theme of the conference.

The fraternity of development experts and practitioners that is present here will be identifying the impulses of growth and development so that both individually and collectively member countries of this region gather growth momentum by building common bridges of development. We shall, therefore, be listening to the experiences from development experts and practitioners, and over seeing their prescriptions for accelerated growth and development. I am reminded of the memorable words of India's Prime Minister, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, at the 19th SID World Conference held at Delhi on March 25, 1988 when he asserted that 'Stability in the North is not possible without growth and development in the South'. Surely, stability of advanced economies, both market economies and centrally planned economies gets linked to growth and development of

### *Self Reliant Growth and Alleviation of Poverty*

underdeveloped economies wherein South Asia becomes important because of its large share in World Population.

Already the knowledge industry has made the entire globe easily accessible at all points. Europe is getting into a unified Europe by early 90's, America is developing its diversified regional economies into an integrated whole, Soviet Union is opening up into Perestroika. This part of the globe cannot remain unaffected by the March of Events.

The societies of South Asian countries and their neighbours in Asia have experienced some notable changes in recent years, social, technological, political and economic. The size of the markets of this region has been growing, the purchasing power of the people rising and the supply of resources expanding. Collectively, today, there are substantial resources and sufficient talent such that dependency relationship with the north and the west can be substantially reduced.

The region should take the help of marketing tools for mutual transmission of progress. The marketing mechanism of the region should be so adopted that each country of the region may draw strength from the other. A wider market enables a greater utilisation of specific skills available with different participating economies than is possible within the national frontiers. We should address ourselves to this task and perhaps establish working groups to further study the issues involved in enhancing trade within the region.

May be we can consider and suggest setting up of some payments system which is advantageous to all member countries which also takes advantage of our respective efficiencies and proficiencies. A beginning can also be made through setting up of a system which allows imports into the region only for such products and technologies as are not available at a competitive price within the region. It may be pre-mature, but thinking can also start on setting up of a regional development fund.

### *Self Reliant Growth and Alleviation of Poverty*

Other areas of cooperation towards which significant advances can be made with speed are rural development, environment upgradation, agriculture, food, travel, education and training, scholarships and fellowships and cultural and social exchanges using audio-video media. Some steps in this direction have already been initiated through SAARC, but NGO's can play an important role in accelerating the process.

In short, we should take advantage of what, in today's parlance, has come to be known as systems approach. I take system as a technology with a large number of natural, human and technological factors which are, in essence, input and output oriented. Our region should be studied as a system identifying and eliminating imbalances and asymmetries. Also identify new stimuli for a better society in a larger framework of family of nations. It bears repetition to say that more the number of micro-equilibria in the region, the greater the collective loss to the region. We have to strive in a manner that this loss is minimized.

Among other things this will require that what makes economic sense should also make political sense. This will call for a greater interaction between development theorists and practitioners and the politicians. Happily, SID provides a useful forum for such meeting of minds. I am pleased to note in this gathering a galaxy of development specialists, political economist, politicians, administrators and grass root workers. That is the mix which is essential for an accelerated growth together.

As to the role of NGO's there are areas of work which Governments will prefer to be handled by NGOs. for example the problem of population limitation. NGOs may come forward to ensure diffusion of knowledge in this difficult terrain. Further, outreach of Government machinery becomes very expensive and diffused when it comes to delivery of welfare programmes at the house-to-house grass root level, especially among the poor. Here again NGO's can play an effective role in coordination with the Government.

NGOs should also strive to bring about an improvement in the condition of women by developing a common programme for the region.

## **NGO - To Initiate Programme for Women**

Of course, women themselves have to assume a dynamic role and assert their position in keeping with the theme of gender and equity, a concept writ large in our historical past. Recently NGOs have been performing meaningful functions of substantive nature. Obviously, there is need for closer understanding of NGOs role in the scheme of things. Hopefully, we shall seek solutions for strengthening links of NGOs with Government agencies with a sense of direction so that we place our development priorities in correct perspective and enter the 21st century with an Act of Faith. And NGOs' actions have to draw support and substance from mutual NGO cooperation as between countries, of which SID is one good example.

Before State in its modern form took shape Society was being largely managed through the NGOs under the auspices of our religious and social institutions. The ancient Asian culture does not derive its scope and strength from the modern State. State displaced these institutions to take responsibilities of welfare and development. But it has seen its limits and is now willing & ready to return some of its functions back to NGOs. NGOs, therefore, have a role and a purpose.

The difference is that whereas State can deliver welfare and development at great cost, specially when micro societies and households are concerned the NGOs can do so at minimal cost and with love. Love is the entry point into the households of the poor and State, which is soulless, cannot offer this. NGOs can. Love is one asset that we in Asia, in general, and South Asia, in particular, must preserve even as we emulate the west in several fields of development.

With these few observations and remarks I welcome the sharing of our experiences and pooling of our resources to discover and implement new development paradigms which are more humane, more self-regenerating, and

*Self Reliant Growth and Alleviation of Poverty*

self-sustaining and capable of taking care of all born and yet to be born. Welcome once again to all of you who have come from long and short distances to help us in our tasks of giving ourselves and our children a better future than we have inherited. Thank you.

\* S.P. Ahuja  
Hony. Director-CERPA