

Programming Committee

The Programming Committee comprises the Heads of SAARC Divisions/Departments of the Ministries of Foreign/External Affairs of the Member States. The Committee considers the Calendar of Activities, and administrative and financial matters of the Secretariat, Specialized Bodies and Regional Centres. It also considers reports of the Technical Committees, Working Groups and other *ad hoc* bodies.

The Programming Committee meets prior to the Sessions of the Standing Committee as its preparatory body. The Committee is also to meet independently at least twice a year, and as and when deemed necessary.

Technical Committees

The Technical Committees comprising representatives of the Member States are responsible for the implementation, coordination and monitoring of programmes in their respective areas of cooperation. The Chair of the Technical Committees rotates among the Member States in alphabetical order every two years.

- 1. Technical Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (including Livestock and Fisheries)
- 2. Technical Committee on Environment and Forestry
- 3. Technical Committee on Health and Population Activities (including nutrition and drug related issues)
- 4. Technical Committee on Science and Technology, and Meteorology
- 5. Technical Committee on Transport (including Land, Water, Railway and Civil Aviation)
- 6. Technical Committee on Women, Youth and Children

Action Committees

The Standing Committee may set up Action Committees comprising the Member States concerned with implementation of projects involving more than two Member States.

Sectoral Ministerial Meetings

Sectoral Ministerial meetings promote regional cooperation in thematic areas. These Ministerial meetings are assisted by the preparatory meetings of the Secretaries and/or Senior Officials or the relevant Technical Committees and Working Groups.

Working Groups

Working Groups formulate programmes and activities in specialized areas with identification of sources for their financing. They monitor progress in the implementation of programmes and activities in their respective fields. They also formulate common positions of the Member States on specific issues for presentation at international fora.

- 1. Working Group on Biotechnology
- 2. Working Group on Energy
- 3. Working Group on Telecommunications, and Information and Communication Technology (ICT)
- 4. Working Group on Tourism

Other Mechanisms

Besides the Charter Bodies, several other mechanisms and *ad hoc* bodies pursue regional cooperation in the identified areas.

Areas of Cooperation

Agriculture and Rural Development; Biotechnology; Blue Economy; Children Welfare; Communications; Connectivity; Cooperatives; Economic and Trade; Education and Culture; Energy; Environment, Forestry and Natural Disasters; Finance; Food Security; Gender Equality; Health and Population; Human Resource Development; Human Trafficking; Information and Media; Meteorology; Migration; People-to-People Contacts; Postal Service; Poverty Alleviation; Science and Technology; Scholarship and Fellowship; Security; Social Development; Tourism; Transport; and Women Empowerment.

Conventions/Agreements

- SAARC Charter (December 1985);
- Memorandum on the Establishment of the SAARC Secretariat (November 1986);
- Agreement on Establishing the SAARC Food Security Reserve (November 1987);
- Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism (November 1987);
- Regional Convention on Narcotic Drugs & Psychotropic Substances (November 1990);
- Agreement on SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) (April 1993);
- SAARC Convention on Regional Arrangements for the Promotion of Child Welfare in South Asia (January 2002);
- SAARC Convention on Preventing & Combating Trafficking in Women & Children for Prostitution (January 2002);
- SAARC Social Charter (January 2004);
- Agreement on South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) (January 2004);
- Additional Protocol to the SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism (January 2004);
- Agreement on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Customs Matters (November 2005);
- Agreement on the Establishment of SAARC Arbitration Council (November 2005);
- Agreement on Avoidance of Double Taxation and Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters (November 2005);
- Joint Declaration on the admission of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan into SAARC (April 2007);
- Agreement on Establishing the SAARC Food Bank (April 2007);
- Agreement for Establishment of South Asian University (April 2007);
- SAARC Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters (August 2008);
- Protocol of Accession of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to Agreement on SAFTA (August 2008);
- Agreement on the Establishment of South Asian Regional Standards Organisation (SARSO) (August 2008);
- Charter of the SAARC Development Fund (SDF) (August 2008);
- SAARC Agreement on Trade in Services (SATIS) (April 2010);
- SAARC Convention on Cooperation on Environment (April 2010);
- Agreement on Establishing the SAARC Seed Bank (November 2011);
- SAARC Agreement on Multilateral Arrangement on Recognition of Conformity Assessment (November 2011);
- SAARC Agreement on Implementation of Regional Standards (November 2011);
- SAARC Agreement on Rapid Response to Natural Disasters (November 2011); and
- SAARC Framework Agreement on Energy Cooperation (Electricity) (November 2014).

Specialized Bodies

Specialised Bodies such as the SAARC Arbitration Council (Islamabad, 2010), South Asian University (New Delhi, 2010), SAARC Development Fund (Thimphu, 2010) and South Asian Regional Standards Organization (Dhaka, 2014) carry out specific mandates entrusted to them.

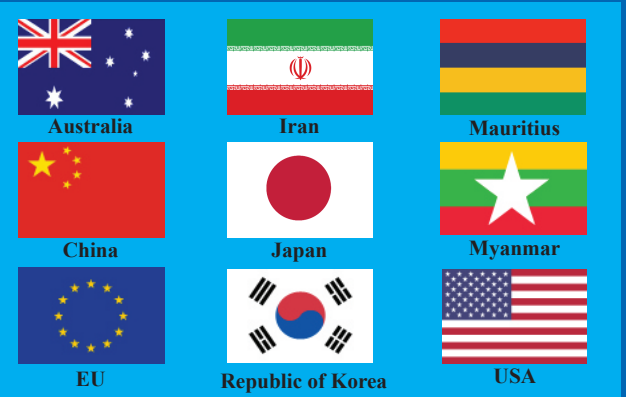
Regional Centres

SAARC Regional Centres act as Centres of Excellence in specialized areas.

- 1. SAARC Agriculture Centre (Dhaka, 1988)
- 2. SAARC Tuberculosis & HIV/AIDS Centre (Kathmandu, 1994)
- 3. SAARC Energy Centre (Islamabad, 2006)
- 4. SAARC Cultural Centre (Colombo, 2009)

Observers

SAARC’s engagement with its Observers is governed by the Guidelines for Cooperation with Observers adopted by the Fifteenth SAARC Summit (Colombo, 2-3 August 2008). The Eighteenth SAARC Summit (Kathmandu, 26-27 November 2014) has decided to engage the SAARC Observers in productive, demand-driven and objective project-based cooperation in seven priority areas: (i) Communication; (ii) Connectivity; (iii) Agriculture; (iv) Public Health; (v) Energy; (vi) Environment; and (vii) Economic Cooperation.



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SAARC Secretariat,  
P. O. Box No. 4222, Kathmandu, Nepal.  
Tel: +977-1-4221785, 4231334  
Fax: +977-1-4227033, 4223991  
Email: saarc@saarc-sec.org  
Website: www.saarc-sec.org

SAARC AT A GLANCE



South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation



Genesis

**May 1980:** The concept of regional cooperation was mooted to promote the welfare of the peoples of South Asia through consultation and collaboration on matters of mutual interests.

**April 1981:** Foreign Secretaries of the South Asian countries met in Colombo for the first time and identified five areas of cooperation, viz., Agriculture, Rural Development, Telecommunications, Meteorology, and Health and Population Activities.

**December 1985:** At the First Summit in Dhaka, the Heads of State or Government of the South Asian countries adopted the Charter establishing the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

Objectives of the Association

- To promote the welfare of the peoples of South Asia and to improve their quality of life;
- To accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region and to provide all individuals the opportunity to live in dignity and to realize their full potentials;
- To promote and strengthen collective self-reliance among the countries of South Asia;
- To contribute to mutual trust, understanding and appreciation of one another’s problems;
- To promote active collaboration and mutual assistance in the economic, social, cultural, technical and scientific fields;
- To strengthen cooperation with other developing countries;
- To strengthen cooperation among themselves in international forums on matters of common interests; and
- To cooperate with international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes.

Membership

Afghanistan



Bhutan



Maldives



Pakistan





Bangladesh



India



Nepal



Sri Lanka



The Secretariat

The Memorandum of Understanding on the Establishment of the SAARC Secretariat was adopted during the Second SAARC Summit (Bangalore, India, 16-17 November 1986). The SAARC Secretariat was established in Kathmandu on 16 January 1987.

The role of the Secretariat is to coordinate and monitor the implementation of SAARC activities; to prepare for and service meetings; and to serve as a channel of communication between the Association and its Member States as well as regional and international organizations, and Observers. The Secretariat is also mandated to initiate proposals for regional cooperation, prepare projects and identify sources for funding.

The Secretariat is headed by the Secretary General of SAARC appointed for a non-renewable term of three years by the SAARC Council of Ministers upon nomination by a Member State on the principle of rotation in alphabetical order.

The Secretary General is assisted by eight Directors, nominated by the Ministries of Foreign/External Affairs of the Member States for a three-year term, which may be extended by the Secretary General for a period not exceeding another full term in consultation with the Member States concerned. The Secretary General and Directors are assisted by regionally appointed officials and those on deputation from the Member States. Locally-recruited staff provide general support services to the Secretariat.

Secretaries General of SAARC

Sr. No.	Country	Photo	Name	Period
1	Bangladesh		Abul Ahsan	16.01.1987 – 15.10.1989
2	India		Kant Kishore Bhargava	17.10.1989 – 31.12.1991
3	Maldives		Ibrahim Hussain Zaki	01.01.1992 – 31.12.1993
4	Nepal		Yadab Kant Silwal	01.01.1994 – 31.12.1995
5	Pakistan		Naeem U. Hasan	01.01.1996 – 31.12.1998
6	Sri Lanka		Nihal Rodrigo	01.01.1999 – 10.01.2002
7	Bangladesh		Q.A.M.A. Rahim	11.01.2002 – 28.02.2005
8	Bhutan		Chenkyab Dorji	01.03.2005 – 29.02.2008
9	India		Sheel Kant Sharma	01.03.2008 – 28.02.2011
10	Maldives		Fathimath Dhiyana Saeed	01.03.2011 – 22.01.2012
11	Maldives		Ahmed Saleem	12.03.2012 – 28.02.2014
12	Nepal		Arjun B. Thapa	01.03.2014 – 28.02.2017
13	Pakistan		Amjad Hussain B. Sial	01.03.2017 -

Designated SAARC Decades

1991-2000	SAARC Decade of the Girl Child
2001-2010	SAARC Decade of the Rights of the Child
2006-2015	SAARC Decade of Poverty Alleviation
2010-2020	Decade of Intra-regional Connectivity in SAARC

Institutional Mechanisms

Charter Bodies

The Charter Bodies are the main mechanisms of SAARC. These include the Summit, Council of Ministers, Standing Committee, Programming Committee, Technical Committees and Action Committees.

Meeting of the Heads of State or Government

The Summit is the highest decision making authority in SAARC. These meetings are hosted biennially by the Member States in rotation in alphabetical order. The Member State hosting the Summit assumes the Chair of the Association until the next such meeting hosted by another Member State.

The key outcome of the SAARC Summit is the Declaration. It contains decisions and directives of the Heads of State or Government to strengthen regional cooperation in the agreed areas.

First SAARC Summit, Dhaka, 7-8 December 1985

SAARC Summits		
Summit	Venue	Date
First	Dhaka	7-8 December 1985
Second	Bangalore	16-17 November 1986
Third	Kathmandu	2-4 November 1987
Fourth	Islamabad	29-31 December 1988
Fifth	Malé	21-23 November 1990
Sixth	Colombo	21 December 1991
Seventh	Dhaka	10-11 April 1993
Eighth	New Delhi	2-4 May 1995
Ninth	Malé	12-14 May 1997
Tenth	Colombo	29-31 July 1998
Eleventh	Kathmandu	4-6 January 2002
Twelfth	Islamabad	2-4 January 2004
Thirteenth	Dhaka	12-13 November 2005
Fourteenth	New Delhi	3-4 April 2007
Fifteenth	Colombo	2-3 August 2008
Sixteenth	Thimphu	28-29 April 2010
Seventeenth	Addu City	10-11 November 2011
Eighteenth	Kathmandu	26-27 November 2014

Council of Ministers

The Council of Ministers comprises the Ministers of Foreign/External Affairs of the Member States. The Council formulates policies of the Association; reviews progress of cooperation; decides on new areas of cooperation; establishes additional mechanisms as deemed necessary; and takes decisions on other matters of general interest to the Association.

The Council is to meet once a year. It also meets preceding each Summit. It reports to the SAARC Summits.

Since 1997, the Council has also been meeting in informal sessions on the sidelines of the high-level segment of the United Nations General Assembly.

Standing Committee

The Standing Committee comprises the Foreign Secretaries of the Member States. The Committee is responsible for overall monitoring and coordination of programmes of cooperation; approval of projects and programmes and modalities of their financing; determination of inter-sectoral priorities; mobilization of regional and external resources; and identification of new areas of cooperation.

The Standing Committee is to meet once a year. It also meets preceding the sessions of the Council of Ministers and in Special Sessions, as often as deemed necessary. It reports to the Council of Ministers.