

International Seminar
on
India and SADC: Role and Importance of South Africa

(9-10 October 2009)

REPORT

Two-Days International Seminar on the theme of "**India and SADC: Role & Importance of South Africa**" was organized by the Department of Distance Education, Punjabi University, from 9-10 October, 2009. It was discussed that the main objective of SADC is to provide sustainable solutions to the challenges being faced by the 15 member countries of SADC. Sub-themes deliberated upon during the two-day seminar were covering political-historical aspects, economic cooperation, gender and Diaspora issues. It was asserted that out of the 15 member countries, South Africa is of great importance as it is making maximum contribution to the economic development. Thus, India & SADC relations, mainly with South Africa holds great relevance in the present times.

The impact of globalization on the international relations of India with special reference to South Africa and Brazil was also discussed in detail as these nations are considered three largest democracies of the world.

India's historical role in the region and the importance of South Africa in SADC was emphasized in the various papers. It was stated that both the nations have similar historical and political backgrounds regarding anti-colonial and post-colonial policies. South Africa's position being on the top in terms of economy, military strength, location as well as infrastructure plays dominant role in the region of transport network, manufacturing industry, labour market, scientific and technical expertise as well as capital resources. In the end it was brought out that India is trying to seek cooperation with other countries in SADC but most of them have much dependence on South Africa for their imports and exports. Thus, it is difficult for India to expand its influence in SADC.

The emerging areas of economic and production cooperation were also discussed. The common interests and experiences of India and the countries of Southern Africa were brought out. As South Africa was a major trading partner of India prior to 1946 and now after the end of racialism in South Africa, it has opened new vistas of opportunities for

both countries. India has also prioritized South Africa and South African countries as strategic partners at both political and economic levels. The free trade agreement between India and SADC was also stressed upon which will enhance the level of bilateral trade. Topics such as climate change and food security were also brought to the discussion.

The role of Indian Diaspora in strengthening cooperation was also of major concern for this seminar. The role of gender was highly emphasized in this initiative. The importance of culture in international diplomacy was also highlighted in a paper. Under these issues, the relations between India and SADC were stressed upon which have been forged by the bonds of history. The cultural connections between India and Southern Africa were also explored in detail in one of the papers. However, the issue at hand was agreed to be that of integration of Indian Diaspora with the local community and society which should be a two-way process.

Concept Note

India has historical relations with members of Southern African Development Community (SADC). They are situated in coastal and hinterland areas of Indian Ocean. SADC consists of Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone African countries. Many of the SADC member countries have significant number of Indian diasporic population.

Over the years SADC emerged as a unique and successful experiment in regional cooperation. Its 15 member countries have approximately a population of 250 million people. It generates a GDP of 374.2 billion USD. Many of the structures and experiments in regional cooperation are innovative. Some of the successes and popularity of SADC provisions like Political and Security Protocols went far beyond OAU agreements and were adopted in African Union Charter. In other words SADC emerged as a meaningful and regional grouping of Southern African countries. Its cooperation under community framework rather than through a trade/custom union framework brought the economic and political cooperation under active operation. From regional economic/resource planning to collective protection/restoration of democratic regime within the community led to its success on many fronts. Scandinavian countries which are major donors treat it as a success case.

However, as happens in case of other regional groupings, the difference between economic strength and resource of member countries play proportional roles in such grouping. In economic and military terms South Africa is the most resourceful country. It is the strongest economy in the region with a GDP of 276.5 billion USD and a growth rate of 5%. It constitutes 20% percent of total SADC population and 76 percent of community GDP. In military terms South Africa's military strength is greater than combined military forces of the 14 members in the region. Despite demobilization its defence budget is the largest in the Southern African region, still over 4 billion USD.

In practice South Africa remains a key player in economy and strategic operation of the SADC initiative. Countries from outside the community find South Africa as the most important country in effecting a closer cooperation with the region. In India's attempt to establish broader relationship with Southern Africa, in areas like trade, investment, production cooperation, agriculture, telecommunication, IT and education, India finds South Africa having same interest and competitive advantage as India. Therefore, India South Africa interacts both as friends and competitors in the region. However, India has very good relations with other members of SADC like Mauritius, Seychelles, Namibia, Botswana etc and India is not exclusively dependent on South Africa as its gateway to Southern African Community (SADC). India has robust trade relations with SADC. In 2007-2008, India's export was USD 5481.44 million and imports reached USD 5056.94 million.

The seminar would like to examine the prospect of India's development cooperation with SADC and assess the role and importance of South Africa as the most dominant member of the community. Since India has emerged as knowledge economy the seminar would

focus, though not confined to, areas like distance, education, IT, telecom, banking, pharmaceuticals, medicine, agriculture as prospective area of cooperation. The seminar will broadly have following sub-themes.

Sub-Themes

- 1) India and SADC : India's historical role in the region and importance of South Africa in SADC.
- 2) India and SADC : Emerging areas of Economic and Production cooperation.
- 3) India and SADC : Experiences and Challenges of Women Empowerment.
- 4) India and SADC : Role of Indian Diaspora in Strengthening the cooperation.