JAPAN AND SOUTH ASIA YOUTH FORUM 2003

PREFACE

At the invitation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, delegates from all South Asian countries visited Tokyo for participating in the conference of Japan and South Asia Youth Forum from 31st August to 2nd September in 2003. The general theme of this conference is "Strengthening Peace and Stability in the World" under the scopes for co-operation between Japan and South Asia.

This Forum has been initiated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan since 1983. The purposes of this annual forum are to promote the mutual understanding in the aspects of cultural, religious, economic, political, and international relations. This year, there were 39 participants from seven South Asian countries (India 11, Sri Lanka 5, Nepal 4, Pakistan 8, Bangladesh 7, Bhutan 2, Maldives 2) while there were 24 participants from Japan. The Youth Forum participants included students, journalists, public officers, researchers & research assistants, a volunteer, an engineer and academic professionals.

The delegates were divided into three groups aiming to discuss and generate proposals on three separate groups A, B and C on the sub themes of Politics, Diplomacy & Security, Economic & Development and Society & Culture, respectively. Their views, proposals and the action plans are as follows:

GROUP A
POLITICS, DIPLOMACY AND SECURITY

The members in this subgroup discussed issues of politics, diplomacy and security of South Asia with special focus on scope of cooperation between Japan and South Asia. The core issues discussed were the following:

> ➢ International peace

> ➢ Terrorism

> ➢ Resolution of disputes

> ➢ Steps to denuclearising South Asia

> ➢ Role of Japan

The delegates then resolved as follows

1. The participants agreed that, since the United Nations had not been functioning in its full capacity and authority, the United Nations needs to assert itself. The delegates proposed that the UN could have regional mechanisms to support regional organisations like the SAARC in its effort to increase cooperation and resolve disputes. It was felt that including Japan as a permanent member of the UN Security Council could enhance Japan's role in the United Nations.

2. The participants viewed that US unilateral actions in the name of tackling terrorism was unacceptable and the involvement of United States in South Asia on this matter had been suspicious and of a double standard. The members of the group also pointed to the strong criticism that such US action had evoked among the intellectuals and civil society.

   The delegates advocated an increased political (other than economic) role for Japan in South Asia.

3. The group unanimously agreed that the Kashmir issue was central to the threat of nuclearization of the region. It was agreed that there could be some sort of facilitation of talks between India and Pakistan. The participants thought that both sides should be encouraged to take advantage of the current situation for resumption of dialogue. It was also felt that the UN could facilitate regular discussions by both sides.

4. The delegates were of the opinion that nuclear weapons were not necessary for the promotion of peace and stability in the South Asian region. The participants

agreed that all countries should work towards the goal of comprehensive nuclear disarmament. Instead of investing in developing nuclear weapons South Asian countries need to invest on basic infrastructure and human development activities, aimed at uplifting the standard of living of all peoples.

The group also felt that since governmental efforts alone would not suffice, civil society advocacy on non-nuclear position in all South Asian countries should be ardently followed.

In this area the nuclear bomb victims of Japan should spread their message of peace more widely by increasing their international tours and speaking at many more international fora. This, the participants thought would enable the world to understand the catastrophic effects of use of nuclear weapons.

Another point raised was the need for a worldwide regulation of conventional small arms, as these aggravate and sustain conflict and thus result in loss of life over a longer period of time than the mass killing potential of nuclear weapons.

5. The members of the group discussed in depth the need, mode, and possible effect of role of Japan in the path towards lasting peace in the South Asian region. They advocated a more active Japanese role in international organisations like the United Nations for example, by calling for permanent membership in the UN Security Council. The participants appreciated the timely and generous assistance that Japan provided for economic and humanitarian contingencies. It was further suggested that Japan should enhance its political role in South Asia. The members of the group acknowledged the need for the creation of suitable conditions like the active exchange of ideas at various levels to enhance understanding of the issues and seek their resolution.

Group B
Economy and Development in South Asia

South Asia is home to one fifth of global population and also one of the largest concentrations of global poverty. In order to promote peace and stability at the global level, the efforts on strong cooperation at the regional level cannot be ignored. In South Asia, since poverty is the major obstacle for peace and stability, eradication of poverty is our primary concern. During the three-day discussion on economy and development in South Asia, we looked at the ways though which South Asia and Japan could meaningfully cooperate to reduce poverty.

We aim to achieve sustainable development of the South Asian region through poverty reduction. We aim to reach to the most vulnerable population such as children, women and minority in ensuring their basic human rights and better quality of life.

With the objectives described above, we categorized the issues of concerns for South Asia into following groups: Livelihood, Governance/ Administration, Economic and Human Development. Then within each category, we identified major problems related to poverty and what needs to be done in order to solve those problems. Many of the issues are interrelating to each other and as major crosscutting issues, strong emphasis is put on gender, culture, social inequality, human rights and people's participation.

1) Livelihood
Problems:

Due to the lack of access to resources (natural, material, human, capital) majority of the people in South Asian states are deprived of basic necessities.

- Education: low literacy rate, school attendance, high drop-out rate, lack of accessibility and availability of services and facilities, etc.
- Basic Health/ Medicare: lack of accessibility and availability of services and facilities
- Sanitation and supply of safe water: lack of accessibility and availability

What needs to be done:

- Strict implementation of compulsory primary education
- Standardization of education
- Motivation and incentive for parents to send their children to schools
- More active commitment and investment on the part of the government in education
- Greater participation of NGOs
- Quality/relevant education
- More active commitment of government and investment on health sector
- Health Education especially for women: child health, maternal health, reproductive health, sex education, family planning, etc.
- Infrastructure for better access to adequate sanitation and water
- Special attention for the poorest of the poor, the most vulnerable people: children, women, minority

2) Governance/ Administration
Problems:
- Corruption
- Lack of participation

What needs to be done:
- More accountability and transparency in public expenditure
- Participation of people especially women at different stages and various levels of decision making process
- Decentralization and strengthening of local governments
- Separation of judiciary from administration

3)Economic and Human Development
Problem Statement:
- Unemployment: lack of economic opportunities
- Overpopulation
- Rural-urban disparity
- Foreign debt
- Environmental degradation: pollution, lack of proper disposable system, lack of proper planning
- Harnessing energy

What needs to be done:
- Creating more labor-intensive job opportunities
- Peoples' representation and participation for increasing self-dependency
- Cutting government expenditure in un-productive sectors such as defense budget
- More participation of NGOs and their strong coordination with local communities in development
- Land reform: redistribution of land so that benefits from agriculture will reach to all including the poor
- Foreign Direct Investment: cheap labor
- Environment-friendly development: eco-tourism

Policy Recommendations

In order to achieve our goals to eradicate poverty and promote sustainable development in South Asia, strengthening the cooperation between the donor country, Japan, and the recipient countries is vital. Cooperation between these two actors of development requires sharing of common goals interactively and understanding on their own roles. In determining the roles of the donor and the recipient country, each actor exchanges its view on expectation and recommendation. Considering limitation of economy, capacity, available resources of these two actors, who are in charge of political decision-making, we focus on ODA as the major issue on the action plan. This is because ODA is the major key success in poverty reduction.

<u>Recommendations to South Asian government</u>

In order to maximize the effectiveness of ODA, Japanese government recommends that the recipient countries should decide what the most important issues to be solved. In other words, they need to prioritize the area of focus. It is their responsibility to support their reason why they chose that certain issue to be solved before others.   Then, they should submit concrete action plan to the Japanese government.

<u>Recommendation to Japanese government</u>

In order to promote cost-effectiveness of ODA, South Asian recipient countries recommend that Japanese government should clearly ensure where its aid goes and how it is spent. This is because some Japanese ODA projects had finished as failure in the past due to lack of adequate planning. Japanese government should consider possible negative impact on local people and resources in their development assistance. Therefore, the most importantly, ODA should reflect the voices of the locals and the poor.

Group C
Society and Culture

The aspect of society and culture was considered by the group as the most important in strengthening peace and stability in the world given the fact of political and economic acrimonies. It is the most promising field to initiate cooperation and in turn strengthen peace and stability in the world. Despite the time constraints, the group went through all the talking points in a comprehensive manner. Through the deliberations among the Japanese and South Asia members and finally through the valuable inputs from the Forum (during the question hour after the final presentation) evolved the following proposals.

Common Identity
There was unanimity over the fact of existence of common identity in South Asia based on the following attributes:
- Food habits
- Colour of skin
- Family values
- Communitarian living
- Colonial background
- Linguistic roots
- Dress
- Developing status

The ways of strengthening the social and cultural ties were addressed under subsequent points.

Information Technology and "Digital Divide"
Information Technology (IT) was defined as the technology anything to do with the flow of information like telecom, internet, media etc. The Indian entertainment industry, especially movies, is popular in other countries of the region (including Japan). This can further be strengthened by also making it as a two-way process. Exchange of emails and proliferation of the number of websites have immensely benefited in furthering the information flow and thus enhancing the cultural exchanges and mutual understanding. However, "digital divide", which is a reality, continues to pose a big problem in this process of enhancement; more than half of the population of the region is out of the purview of the IT. Accepting this reality the concerned governments must act fast in the bridging the divide so as to gain the full benefits of this means in enhancing the social and cultural ties not only within the region but also with Japan. India with its software and Japan with its hardware could help other countries of the region in this regard.

South Asian Traditions vs. Human Rights
The group decided not to get into the East-West debate of human rights. It was agreed that Universal Declaration of Human Rights could be taken as a standard. With this conceptual clarity it was observed that there are both incompatibilities and compatibilities as far human rights and South Asian traditions are concerned. The

condition of women, poverty and social evils like caste discriminations are starkly incompatible with the human rights standards. This does not mean that South Asia is isolated from the very idea of human rights. Its religion and other cultural traits except few ills have immense values that find oneness with the current universality of human rights.

"Global" Values vs. Traditional Values and Culture

The concept of "global" values though synonymously misunderstood as "western" values, the group went on to correct this anomaly by perceiving the "global" values as those "positive values that are evolved from the positive inputs of all the cultures (both orient and western) and that are not incompatible with the existing cultures of the world." The definition is itself self-explanatory of the point taken for the discussion.

Network among Overseas Inhabitants

The group recognized that the contribution of the overseas inhabitants of South Asia for the future of the region is vital though the very idea is still emerging. In this regard, the group identified the following contributions:

1. The valuable experiences that they gain overseas in various fields;
2. Lobbying with the world bodies and international NGOs to pay more attention to the development of the region;
3. Promotion of tourism by clearing misconceptions and by creating positive image;
4. Funding both in terms of FDI and development projects; and
5. The diasporic academia of the region can play a vital role through their writing and lectures.

A 'SAARC Overseas Chapter' can be instituted to realize the above-mentioned ideals. Simultaneously, a 'South Asian Caucus' could also be formed especially for the lobbying purposes.

Medium of Instruction

Language of education was identified as a common problem in both the South Asian countries and Japan. On this issue, the group decided to take a middle path—to advocate education in both the languages. At the same time, keeping the present world realities, it was understood that English could be used for teaching all the technical subjects like science, mathematics, civics etc. and mother tongue could be retained as a compulsory language subject for all standards. Apart from this bilingual approach, in the countries where the particular national language is different from the mother tongue a three-language formula could be adopted.

Civil Society Network

Civil society in the modern sense is an emerging phenomenon in South Asia, if not in Japan. Given the fact of lack of good governance in South Asia, the role of civil society was recognized a vital. However, it is disorganized in the region. So as to enhance network of civil society organizations, the group proposed multi-pronged strategy in which the national governments, global governmental institutions and the civil society (both local and global) itself have roles to play. The details of their roles are given in the appendix chart.

Infiltration of Consumer Society

The impact of consumer society on the traditional value and culture of Japan and South Asia was acknowledged. As a result of the ongoing consumerism there are changes in the entertainment, dress, food, communication, and sports. The absorption is due to cheaper availability and fashion. Consumerism has indeed led to overall modernization and tremendous change in education. However, there is a rise of materialism and individualism that are not compatible with the South Asian as well as Japanese tradition and culture.