

COVID-19 Pandemic and its Impact on Sustainable Development Goals: An Observation of South Asian Perspective

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Abstract

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has been impacted nations and their institutions around the globe and has also possess a threat to achieving the UN sustainable goals. This paper describes how the pandemic may influence the SDGs in south Asian perspectives including Nepal and also discusses how it could be affecting the implementations parts. For this, the methods used are mainly literatures, published reports, observations and an assessment etc. The result of the study clearly depicts that for supporting sustainable industrialization by consolidation of skill development will place South Asia in an advantageous plate to fill the youth skills vacuum. After COVID-19 pandemic, SAARC should promote agricultural productivity and empower gender equality as a tool of sustainable development, and the like.

Keywords: SDGs, Covid-19, Impacts, Future Strategy, South Asia, Nepal.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the decades much-attention has been paid to sustainable development goals. For social benefits. The term sustainable development is defined as economic development, peoples and their community development and environmental developments. Further, there are necessary aspects of balancing of development in a country which consider as a sustainable development (New man and kenworthy,1991. International council on local environment initiatives ,1999). In this approach, besides profit making, addressing a social issuing is an important for survival and growth of business in developing countries. Therefore, to reduce the poverty level in a country and upgrading there health life social as well as inclusive business environments should be needed (Prahalad 2009;Yunus et al 2010; Jenkins et al; 2010; London and Hart, 2011). These things are Mainly intended to solve the social problems including human vulnerabilities and poverty reduction.

In recent years, the term sustainable development foal for poverty reduction, health and sanitization, ecological perspective etc. have been widely recognized around a globe. For this role of government, private sectors and plural sectors organizations and non-governmental and

non-profit Organization as well as social awareness and moments are critical importance got humanitarian, ecological problems and sustainable developments, and Nepal as a least development country in south Asia is not far from its effect (porter and Kramer, 2011; Mintzberg, 2015) and the UN adopted the 2030 agenda for sustainable developments goals. Moreover, the sustainable developments goals were established by UN(United Nations) in 2015. They have been in target for five years initially, however many developing economics countries notice to be falling behind in meeting their targets (Sachs et al; 2019). Despite this reality the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 On the global economy will be more intense and long-term than ever before (Walter et al; 2020). These impacts less industrialization countries line south Asian nations including Nepal, and also to the achievements of the UNSDGs by 2030(UN news, 2020; Martin, 2020.) Social impact of COVID-19 and it has also the impact on the SDGs in terms of negative impact on trade and employment social and public health and overall economic and business environment. Therefore, realizing this difficult situation regarding the remaining plate for sustainable development in South Asian perspective. This paper seeks to assess the impact of covid-19 pandemic on sustainable development goals in Nepal in the south Asian context.

2. Rational of the Study:

The ongoing pandemic has become a precedence to sustainable development goals in many developing nations including Nepal. The developing country still need to put more attention to dealing with covid-19 as disrupting every sector of the economy and quality of life of the peoples. In fact, Peoples and economies activities around the globe have been imposed to do to find out the right solutions regarding sustainable development. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), established in 1985, aimed to work together towards finding solutions of its member countries' common problems through economic growth by uplifting the regional economic activities in common platform of the people of South Asian Countries. South Asia is a common plate of eight countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Maldives), encompassingsimilar language, culture, religion, socio-economic status, and geopolitical features. Mostly, socio-economic indicators of the region possess a remaining part for development. That can be put into perspective through the lens of south-eastern neighboring countries of south Asia:Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong have been achieving remarkable economic growth because of scope of high level of intra-regional integration. Comparatively, such type of intra-regional integration didn't function in the same way in South Asiadespite havingsimilar socio-economic and geo-political features of South East Asian nations. Likewise, another rich country China has been achieving targeted economic growth and development in the world.Even after Covid-19 pandemic,the essence of the clarification of SAARC's rolet to upliftthe quality of life of the peoplein this region isincreasing.South Asia and the world's poor number of people look for the unique opportunities of integration and connectivity through the agendas of sustainable development goals. SAARC's coordination and contextualization of 2030's agendas of sustainable development were its major

practices to operate the regional mechanism and sustainable transformation. But after covid-19, all sustainable development goals and strategies are paralyzed. New simultaneous fiscal and health crisis have been experienced. For the revive, it is emergence to investigate the financial, health and infrastructural capacity of the region and covid-19 impact navigation in order to suggest acquired future strategies. Moreover, with the literature and analysis this study could be the nexus for the future research.

Before Covid-19 pandemic, south asia can be observed as a highly potential growing region in the world despite having dense cross-cutting issues. The existence of SAARC has been one definite and high crux to put regional endeavor to reduce poverty, inequality, and raise the quality of life of the people in south asian region for sustainable development. However, regional level conflict and confrontations are the critical issue for the cooperation to secure stable region as a common platform. It has been seen that the regional strength after Covid-19 pandemic has been paralyzed to achieve the sustainable development goals along with the challenges such as political instability, corruption, lack of good governance, and knowhow. For this matter, political commitment is a must for the prosperous regional future settling financial and health sector stability. These days south plate has to create investment opportunities to reduce the financial and health constraints. Going through the history of the development, however, it can be observed that there was (and still exists to a large extent) inadequate development in terms of education, basic health, rural energy, rural banking, and financial intermediation.

After Covid-19 pandemic, financing to manage all issues is another challenge and an important part of south asia. Injustice in South Asia seems with the poor. Governance is unjust, and there is inequitable access of human development, market, and productive resources. Rural areas are more backward than urban areas. Rural people are not benefiting from globalization. Urban people are getting opportunity to unfold as per the dynamics of economic activities. Rural people are not benefiting from the technology and education. Poor health and nutrition account for less productivity. Healthy life is insecure and vulnerable to South Asian people. It makes matters worse considering that they have lack of competitive strength and capacity to compete in the growing market places. Participation of small and medium enterprises) at an integrated form is to raise trade capacity and smooth supply. But sees still don't have the full access of finance, infrastructure, and skill development to be able to create business opportunities and export market. The scope of connectivity is growing after the Covid-19 pandemic. Connectivity is another means to speed up the pace of regional integration process of SAARC. Bilateral and sub-regional levels touch can strengthen SAARC countries connectivity, is yet to materialize to its fullest. Common protocol, transmission network, taxes system operation and system imbalances, harmonization of code and dispute settlement distribution channel are emerging issues in south Asia that are required to unfold into opportunities. This plate lacks peace, security, justice, and human rights to stop rampant corruption. There is not enough schooling of accountability to spread positive perception towards bilateral problem solving endeavor regarding surplus of trust peace, security, rights, and avoiding extremism. Investment in fiscal and health infrastructure

grows the scope of development of agriculture, service and manufacturing. Infrastructure development is one of the most important development means through which employment opportunity can be generated to make better life of large number of poorer. So, all countries have to manage sustainable development fund.

Objectives and Methods:

Covid-19 has had increased uncertainties about the sustainable development goals that UN has adopted the 2030 agenda for least and developing nations. Realizing this difficult situation regarding the remaining plate for sustainable development in South Asian perspective. This paper seeks to assess the impact of covid-19 pandemic on sustainable development goals in Nepal in the south Asian context. Therefore, as per the nature of this study, descriptive research design was used to identify the impacts of covid-19 on sustainable development goals in south Asian perspectives including Nepal. For this scientific method of review was used to describe the present situations of SDCs.

Reviews and Analysis:

As per the country wise averages of South Asian plate, Bhutan has the highest industrial productivity and investment due to the energy development. Similarly, Sri Lanka remains at the top when it comes to human resource, and education and training. India is second as far as human resource, and education and training are concerned. Nepal has low industrial productivity. Pakistan has low investment and equal averages in human resources. Similarly, Nepal, in average, is low in education and training. It has been reflected that the poor numbers of Annual percentage growth of industry between 2000 and 2016: So much so that countries like Nepal, Bhutan, India, and Sri Lanka have deteriorated their industry's growth from 2010 to 2016.

Table 1: Industry value add (percentage of GDP)

Country/Year	2000	2010	2016
Bangladesh	23.314	26.144	28.766
Bhutan	35.991	44.588	43.463
India	31.044	32.424	28.845
Maldives	15.037	10.168	11.232
Nepal	22.132	15.634	14.76
Pakistan	23.326	20.575	19.363
Sri Lanka	27.318	29.678	29.592
Afghanistan	NA	NA	NA

Source: *World Bank, 2016 Note: NA means to not available*

Industry value added growth of South Asian countries needs to improve by developing industrial infrastructure and market access as well. For a long time, the countries of South Asian region experienced economic stagnation which also manifested in low gross domestic product contribution from industries. This was mainly due to the import-substitution policy adopted by the government. South Asian countries should begin redirecting their economic systems to adopt economic liberalization and open-door policies. Furthermore, both real and nominal openness has raised the industrial productivity output in the SAARC countries. Hence, industrial productivity, investment, human resource, education and training need to be addressed by the government, national and international partners, and private sectors proactively. Still, industries are not well functioning as it doesn't have large scale productive capacity of SAARC countries. It needs bilateral and multilateral integration among the countries. Ineffectual policies of trade liberalization and no proper implementations of South Asia Free Trade Area for intra-regional trade opportunities have been the impediment to enhance trade and attract bilateral and multilateral trade and investment.

Table 2: Development GAP in South Asia

Countries	Access of electricity percent of population 2014	Account at a financial institution percent of age 15+ (2014)	Commercial Bank Branches per 100,000 adults 2015	Government expenditure on education % of GDP 2015	Health expenditure % of GDP 2014
Afghanistan	89.5	10	2.3	3.3	8.2
Bangladesh	62.4	29.1	8.4	1.9	2.8
Bhutan	100	33.7	15.4	7.4	3.6
India	79.2	52.8	13.5	3.8	4.7
Maldives	100		12.1	5.2	13.7
Nepal	84.9	33.8	8.9	3.7	5.8
Pakistan	97.5	8.7	10	2.6	2.6
Sri Lanka	92.2	82.7	18.6	2.2	3.5
Source: <i>WDI, 2016</i>					

Access of electricity is fundamental to people's daily lives, yet only Bhutan's and Maldives' population have full access to electricity. Countries like Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Afghanistan are yet to improve their numbers for their population. Likewise, the account of people at financial institution is one of the good representations of people's economic state. However, only Sri Lanka shows a good percentage of its population (above 15 years of age) having account at the financial institution and the rest of the countries linger staying well behind

the targeted percentage. Establishment of commercial banks speaks about the financial climate of the country: The higher the number of banks, the greater the credit creation for people. Still, all the countries show greater room for improvement in this concern. With just an average expenditure on education relative to the need of their population, SAARC countries' education begs much prioritization as well. Government's expenditure on health has a direct correlation with the health of its people. Therefore, the goal for the greater achievement in the health standards of SAARC people falls well short looking at the current expenditure on health. So the SAARC countries need to show a greater urgency on health sector by making more expenditure on health.

South Asian people are living in a room of poverty, inequality, and unemployment. The realization of South Asian countries at current time is lack of financial resources as well as inefficient financial intermediation. Planned allocation of resources is an important task for the days to come. Besides, planned allocation of resources has not been meeting the targeted goals due to lack of policy implementation. In South Asia, there is a high gap of financial development. Actually, financial development is synonymous to the overall development of the region. Financial resource mobilization plays vital role to the implementation of developmental agenda of sustainable development. South Asian plate should fulfill the development gaps, addressing the needs of investment expenditure on education, health, trade and business, and bank and financial institutions within themselves and all nations that are witnessing as well.

It is also important to consider the role of India in South Asia. Only India shares common land with four countries- Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Bhutan- and has close proximity to the two island nations-Sri Lanka and Maldives. The six other nations of South Asia are located far apart from one another. Thus, India's central position in South Asia hands it a crucial role as its relations with smaller countries in the region affect their socio-economic and development activities.

Table 3: Public Resources in South Asia

Countries	Cash surplus deficit percent of GDP	Tax revenue percent of GDP	Total reserves including gold billion USD	Short term debt percent of total debt	Other taxes percent of revenue
Afghanistan	-0.6	7.5	7	8.6	0.5
Bangladesh		8.7	27.5	11.9	3.1
Bhutan		9.2	1.1	0.5	0.1
India	-3.8	10.8	353.3	18.5	0.1
Maldives		13.7	0.6	14.5	4.1
Nepal	-0.6	13.9	8.1	8.3	2.3
Pakistan	-8	10.1	20	8.9	2.8
Sri Lanka	-5.3	10.4	7.3	17	2.6

Source: *WDI, 2016*

Table 3: shows public resources in South Asia. Cash surplus is deficit in all countries of south asia. Debt ratio is higher than tax revenue. A total reserve of gold is increasing in US dollars in

all south asian counties. South Asia has been focusing to improve the state of problematic factors in business which includes government instability, corruption, poor implementation of policies, inefficient role of labor union, inadequate infrastructure, governance and transparency, poor work ethics in bureaucracy, inflation, crime and theft, lack of skilled work force, etc. Some areas of doing business indicators like starting a business, dealing with construction permits, getting electricity, registration property, getting credit, protecting minority investors, paying taxes, trading across border, enforcing contracts, resolving insolvency, and labor market should also ameliorate exponentially.

Table 5: Level of preparedness in South Asia to COVID-19

	Health System				Access to basic infrastructure			Connectivity	
	Government health Experience (% of GDP)	Hospital Beds (per 1,000 People)	Nurses And Midwives (per 1,000 People)	Physicians (per 1,000 people)	Basic Drinking Water Service (% of population)	Basic sanitation service (% of population)	Open defecation (% of Population)	Fixed broadband Subscriptions (per 100 People)	Mobile cellular subscription (per 100 People)
Afghanistan	0.49	0.47	0.17	0.27	57.59	38.75	15.49	0.02	53.41
Bangladesh	0.47	0.67	0.26	0.46	43.78	43.78	2.88	2.47	76.69
Bhutan	2.49	1.75	1.28	0.31	95.38	65.67	1.56	2.41	83.30
India	0.91	0.70	1.37	0.74	89.91	50.48	35.17	1.21	75.40
Maldives	5.21	4.30	5.65	2.57	98.42	96.20	1.13	5.76	155.59
Nepal	1	0.30	2.31	1.67	87.13	51.28	30.54	1.12	88.85
Pakistan	0.72	0.60	0.52	0.90	90.31	54.45	16.31	0.80	65.26
Sri Lanka	1.62	3.55	1.92	0.84	87.39	93.41	1.29	3.30	109.7
South Asia	0.89	0.67	1.14	0.74	89.81	50.65	29.28	1.28	74.57

Source: UNESCAP based on World Development indicators, accessed at <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-Indicators>.

Table 5: shows the level of preparedness in South Asia to COVID-19. Health crisis and financial crisis, infrastructure requirements and connectivity network are the requirements of preparedness of covid-19 in south asia. The management of health system, access to basic infrastructure and connectivity are experienced in the south asian countries. In the region, government health experience remained 0.89 percent of gross domestic product. Hospital beds 067, nurses and midwives 1.14, physicians 0.74, basic drinking water 89.81, basic sanitation service 50.65, open defecation 29.28, fixed broadband 1.28, mobile cellular subscription 74.57 represents average number of for 2010 to 2018. Maldives used beds as per 2009 data.

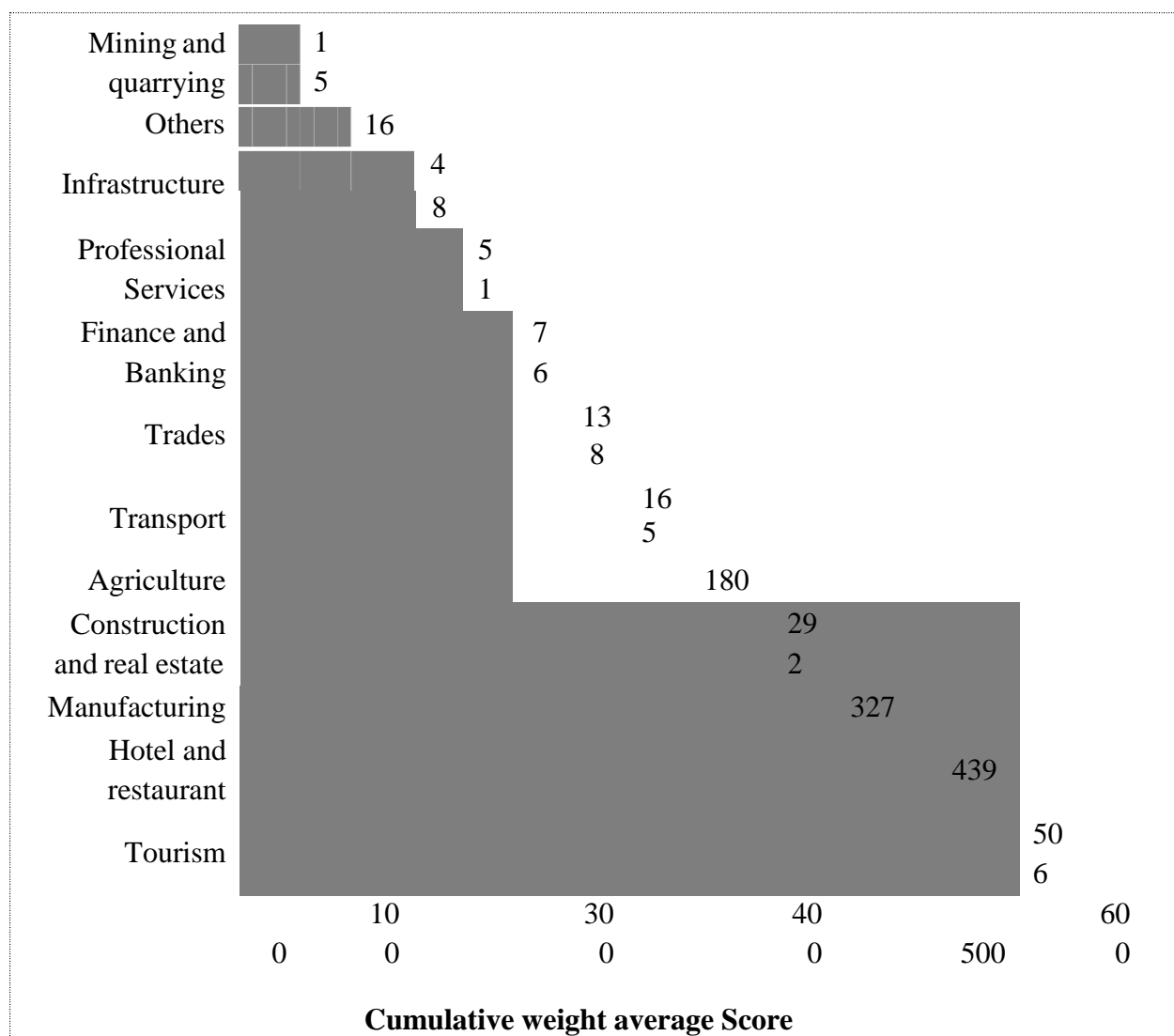
Table 6: Indicators of fiscal and Debt Sustainability in South Asia, 2019

Indicators of fiscal and Debt Sustainability							
	Fiscal Sustainability		Debt Sustainability				
Country	Tax Revenue (% of GDP) (2017)	Fiscal Balances (% of GDP) (2019)	Public Debt as % of GDP (2019)	External debt, % of GDP (2018)	Short term, % of external debt(2018)	Risk of debt distress	DSA Year
Afghanistan	9.3	-1	7.6	13.1	14	High	2020
Bangladesh	8.8	-5.2	34.6	18.1	17.3	Low	2019
Bhutan	12.5	0.6	108.6	101.4	0.2	Moderate	2018
India	11.2	-7.4	69	19.2	20		2019
Maldives	21.2	-5.6	70.1	43.8	11.3	High	2020
Nepal	20.7	-4.6	32.6	18.9	4.6	Low	2020
Pakistan	12.4	-8.8	76.7	28.9	9.1		2020
Sri Lanka	12.4	-6.8	83	59.5	15.5		2020

Source: UNESCAP, based on various DSA reports, IMF Fiscal Monitor (April 2020), World Development Indicators and Fiscal Space Dataset (April 2020).

Table 6: presents indicators of fiscal and debt sustainability in South Asia, 2019. Fiscal sustainability and debt sustainability are very critical in the south asian countries. Afghanistan has high risk of debt distress. Bangladesh has very low debt distress. There is moderate risk of debt in Bhutan. Maldives has high debt risk and Nepal has low risk of debt distress. Comparatively, all countries have high debt sustainability than fiscal sustainability. A fiscal balance is 0.6 of gross domestic product in 2019 as surplus fiscal balances. Rests of all countries have negative fiscal balances. Pakistan has high -8.8 percent of fiscal balance as a percentage of gross domestic products.

Figure 1: Most affected sectors due to COVID-19 in South Asia



Source:UNESCAP-SSWA online Survey, 2020

Figure 1: presents most affected sectors due to COVID-19 in South Asia. All sectors of the region were affected by covid. The maximum average score is 506 in tourism sector. And the minimum affected score is 15 in mining and quarrying. Similarly other sectors affected such a score with infrastructure score is 48, professional service score 51, finance and banking score 76, trades score 138, transport score 165, agriculture score 180, construction and real estate score 292, manufacturing score 327, hotel and restaurant score 439 remained second position.

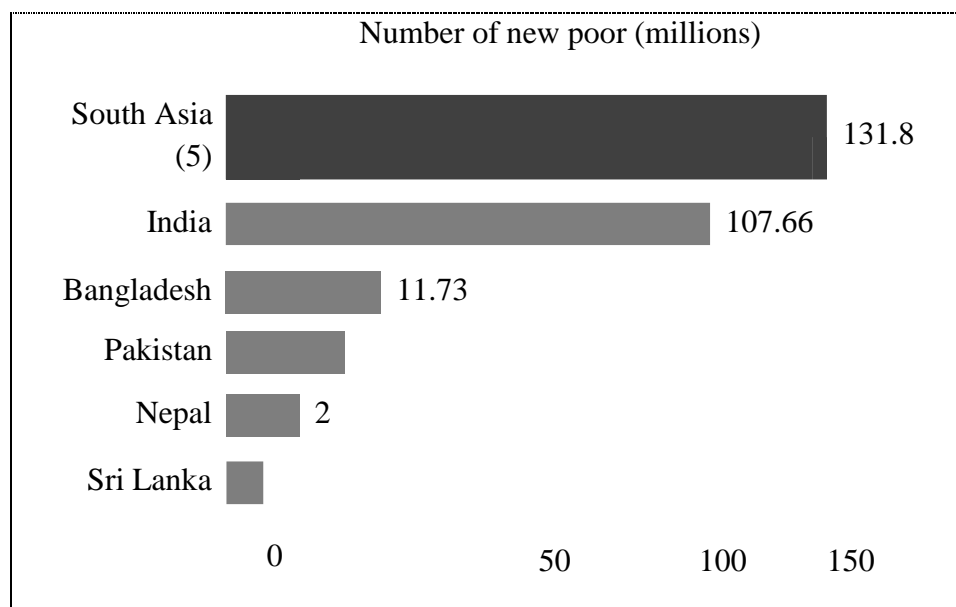
Table 8: MSME'S Contribution to Gross Domestic Product, Employment and Exports (inpercent)

Country	GDP	Employment	Exports
Afghanistan ^a	50	33	NA
Bangladesh ^a	22.5	40	11.3
India ^b	28.9	21	48.1
Nepal ^a	22	23	NA
Pakistan ^b	30	70	25
Sri Lanka ^b	52	35	20

Source: UNSCAP based on different national sources, 2020 Note: a=2014; b=2018

Table 8: presents MSME'S contribution to gross domestic product, employment and exports (in percent). Gross domestic product is growing gradually in all south asian countries which has created employment opportunities. Exports are in rising trends in the south asian countries but covid-19 has affected severely in the region.

Figure 2: Number of People that could be pushed into Extreme poverty due to COVID-19related measures.



Source:UNESCAP-SANEM South Asia, 2020

Figure 2 shows that the extreme poverty due to COVID-19. In south asia, five countries has new poor groups. The financial investment for their education health and job security is the requirements. In south asia, five countries has 131.8 percent poor number. South Asia is

facing the problem of poverty, unemployment, and inequality. Educated people are leaving the country to be further educated and employed. South Asia has dense youth population. They are unemployed. If they do hardship in their own locality, then they can build South Asia into a wonderful plate. Ultimately, this region has to be secured through cash surplus in bank and financial institution, tax revenue with government, total reserves of gold, short-term debt, tax base, and other innovative tax and revenues to escape from the poverty.

Conclusions and the way forward:

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has been tiger the global crisis that continuously force to pursuing and implementing the SDGs are more important now than ever before. Actually, there needs to be more solidarity globally in relation to political communication and commitment across all nations specially neighborhood countries to ensure SDCs UN agenda 2030. After Covid 19 pandemic, the region in pursuance with the hard hit Millennium Development Goals agenda and emerging challenges of development and innovation faced by the South Asian region, some important issues and policies for sustainable development in South Asia including poverty alleviation, youth employment, agriculture and food, health and education, social protection, energy, and environment. In this light, this paper has identified several strategic policies and priorities in order to address the challenges and hindrances and integrated the sustainable development goals achievement in south asia.

Covid-19 pandemic has given new ways for the development process. Most of the developing countries have much space for improvement with innovation in human resource, institution and infrastructure building, industry, entrepreneurship and trade sector for a sustainable development. South Asian countries need to focus in education, trainings, and skill development of labor in order to increase labor efficiency and productivity. In South Asia, it can be observed that there are large number of semi and low skilled people working in the industry with low production, and the availability of high skilled human resources is insufficient. It is necessary to increase the efficiency of labor to realize higher level of productivity. South Asia should be market driven at an integrated form. Hence, steady restructuring of economies has a big role in market's integration and expansion. Development of energy is another important way for resource sharing to promote sustainable growth. Vision of co-existence prepares greater benefits for all nations to boost largest market in the region. Also, South asia has a rapidly expanding middle class with substantial purchasing power. The SAARC nations have to capitalize on the growing market share of the western countries, especially in commodities like carpet, ready-made garment, tea, cotton, leather, marine products, processed foods, gems and jewelry, computer software, agri-products, and the like.

All south Asian countries should increase manufacturing capacity by allocating the available resources, building infrastructure, formulating sound industrial and trade policies and implementing them. Ownership should also be broadening in South Asia. After Covid-19 pandemic, investor's connectivity, business connectivity, customer connectivity, social

solidarity, and stable political connectivity should be enhanced. South Asia should give more attention to protectionism, promotion as well as industrial transformation to achieve 2030's agenda of sustainable development goals. Employment should be generated through economic growth, entrepreneurial movements, and sustainable industrialization. Similarly, there should be provision of essential service and support to all socio-economic infrastructural development by making policies of access to socio-economic infrastructure and basic services like water and sanitation, electricity, and transport infrastructure imperative. This becomes even more relevant in the light of the fact that improved sanitation, existence of road, and access to electricity have been found associated with better health and educational outcomes. It is equally important for south asia to make the availability of education and health to leverage the quality of life of people in south asia. This can be done by prioritizing human development through accepted health and educational dimensions, and vocational training, especially relevant for South Asia to harness its burgeoning youth.

As envisioned by UN, when provided with opportunities for human resource development and productive jobs, youths could make South Asia the home of the largest middle class in the world and a driver of global growth, as total consumption could reach nearly \$30 trillion by 2050. It has totally disturbed by Covid -19 pandemic. Supporting sustainable industrialization by consolidation of skill development will place South Asia in an advantageous plate to fill the youth skills vacuum. Also in order to hedge the skills gap and produce more number of medium and high skilled workers for its manufacturing and services sectors, South Asia needs to improve educational attainments and quality in educational system and further corroborate job-oriented vocational trainings. As per UN, South Asia's returns to education have been found to be high compared with those of other parts of the world, especially for tertiary education, which is at 18.4 percentage compared with 16.4 percentage for the global average. SAARC should also develop standard benchmark with respect to social protection and financial inclusion making reduction in inequalities and widespread poverty, and other lack of necessities. Moreover, After Covid -19 pandemic, SAARC should promote agricultural productivity and empower gender equality as a tool of sustainable development, and the like.

Thus, Covid-19 pandemic learn for the transformation of the South Asian economy, agendas like climate change adaptation, capacity building, technology use, inclusive and sustainable economic growth should get focus in master plan and policy. Government of all countries should manage public resources like cash surplus, tax revenue, total reserve of gold, short term debt, agricultural subsidies, aid for trade, and other incentives and taxes. All qualities of products and means should be harnessed. Development of finance, enhancing efficient work environment, and reduction of trade deficit is crucial to build the future in South Asia. Proper utilization of fund brings the better performance of Public Private Partnership approach and local administration. Capital market diversification, micro finance, bank landing, and long term bonds should also be expanded. South Asia should have collective rule of government to lead and succeed.

Good governance, rampant corruption, and transparency are the major concern to reduce wide spread poverty of South Asia. Nonetheless, countries have the high potentiality to fight against poverty, unemployment, and deprivation. In order to achieve the high rate of economic growth, it is important to upgrade infrastructure and roots of development for the welfare of the people and build effective, accountable and inclusive public institutions. Inclusive growth depends upon creating better opportunities for quality education and sustainable infrastructure. The industries' future depends upon mobilization of available resources, use of modern technology, rising productivity of labor, extension of market access, institutional development, and integrated trading system globally. The capacity of demographic dividend can enjoy the business with supernormal profit from small, medium, and large-scale industries by investing in several areas of entrepreneurship. They can be provided with education and training for youth. Intra-government negotiation is a must to create the business environment for the bright regional future. South Asia needs quantum of trade development and investment activities at a desired level. Partnership for shared growth should get importance in South Asia.

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