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SAARC Development Fund



Afghanistan



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SDF Quarter-2 Newsletter, April - June 2022

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One of our beneficiaries. Photograph ©TaraYana Foundation

Greetings from SAARC Development Fund (SDF). Welcome to SDF's E-Newsletter for the Second Quarter of 2022.

SDF, as an umbrella regional financial institution for SAARC projects and programs, is fully committed towards promoting "Regional Integration and Economic Cooperation among the SAARC Member States" through project funding and collaboration".

To realize our mission, we at SDF continue to undertake a number of initiatives for the strategic growth of the region. The past decade has offered us new regional projects, partnerships and numerous interventions to enable SDF to become a more dynamic and robust umbrella-funding institution, amply capable of delivering the benefits of

regional engagement to the millions in the region through project-based collaboration.

This newsletter highlights SDF's continued commitment towards promoting the welfare of the people of SAARC Region, improving their quality of life, accelerating economic growth and social progress, and alleviating poverty through financing and implementation of development projects in all the SAARC Member States.

SDF operates through the three financing windows: Social, Economic and Infrastructure. SDF has about 100 projects approved by the SDF Board under the three funding windows with a fund commitment/allocation of over USD 134 million.



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Empowering women and families through value addition to agricultural produce



Every day, smallholder women farmers around the world contribute to the wellbeing of their communities.

32-year-old Chimi Pem from Bjabchhog village in Chhukha, Bhutan is the chairperson of the Bjabchhog Women's Group. The group received an SDF-funded training on value addition and enterprise development.

Chimi says that their agricultural products were not fetching the right price. The markets are far, resulting in higher transportation loss. This is why the value addition and agri-enterprise development training was much needed especially for these rural women groups as they can increase their income by adding value to their fruits and vegetables through processing and packaging them into pickles and noodles respectively, and promoting them at the nearest markets.

Chimi, who is leading 14 women farmers, says that value-added agriculture provides a unique opportunity for women's empowerment. The 14 young women farmers provide a platform for themselves to interact and share information on innovation, production, value addition and sustainable farming methods and markets.

"The training on value addition, food hygiene, book-keeping, pricing, packaging and branding has helped enhance our family and group income. We now provide value addition to our farm produce and then sell them. It has increased the value and prices of our products by many folds, decreased the losses and generated employment opportunities for young women," she said.

This training was conducted under the SDF-funded project - "Livelihood enhancement of small farmers in SAARC region through small scale agro-business focusing on value chain development". Production and value addition equipment, bought with SDF support, will soon be installed inside the recently built processing shed to enhance production.

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SDF's Livelihood Project in Bhutan

May-June 2022: The SAARC Development Fund team undertook a field mission to Paro and Chhukha districts in Bhutan to monitor the progress of the SDF-funded livelihood enhancement project.

The project - Livelihood enhancement of the small farmers in the SAARC Region through small-scale agribusiness focusing on value chain development - provides farmers in the SAARC Member States opportunities to improve their livelihoods and increase income through small scale agro-business focusing on value chain development.

The project is implemented in Bjachho gewog (administrative division composing a group of villages) in Chhukha and Yoedseltse gewog in Samtse. SDF has committed a grant of over US\$ 191,334 to Bhutan for this project, of which US\$ 150,191 has been disbursed so far.

SDF team saw the recently constructed processing shed, held fruitful discussions with partners at the National Post Harvest Centre, Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, and community members. Beneficiaries also shared their

The team was also made aware of the benefits of the Refrigerator Truck, which was bought with SDF support to transport perishable agriculture produce from the farms to either the cold storage or the market. The trucks are equipped with temperature control and monitoring mechanisms to keep agriculture contents safe and consumable.





Project on rehabilitation science education successfully closed

Phase I of SDF's CRP project titled SAARC Regional Inter-Professional Master's Program in Rehabilitation Science at the Bangladesh Health Professions Institute was officially closed this quarter after benefiting hundreds of graduates in the region.

The Phase I of the project started in 2013 with an approved funding of US\$ 1.5 million. SDF is now supporting implementation of Phase II of the project.

Disability is a significant issue in South Asia and the region needs quality therapists who are trained and retained in the health profession to continue developing meaningful services for people with disabilities.

Therefore, the project is geared towards building a cadre of leaders capable of advancing education, research and practice in the field of disability and rehabilitation in the SAARC Member States.

The project is implemented by a Bangladesh-based institute called the Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralysed, Bangladesh Health Professional Institute (CRP).

Each year, SDF supports about 30 Masters students (50% reserved for students from the SAARC Member States & 50% for Bangladeshi Students).

Some of the achievements of the Phase I project are:

- Establishment of a first ever Masters' Program in Rehabilitation Science under the University of Dhaka;
- Construction of a well-furnished International Hostel accommodating about 60 students;
- Improved access to learning facilities for 120 students through upgradation of Institute's library; and
- Enrollment of 120 students through Scholarship (60 students from SAARC Member states and 60 from Bangladesh).

Enhancing coconut farmers' income in Kuttanad, India



The M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) and the SAARC Development Fund (SDF) has launched a project to boost farm income in Kuttanad in Kerala, India by helping farmers make value-added products from coconut.

Officials of the MSSRF say a Joint Liability Group (JLG) comprising farmers has been constituted for the purpose. The value-added products made from coconuts procured solely from the below sea-level region are expected to hit the market under the brand name 'Kera Saras' in October 2022.

"It is a model project funded by the SDF to promote coconut farmers in Kuttanad. A wide range of value-added products such as coconut oil, virgin oil, coconut milk, powder, coconut water, and coir geotextiles, to name a few, can be made from it. The JLG will begin with producing coconut oil and virgin oil before launching other products. The project will ensure higher income for farmers, increased employment, and a rise in coconut production in Kuttanad, while consumers will get the best products made in the below sea-level region," said Jibin Thomas, coordinator, MSSRF, Kuttanad centre.

Along with paddy, coconut is an integral part of the agricultural system in Kuttanad. According to a report prepared by the MSSRF in 2007, rice and coconut contribute to about 80 percent of agricultural income in Kuttanad. The area occupied by paddy and coconut is 38 percent and 45 percent of the cropped area respectively.

As part of the project, SDF and MSSRF are providing support in the form of technology, machinery, training, infrastructure, and market backup to the members of the JLG.



The production unit being constructed at Pulinkunnu in Kuttanad will be ready in few months. "Value-addition is the best way to increase the income of coconut farmers. As the next step, the JLG, which currently has 50 members, will be expanded to make it a big venture. This hopefully with the financial assistance of the Union and State governments," Mr. Thomas says.

The Central Plantation Crops Research Institute (CPCRI), Kasaragod, CPCRI Regional Station, Kayamkulam, Kerala Agricultural University, and Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, are also contributing to the project in the form of imparting training, technical expertise, and so on.

Text and photograph - © The Hindu

IN BRIEF: The Tarayana Foundation is an Implementing Agency in Bhutan for SDF-funded project - “Promoting Integrated Bamboo Based Enterprise Development among SAARC countries”.

The project has disbursed about US\$ 0.4 million of approved US\$ 0.5 million.

On 28 June, 2022, SDF team visited the Tarayana Foundation to measure the progress, and to discuss the challenges and way forward. The project has been able to deliver results in the targeted rural communities through the SDF funding. Some of the recent highlights of the project are as follows:

- The project is working with 2,500 farmers and artisans and recorded income of Nu 10 million from the plantation, processing, preparation, and marketing;
- Six among the supported artisan have received the “Seal of Quality” award for their products; and
- 10 artisans are linked with financial institutions to start their new enterprise.



SDF's COVID-19 Grant

SDF team with the officials of the Health Ministry, Royal Government of Bhutan checking the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and other kits for COVID-19 purchased with SDF support.

This is part of SAARC Development Fund's US\$ 1 million to Bhutan as COVID-19 emergency grant.



Economic and Infrastructure Windows

The Economic & Infrastructure (E&I) Windows of the fund provides loans for financing both sovereign and non-sovereign projects in the SAARC Member States. The mandate of the E&I windows is to finance economic and infrastructure projects in the eight member states with direct benefit going to at least 2 member states.

The E&I Team continues to strategize in order to garner sound bankable projects. In this quarter of 2022, SDF's E&I team continued its discussions with:

1. Royal Bhutan Helicopter Services Limited to finance purchase of new Helicopters
2. Druk Green Power Corporation Limited for financing of small Hydro Power Projects
3. Mohan Mutha Exports Private Limited for projects related to the Ministry of Defense, Government of Republic of Maldives.

Assessing the status of ATR 42-600 aircraft



1 June 2022 - SDF team led a field mission to Paro International Airport in Bhutan to see the status of the Drukair ATR 42-600 aircraft purchased with SDF loan financing under its Economic & Infrastructure Windows in 2019.

This is the first project under SDF's Economic Window. SDF financing not only helps Drukair extend aviation connectivity with Bangladesh, India and Nepal but provides greater economic connectivity and regional integration.

It was encouraging to learn that the Aircraft was in operating condition despite the effects of the Covid-19

Pandemic and it had just landed after coming from Yonphula airport in Eastern Bhutan.



PARTNERSHIP & EVENTS



SDF team lead by the Officer-In-Charge, Satya S. Saswat called on the Hon'ble Foreign Minister of Bhutan, Lyonpo Dr Tandri Dorji, at His Excellency's office on 17 June 2022. The team thanked the Hon'ble Minister for the continued support and cooperation of Bhutan as host country and SDF's ongoing partnership with the Royal Government of Bhutan.



International Day of Yoga 2022 – SDF joined the global community on 21 June 2022 in observing the International Day of Yoga 2022 for the benefit of its employees' well-being.

Staff pledged to invest more time every day to the holistic approach of wellness of the mind and body and towards achieving greater work life balance. Recognizing its universal appeal, on 11 December 2014, the United Nations proclaimed 21 June as the International Day of Yoga by resolution 69/131. The International Day of Yoga aims to raise awareness worldwide of the many benefits of practicing yoga.



Who we are?



SAARC Development Fund Secretariat was established in April 2010 by the heads of the eight member countries of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Our mandate is to promote the welfare of the people of SAARC region, to improve their quality of life, to accelerate economic growth, social progress and poverty alleviation in the region and to contribute to “Regional Cooperation and Integration through Project Collaboration”.

SDF manages projects in all the SAARC Member States under its three investment Windows: Social, Economic and Infrastructure Windows. For details, Visit Website: www.sdfsec.org



Towards Regional Integration and Economic

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