



**AeA South Asia
Regional Strategy Paper
(Draft)**



Section 1

Introduction

Aide et Action (AeA) is an international development organization, established in 1981 with its head office in Paris, which was moved to Geneva as part of the internationalization process. The organization is working in more than 26 countries worldwide including India through independent country programs (International and SA Map). India program was the first program initiated by AeA in 1981 as a not-for-profit private limited company. The South Asia region of AeA was created in 2005 and India program became part of this region along with the initiation of work in Sri Lanka. In the year 2008, preparatory steps to launch its intervention in Nepal were initiated. AeA works through its offices located at Chennai, Bhopal, Hyderabad, Delhi, Patna, Jaipur and Guwahati in India, Colombo in Sri Lanka and Katmandu in Nepal with Chennai being its headquarter for South Asia.

In the current strategic phase, AeA will further expand its coverage to work in Bangladesh and Bhutan based on the outcomes of the III ETG Review. The context analysis that was done as part of ETG III suggests that while Bhutan and Sri Lanka provide greater learning opportunities for other countries of the region, Bangladesh, India and Nepal add up to the critical number of countries to take up issues at the SAARC level. These countries are also faced with challenges of access and quality of education for children. At the same time, the fragile and volatile political situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan does not provide supportive environment to initiate programs. The high human development indicators in the Maldives do not warrant AeA's immediate intervention.

ETG III Review and process of preparation of Regional Strategy Paper

Etats Generaux (ETG) – the first global policy of the organization was developed in the year 1998 with the participation of all country programs of AeA. It was reviewed in the year 2003 and the ETG II was developed in 2004. The ETG II facilitated the need for the internationalization of the organization and also paved way for the creation of AeA South Asia region. Since India was the only country program of AeA South Asia at the initial stages, Country Strategy Paper (CSP) was developed for India for the period of 3 years (2006-08). The ETG III – 2008 emphasized the need to expand to other countries of South Asia. ETG III review had wide ranging consultations with various stakeholders including communities, partner NGOs, INGOs, representatives from government agencies, academicians and other likeminded organizations and individuals. This review focused on the context analysis of South Asia, analysis of initiatives by the state and other stakeholders, review and reflection of AeA's work based on the previous strategic phase, analysis of external environment, opportunities and challenges. This has formed the basis for the preparation of Regional Strategy Paper (RSP) for South Asia.

A smaller team of AeA SA prepared the draft document. It was then shared with the larger team of AeA South Asia and AeA International for their comments and value addition. Subsequently the revised draft was shared with partner NGOs during the partners meet held at Bhopal and other external stakeholders for their inputs and feedback. This RSP details out strategic directions for the organization in the region for the period of 4 years from 2009 to 2012 which coincides with the ETG – the global strategy formulation process.

Structure of the RSP

The RSP document has the following sections:

Section 1 gives an introduction, extent and rationale for geographical expansion and ETG review and process of preparation of RSP.

Section 2 provides the context analysis of South Asia.

Section 3 reviews AeA's work in South Asia



Section 4 highlights the changes over previous strategies and focus of the current strategic phase

Section 5 focuses on AeA's approaches

Section 6 presents about the priorities within the thematic focus of AeA

Section 7 covers programmatic goals and objectives

Section 8 highlights the organization objectives

2. South Asia Context Analysis

South Asia comprising eight countries i.e. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka is home to about one fourth of the world's population. However, it is the poorest region economically in the world, with an average per capita income of about US\$350. Over the last decade, South Asia has however witnessed fast changing political and economic scenario across all its countries.

The region has been able to achieve high macroeconomic growth with the regional average GDP growth accelerating from 4.2% in 2000 to over 8 % in 2006 and 2007. However, there is a serious disjuncture across South Asia between the growth rates on the one side, and the desolate performance on all indicators of human development, as represented by the low human development indices. This is due to a host of factors, ranging from political instability, economic inequality, distressed migration, to social exclusion of disadvantaged sections. Human development indices have improved only marginally and the region lags on most of the Millennium Development Goals. A few countries are on track and the governments have recognized the need and urgency for poverty alleviation and the critical role of education in social, economic, and political development. As a result, there has been increase in government's fund allocation to social sectors including education, health, employment generation etc.

In India, the government has introduced programmes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) aimed at Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE), National Rural Employment Guarantee Act providing 100 days of employment to all adults and other such programmes for the poor. However, a glimpse at the enrollment and retention figures shows that additional efforts are required for achieving the goal of UEE and achieving gender parity in education. For example, there are 94 girls for every 100 boys, according to a report brought out by the Human Resources Development Ministry for the period 2005-06. However, this index falls to 0.80 by higher secondary (class IX- XII), showing that the dropout rate is higher among girls.

One unique feature of these programs is that the government has adopted a different approach in the implementation of the schemes and has called for increase participation of the civil society organization and the community. This new approach to implementation of the programs has widened the scope of work for the civil society and community based organizations. Aide et Action has also been working in partnership with the government in some parts of India and has been directing its efforts towards achieving the goal of UEE.

Over the past few years, South Asia region has seen increased turbulences on political front, with instances of conflict and civil strife. For example, the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan or Sri Lanka, frequent violent agitation, as in Bangladesh, naxalism and other such violent strife as in parts of India and Nepal. The political situation in countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan and Nepal has been quite unstable, with Nepal returning to democracy very recently. In addition, the south Asian countries have faced frequent natural disasters – drought, tsunami floods, earthquakes and landslides. One other most important development in the south Asian nations has been the establishment and functioning of National Disaster Management Authorities as the region is quite prone to disasters (both natural and man made) and has witnessed the worst catastrophes in the past few years. The political instability and the disasters further aggravate the vulnerability of the poor people, infringing them of their basic rights and entitlements.



Right to information is considered a fundamental civil and political right in many international human rights instruments (e.g Art 19 UDHR, Art 19 ICCPR). In India, Right to Information (RTI) Act came into force in 2005 enabling its citizens to seek and receive information from any government department and making it mandatory for the government to respond to requests expeditiously. The RTI Act permits all citizens of India to inspect works, documents, records, take notes, extracts or certified copies of documents or records ,take certified samples of material, obtain information in form of printouts, diskettes, floppies, tapes, video cassettes or in any other electronic mode or through printouts. This Act is a significant step towards fulfillment of basic human rights of marginalized people and is widely used for advocacy by poor people and Civil Society Organizations.

The era of globalization and new market economy has resulted in an increased presence of multinationals and other corporate houses in the entire South Asian region. Though the core of all corporate endeavors remains profit, there is an increasing resolve to contribute to social, environmental and other causes and support the communities for social empowerment. Internationally, serious attempts have been made to promote corporate citizenship on the basis of a voluntarily accepted set of principles and standards.

With the increased presence of corporate in the social sector, the governments of South Asian countries have been working in the social sector in partnership with private companies. Though the model has worked well in some instances, at times, it can be exploitative and can increase the inequality and discrimination. At this juncture, an important issue for the intervention for NGOs like AeA is that of safeguarding the interest of community in the light of increasing public private partnership model of development.

3. AeA's Work in South Asia - A Review

3.1. AeA South Asia – Coverage details

<p>Number of countries covered : 3 Number of partnership projects : 20 Number of directly implemented projects : 14 Number of villages covered : 1884 Number of children covered : 112775 Number of youth : 41470 Number of CBO's (SHGs & VECs) : 3356 Number of schools covered : 1267 Number of sponsored children : 6000</p>
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AeA South Asia currently intervenes in India, Sri Lanka and Nepal through its partnership and directly implemented projects and focusing on various themes around Education. AeA is collaborating with national, international agencies and experts to meet the development needs of the community.

3.2. AeA – South Asia: Time line

The interventions of AeA in South Asia since its inception in 1981 can be divided into four major phases.

1981 to 1995	1996 to 1999	2000 to 2004	2005 to 2008
AeA had operated in a donor mode with support to big local NGOs for the implementation of education projects. This had resulted in limited visibility and restricted presence of AeA, lack of involvement of AeA staff at the field level and lesser involvement of communities in various stages of project cycle.	The introduction of the concept of sustainability among the NGO partners of AeA and three years planning cycle for the projects developed through Planning and Monitoring Documents.	ETG resolutions were contextualized to India thus proclaiming the Charter of AeA in India. The charter emphasized community ownership of educational projects and partnership development. AeA India had initiated three DIPs in addition to its action research project titled 'Liberate School' (LS) in India.	Tremendous growth of AeA in the region. As a result of ETG 2004, South Asia Region created which led to the promotion of interventions in Sri Lanka and developments such as expansion of programs and coverage, new thematic approaches, new regional offices, increase in human resources, fundraising, image building, promotion of innovative projects and building new partnerships.

3.3. Implementation of Country Strategy Paper - 2006-2008 and Thematic Areas of Intervention

For many years, major thematic area of intervention for AeA India was elementary education with a focus on issues such as accessibility, enrollment, retention, quality and community participation. The educational interventions had also promoted extra-curricular activities, peace and value education. A few projects also had small components of income generation activities, women's Self Help Groups and other community development activities but these were incidental and not part of a well planned strategy on the part of the organization. In a few projects issues of children with disabilities were addressed through institution-based specialized services.

In 2005, with the preparation of Country Strategy Paper (CSP) for India program for the period of 2006 – 2008 based on II ETG, the thematic areas of intervention were crystallized and more systematic approach to various issues revolving around education were adopted. The following major thematic areas of intervention were the focus of this CSP:

- Quality of Education
- Livelihood Education
- Inclusive Education
- Women's Empowerment and Education
- Disaster Response, Mitigation and Preparedness, and
- HIV/AIDS and Health



The work was spread across 20 States and Union Territories of India and 3 districts of Sri Lanka focusing on target communities such as Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, minorities and other backward communities in rural, urban and tribal areas in India and Disaster and conflict affected communities in Sri Lanka.

3.3.1. Thematic interventions:

Access and Quality of Education (AQE)

The theme of access and quality education was one of the main focuses of AeA in the region for a long time but the significant change in the approach of AeA from welfare to preparing the communities for accessing the basic educational services from the state took place during this period. AeA is also worked on the unaddressed issues by the government.

AeA's interventions included activities such as formation of village education and development committees, capacity building of communities towards self management of education, preparation of village education reports, school development plans and interface with the government agencies to leverage resources. In addition, special projects such as B2B (Back to Basics), Prajayathna (Reform in elementary education with people's participation) and Liberate school were also implemented.

A total number of 13 partnership and 3 directly implemented projects worked on AQE and covering 103,449 children.

All these interventions contributed for the increase in the enrollment and retention of children in schools, improvement in the level of competency of children, participation of communities on the issues of governance and promoted innovations.

Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities (IE)

Mainstreaming the theme of IE in existing projects and the promotion of two exclusive projects were the major initiatives during this period. Through these initiatives, 5500 CWDs and PWDs were supported on aspects such as obtaining disability certificates, availing aids and appliances, education and medical services from the government and creating barrier free environment in schools. In addition to this, formation of 210 self help groups for the PWDs, sensitization of teachers, parents and communities on various issues of disability.

Livelihood Education

Promotion of Livelihood Education was the major thrust of this period through the iLEAD, a market oriented employability training program for youth in the age group of 18-25 years. Through this program 41470 (as on December, 2008) youth trained in India and Sri Lanka. iLEAD provided an opportunity to promote a strong volunteers network in India in few locations through it's alumni forums. As a result of its impact and the strong reputation built in such a short duration, iLEAD project has had an impact on the Government and related agencies to re-look at the vocational education system. AeA conceived a four year project focusing on the re-orientation of vocational education system in the state of Andhra Pradesh in India.

In addition to iLEAD program, an entrepreneurship development program SIYB (Start and Improve your Business) was promoted in collaboration with International Labour Organisation to impart training for Tsunami affected in Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu and Kollam district of Kerala. The training focused on generating and identifying feasible business ideas, starting own business ventures and extending support to existing entrepreneurs to improve their business. This training program has benefited 1515 persons to become entrepreneurs.



Women empowerment and Education

A total number of 1034 Women's Self Help Groups (WSHGs) promoted with a membership of 12,668 women. The actions include promotion of credit and thrift, building the capacity of members on group concepts, leadership skills, livelihoods and health, developing micro enterprises and linking them with financial institutions. These resulted in the increase in income levels and enhanced their participation in education and development processes.

[\(Case study from Vishy\)](#)

Disaster Response, Mitigation and Preparedness

With the aim of ensuring equitable and sustainable rehabilitation of Tsunami victims and also promoting participatory disaster proofing in Tsunami affected villages in 11 locations of India and Sri Lanka. These projects include interventions among children, youth, women and farmers focusing on issues such as education, livelihoods, sustainable agriculture, community organization, capacity building and participatory disaster proofing which focusing on the ecological restoration, promoting sustainable agriculture practices, making schools as eco centers and capacity building of communities on disaster preparedness and mitigation. AeA's Tsunami projects have impacted the lives of 332364 persons from 71667 families in 281 villages across India and Sri Lanka.

HIV/AIDS and Health

Realising the gravity of the HIV & AIDS epidemic in rural India, AeA entered into a collaboration with UNDP supported NACO (National Aids Control Organisation) programme called Link Workers Scheme. This a new initiative on HIV & AIDS spread across 9 districts of Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh in India and provides an array of preventive BCC services. It has generated a cadre of 1000 trained local personnel as Link Workers and Volunteers to work with High Risk Groups (HRG's) and vulnerable young people especially women. Through this work AeA is:

- Reaching out to HRG's and vulnerable young people (men and women) in rural areas with information, Knowledge and Skills on STI/HIV prevention and risk reduction.
- Promoting increased and consistent use of condoms with casual and regular partners.
- Generating awareness and enhance utilization of prevention, care and support programmes and services (especially STI, ICTC, PPTCT, ART and DOTS).

Early Child Care and Education (ECCE)

A total number of 69 ECCE centers provided day care facilities and pre primary education to 1213 children. It inculcated the habit of school going among children below 5 years and also ensured their enrollment in schools.

Education for Global citizenship and sustainable development

With the aim of ensuring equitable and sustainable learning opportunities for children of slums in Chennai, "ARUMBU" was initiated in the year 2005 in collaboration with the city police. This project covered 10000 children from 200 slums of Chennai. The interventions helped in continuation of and better performance in formal education. Additional inputs were provided on peace, value, health, environment and development issues. ARUMBU has also impacted the communities and the police to change their attitude towards slum children.

Migration

A project exclusively focusing on the theme of inter-state migration is implemented in Tamil Nadu for the children of Telugu migrant workers and which provided basic education for 625 children through Alternative Innovative Education centres and Residential bridge course. Curriculum developed by SSA, Andhra Pradesh has been used and efforts have also been taken to mainstream the children in schools of their place of origin.



3.3.5. EduAction

EduAction was conceived as a resource center which was then visualized as an approach in the field of education to strengthen the areas of capacity building, research and advocacy. EduAction brings together experience and expertise of AeA in education and strengthens not only the partners but also other stakeholders in the field of education such as NGOs, INGOs and government in capacity building of field functionaries and professionals, conducting high quality research and to address issues of education through evidence based advocacy.

EduAction has done Research and documentation on the following: ECCE, B2B and LS, Child labor, NGO capacities, people's in primary education, alternative livelihood vocation and livelihood. EduAction's advocacy initiatives resulted in impacting impacted the policy of the government of Rajasthan on the formation of SDMCs (School Development and Monitoring Committees) to ensure the participation of communities in education.

3.3.6. Image building and visibility

AeA's image building and visibility activities such as promotion of website, coverage of AeA's work in press and media, preparation of Annual report for external audience, fundraising events, thematic workshops and promotional / communication materials resulted in new collaborations, networking, fund raising and advocacy.

3.3.7. Analysis of Internal Environment: Strengths and Weaknesses of the Organization

Through its interventions over the past 28 years in South Asia, AeA has developed strengths which it intends to build upon in the coming years. It also intends to overcome the areas needed to be improved to make its work more effective and efficient in future.

Strengths acquired: AeA SA team has acquired skills on implementing large scale projects, qualitative and quantitative research, training, proposal development, direct implementation, liasioning, networking and institutional fund raising.

Areas for improvement: AeA SA team needs to upgrade its skills in the areas such as documentation and review, publications, event management, website management and Internal Audit.

This analysis of strengths and weaknesses identified by the team gives a very good base to devise systems, procedures and policies within the organization to address the gaps and capitalize upon the strengths in the future.

4. Changes over previous strategies and focus of the current strategic phase

The last strategic phase helped to re-look at some of the key strategies which led to certain shifts in organization's thinking and approach. Originally iLEAD and EduAction were promoted as institutes which were envisioned to become self sustaining independent units but now they will be promoted as ideas and approaches of AeA in strengthening the thematic interventions of the organization. EduAction now will focus primarily on its original mandate of capacity building, research and advocacy in the field of education rather than focusing mainly on fund raising.

During the last strategic phase, more emphasis was on country specific interventions rather than a focus on the South Asia regional level. From now on emphasis will be laid upon making South Asia region as the unit of operation.

This phase will develop relevant structures, systems and procedures to support organizational values and principles. There will be greater thrust on sharing and collaborative work with other regions of AeA with the expected outcome of strengthening the process of internationalization and promoting cross learning within the organization. While the outcome of the third ETG has given impetus to the



process of expansion within the region, the focus will still remain on the consolidation and enhancing the quality of existing interventions.

The focus of this strategic phase will be the following:

Conflict and related temporary to longer term relocation

One of the efforts of Aide et Action for future course of action can be the initiation of interventions specific to conflict prone areas and children in difficult situations including those affected by distressed migration, trafficked children etc.

Influencing corporate policies in its investment in social sector

In South Asia region, corporate are emerging as important stakeholders in the process of development. Civil society organizations like AeA would enter into partnerships to play a crucial role in influencing their policies for appropriate investment and increased share of their profits to social sector.

Critical analysis of impacts made by the state led investments in social sector in general and education in particular

One of the critiques has been the level of investment in the social sector by the governments have not been adequate to achieve the target of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Civil society organizations can critically analyze the government's budgetary expenses in the social sector and can use this as a tool for pushing the state towards more pro poor policies and investments.

Public Private Partnership

Though the Public Private partnership has worked well in some instances, at times, it can be exploitative and can increase the inequality and discrimination. At this juncture, an important issue for the intervention for NGOs like AeA is that of safeguarding the interest of community in the light of increasing public private partnership model of development

Strengthening inter-linkages between different themes for effective program outcomes

The ETG review was a process of reflection which revealed the necessity to create inter-linkages between different themes in order to achieve a more effective level of programming and enhance impact on communities.

Development of knowledge management systems within the organization

The development of knowledge management systems within the organization and creation of new platforms and mechanisms for cross leaning among regions will not only help in better understanding of the development issues in international perspective but also provides the opportunity to identify contemporary issues that are significantly impacting education of poor people globally and ways to take them up at the international level.

Strategies for policy influencing will be strengthened at the regional level:

The ability of AeA South Asia to bring in expert technical support within India and from outside needs to be highlighted and its thrust towards active engagement at policy level through evidence based advocacy would put AeA South Asia at a higher plane in the region, as one of the very few specialist organisations working in the area of education. AeA India website would be used as strategic tool to enhance visibility.



Operational Priorities

a. Organisation's identity and brand building

AeA South Asia's presence and visibility in the region as a major player addressing issues of education would be enhanced both at micro level as well as at policy level. The following measures would be taken up to enhance visibility of the organisation:

- Periodic publications
- Theme based seminars and workshops
- Organising events commemorating 30 years of AeA's work
- Periodic events for resource mobilisation
- AeA India Fellowship Programme

b. Local Fund Raising through major donors

One of the major reasons for regionalisation is to enhance the scope of local resource mobilisation and reducing the dependence on sponsorship base. AeA South Asia would widen its resource net with diverse sources and multiple donors. Resource mobilisation would be done at different levels. At the community level, community contributions, convergence with other government schemes and donations from local businesses would form integral part of resource base in all future interventions of AeA India. This would enhance ownership and responsibility of the communities over the development processes and enables sustainable outcomes. The resource mobilization unit of AeA South Asia will work closely with partner organizations to develop proposals and seek support from the government and other donors to meet those community needs which are not under the purview of AeA's priority. All the offices of AeA will develop resource mobilization plans that would cater to the needs of existing projects, new partners and communities.

5. AeA's approach

The approach used by AeA in South Asia have been developed considering the strategic advantages of the Region, local country context and situation of Education Sector in different countries of South Asia.

5. 1. South Asia Region as the unit of operation

South Asia has the largest concentration of population with 22.8% of the world's population residing in this region. The increasing significance of its political platform SAARC (South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation) and its potential to influence the social development processes in the region make it more important for organisations like Aide et Action to use South Asia as its operational unit.

During the past decade a number of institutions have been set up to serve SAARC and they have been attached to different national institutions. These, in general, have succeeded in fostering contact between experts facilitating exchange of information, sharing of experiences and compilation of data. These exercises may appear modest in their impact on the process of cooperation but they have contributed towards the development of an agenda of cooperation on some of the most pressing socio-economic concerns relating to poverty, environment, technology, etc. in the SAARC region. Such official level consultations need to graduate into operational programmes of cooperation, which is where there is a need to have a push from the civil society organisations and INGOs.



Among the countries of South Asia, there are lot many learning opportunities available for each other. For example, other countries of South Asia can learn from Sri Lanka and Bhutan- about their public action on Education in the past that resulted in very high levels of literacy rates in Sri Lanka; and a more holistic development thinking of the *Gross National Happiness*- development with good governance, preservation of culture and sustainable use of environment, in Bhutan.

AeA will have its presence in significant number of countries of South Asia to develop its comprehensive understanding of the region and to influence the SAARC level processes related with Education and Development.

5.2. Promoting community-led solutions using participatory research and studies

AeA will continuously explore new avenues in quality education by identifying solutions with participation of people. The participatory research and studies would engender greater inclusion, ensure full education for girl's and empower women and excluded groups of people.

Needs and experience based demands and expectations form the very basis of any participatory research and lead to a discussion and analysis by the communities to identify the solutions of their own problems. These solutions will be result of an informed analysis by the community members, with AeA providing knowledge and information that is external to the community. Hence, these solutions will be contextual, practical and best in the given situations.

AeA would promote development of such community led solutions to inform its own programming considerations in the future and to help improve educational programmes of the government and other stakeholders in favour of children of poor and excluded communities.

5.3. Evidence based advocacy for change

Striving to influence policy and its outcome is a process of ongoing interaction between various actors, as well as the internal and external forces that affect their beliefs and actions. AeA believes that evidence is the cornerstone of the scientific reasoning as well as the legal system.

AeA in South Asia would provide inputs for policy influencing through evidence based advocacy and constructive critical engagement with the governments and policy makers.

AeA refers to a result or output of a research process as evidence. It will focus on applied or action research. Individuals and organisations seeking to transform society and to sustain gains over time use evidence to justify the course they are taking. The social transformation intended by evidence-based change advocacy is one which ensures the rights of excluded groups of people. The work with the government by involving in collaborative research, project evaluations and studies and programme monitoring events provide opportunities to gather, analyze and use evidence for policy influencing and advocacy purpose. Idea is to effectively use evidence to influence policy for the benefit of poor people. There is a growing acknowledgement to the power of evidence in influencing policies.

In the evidence based advocacy role of the poor or affected person is central and her/ his views and experiences form the very basis of evidence. The lessons learnt from such action research will also help us in making programmatic decisions about our own projects. This will also lead to



identification of best practices that can be promoted among all stakeholders to replicate and expand in larger areas.

AeA South Asia's strategic work or thematic priorities will define the areas of action research for the use of evidence based influencing purposes.

To collect effective and substantial evidences and for its future use for policy influencing, we will be working in collaboration with and support of the local partner organisations, other Civil society organisations, NGOs and INGOs.

5.4. Developing collaborative work and partnerships with other organisations to synergise the efforts

A collaborative approach can synergise efforts to realign different interests and help secure space for strengthened common perspective with respect to Education policies and initiatives. Collaborations would also enable the effective leveraging of opportunities for advocacy and action.

The relevance of these collaborations, wherever the opportunities are available, can be extended to taking up the issues of international relevance. These networks can also be used as a ready platform to integrate education related work with their respective development efforts in the same areas of action.

Defining the nature of collaboration is very important in the success and effectiveness of a collaboration. AeA South Asia sees it in the form of joint studies and research work, collective advocacy campaign and work in partnership with other NGOs, INGOs and Academic/ Research Institutions that would also promote solidarity for the cause among the partnering stakeholders in the collaboration.

5.5. Perspective building to develop leadership and movement in the area of Education

Education sector being one of the low priority issues in South Asia, there is a need to develop critical mass of people at grassroots to policy formulation levels to initiate substantive discussion and action. Engagement with wider stakeholders including the Governments, Donors, Private sector and Academics to have common understanding on the issues of education is important to pursue the vision and mission of Aide et Action. The shared understanding would also result into greater solidarity and support from different stakeholders. Developing identity of AeA as an organisation working for excellence in Education would be contingent to the solidarity of stakeholders from varied sections of the society.

The Stakeholders' Network will be developed in South Asia with it's members contributing to the varying AeA needs of acquiring external experiences and expertise for its advantage and growth as an expert organisation in the area of Education and learning.

The Thematic Workshops and Fellowship Programmes will be some of the ways by which perspective building for leadership in Education will be achieved. The Stakeholders' Network with its members from different countries of South Asia would add value to AeA's thinking and vision.



5.6. Local fundraising to develop a solidarity base of people committed to the cause of Education and who believe that Education is the lever for change.

AeA South Asia will work to fundraise locally with the aim to bring together a diverse array of people and organisations (particularly corporate companies) to share ideas on the issues of Education, to forge new connections, and to build a widespread movement to promote the vision of Aide et Action.

Local fundraising in the solidarity framework is important for the social and economic development that puts excluded people and their priorities before private profits and power. And, it talks about education and healthy environment for all those who work for and contribute to such wealth creation.

The relevant communication material will play a key role in attaining plurality and diversity to our support base and sustainability to our local fundraising efforts. Hence, non-negotiable and appropriate level of attention will be paid to this aspect of local fundraising work.

In South Asia, India's economic growth and its fast growing middle-class offer best opportunities to start such work and during this strategic phase, local fundraising work would primarily be concentrated in India only.

5.7. Promoting use of ICT for Education and Development – quantum leap for quality learning among poor children

The primary purpose of education in the developing countries of South Asia is to develop and enhance the potential of our human resources and progressively transform it into a knowledge society. Our educational system should, therefore, realign itself at the earliest to meet the needs of these challenges and gear itself to participate in this process of social transformation. Information Communication Technology (ICT) for Education will play a vital role in building the confidence and capacity of the local community to engage and participate in local and higher level governance and change process.

Use of ICT will build the confidence of poor and excluded children and apart from simplifying the learning it would also provide the necessary big push to bring them at par with their privileged counterpart and push them out of the vicious trap of poverty. The minor interventions to improve the educational services for such children have historically been proved incapable of saving them and their families from falling back into the poverty trap. AeA believes that the first step to bring these children and their families out of this cycle of poverty and ignorance should be to arm them with information and education, not just through the traditional means of teacher-school building mode but also through the use of computers, e-learning and other modern technologies.

Aide et Action will promote ICT for Education in all its projects and initiate experiments to simplify and popularize its use among children of poor families excluded from the school or within schools. The specific focus will be on educational content, exposure and training of ICT to children, teachers' training and capacity building, and establishment of learning based communication between distant communities.

6. Priorities with in themes

6.1. Quality Education

South Asian Countries have made significant progress in expanding the education net to cover large number of children through the implementation of various programmes and schemes. Efforts of the governments have been supported by civil society organizations by bringing in different approaches and initiatives in the education sector.

While the political and socio-economic context of these countries is different, issues related to education largely remain the same. Common issues relating to the quality of education among all the countries are lack of proper infrastructure, quality of teachers, absenteeism of teachers, access where remote areas are concerned (In Nepal, North Eastern part of India, Plantation and rural areas of SriLanka), lack of child-friendly teaching methodologies, prevalence of corporal punishment and issues related to the enrolment and retention of girl children beyond the primary levels of schooling.

In general, the quality of education has been defined to mean the quality of curriculum, the standard of teaching learning material, infrastructure availability, effective management of school resources, availability of trained and motivated teachers, child friendly classrooms and heightened community participation and ownership where children are seen as active learners and subsequently active citizens.

For Aide et Action South Asia, quality education is that which develops the critical thinking and inquisitiveness of a child, where teachers are change agents, where learning is seen as a process that takes place even outside the four walls of the school, and where the process of learning is not a burden but an enjoyable experience that develops the character and shapes the personality of the child.

Following will be the major focus of AeA during this strategic phase:

- In-school processes such as enhancing capacities of teachers, improving the learning environment in the schools, simplification of the learning process through programmes like B2B and AFC.
- Promoting learning beyond the confines of a school like for instance through the Liberate School project where children learn from their own environment, their communities and tap local knowledge.
- Strengthening efforts to ensure 100% enrolment and retention of girl children in all project areas of AeA
- Promoting research in investments in education sector and advocacy based on the research

6.2. Inclusive Education

South Asia, with the exception of Sri Lanka, has been rated as the most illiterate region of the world as 400 million persons live in the dark of illiteracy. The average public expenditure on education still remains 3.4% of GNP. Only two-third of the total number of school-age children are enrolled in schools, of these 40% drop before reaching grade 6. About 540 million people, or 45% of the population, live below poverty line with daily income of less than one US dollar. The child labor force in the region is about 134 million. UNESCO estimates that nearly 24 million girls of primary-school age are not receiving education in South Asia

Schools play a fundamental role in defining and supporting children's life chances. Apart from the provision of education, schools play a vital role in transmitting society's values and offer a place for interaction and engagement for children and their communities Inclusive education is about building a learning community in which all students (including those from disadvantaged groups) can learn successfully.



At the core of inclusive education is the human right to education, pronounced in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1949. Equally important is the right of children not to be discriminated against, stated in Article 2 of the Convention on the Right of the Child (UN, 1989). A logical consequence of this right is that all children have the right to receive the kind of education that does not discriminate on grounds of disability, ethnicity, religion, language, gender, capabilities, and so on.

In this region majority of children who are excluded in mainstream education are those with disabilities, girl children and street children.

The countries of South Asia Region have developed National policies and Acts and there is a strong agreement on some vital points among all policies such as education, health, employment, accessibility and transportation. Regarding the issue of education of persons with disability there is a growing consensus that the persons with special needs should be included in regular education system with a flexible curriculum to facilitate the needs of children with disability.

Aide et Action South Asia region has gained considerable experience in implementation of inclusive education projects in India with specific reference to children with disabilities through processes of community based rehabilitation.

A strategic shift in thinking of Aide et Action occurred as a result of ETG processes and has led to an expansion of the theme to include all the children who are excluded because of socio economic and systemic processes. AeA believes that inclusion is a continuing process and not a one time event so continued efforts to strengthen and sustain the participation of all children, teachers, parents and community would be made.

Following will be the major focus of AeA during this strategic phase:

- AeA would work preferentially with girl children (largest number of excluded children), children with disabilities and children of migrant populations to promote their right to quality education
- Bring about innovations in and advocate for inclusive infrastructure and teaching methodologies
- Developing new ways of learning in bridge courses for children who were never enrolled or dropped out of schooling to integrate them into the formal school system

6.3. Early Child Care and Education

Early child hood care and education forms the foundation for holistic development of children. It has been globally acknowledged that first six to eight years of a child's life are the most critical years for lifelong development. The importance of targeting young children prior to primary school age in order to reach Education for All was recognized in the World Declaration of Education for All in Thailand which was later expanded and strengthened in the Dakar EFA Framework for Action a decade later. The present situation for ECCE across South Asia is quite challenging in terms of coverage, functioning of ECCE centres, quality of care and support provided to children. Universalization of child care services is still a distant dream especially for low income and poor families. There are varied programmes across South Asian countries on Early Childhood Care and Education. All the South Asian countries view ECCE as a holistic process and some countries have programmes specifically focused on birth to three years old. As per the Global Monitoring Report of UNESCO (2008) 17 million children in South and West Asia are out of school, of which 66 % are girls. Looking at the ECCE figures, there is only 37% enrolment in ECCE in South Asia as compared to 79% in North America and Europe. Principal concerns for all the countries include the issues of quality, staff training, lack of coordinated policies, infrastructure and resources, quality of materials and teaching aids; access, equity and inclusion of disadvantaged groups including girls, children in difficult circumstances among others. One of the other major challenges in ECCE across all the South Asian countries is the issue of diversity of language and local dialects with children often being more comfortable in their own dialect rather than the language of instructions in the schools.



In South Asia, as in other developing countries, all three channels – public, private and voluntary – are actively engaged in providing early childhood education experiences through a variety of modes and of varying degree in quality. For example, In India, there is the official Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), the Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme for the Children of Working Mothers and the National Policy on Education (1986). Similarly in the other countries of South Asia too there have been numerous policies and programmes relating to early childhood development and care. There have also been voluntary and non governmental responses in the form of involvement of civil society organizations who have been engaged in providing ECCE services in socially and economically backward areas.

AeA South Asia has done work in the area of ECCE by way of consultations pertaining to documentation of best practices in the field and also running of early childhood care centers in the Tsunami affected regions. However there is a need to initiate and strengthen work in this theme so as to make a more positive impact.

Following will be the major focus of AeA during this strategic phase:

In particular, AeA will focus on aspects such as the difficulties that children across South Asia have in making the successful transition from their vernacular tongue and dialect which is usually their first language and the one that they are most comfortable with, at that age, to speaking the language which forms the medium of instruction in the schools that they are first admitted to. It is this disconnect from which a great deal of adjustment and other problems can ensue in these very young children that AeA will address in addition to the universal standards and best practices that exist in ECCE programming and work globally.

6.4. Livelihood Education

South Asia is a highly populated, agriculture dependent, poor income region, often identified as the most deprived region in the world. South Asia is home to half the world's poor. 80% of South Asia's poor live in rural areas. Most of the rural poor depend on rain fed agriculture, livestock, fragile forests, and/or casual often migratory employment for their livelihood. Agriculture employs about 60% of the labor force but it's growth is less than 3 percent.

Though there has been an average increase of 4-8% in the GDP growth rate of the region for the last few years due to global economic integration and technological changes, still a large section of the population lives below the poverty line especially in rural areas. Poor growth in agriculture and lack of alternative livelihood opportunities make the life of rural people miserable. This situation leads to poverty, unemployment and also migration to urban areas with out any market oriented skills. Finally the rural poor land up in an organized sector for low wages. Hence there is an urgent need to enhance livelihood opportunities in rural areas.

South Asia region has a very high number of illiterates, school drop outs and unemployed youth who are unskilled or inappropriately skilled manpower idling for want of opportunities. Lack of adequate and appropriate opportunities after schooling is one of the biggest de-motivator resulting in high rates of dropout. Education dovetailed with specialized skills has the potential for employability or self employment.

In India, 41 million unemployed youth registered with the Employment Exchanges. Another 260 million of age group 15 to 50 are underemployed / unemployed but not registered. Most of them are NOT employable as they have no skills which are relevant to our present day economy. Many of them are illiterate.

The other side, there is a growing demand for skilled and trained manpower by the market but the existing avenues are not designed to suit the current market oriented demand. The present market has large potential for growth in infrastructure and service providers sector.

The existing vocational education system is not responding to the needs of the labor market. Less than 40 percent of its graduates find employment. Industry's limited involvement in the management



of vocational training is a key constraint to matching skills between demand and supply.

As region's economy grows, there is an urgent need to produce technicians of international standard to meet market's rising demand for skilled manpower.

With this background, since 2005 AeA is providing employability training for youth in the age group of 18-25 years who are mainly the school dropouts from marginalized sections of the society on various market oriented trades through iLEAD (Institution for Livelihood Education and Development).

Following will be the major focus of AeA during this strategic phase:

- Strengthening of existing initiatives of AeA towards livelihood education by enhancing livelihood opportunities and strengthening of local economy
- Promoting advocacy processes to re-orient / re-form the vocational education system
- Bring in the aspects of workers right in AeA and government supported vocational education
- Promotion of employability and entrepreneurship skills simultaneously which will be mutually beneficial

6.5. HIV and AIDS

South Asia's HIV epidemic is extremely severe in magnitude and scope with an estimated 5.5 to 6 million people who are currently infected. According to figures, 60 percent of HIV-positive people in Asia live in India alone. The countries in South Asia have a diverse range of structural factors that amplify HIV vulnerability and risk such , chief among which are widespread poverty and inequality, illiteracy; low social status of women, trafficking of women into commercial sex, a large, structured sex work industry, porous borders, widespread domestic and international migration among many others. There is growing evidence of significant rural epidemics in parts of India and Nepal, but knowledge is lacking of HIV prevention needs and service delivery patterns in rural settings.

In India, this most severe epidemic occurs particularly in a cluster of southern and western states, including Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Goa, and Maharashtra, where sex work is the critical driver of HIV transmission. Epidemics also occur in some North-Eastern states, including Mizoram, Nagaland, and Manipur, where injecting drug use is a major driver of transmission. There are certain peculiar characteristics relating to the epidemic in India. HIV prevalence is as high or higher in rural areas as in urban areas, suggesting that the sexual structure in rural areas in terms of sexual behaviours and networks is sufficient to sustain and amplify HIV transmission. Also marked heterogeneity exists in the HIV epidemic, suggesting that heterogeneity in transmission dynamics occurs at a very local level. Thirdly, local areas exhibit highly variable sexual structures, most likely associated with differences in the nature of locally concentrated epidemics. In particular, large differences in the volume and distribution of female sex work could relate to variations in the patterns of sexual behaviour among men.

In Nepal, transmission occurs largely through sex work and injecting drug use, and among the sexual partners of those engaging in injecting drug use. Both Bangladesh and Pakistan face growing epidemics, particularly among injecting drug users (IDUs), but HIV rates remain relatively low among sex workers (SWs) in those countries. HIV prevalence in Sri Lanka remains low, even among vulnerable groups. In all of these countries, men having sex with men (MSM) represent an important vulnerable population, but much more information is required to better understand their role in the dynamics of HIV transmission. There is very little data available on other South Asian countries such as Bhutan and the Maldives.

All the South Asian countries have fairly well articulated government policies and programmes addressing the spread and prevention of the epidemic as also coordinated and joint programmes between the governments of different countries , the United Nations organisation , other bi –laterals and multi-laterals as also civil society organisations. HIV/AIDS seriously threatens the attainment of the "Education for All" goal in India and other countries of south Asia. It also poses major threats to the broader goals for sustaining development and eliminating poverty. While government's response has been scaled up markedly over the last decade, major challenges remain in raising the overall



effectiveness of state-level programs, expanding the participation of other sectors, and increasing safe behaviour and reducing stigma associated with HIV-positive people among the population. Considering this external environment, AeA South Asia has initiated its interventions in India on HIV/AIDS through education which encourages an open-minded attitude to understand the epidemic and will equip individuals with the ability to make choices and lead a better quality of life. iLEAD (Institute for Livelihood Education and Development), the livelihood skills development programme of AeA helps the youth from the marginalized communities to take up employment opportunities which in turn contribute in accessing other entitlements like education and health. The on going processes of iLEAD has been integrated to positive people in Vishakhapatnam and will continue to do so in other parts of its development constituencies. A new intervention – Link Workers Scheme on HIV / AIDS through collaboration with UNDP supported NACO (National Aids Control Organisation) was initiated in 9 districts across India which aims at providing an array of preventive services and generate a cadre of trained local personnel as Link Workers and volunteers to work with High Risk Groups (HRGs) and vulnerable young people and women.

Following will be the major focus of AeA during this strategic phase:

In the process of making educational program integral to contemporary development concerns, AeA South Asia recognises the need for enhancing awareness on HIV and AIDS and would work with affected children and communities. Emphasis will also be given to health education and education on sex and sexuality across all the projects of AeA. The third area of focus will be to initiate household and family level analysis and planning for HIV affected people so as to address their individual and family needs at different levels – medical care, economic support, other kind of support – and to do this by linking up to the iLead and other resources.

6.6. Disaster Response, Mitigation and Preparedness

South Asia region is prone to frequent disasters. The floods and cyclone put together contributed to 99% of the disasters victims. Among 55.7 million victims of disasters in the region during the year 2007, 53 million (more than 95%) were due to the floods, followed by 2.6 million due to cyclone (4%). During the Tsunami in the year 2004, it is estimated that 350,000 lives were lost and potentially millions left homeless in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Thailand.

Disasters have an enormous impact on development. With every disaster, there is a significant impact on various sectors of development like agriculture, housing, health, education and infrastructure. This results in a serious social and economic setback to the development and particularly the poverty reduction priorities of the developing countries, and poses a threat for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). To meet with this crisis, the scarce resources that are programmed for development are often diverted for relief and rehabilitation efforts.

In cases of natural calamities and disasters the most vulnerable and affected are women and children. Disasters and calamities not only bring about loss to human lives and property but also disrupt the normal pace of development for the survivors affecting their education among many other things. Psycho-social support and care are required for the affected communities to come out of the trauma.

Acknowledging the importance of effective disaster response planning and disaster preparedness, all South Asian countries have their own Emergency disasters management policy and highest level management committees. Countries like India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan have similar polities for disaster response.

AeA South Asia has been engaged in intermediate and long term rehabilitation of disaster affected communities in South Asia. AeA has expertise on promoting equitable rehabilitation in disaster affected areas and also equipping the communities on participatory disaster proofing.



Following will be the major focus of AeA during this strategic phase:

- Address issues of children's education in disaster situations and develop locally relevant and appropriate interventions so that children's education is not disrupted
- Focus on building the capacities of communities on disaster preparedness and mitigation
- Introduction and advocacy for disaster preparedness in school curriculum

6.7. Education for Global Citizenship:

South Asia comprises of rudimentary and complex social structures, with caste system and religion predominantly playing the divisive role. 'South Asia is also beset with ethnic, religious, and domestic political conflicts which pose a potential threat to regional peace and security. There is an economic and political imbalance, resulting in abuse of human rights, poverty, hunger, malnutrition, illiteracy, and environmental degradation'¹.

Poor literacy levels, struggle to come out of poverty and increasing polarization around religion and ethnicity makes people in South Asia more vulnerable to accessing their rights and entitlements, insensitivity towards their environment and an inclusive development of the society, respectively.

The development education and protection of environment for right to development is missing link in the whole approach towards building up the economy and also to address the structural issues.

In the post independent era the respective nations in South Asia have tried to address the structural and functioning of the society, which denies the rights and entitlements of citizens of the country, in compliance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

The international covenants largely speak on the protection of the rights of the citizens, for a sustainable and right to development process but contrarily the lowest quartile of the population are denied and deprived of their citizenship rights.

The respective South Asian national governments have been addressing these structural issues through the legislative process and legal actions and sanctions. The states have developed laws to protect its citizens, to build a peaceful and coexisting society and protect the environment. With respect to human rights education the states were obligatory for promotion of human rights education, includes the Plan of Action for the First Phase (2005-2007) of the World Programme for Human Rights Education. Human Rights Education in the Member states has the components for action. The members state have set up national institutions for protection of human rights-protection of women, children and for the scheduled caste and scheduled tribes (India) and similar institutions across for protection of minorities.

In India National Action Plan for Human Rights Education, adopted by the Government of India, envisages promotion and awareness of human rights to all sections of the society. Specific target groups have been identified such as schools, colleges and universities. Government officials, armed forces, prison officials and law officers are also sensitized to the protection of human rights.

In India the first National Curriculum Framework formulated by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in 1975 states: "The awakening of social consciousness, the development of democratic values and of a feeling for social injustice and national integration are extremely important.... All subjects should be taught in such a manner so as to foster the spirit of scientific humanism." This was re-emphasised in the subsequent National Curriculum Frameworks of NCERT for school education. Similarly, the respective state governments in India have introduced the *Environmental education*.

¹ Source Institutions of International Law and the Development of Regional Forum for Peaceful Dialogue in South Asia pg 1. -Javaid Rehman



The human rights education has been taken forward by many NGOs in Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

One of the Charters of Aide et Action is 'Promoting an education that is open to the world and to its diversity, is a factor for peace and respects individuals, populations and the environment'. The increased polarization of society on various dividing lines and other development processes resulting into reducing respect for basic human values and rights necessitates AeA to promote interventions in this theme.

Though there are significant interventions made by the government and civil society groups, the missing links and challenges arising in the given context need to be actively addressed.

Following will be the major focus of AeA during this strategic phase:

Aide et Action will be working with an objective to build citizenship identity and human dignity. To achieve this AeA will work with children in schools, in building and development of new generation of children for global citizenship by introducing new learning material as extra-curricular activities and innovative methodologies such as *Animation for Change*. Apart from this AeA will demonstrate interventions for integration of human rights education, peace education, development and environmental education in the operational areas for influencing changes in the policies so that a society is sensitized to human dignity and citizenship rights. Inclusion of workers' rights education within our livelihood education projects will be another priority during this strategic phase.

6.8. Education for Migrating populations

It is estimated in South Asia that there are more than 30 million people who are on migration. With the changing economies, among the nation state the pattern of migration continued to be both international and intra-country or inter-state. Migration is high in remote rural areas, particularly amongst chronically poor people, socially challenged based on their caste/ethnicity. The communities are semi and low skilled. However, the cross border migration in South Asia also continues.

The internal migration patterns are significantly higher in the recent times, largely owing to the internal displacement of people. The economic development policies and increased internal conflicts and disasters in South Asia have mostly contributed to internal displacement. The IOM figures suggest internal displacement of more than one and half million people in 5 of the south Asian countries in 2007.

The pattern of migration across South Asian countries is also increasing, as explained in the following table:

S. No	Source country	Bangladesh	Bhutan	India	Nepal	Sri Lanka	Others (South)	TOTAL
1	Bangladesh	0	0	3,459,579	555	0	396,745	3,856,879
2	Bhutan	0	0	7,251	26,874	0	3,176	37,301
3	India	1,000,886	0	0	719,548	364,368	811,008	2,895,810
4	Nepal	0	0	592,354	0	0	61,201	653,556
5	Sri Lanka	0	0	169,318	625	0	75,976	245,918
6	Others (South)	9,756	0	103,778	40,392	818	786,663	941,405
	TOTAL	1,010,641	0	4,332,280	787,993	365,186	2,134,769	8,630,869

Sources: University of Sussex and World Bank 2007.

The recent global economic crisis had its impact on migrant workers. The South Asia countries, especially India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal are severely affected and many more people are expected to return to their respective home countries. This has negative impact on the ratios of poverty, unemployment, household economy and local economy and resources. The national



policies for migrant workers in the destination countries, therefore, need a fresh re-look to conceive longer term vision and strategies for such migration.

The impact of migration on the MDGs and vice versa, with appropriate state interventions aims to maximize the benefits and minimize the risks for the migrant communities. The efforts towards poverty reduction, improvement in the quality of health and education services and their appropriateness and the work towards gender equality will all lead to reduced risks of migrant communities.

Apart from this, various agencies are involved in specific interventions around access to basic services for the migrants and social protection and safety net measures- both at source and destination, particularly in case of internal migration, relocation or displacement. The government response in different countries of South Asia has been limited to non-targeted poverty alleviation measures and rural employment creation programs and support to some specific projects on health and education of migrant communities.

Aide et Action's response to this issue in South Asia has been limited to provisioning of quality education services to children of inter-state migrant communities through a project in the state of Tamil Nadu, India.

A holistic analysis of situation in South Asia during the ETG review clearly suggests that migration has significant negative impact on quality of educational provisioning and services for children; and at large it is also affective the learning processes and knowledge systems of all ages and sections of poor communities. The frequently changing locations and alien (new) environment deteriorates the conditions for learning. Apart from this, issues of appropriateness and sufficiency of support infrastructure and services are the obvious issues for migrating populations. The seasonal migrants severely suffer because of lack of policies for intra-state migration and lack of political will for the inter-state migration. The associated child-labour issues are also our area of concern. The lack of research and authentic comprehensive information and knowledge base around labour mobility, migrant workers and their vulnerabilities restricts required policy formulation for migrants at various levels.

Following will be the major focus of AeA during this strategic phase:

During this strategic phase, AeA would be focussing on participatory action research for generation of information for policy influencing in South Asia at the intra-state, inter-state (intra-country) and international level. Our projects and interventions will address the inter-country migration issues between India-Bangladesh and Nepal-India. Within the national boundaries, we will be giving greater priority to the issues of conflict and disaster induced migration, relocation or displacement and the interventions that prepare people to cope up with new situations to take forward the fight against injustice. The third area of focus would be to deal with the issues of child-labour associated with migration of families.

6.9. Women Empowerment and Education

One of the most critical development issues currently facing South Asia is the lack of gender equality and equity. Due to various traditional, social, cultural, civil, political, economic and historical processes, women and girls are particularly vulnerable to discrimination and subordination in post colonial societies such as India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and other countries of South Asia.

Since the beginning of the 1980's, the world has witnessed a "feminisation of poverty". Female unemployment increased at a greater rate than male unemployment in those countries which based their growth on the development of manufacturing industries. In terms of education, the decreased budget for education combined with the impoverishment of the working class reduced the number of girls in schools in many countries. However what makes the question of gender even more complex and intransigent in the South Asian context is the powerful role of institutional

rules, norms and practices in tilting the gender balance in favour of men and perpetuating and reproducing gender inequality (Baden, 1999).

As per the Human Development Report 2007, the Gender Development Index (GDI), among the South Asian countries Sri Lanka has the highest rank of 89 in the world; India is at 113 ; Bangladesh at 121 and Nepal has been ranked 128. It is significant that with the exception of Sri Lanka, in all the other countries the GDI is lower than the HDI reflecting the overall picture of poor gender related development. The 2007 Social Watch Gender Inequality Index (GEI)² states that over the period of 2004 – 2007, three regions presented with GEI regression: South Asia, Central Asia and North America.

Women and Poverty: Links are often made between gender and poverty suggesting that women are poorer than men. According to the UNDP more than 70% of the world's poor are women and thus, poverty has a decidedly female face.

Many governments of South Asian countries have initiated large and far reaching micro credit programmes in an endeavour to lift women out of poverty. Gender budgeting is another way by which civil society groups across the region are attempting to sensitise governments to the gender-differentiated nature of the outcomes of programmes and policies. In South Asia, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka are the countries in the process of engendering their budgets.

Women and Education and their political participation: In terms of education, there are still significant divides between men and women in the South Asian context although certain countries such as Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Bhutan are faring relatively better than India and Nepal. Educational indicators of South Asian women, although recording improvement in recent years, are some of the worst in the world, especially at technical and higher levels. Stark disparities exist throughout the education systems in South Asia and UNESCO estimates indicate that as recently as 2006, nearly 24 million girls of primary school age are not receiving education in South Asia. Women's political participation at the parliament level is almost double (15 percent seats) in Bangladesh as compared to India (8 percent) and Nepal (7 percent). In Sri Lanka and Bhutan the percentage of Parliamentarians is 5 and 3 percent respectively in the existing/ previous parliament.

Various governments in South Asia have put in successful effort in achieving very high levels of enrollment of girls and boys in schools, however, the quality of education and retention of girl children after primary schooling has been very low all across, with the exception of Sri Lanka.

Women and Health: The vast majority of South Asian women lack even the most rudimentary health facilities, resulting in high maternal and infant mortality rates. Women's access to health is severely compromised in this region. According to the World Health Report 2004 , with the exception of Sri Lanka, all the countries in South Asia fall in the 'high child and high adult' mortality stratum. Women's access to health and health seeking behaviour is affected by their low economic status, social norms and cultural values. South Asia also presents with the unique problem of 'missing women' wherein figures reflect that 79 million women are simply missing and have either never been born (as a result of sex selective abortion) , or dying of chronic malnutrition or never receiving medical care (HDR,2005).

Bangladesh has made some progress in establishing a health care system although inequalities in terms of access to basic health care facilities still persists. In India, the National Population Policy 2000, National Health Policy 2001 and the Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007) all of which emphasize the needs of and empowerment of women. The National Rural Health Mission (NRHM 2005) was also launched in 18 states with poor health indicators (Unifem , 2005 and 2007).

Nepal under its National Health Policy has formulated the Second Long-Term Health Plan (SLTHP) 1997–2017. The main features of this are the development of integrated and essential

² The three dimensions included in the GEI are economic activity, empowerment and education. The index's range of values is from 0 to 100, with lower values indicating greater inequality.



health care services at the district level and below. Sri Lanka has historically presented with relatively higher social indicators and the health sector is no exception to this.

Women and Violence: According to former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, South Asia has one of the worst indicators with regard to violence against women in the world. There are 50 million fewer women in South Asia today than there should be due to sex selective abortions, violence and neglect (UNRISD, 2005). Certain cultural, religious and traditional practices compound the problem of violence against women in the region.

The countries of South Asia have all ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) though some of them have done so with reservations. The countries of South Asia have also signed the SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating the Trafficking in Women and Children for prostitution. Apart from this, several South Asian countries also have extensive constitutional guarantees protecting the security rights of women and which specifically address violence against women. However legislative and policy reforms have not, by themselves, helped to abolish phenomena such as violence against women which calls for a wider movement of change in social consciousness and awareness which can challenge the existing detrimental social constructions of gender.

Non state initiatives in the area of violence against women in South Asia have been quite vibrant and there has been activism, campaigning, advocacy and also provision of support, rehabilitation and counseling services offered by NGO's to victims of violence.

Women and Armed/Violent Conflict : In South Asia, it has been found that women are affected by conflict in very diverse ways as victims, survivors, leaders and peacemakers. In certain situations such as Sri Lanka and among the Naxal cadres of India, women are also combatants. In Nepal, women formed 30 - 40% of the Maoist cadres. Women are also vulnerable to trafficking in situations of armed conflict and reports suggest that every year one to two million women, men and children are trafficked world wide and around 225,000 of them are from South Asia. Another way in which women are affected during conflict is that they are internally displaced and sometimes could also be displaced across borders. 80% of the internally displaced person (IDP's) are women and children and they often have to live in very miserable conditions in refugee and relief camps where they are vulnerable to further victimization in the form of sexual abuse by camp authorities and inmates (Coomaraswamy, 2005). When women become refugees due to displacement, they are denied the most basic human rights and even the most minimal levels of social protection (Unifem, 2007).

There have been initiatives which have been started in South Asia to involve women both in peacekeeping processes and in post conflict reconstruction. For example, in Sri Lanka, women's groups like "Mobilizing Mothers for Peace" play an important role in advocating and lobbying the government and the LTTE to stop the violence and conduct peace-building activities (USAID, 2007). Similar efforts have been taken up by various groups in India, Nepal and Pakistan too.

Following will be the major focus of AeA during this strategic phase:

AeA South Asia is committed to and will work towards developing and strengthening institutions of women in whatever form and at all levels of its work. The basic institution of Self-help Groups (SHGs) of women will function with an objective to develop leadership among member women to take up the issues of women and girl child's education. An active engagement with women leaders at other levels to influence the policies and programmes of the government in favour of girl children and other poor women would also be AeA South Asia's priority.

The other priority of AeA during this strategic phase would be to ensure that women from disadvantaged groups are able to secure quality livelihoods through iLEAD support and through initiating groups based and individual enterprises.



The enrollment and quality school education of cent percent girl children from our project areas would be a non-negotiable expectation.

7. Programmatic goals and objectives

Goal 1: Ensuring meaningful quality education to children that respects diversity and promotes inclusion within and outside the school system

- Promote innovative methodologies and processes to ensure quality Education which would include projects on Back to Basics, Liberate School and Gossip Circle for Empowerment (GCE)
- Work with children from excluded communities i.e. children with disabilities, children affected by disasters and conflicts, children of migrant workers, children affected / infected by HIV and AIDS, child laborers and children of minority communities
- Develop appropriate strategies to address the educational needs of children of indigenous communities
- Promote interventions for integration of human rights education, peace education, development and environment education in the operational areas of Aide et Action
- Enhance awareness of development priorities and sustainable human development among children and communities

Goal 2: Promoting participation of communities in educational governance to make the state more accountable in delivering quality educational services

- Increasing awareness, mobilization and lobbying to garner greater commitment of the state and other institutions
- Engaging with policy makers at the local level (members of the local governance institutions) and higher levels
- Promoting people's movement for education through local community structures and processes

Goal 3: Building solidarity through greater exchanges within and outside AeA to promote right to quality education and learning

- Collaborative work with other regions of AeA and with other organizations in South Asia
- Embarking on joint policy advocacy work with other organizations at national and international levels
- Developing critical spaces and platforms for perspective building and dialogue with other stakeholders and professionals in the education sector
- Capitalization of AeA's experiential learning through documentation and high quality communication materials



Goal 4: Influencing the policies of the governments and private sector to have more responsible and enhanced investment in education

- Engage in budget and investment analysis in education to use the outcomes as an advocacy tool to address the gaps and challenges in education
- Understand, analyze and influence the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policies of the Corporates that AeA is engaging with

Goal 5: Promoting leadership among women and girl children to advocate for their right to education and development

- Creating critical spaces for women to reflect on their condition and causes through the process of education
- Strengthening women's organizations, movements and networks at the community level to address gender and education related issues
- To bring about empowerment of women and young girls through access to livelihood skill training and promotion of sustainable livelihood
- Ensure 100 percent enrollment and retention among girl children up to upper primary level in all projects

8. Organizational Objectives

Objective 1: Promoting gender equity and diversity of staff in the organization

AeA South Asia would ensure gender equity and encourage diversity of staff through specific strategies which are as follows:

- Sensitizing and capacity building of staff
- Achieving gender balance in staffing
- Creating gender sensitive work environment and organization policies
- Emphasize social inclusion in the HR policy of the organization
- Developing policies and structures to address staff grievances and cases of sexual discrimination and harassments

Objective 2: Less hierarchical structure that will have clear delegation of authority and responsibility

AeA South Asia would promote matrix like multi-dimensional organization with organic linkages with projects, various AeA offices and thematic expertise. There will be geographically and thematically interlinked work with shared human resources that will reduce the layers of hierarchy in a project. This would mean support functions and expertise are pooled.

Objective 3: Formation of structures to promote democratic decision making

AeA South Asia would promote democratic decision making in the organization through the formation of Management Team (MT) and Working Group (WG). Management team will comprise all heads of departments, sectors and regional offices to support the regional director to take decisions on



strategic directions and critical operational and organizational issues.

This process will promote participation of staff and transparency and accountability in decision making. Working group consisting of most aware staff on a particular issue would provide most informed analysis which will be helpful in the decision making by the Management Team.

Objective 4: Promote AeA as a learning organization

In line with AeA International's mandate to form stakeholders' network, a Regional Advisory Council would be formed with members from various countries of interventions in South Asia to gain from their external experience and expertise in the field of education which will set and refine the regional directions, strategies and programmes.

AeA South Asia will promote networking among all stakeholders concerning the work of the organization in the region which will include groups such as partner NGOs, Civil Society organizations, academic and research institutes, INGOs and government departments. This network will promote learning and help the organization to achieve its objectives.

Objective 5: Strengthening of Systems and procedures for cost effectiveness and optimum use of resources

DW

Objective 6: Enhancing participation of communities and partners by being closer to the field

Establishment of regional offices would enhance interaction with partner organizations and communities. A regular interface and proximity to projects would help in building solidarity with other local stakeholders.