

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

NSF Working Committee on Social Sciences

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As is well known, South Asia is a region with great social, economic, geographical and cultural diversity. Socio-economic inequities have long been a significant feature of almost all the countries in the region. While most south countries have achieved significant economic growth in the recent past, growing income inequalities have emerged as a major socio-political issue. In other words, the benefits of economic growth have not been equitably distributed among different social strata and various communities.

The developments outlined above are largely the result of liberal economic reforms adopted by governments in South Asia. While not all political regimes have been able to come up with effective strategies to deal with emerging social issues like precarious work, poverty, unemployment and underemployment, countries that have done well in the above regard can no doubt inspire others to take similar measures.

The globalization, spread of consumerism and growing economic pressure have encouraged many people in South Asia to look for livelihood and other opportunities in many other parts of the world. Though temporary and permanent migration has been a blessing in disguise in some countries in the region, the social and long-term economic impact of migration has not always been positive. This is also an important area for policy development. While migration brings short-term economic benefits, it can also retard sustainable development, as highly skilled human resources are continually lost for the country. This may be particularly significant in smaller countries with limited capacity to replenish lost human resources.

Countries in the region can benefit from each other's experiences with respect to many issues mentioned above. Given the widely shared value of socio-economic equity in the region, sharing of such experiences provide a basis for collective thinking and action.

This conference therefore, provides a great opportunity to scholars and development practitioners in the region to learn from each other with a view to not only understanding issues involved but also finding appropriate strategies to deal with them.