
The Importance of Regional Cooperation in 21st Century: A Study of ASEAN and SAARC

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Abstract

Regionalism has been a significant phenomenon in post-World War II international relations. In 1950s' and 1960's witnesses the rise of many regional cooperation in different parts of the world. The end of the Cold War brought about some major transformation in the international order and also it accelerated the growth of new regional cooperation in every inch of the world arena. Regional integration in South Asia and South East Asia are represented by South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and Association of South East Asian Nation (ASEAN) as the main regional cooperation bodies respectively. South Asia has number of inter- state and intra-state conflicts whereas ASEAN face many challenges mainly with South China Sea crisis. Both SAARC and ASEAN expect to serve as vehicles to promote better relations among the disputed parties in the South Asia and South East Asia. The main research question is what are the importance of regional cooperation in 21st century world arena. The primary objective of this study is the analyzed the importance of regional cooperation in 21st century. Apart from that, the study shall also attempt to identify the constraints for better cooperation in both South Asia and South East Asia. Furthermore, finding opportunities and strategies for resolving internal and external conflicts in these regions in 21st century to using regionalism. The research methodology mainly based on interpretivism and epistemological philosophy, this help to build subjective reality, exploratory understandings and interpretations of real-world contexts. The qualitative research study by collecting both primary and secondary data for content analysis. Furthermore, the researcher has chosen to explicate a number of the importance literature areas regarding research. As this study based on concept of regionalism, in additionally used Functionalism and neo-Functionalism theories for described research problem. Finally, researcher concerned key findings used content analysis and provided recommendations for both SAARC and ASEAN as regional cooperation to overcome their constraints in 21st century.

Key Words: *ASEAN, Functionalism, Regional Cooperation, SAARC, 21st century.*

Introduction

Today we are living in such a highly complicated and interdependent world where no state can remain isolated. The study of regional cooperation has become an essential topic of research in modern International Relations. Regional cooperation is the fundamental step leading towards regional integration. With its reintroduction around the world after the Cold War, regional economic integration was recognized as potentially making a significant contribution to the development efforts of the Third World. It did not become a significant topic only in third world, but also in other parts of the world. Most of the regions look up to the European Union (EU) as a model of regional economic integration, as it has been successful in this regard.

A new regionalism is a truly world-wide phenomenon that is taken place in more areas of the world than ever before. The classic examples for this would be the European Economic Community Western Europe, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries in the Middle East, the Association of South East Asian Nations in South East Asia and The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation in South Asian Region. The success of EEC among these was the spectacular and by 1990 many of these regional organizations had been weakened and some had even ceased to exist. However, regionalism received a renewed impetus after the end of cold war and with the push of globalization. Today regionalism is extroverted rather than introverted, which reflects the deeper interdependence of today's global political economies. It should also be noted regionalism is linked with domestic factors as well.

Thus, this whole study mainly focuses on the importance of regional cooperation in 21st century. For this purpose, the study shall make an analytical study of two regional organizations, namely South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and Association of South East Asian Nation (ASEAN). Regional cooperation in South Asia developed over a number of years. Since the end of colonial rule, regional leaders, especially Jawaharlal

Nehru, espoused regional cooperation for the development of South Asia. When concern about Regional cooperation in South East Asia, South East Asian economies came together with the formation of ASEAN in 1967. It provided an explicit platform for the economic ties among the regional members. Greater regional cooperation and integration offers immense opportunities for SAARC and ASEAN member countries. Asia is experiencing a transformation in how business is conducted, resulting in increased specialization and cross- border production networks. Private sector interests are leading the way and the region needs to ensure that it has the appropriate infrastructure and policies that enable this transformation. Inclusive and sustainable rapid growth is conditional on continued reduction of impediments to doing business together.

When social and geographic distances between parts of a region are relatively large, transport costs sufficiently high, and connectivity between places thus relatively low, or institutional differences sufficiently strong, the different parts of a regional economy evolve fairly independently. Economic gaps between the parts are large and persistent, and may even grow if one or several of the parts of the region experience economic transformations, and become more integrated into the world economy. Economic integration has the highest transformative effect and thus economic impact in the lagging and peripheral areas of the region. When economic integration transforms the region and spreads new infrastructures, institutions and approaches that lower frictions, and alleviate coordination and information failures, the benefits from stronger regional cooperation and integration tend to be highest for the peripheral regions and in this case for the poor in South Asia. This study advances discusses about what are the importance of regional cooperation in 21st century world arena.

The Conundrum

At this inception, both ASEAN and SAARC regions were facing very identical issues which include both intra- regional as well as inter- regional issues. At those times, both the regions were drenched in suspicion, turmoil and political instability. When social and geographic distances between parts of a region are relatively large, transport costs sufficiently high, and connectivity between places thus relatively low, or institutional differences sufficiently strong, the different parts of a regional economy evolve fairly independently were common to both regions. With Asia's continuing rise and growing impact on the global economy, regional cooperation and integration (RCI) is expanding, bringing with it both benefits and costs. Regional cooperation and integration have vast potential for accelerating economic growth, reducing poverty and economic disparity within and across the countries involved, and addressing some of the challenges of managing regional public goods in both ASEAN and SAARC regions. The main research question is what are the importance of regional cooperation in 21st century world arena. Accordingly, a content analysis about SAARC and ASEAN would support answer the above question.

The primary objective of this study is to the analyzed the importance of regional cooperation in 21st century. Apart from that, the study shall also attempt to identify the constraints for better cooperation in both South Asia and South East Asia. Furthermore, finding opportunities and strategies for resolving internal and external conflicts in these regions in 21st century to using regionalism.

The research methodology mainly based on interpretivism and epistemological philosophy, this help to build subjective reality, exploratory understandings and interpretations of real-world contexts. The qualitative research study by collecting both primary and secondary data for content analysis. The primary data first hand, fast, current accurate raw data or information which have collected from resolutions, treaties, conventions, charters, direct online sources,

speeches and other using primary data collecting techniques. The data collected through secondary means including books, magazines, journals, newspaper articles, reviewed videos, annual reports, and researches conducted by national, international institutions and online sources in the web to develop the importance the whole analysis.

Previous Research

The end of the Cold War saw a surge in regionalism. While the number of preferential trading agreements (PTA) exploded (Mansfield and Pevehouse 2013), long-standing regional organizations, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) or the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), experienced the delegation of more political authority and policy competencies in the past two decades (Börzel 2013). These two trends of more and deeper regionalism, respectively, are often attributed to processes of diffusion or interdependent decision-making. Regional cooperation and integration spread across time and space. Research on regional cooperation and integration used to be dominated by International Political Economy and European Integration. International Political Economy explores regional trade and investment patterns and the design of formal regional institutions to foster liberalization and settle disputes over market access between states. The literature features a multitude of mainstream theories of regional cooperation and integration. Classical theories of international cooperation and integration are rationalist and state centered. Power-based approaches such as neorealism assume that in the absence of a central enforcement power (anarchy), cooperation is risky for states which are concerned about the equal distribution of power among them (cf. Baldwin 2013; Grieco 1988). To explain regional cooperation, hegemonic stability theory points to powerful states within the region or outside, which are willing to and capable of acting as “regional paymaster, easing distributional tensions and thus smoothing the path of integration” (Mattli 1999a: 56; cf. Gilpin 1987: 87-90;

Grieco 1997). The US played a key role as external hegemon in the creation and prevalence of the European Community and ASEAN by mitigating the security dilemma in the region (Gruber 2000; Acharya 2001). Conversely, the ineffectiveness of regionalism in the Middle East or Asia is often blamed on the absence of a regional or external hegemon (Fawcett and Gandois 2010; Hemmer and Katzenstein 2002).

Social constructivist approaches are equally weak when it comes to explaining differential outcomes of regionalism. They often invoke cultural differences to account, e.g. for the loose cooperation ASEAN states had opted for. The “ASEAN way”, which is based on informal consensus-building, organizational minimalism and thin institutionalization, is said to be incompatible with Western models of legalized institutions (Acharya 2004; Katzenstein 2005; Nesadurai 2009). Such explanations have an essentialist flavor suggesting the existence of Western and non-Western cultures that are more or less compatible with certain outcomes of regionalism. They lose a lot of their explanatory power when applied across time and space (Beeson 2005). With the creation of the Asian Free Trade Area, ASEAN established for the first time a dispute settlement procedure breaking with the ASEAN way of informal and consensus-based institutions. The ASEAN Charter provides another major step towards both more political and more legalized integration. Likewise, the League of Arab States, which has shared the reluctance of ASEAN to delegate political authority to regional institutions, has become more forthcoming and is planning institutional changes (van Hüllen 2015).

The concept of ‘region’ differs from discipline to discipline. However, whether it is in comparative politics or international relations most scholars agree that regions are socially constructed. As Hettne (2005, p.544) put it: ‘...all regions are socially constructed and hence politically contested.’ Because regions are constructed, the most important aspect to understand region depends on ‘how political actors perceive and interpret the idea of a region and notions of ‘regionness’ (Hettne 2005, p. 544). Furthermore, in this fast-changing world

increasingly driven and shaped by technology, some observers anticipate that the idea of 'region' may undergo radical changes and in the near future the world may have 'virtual regions' where people with shared interest or belief from different parts of the world come together to form forums using technology (Jarrar 2016). Even so, in the narrower definition of region, the element of 'geographic proximity' is seen as essential (Behr & Jokeia 2011).

Regional cooperation in South Asia remains a distant dream for a number of reasons. The experience in South Asia, therefore, has been quite unfortunate in this regard. "Regionalism in the shape of the SAARC was set in motion over three decades ago but the progress towards regional cooperation, economic integration, and creation of the security community in South Asia has been mostly paralyzed. Regionalism in South Asia, however, has faced several prominent challenges; the establishment of SAARC in 1985 regionalism does not have the total support of the elites from some of the states. Uniting the region's elites to back regionalism is, therefore, the first political challenge that needs to be addressed" (Pattanaik, 2011). "Regionalism further its strategic, geopolitical and foreign policy dimensions have been a major plank of development cooperation and integration in various parts of the world. There are sufficient examples of regional organizations that have transformed the conventional outlook and aspirations into more open, dynamic and wider systems and practices of peaceful coexistence collective responsibility and regional development. There are instances where bilateral issues have been effectively dealt with by the larger concept of win a win situation generated by regionalism and multilateralism. The new regionalism also purposes the growth of a regional civil society opting for a regional solution to local, national and regional problems.

The implications of this or that not only economic but also social and cultural network are developing more quickly than the formal political corporation the regional level" (Rizal, 2012) Originally SAARC worked in areas such as population, health, climatology, culture, telecommunications, and sports. The

December 1988 Islamabad Summit saw significant progress in this area. He underlined the fundamental requirement for “real and result-oriented activities” in the SAARC Agreement to involve the trade sector.

South Asia as a region lacks clarity of a geographical ‘vision’ (Michael 2013, p. 15) i.e. where South Asia begins and where it ends. In recent years, the emphasis on the elements of regions have been shifting from geography to ‘political and ideational character of regions’ (Behr & Jokeia 2011, p. 4). South Asia has been atypical when seen from this perspective. It emerged from a region “characterized by political disharmony and strategic schism”, unlike other regionalism projects where “...politico-strategic harmony [forms] a vital factor in stimulating and facilitating close and extensive cooperative linkages, including those in security and strategic areas” (Muni 1985 pp. 391-92; Tiwari 1985). The idea of a regional grouping in South Asia emerged from within a diverse set of interests among its member states. These political and strategic divergences continue to affect SAARC even today after three decades of its existence. Given this characteristic, South Asia has been a ‘formal’ region rather than a ‘real’ region. The existence of SAARC as the basis to define South Asia as a ‘region’ is but notional because of the lack of shared strategic interests among its member-states.

From the regional security perspective, the ‘Regional Security Complex Theory’ (RSCT) of the Copenhagen School (Buzan & Waever 2003) explains that the rivalry between India and Pakistan defines South Asia security complex. This ‘pattern’ of South Asian security dynamics has not changed, but with its rise, India’s security interests has expanded beyond the confines South Asia. India’s own interests to safeguard its interests in its neighborhood and to reach out to nations in the Indo-Pacific region, on the one hand and China’s growing strategic entry in South Asia, on the other has reinforced the strategic rivalry between India and China both in the subcontinent as well as in the wider Indo-Pacific region. Hence, there is a growing tendency of India finding itself in the

‘Asian super complex’. It is within this strategic context that India’s perceptions towards regional and sub regional institutions have been evolving.

From the ‘narrow focus on free trade arrangements and security alliances’ that existed up until the 1970s, the concept of ‘regionalism’ has undergone drastic changes. By the mid-1980s, a worldwide phenomenon emerged which came to be known as the ‘new regionalism’ (Fawcett 1995). Analyzing the new phenomenon, Hettne and Söderbaum (1998, p. 3) noted that in contrary to the ‘old regionalism’ that emerged in the context of the Cold War politics, major structural changes in the global system including multipolarity caused the emergence of the new regionalism. Identifying the basic characteristics of the new regionalism, Hettne and Söderbaum (1998) argue that the new regionalism is ‘comprehensive’, ‘multifaceted’ and ‘multidimensional’ and unlike the old regionalism it involves ‘more spontaneous processes’ that often emerge ‘from below’ and from within the region itself.’ In the new regionalism, the level and process of regionalization takes place at interregional, interstate as well as subnational (sub regional) levels. Moreover, the new regionalism is ‘extroverted’ rather than ‘introverted’ and thus supports ‘open regionalism’ (Hettne & Söderbaum 1998).

Finally, Southeast Asian residents have developed a distinct regional identity that helps ASEAN to function effectively. However, there is no equivalent South Asian identity in South Asia, which precludes potential cooperation between the states in the region.

Analysis

During the early years of regional integration, critics continued to raise concern about how the integration terminology could be properly used in the midst of a lack of clarity regarding its content. There are different aspects of regional integration, and these include economic, social and political aspects. Regional integration schemes are famous ways in which regions embark on their integration. There are differences, however, in the manner in which regional integration schemes have been implemented across the world, as well as in the

results obtained by different region. The main difference is in the extent of commitment to the application of regional integration in economic integration schemes in both developed and developing countries.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is Southeast Asia's primary multilateral organization, a 10-member grouping of nations (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Vietnam) with a combined population of 650 million and a combined annual gross domestic product (GDP) of around \$2.8 trillion in 2019. The group has played a central role in Asian economic integration, spearheading negotiations among Asia-Pacific nations to form one of the world's largest free trade blocs and signing six free trade agreements with other regional economies (Congressional Research Service, 2020). Established in 1967, it has grown into one of the world's largest regional fora, representing a strategically important region with some of the world's busiest sea lanes, including the Straits of Malacca and the South China Sea.

Map 1: Association of Southeast Asian Region

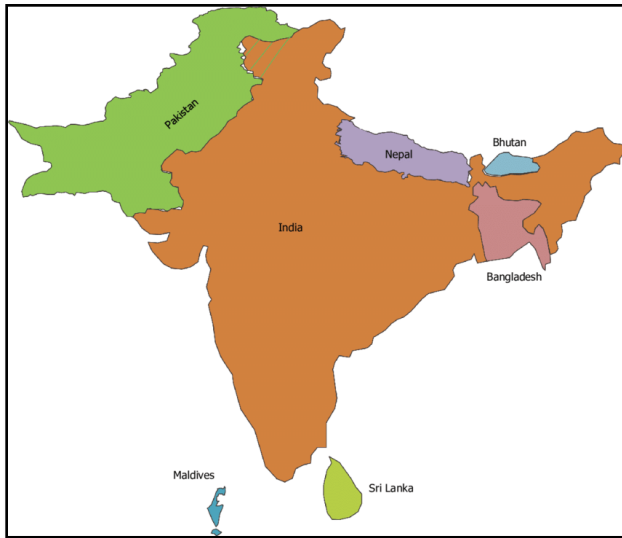


Source: Congressional Research Service, 2020.

Taken collectively, ASEAN would rank as the world's fifth-largest economy. ASEAN as an outward looking, rules based, people-oriented organization has over the last five decades made significant progress in many spheres. ASEAN's role is also critical for peace, security, development and shared economic and social progress in Asia (Congressional Research Service, 2020). The areas of ASEAN cooperation include education, the environment, social welfare, science and technology, culture and information, youth, transnational crime, trade, investment, agriculture, transport, tourism, energy, finance, political matters and security. Yet experts say ASEAN's impact is limited by a lack of strategic vision, diverging priorities among member states, and weak leadership. The bloc's biggest challenge, they say, is developing a unified approach to China, particularly in response to Beijing's claims in the South China Sea, which overlap with claims of several ASEAN members.

On the other hand, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) appear to be works-in progress as its achievements to date have been limited. South Asia, cut off from the rest of the Asian land-mass by the Himalayan, Karakoram, Sulaiman and the Hindukush mountain ranges, constitutes a distinctive geographic region. The countries of this region share common historical, cultural and linguistic ties (Khilnani, 1987).

Map 2. The Map of South Asian Region



Source: <https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Map-of-South-Asian-countries>

The common heritage of colonial rule continues to shape South Asian politics. Modern South Asia faces what at the surface seems to be insurmountable challenges rising from rampant poverty, rapidly growing populations, unemployment and low economic growth which are compounded by the presence of domestic conflicts rising primarily from secessionist movements. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is the regional intergovernmental organization and geopolitical union of states in South Asia. Its member states are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The SAARC comprises 3% of the world's area, 21% of the world's population.

Despite robust economic growth in recent years, South Asia accounts for only 3 percent of world's gross domestic product, and nearly 40 percent of its inhabitants live on less than \$1.25 per day. Daunting challenges from climate change, environmental degradation, and increasing inequalities pose serious threats to South Asia's growth and prosperity. Regional cooperation and integration have vast potential for accelerating economic growth, reducing

poverty and economic disparity within and across the countries involved, and addressing some of the challenges of managing regional public goods in South Asia. Yet, the region remains among the least integrated in the world. In recent years, South Asian countries have demonstrated greater commitment to moving forward the regional cooperation agenda. One of the most recent examples is the Bangladesh–India Memorandum of Understanding of 2010, which not only envisages greater trade between these two countries, but also provides a framework for the landlocked Bhutan and Nepal to benefit from understanding between Bhutan and Bangladesh and Nepal and Bangladesh to strengthen cooperation in transport and power. This has boosted the prospects for accelerating regional cooperation in South Asia to address the region’s massive development challenges.

With Asian region continuing rise and growing impact on the global economy, regional cooperation and integration (RCI) is expanding, bringing with it both benefits and costs. To sustain region-wide economic growth, an integrated market for the free flow of trade and investment across the region is necessary. Some degree of cooperation, if not coordination, in macroeconomic policy should also be considered. Intraregional trade in Asia, as well as South-South trade, has grown substantially (Asian Development Bank, 2013). But the trade landscape is becoming increasingly complicated with the proliferation of free trade agreements (FTAs). As of January 2013, the economies of Asia were party to 109 ratified FTAs. This has raised concerns over distortions associated with the so-called “spaghetti” or “noodle bowl” effect.

As with trade, financial integration in Asia has also been expanding, though less rapidly and from a low base. Although this has accrued benefits in terms of consumption and investment risk sharing, magnitudes remain small. The majority of Asia’s savings continues to be intermediated outside the region (Asian Development Bank, 2013). There are numerous importance can discuss of regional cooperation. These are as follows:

- i. Promote peace, security and stability on the region**

Another important security-related objective that states pursue through regional cooperation is the build-up of stability and peace in the region. Apart from the obvious value of conflict-free relations with neighbors and reduced defense expenditure, regional stability and peace is a key requirement for attracting foreign and local investment (Wanandi, 2001). Regional peace is likewise critical if the region is confronted by an external security threat. While regional stability and peace are highly desirable, nation states are often at odds with their neighbors. This is because nation states, almost always have ongoing differences with neighbors regarding land and maritime borders, ownership of resources straddling these borders, and the (illegal) entry of goods and humans, among other issues. Mutual suspicion about each other's territorial ambitions is also not uncommon among neighbors. Moreover, internal problems and instability in one state usually tend to spill over into a neighboring state/s, especially when there is a sympathetic ethnic group in its own population.

In sum, it was a weakened but not broken ASEAN that emerged from the regional crises of the late 1990s. ASEAN managed to survive the ordeals and learn some lessons. In order to improve the management of inter-state conflicts in a more effective way and take cooperative security to a higher plane, in 2003 regional leaders signed the ASEAN Concord II, which endorsed the establishment of an ASEAN Community. This does not mean that territorial contestations and bilateral differences have vanished. The longstanding Sabah claim, areas in the oil-rich Sulawesi Sea contested by both Malaysia and Indonesia, and the dispute between Singapore and Malaysia over Pedra Branca persist, but at very low intensity.

The South Asian reality is vastly different from that of Southeast Asia. The presence of a regional organization has not blunted the raw edges of historical irritants between members nor ameliorated the high levels of suspicion and distrust among neighbors. Many of the region's conflicts are products of the colonial era, but they have also been exacerbated by the short-sighted policies of states. Precisely because of their inflammatory nature, one of the conditions

that bound SAARC from the beginning was to keep contentious issues off its agenda.

ii. Regional Cooperation initiatives has been prospect of enhanced Economic growth.

Southeast Asia has also been one of the most successful regions in the world in terms of economic development. ASEAN's emergence coincided with a period of remarkable economic expansion, with per capita incomes in the region expanding 33 times from US\$122 in 1967 to US\$4,021 in 2016.³ When ASEAN was founded in 1967, nearly all of its members were low-income economies. Today, the region includes two with high incomes (Singapore and Brunei), two with upper middle incomes (Malaysia and Thailand), and the rest with lower middle incomes. ASEAN has played an important role in this economic improvement by helping to maintain regional stability and facilitating greater regional economic integration. While the key driver of economic growth has been two-way trade between individual ASEAN countries and major economies (US, Japan, South Korea, China, and Europe), recent evidence shows that intra-ASEAN trade is on the rise, and trade and investment from other countries is also increasing. In the last decade, trade and investment from China has become an important contributor to ASEAN countries' economic growth, and China is now the largest trading partner for every ASEAN country.

iii. Regional cooperation between developing countries to improve transport facilities

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has successfully evolved into a well-knit and dynamic regional entity that is now a major force behind several economic cooperation initiatives between the Southeast Asian economies and the rest of the world. ASEAN has also begun to actively promote interaction with non-members on issues of regional security. Likewise, the younger Greater Mekong Sub-Regional (GMS) arrangement has registered impressive achievements on a more modest scale. For example, GMS has been effective in catalyzing cooperation among once adversarial countries to develop

joint infrastructure facilities and systems in the sub-region, and is seen as a model for flexible yet effective cooperation by many developing countries. Moreover, the groundwork for cooperation established under the GMS is facilitating smoother integration of some of Southeast Asia's least developed economies into ASEAN.

iv. Reduce trade barriers

The South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) agreement in 2004 imparted a new momentum, heralding the third phase of SAARC's evolution when it first began to focus seriously on the goal of regional economic integration. Several developments brought about this change. There has been a resurgence of interest in SAARC among the South Asian states, especially by India. Civil society initiatives have acquired certain autonomy and a new dynamism. The private sector is emerging as an important stakeholder. Further, major powers including the PRC, the European Union (EU), Japan, South Korea and the United States (US), among others, are showing a keen participatory interest in the SAARC process. The convergence of these factors has opened a new window of opportunity which, if utilized, could catapult South Asia to become a key player in the world economy (Asian Development Bank, 2012).

v. Harvesting Regional Opportunities and Answering Regional Issues

Harvesting opportunities and addressing issues in the region that require two or more states to collaborate is an important objective in most, if not all, regional cooperation. Opportunities exist in the form of coordinated and joint development of resources such as rivers and bodies of water that straddle more than one state, and protecting regional ecosystems that can be best managed through cooperative approach.

In an increasingly interconnected world, where norms and rules for global and national governance in critical areas (e.g. trade and capital flows, intellectual property rights, climate change, global financial architecture) evolve through

negotiations among groups of nations, member states of a regional cooperations are more likely to have their voices heard collectively rather than as individual states. As in the case of ASEAN, regional cooperation allowed the group of small and medium powers to unite and engage more powerful states and economies than would have been possible for 10 small states individually (Tay and Estanislao, 2001).

In addition, there are additional regional issues that require two or more (and sometimes all) regional cooperation member states working together for their effective management. These issues include controlling cross-border terrorism; halting trafficking in drugs, weapons, and humans; preventing the spread of infectious diseases; and mitigating the effects of acid rain, haze, and other pollutants. Mercosur, for instance, has the explicit goal of providing a platform for its members to discuss common security issues such as drug trafficking. The management of these issues through regional cooperation has the potential to enhance regional and global welfare. While such opportunities have not yet adequately engaged the attention of member states of several regional cooperation, they should gain greater attention and priority in the future (Asian Development Bank, 2010).

- Research and development and knowledge generation can be crucial for the success of development strategies
- Improving cooperation in the region
- Improving the socioeconomic conditions
- Increase greater connectivity in the region through expansion of infrastructure facilities for goods and services and fostering communications across border among business, academics, civil society groups, and media.
- Provide commercial information and pool efforts in such areas as energy, water supply

We are living in a fast-changing world and are facing many challenges ranging from economic development and social stability to international relations. Poverty, conflicts, and even wars are affecting many parts of the world today,

regional cooperation stand out as having been instrumental in turning entire world into the stable, prosperous, peaceful, and cooperative region it is today, and in nurturing a spirit of amity and cooperation with other partners.

Findings and Suggestions

It is recognized that the performance and the role of the Regional cooperation is very crucial not only for the economic cooperation but also other areas of regional cooperation in the world. The member countries are quite aware that they cannot achieving in isolation or they cannot depend upon the other regions permanently.

Before concluding this study, the researcher presented some of key findings and main recommendations pointed for future implementation of SAARC and ASEAN as fruitful regional cooperation. These are,

- It is through regional cooperation they can become viable and stable as independent countries. In the current scenario both SAARC and ASEAN are not able to perform its important role towards the happy and green Asia.
- SAARC and ASEAN have to concentrate on food security, climate conditioning and diseases and also focuses on improving the socioeconomic condition of people in the region
- Climate change has become a core issue and entire world vulnerable to the impact of environmental degradation. An effective policy should be made on climate, to face against its changes.
- There should be focus on health infrastructure specially battle against Covid- 19 global pandemic.
- To issue the free visa in the region

Summary and Conclusion

Regional cooperation role in contributing to growth and development was recognized and acknowledged, its importance in SAARC and ASEAN have been properly outlined. The incremental, consultative and consensus-based approach that ASEAN follows has created a more stable regional order. ASEAN can therefore take credit for embracing a formula that dampens rather than inflames conflicts even though it was not explicitly set up as an institution for conflict settlement or resolution. But over time it has evolved as a cooperative security regime based on habits of consultation and dialogue and eschewing the use of force. SAARC, on the other hand, encompasses a region where the use of force is still an instrument of foreign policy. SAARC's presence has not prevented violent conflicts, much less settled or resolved them. Regional cooperation is at a very rudimentary stage in South Asia. Conflict management of even a minimalist sort is non-existent at present. South Asia is yet to cross the Rubicon and make regionalism effective enough to build trust among its members and use it as a collective forum to manage inter-state conflicts. In comparison, Southeast Asia is certainly more advanced, and ASEAN more effective, in dealing with inter-state conflicts. Finally concluded with concentrated in one key area which can needs further study will be to discover areas where ASEAN and SAARC can work together. Thus, further study is required in that topic area and it can be a great platform for both regions in 21st century.

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