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**DEMOCRACY AND INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT: ACHIEVING
SAARC MDGs**

Conference Paper as prepared by:

Mr. Hassan Hakeem

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Introduction:

There is a general consensus that policy choices made by the democratic governments differ substantially with other form of governments. The democratic governments, in principle, are inclusive of people's voice and follow altruism. The two, being necessary for the inclusive and sustainable growth of economy. In democracy, human development, societal security, and national security constituting the central focus encourages citizenry participation in the formulation and implementation of development policies, besides encouraging transparency and free flow of information.

Democracy has the potential to facilitate inclusive development by creating equal opportunities for all segments of society. It therefore helps in addressing the issues faced by the marginalized groups, and also helps in narrowing the disparity. Much has been written about the linkages between democracy and citizen participation, democracy, transparency and accountability. However, the linkage that exists between democracy and inclusive development somehow remain under discussed. This paper aims to discuss the fundamentals that establish linkages between the political dispensation and the policies adopted for achieving development goals.

1. Current State of SAARC Countries Development vis-à-vis MDGs:

Apart from the traditional security challenges, South Asia faces a number of non-tradition security threats which are usually given less attention than what they merit. Impacted by international dynamics, the changing socio-political topology of the region requires the South Asian neighbours to invest in areas of gender parity, agriculture, education, poverty reduction, and health. 80 % population of these 8 South Asian neighbours is dependent on agriculture. Hence, poverty level and hunger become interwoven with food availability, access, distribution and pricing in these countries. Consequently, this also impacts the health of women and children in the region.

In the year 2000 global community agreed on a time-bound, measurable framework for alleviation of extreme poverty and environment degradation known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The development goals with targets and indicators identified aimed at addressing social and economic disparities. The baseline year was 1990 and the

deadline for achieving the goals was set as 2015. With the deadline fast approaching, it is pertinent to reflect on the progress made by the countries.

According to United Nations, despite the fact that extreme poverty rates have fallen in many developing regions, it remains widespread in the Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. In South Asia, poverty rates, measured as the proportion of people living on less than \$1.25 a day, decreased from 51 per cent in 1990 to 30% in 2010. The target of 25.5% i.e. reducing the proportion by half does not seem to be a probability that is achievable by the year 2015.

Considerable progress has also been made by South Asia towards equal access of girls and boys to education particularly at primary level of education where the Gender Parity Index (or GPI, defined as girls' school enrolment ratio in relation to boys' enrolment ratio) is 0.98, which is close to the targeted level of one. However, more concrete action is needed at secondary level of education where the Gender-Related Development Index GDI is 0.92.

The mortality rate of children less than 5 years of age, which is deaths per 1,000 live births, also declined in the South Asia from 116 to 61 between 1990 to 2011 (Table 4). However, despite improvements, more efforts are required to meet the 2015 target of a two-thirds reduction in child deaths.

The coverage of antenatal care (at least one visit with a doctor, nurse or midwife during pregnancy) in South Asia increased from 24% to 36% during 1990 - 2011. Though South Asia made progress over the past decade, it still lags behind other regions of the world (Table – 1).

Table 1		
Proportion of Women aged 15-49 attended four or more times by any Provider during Pregnancy (%)		
Region	1990	2011
Latin America	69	89
South-Eastern Asia	45	77
Caribbean	59	72
Northern Africa	23	66
Sub-Saharan Africa	52	49
Southern Asia	24	36
The World Health Organization has recommended a minimum of four antenatal care visits to ensure the well-being of mothers and new-borns. These visits should include tetanus toxoid vaccination, screening and treatment for infections, and the identification of warning signs during pregnancy.		

The progress made by Pakistan in achieving MDG's target is indicated in table 6. Indicators related to education, health, gender equality and environment are mainly indicated in the table - 2.

Indicator	Base line (1990-91)	Current Status 2011-12	MDG Target 2015
Goal 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education			
Net Primary Enrolment Ratio (%)	46	57	100
Literacy Rate (%)	35	58	88
Goal 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women			
Gender parity Index (GPI) for primary education	0.73	0.9	1
Gender parity Index (GPI) for secondary education	n/a	0.81	0.94
Youth Literacy GPI	0.51	0.81	1
Goal 4: Reduce Child Mortality			
Proportion of fully immunized children 12-23 months (%)	75	80	>90
Proportion of under 1 year children immunized against measles (%)	80	81	>90
Proportion of children under five who suffered from diarrhoea in the last 30 days (%)	26	8	<10
Goal 5: Improve Maternal Health			
Proportion of births attended by skilled birth attendants (%)	18	49	>90
Proportion of women 15-49 years who had given birth during last 3 years and made at least one antenatal care consultation (%)	15	68	100
Goal 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability			
Proportion of population (urban & rural) with sustainable access to improve water source (%)	53	59	93
Proportion of population (urban and rural) with access to sanitation (%)	30	72	90
Source: GoP, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Pakistan Social & Living Standards Measurement Survey (2011-12)			

In achieving universal primary education (goal 2), Pakistan has achieved relative success in increasing net enrolment at primary level. Positioned with 57 % as against 46 % during the baseline year, Pakistan still has a long way to go. Even though the literacy rate remains low at 57 % compared to the MDG target of 88 %, efforts are being made to enhance the ratio. There is a growing realization that universal primary education cannot be achieved without initiating an inclusive education development scheme. Though a lot has been achieved in terms of gender parity milestones, there exist challenges for the legislatures and policy makers. The fact that Pakistan is a country with the highest number of women representation in the National Assembly is a notion of pride for women. Women political participation has not only increased

in terms of number but also tremendously enhanced contribution as lawmakers and policy strategists. Female employment rate stands at 22 %. Pakistan is under the process of achieving human body immunization and prevention of Diarrhoea, improving maternal health and antenatal care, provision of safe drinking water and sanitation facilities. The launching of 'Clean Drinking Water for All' by the government is an encouraging step in this regard.

Following are country specific achievements of MDGs and inclusiveness in development process:

Reported in 2012, Maldives has achieved five major targets of MDGs out of eight that is well before the deadline of 2015. Among SAARC countries, Maldives can be termed as "MDG plus" country because its progress in Goal 1 was substantial in eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieved universal primary education (Goal 2), successfully reduced child mortality (Goal 4) and improved maternal health (Goal 5) besides combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases (Goal 6).

The progress of MDGs in Afghanistan is seriously hampered by the regional and local conflicts. It has been reported that besides extreme poverty and hunger, the most serious challenge for MDGs achievements is the inability by government agencies to collect data and this has become the main constraint for the development of planning institutions. In 2007, the World Health Organization released a report ranking Afghanistan lowest among non-African nations in deaths from environmental hazards. Lack of access to clean water sources and poor sanitation is a major factor that has led to poor health conditions. According to the report, infant and under-five mortality rates in Afghanistan are among the highest in the world. The Under-5 Mortality Rate (U5MR) and the Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) are targeted to reduce by 50% of the 2003 levels by 2015 and by two-third by 2020. At 1600 deaths per 100,000 live births, the maternal mortality ratio (MMR) in Afghanistan is equal only to the most poor, conflict-affected countries in the world. It is estimated that 65 women die from pregnancy-related causes per 1000 live births. Afghanistan is a potentially high-risk country for the spread of HIV/AIDS. Drug abuse is prevalent; most users inject drugs through shared needles and are unaware of the dangers.

India has made tremendous inroads in the achievement of MDGs goals and indicators. As per available statistics, the %age of the population living in poverty has declined from 45% in 1993-94 to 37% in 2004-05. In 2009-10, India's Head Count Ratio (HCR) has declined from 37.2% in

2004-05 to 29.8. India's trend of the proportion of underweight children below 3 years of age shows that India is going slow in eliminating the effect of malnourishment. By the measure of Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) in primary education, the country has already crossed by 2008-09, the 95% cut-off line regarded as the marker value for achieving 2015 target of universal primary education for all children aged 6-10 years.

In Pakistan, MDGs have been incorporated into the Government's two important macroeconomic frameworks. One, the New Growth Framework, which focuses on inclusive growth by increasing total factor productivity. Two, Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) which is a framework for social and economic policies. Government's key planning document on development, Medium Term Development Framework (MTDF) 2005-10 also endorsed MDGs. In 2011, government of Pakistan produced a Framework for Economic Growth with inclusive growth approach that specifically targets the poverty reduction through participation and representation of all the stakeholders. With the global economic crunch in 2007, the crisis in global financial sector led to increased poverty and worsening hunger situation.

Poverty alleviation is prime objective of the present democratic government. The other challenges that the government has addressing include inadequate social and health services, high infant mortality (91 per 1000), illiteracy rate 50% for men and 76% for women, and threats of extremism and terrorism. In 2001, the government produced a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) that was based in line with other MDGs goals besides poverty. In 2007, the government launched PRSP-II that formulated a comprehensive integrated strategy to achieve the development goals of MDGs. There were five thematic areas in PRSP-I and seven pillars in PRSP-II. At institutional level, several poverty reduction initiatives were launched to protect the poor and the vulnerable and minimize the adverse impact of poverty. The social safety net programs of the government included Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund and Pakistan Bait-ul-Mall program have contributed tremendously towards poverty reduction. A few noteworthy programs under Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal are Individual Financial Assistance (IFA), Child Support Program (CSP), National Centres for Rehabilitation of Child Labour, Vocational / Diversified Vocational Schools, Pakistan Sweet Homes (PSHs), Langer Program, and Institutional Rehabilitation through NGOs.

Progress on SAARC development goals (SDG):

SAARC countries have agreed on targeting the twenty-two goals to strategically respond to the problems of high poverty and social development. The identified areas are: poverty and livelihood, health, education, and environment. Keeping in view the national priorities and the global MDGs, specific targets and indicators have been identified by the member states with the formulation of National Poverty Reduction Strategies and the National Development Plans. Despite the growth of economy and GDP, 80 % of the region's population continues to live below US\$ 2 per day. The region being home to more than one-fifth of the world's population, holds nearly 7 % of world's total GDP. The development indices also show the same trend of inadequate level of development (HDI Index- UNDP). Whereas the human deprivation in general in all the regional countries except Maldives and Sri Lanka (Human Poverty Index-UNDP).

SAARC Development Goals (SDGs):

<u>Livelihood SDGs</u>	
Goal 1	Eradication of Hunger Poverty
Goal 2	Halve proportion of people in Poverty by 2010
Goal 3	Ensure adequate nutrition and dietary improvement for the poor
Goal 4	Ensure a robust pro-poor growth process
Goal 5	Strengthen connectivity of poorer regions and of poor as social groups
Goal 6	Reduce social and institutional vulnerabilities of the poor, women, and children
Goal 7	Ensure access to affordable justice
Goal 8	Ensure effective participation of poor and of women in anti-poverty policies and programmes
<u>Health SDGs</u>	
Goal 9	Maternal health
Goal 10	Child health
Goal 11	Affordable health-care
Goal 12	Improved hygiene and Public health
<u>Education SDGs</u>	
Goal 13	Access to primary/communal school for all children, boys and girls
Goal 14	Completion of primary education cycle
Goal 15	Universal functional literacy
Goal 16	Quality education at primary, secondary and vocational levels

Environmental SDGs	
Goal 17	Acceptable level of forest cover
Goal 18	Acceptable level of water and soil quality
Goal 19	Acceptable level of air quality
Goal 20	Conservation of bio-diversity
Goal 21	Wetland conservation
Goal 22	Ban on dumping of hazardous waste, including radio-active waste

The Thirteenth SAARC Summit (2005) declared 2006-15 as SAARC Decade of Poverty Alleviation. All the SAARC countries have made some progress in the attainment of eight MDGs goals that are further sub-divided into 21 targets and 60 measureable indicators. For instance, the improvement in policy regime was done through development of policy document in Bangladesh. India has introduced a number of innovative measures in education sector to enhance quality and standard of education in the country. Gender equality achievement in Nepal presents some excellent models for other SAARC countries to follow suit.

Conversely, the pace of development in SAARC countries seems inadequate to overcome the growing multidimensional challenge of poverty in almost all the countries. The fundamental structural deficiency in SAARC countries is the integration of economic growth potential into future human development investment. This is because despite having high growth rate in the last 10-15 years, SAARC countries consist of 39 % of the world poor and the region has highest incidence of poverty of 43 %. One of the major objectives of the MDGs is the structural transformation of the economies that render equitable and just distribution of resources and promotion of inclusive growth for sustainable development path.

Participation and representation are other two important aspects of inclusiveness in the development process that require priority in developing countries like SAARC. Strengthening of institutional framework is of paramount importance in MDGs achievement. The oversight of the process, periodic reporting, gathering of realistic data, preparation of short-term, medium-term and long-term goals and strict monitoring and evaluation of the targets and indicators is vital in this regard. Creation of MDGs knowledge and sharing module could stimulate the chain reaction in the reasonable attainment of targets in almost all categories of MDGs.

2. Relations between Democracy and Development:

The relationship between democracy, economic growth and development (and the direction of this relationship) is complex and non-linear. Experts who take a narrow view of development (in terms of increase in per capita income) try to compare democracy and dictatorship in respect of economic growth only. They assume that growth will have a trickle down effect on poverty reduction while the empirical evidence suggests that the economic growth must precede or accompanied by equitable distribution if the benefits are to be reached to all segments of the society. In this regard, political liberties are considered to be necessary to achieve sustained and equitable growth.

In this context, democracy occupies the high moral ground. As a system of governance, it is regarded as much superior to an authoritarian regime. Basic features of democratic system such as political pluralism, the system of institutional checks and balances, and the periodic renewal of policymakers through elections, protects the economic system against abusive or predatory behaviour typical of most authoritarian regimes. A true democracy plays a role which is conducive to promotion of human development that autocracy is deemed to restrict. The policies in democratic regimes are relatively more pro-poor than in autocracies. Income distribution is often more balanced in democracies than in non-democracies.

It is often argued that there exists a potential trade off between democracy and rapid economic development because democratic governments may take decisions that are designed to increase economic throughput in specific constituencies. This may be partly true in some specific cases but democracy cannot be viewed as a threat to development. In democratic regimes, policies are restricted by the preference of the voters – the major stakeholders. Therefore, political leaders have an incentive to strive for well-being of the majority to ensure their re-election while dictators always rely on patronage of selected elite for retaining their power.

Greater transparency of policy and policy-making processes is also a basic feature of democratic governance. Free flow of information in and out of government creates awareness among the masses about the undertaken developmental policies. Also, democracies with free press and active opposition parties are less likely to adopt extremist policies.

Sustained democracies render political stability and provide clear-cut mechanisms of succession. Therefore, the development momentum is not disrupted in a democratic succession. In democracies, political stability can be further enhanced by better conflict management through the involvement of all stakeholders and by making the process of conflict management more inclusive and participatory. On the other hand, an autocracy may suppress conflict in the short run but provides no mechanism for its solution in the long run.

Development can be inclusive only if all groups of people contribute to creating opportunities, share the benefits of development and participate in decision-making. The concept of inclusive development integrates the standards and principles of human rights – participation, non-discrimination and accountability. Inclusive development occurs when inequalities among groups is reduced. In the context of developing countries, this would entail a strategy based on:

- a) growth in sectors where the poor work
- b) use of labour-intensive technology
- c) availability of goods (food) and services consumed by the poor
- d) enhancement of human capability, and
- e) social protection for marginalized groups.

In the light of above discussion, democracies are the most suitable system of governance for promoting inclusive development.

Democratic SAARC States: Encouraging Inclusive Development

The democratic trends in SAARC countries have been irregular and inconstant. The region has had unwanted periods of suspended democratic processes throughout its post-colonial political history. Though democracy remains vulnerable to forces outside the main political milieu in some SAARC countries, aspirations for inclusive democratic values remains highly desirable by most governments in the region. These forces include military coups, underdevelopment, poverty, illiteracy, ethnic conflicts, and undesirable political clashes.

Many South Asian countries are in the process of evolution towards a successful democratic model. Sri Lanka and India's journey, in this regard, has been relatively smooth compared to

other neighbouring SAARC countries. The last decade has witnessed multi-layer challenges of economic instability, over-population and above all terrorism. South Asia's entanglement with complex geo-political conflicts has brought the region many multifaceted hurdles. This has also hampered inclusive development in the region. However, various democratic governments have been active in enacting laws and evolving strategies to help fight perils of sorts.

Unfortunately, thrice the military dictators have disrupted democratic journey of Pakistan. However, it was in 2008 that democracy returned to the country. Despite hefty challenges, the elected government was dedicated to ensuring an atmosphere conducive for setting up democratic institutions in the country. The period was followed by the first smooth transition of a democratic government with general elections in May 2013. An undisrupted, smooth democratic government had completed its tenure (2008-13), providing space for stakeholders to exercise their constitutional rights and elect their representatives freely. The return to democracy in 2008 led to a greater emphasis on the use of fiscal policy for redistribution, primarily on the expenditure side. Consequently, social protection programs were initiated included Benazir Income Support Program (BISP). The program was aimed at uplifting the population living below the poverty line through the provision of paid cash assistance on per month basis. BISP helped partially offset the impact of inflation on the purchasing power of the poorer sections of society. The newly elected democratic government has scaled-up the BISP from Rs. 34 to 70 billion as cash assistance to 5.5 million families. Furthermore, the present government has also announced small businesses loan scheme that not only provides monetary loans but also includes training, and skills development for youth.

In Pakistan, responsibility of providing basic social services (education, health, water supply and sanitation) lies with the provincial governments based on revenue transfers according to the provisions of the National Finance Commission (NFC) awards. The seventh NFC award (2010) was a major achievement of the democratic government. The award was not only consensus based, it actually reformulated the resource distribution formula. Provinces have been provided the much-needed fiscal space to focus more on inclusive socio-economic development. Another milestone achieved by the previous democratic government was the unanimous passing of the 18th amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan that allows greater political rights and decentralisation and devolution of power to the provinces. Ensuring devolvement, the amendment clearly demarcates the legislative authority between the federal

and provincial governments. The revitalisation of the Council of Common Interest (CCI) has made the council a powerful and key dispute resolution body where representatives of federal and provincial governments can frequently meet to resolve emerging inter-governmental conflicts.

The democratically elected governments in Pakistan have focussed more toward the equitable development programs in the long run. Inclusive approach towards development is amply evident by the decisions taken by the democratic government in quick succession. In 2009, the democratic government granted autonomous status to Gilgit-Baltistan - a step towards strengthening political integration of Northern areas of Pakistan. Similarly, the government also initiated political, administrative and legal reforms in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) with the enactment of amendments to the Frontier Crimes Regulation in 2011. Considered to be a landmark regulation, the regulation provides the basis for guaranteeing the political and human rights to the citizens of FATA.

3. South Asian Parliaments: Committed to Achieving MDGs through Legislation:

Inclusive approach has been the guiding principle for the democratic governments in Pakistan. This is evident from the resolutions 2008, 2012 and 2013 by the National Assembly of Pakistan on terrorism as well as the All Parties Conferences convened in 2009 and 2013 to address the issues of national and societal security. Some other examples are Prevention of Harassment at Workplace Act 2010, Prevention of Anti-Women Practices (Criminal Law Amendment Act) 2011, Prevention of Domestic Violence Act 2013 are legislations that aimed to protect women rights and ensure equal safe and equal opportunities. The Compulsory School Attendance Act 2012 was aimed at improving the education attainment at primary and secondary levels.

The Indian *Lok Sabha* and *Rajya Sabha* approval of the bill on the National Food Security in 2013 aimed at addressing food insecurity in the country. The Act aims at providing subsidised food grains to approximately two thirds of India's 1.2 billion people. Other bills in milieu with the MDGs are The Street Vendors (protection of livelihood and regulation of street vending) bill 2012 introduced in *Lok Sabha* targeting the poorer segment of society.

In Maldives, the State Wages Policy Bill, and Bill on Amendments to the Employment Act 2008 is aimed at improving compensatory mechanism in labor market. Whereas, the bill on the Amendment to the Centralization Act and the bill on the Local Election Act (No. 10/20) would facilitate and accelerate the decentralization of powers. Increasing its focus on the environment protection the *Majlis* (Parliament) introduced an amendment bill for the Environmental Protection and Preservation. It is evident from the above-mentioned bills and acts, that the regional states are committed towards the achievement of MDGs targets.

Sri Lanka's example is noteworthy in this regard. The Parliament has passed a number of legislations that include food subsidies, free education for all, and health sector strategies that have contributed to lowering maternal mortality rates.

In the Maldives, the *Majlis* (Parliament) has taken key steps towards environment protection and other SAARC Goals. This includes legislations that enhance inter-relationship between human rights and environmental harm, especially as caused by climate change. An efficient Environmental Protection Agency has been set up to overlook laws and regulations in this regard.

In Bangladesh, early marriage has been outlawed by the Parliament and has raised the minimum age for legal marriage to 18 years for women and 21 for men. In addition, acts passed in 2004 and 2005 by the Parliament now make it a legal requirement to register marriages and births. The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) law 2010 provides women permanent protection against violence and sexual harassment.

The Articles 7 and 9 of Bhutan's first written Constitution, adopted in 2008 by the country's first elected Parliament, guarantees and protects women's rights, as did the 2004 Penal Code, the 2007 Labour Employment Act and other key legislations.

Though Afghanistan's journey towards achieving MDGs has been patchy, there have been initiatives and efforts from the legislators. Faced by multiple challenges, the Afghan Parliament requires multi-pronged strategy to address issues of gender parity and education on high priority bases.

Conclusions

The South Asian region has been severely hit by global threats of terrorism and economic crisis of the past years. The region is under considerable pressure due to both domestic and external developments including growing extremism, over population, environmental degradation, natural disasters, and rising global prices of food commodities. Earth Quake of 2005, and successive floods of 2010 and 2011 have not only led to loss of precious lives, but a large number of population still remains affected by it. Furthermore, the huge damage to crops and infrastructure severely affects the economy at large. Economic performance is also affected by war against terrorism, the internal security hazards brought by fighting militancy and the growing tide of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs); all brought severe strains on the government's finances. Due to these unforeseen factors governments have often shifted their development priorities by reallocating the resources from development towards disasters management and in dealing with security crisis. Public-expenditure on traditional security has increased substantially.

The challenge now is to revive economic growth and return to sustainable growth path, which must be equitable and inclusive in nature. Equally important is the need to focus on the social development. The trajectory of development has been impeded by local and foreign factors; slowing the transformative impact on most of the targets identified for the MDGs.

The present government in Pakistan has declared economic development as their central concern. It is important for any democratic government to understand the importance of development trajectory that must be inclusive of the social development needs for a sustainable and transformative impact on the society.