

OPENING SESSION
(21 MAY 2019)

South Asia Statistical Capacity Development Workshop on Developing SAARC SDG4:
Monitoring Framework and Preparatory Meeting for the Fifth APMED, Kathmandu, 21-24 May 2019

KEY-NOTE ADDRESS BY H. E. MR. AMJAD HUSSAIN B. SIAL, SECRETARY GENERAL OF SAARC

Distinguished Chair of this Inaugural Session,
Hon. State Minister for Education of the Republic of Maldives,
Distinguished Representatives from UNICEF ROSA and UNESCO,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to address the Opening Session of this important Workshop.

I wish to welcome all the dignitaries and distinguished participants to this Inaugural Session and to this Workshop being held in the beautiful city of Kathmandu, which also hosts the SAARC Headquarters.

We are greatly honoured to have in our midst this morning the Hon. State Minister for Education of the Republic of Maldives.

We are thankful to the Distinguished Secretary of the Ministry of Science and Technology of Nepal for finding time to be present at this Opening Session as the Chair.

We wish to thank UNESCO and UNICEF for co-organizing this Workshop in partnership with the SAARC Secretariat and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics. This joint endeavour is a testimony to SAARC's growing relationship with UNESCO and UNICEF, with both of which SAARC has Memoranda of Understanding for collaboration.

Distinguished Participants,

All of us are aware of the importance of education. Education helps us to grow as an important asset of society. It helps us build social skills, problem-solving skills, decision-making skills and creative-thinking skills. Above all, it helps us to become responsible citizens and better human beings. An ancient proverb says: "A child without education is like a bird without wings." Nelson Mandela said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." To me personally, a single-word definition of education is, enlightenment. I repeat "education is enlightenment".

Distinguished Participants,

One of the objectives of SAARC, as enshrined in its Charter, is to provide all individuals the opportunity to live in dignity and to realize their full potentials. This we believe is possible through education.

With due cognizance of this fact, as early as in 1988, at the Fourth SAARC Summit, our leaders decided to include education as one of the areas of regional cooperation. Since then, regional collaboration on education is being vigorously pursued through several inter-governmental mechanisms, such as the meetings of SAARC Education Ministers and Heads of University Grants Commissions or Equivalent Bodies. The SAARC Chairs, Fellowships and Scholarships Scheme is another good example of the collective efforts of our Member States, which facilitates exchange of scholars and researchers across the region. Moreover, the establishment of the South Asian University is considered as one of the most significant accomplishments of SAARC in imparting quality education.

The priority attached to the promotion of education in the region is amply manifest in the Declarations of successive SAARC Summits. At the last SAARC Summit, our leaders expressed their resolve to eliminating illiteracy from the region in line with the global goal of education for all and ensuring quality education in all institutions by reforming curricula, teaching methods and evaluation systems adequately supported by physical, technical and other facilities. At the same Summit, our leaders also agreed to promote regional cooperation in the field of vocational education and training.

Distinguished Participants,

In an earnest bid to accomplish regional targets in education, we have developed the SAARC Framework for Action (SFFA) on Education 2030. SAFA-2030 not only provides an overall strategy for educational development, but it also seeks to promote specific commitments of South Asian governments in achieving SDG4.

We have also agreed on an “Action Plan on the Implementation of the New Delhi Declaration on Education”, which identifies thirteen areas for cooperation. Some of the key areas of cooperation include: technical cooperation and exchange of experts, generating knowledge base required to support policy formulation, documentation and sharing or dissemination of information and knowledge, and monitoring of progress of SDG4.

In concluding my remarks, I wish to once again thank UNESCO and UNICEF ROSA for joining hands with SAARC in organizing this important Workshop. I am confident that this Workshop will be very useful to the participants in sharing experiences and best practices to better monitor progress on SDG-4 as well as to prepare the spadework for the Asia-Pacific Meeting on Education-2030.

I wish the distinguished participants fruitful deliberations during this Workshop and a pleasant stay in Kathmandu.

Thank you.
