

South Asia Ecumenical Partnership Programme (SAEPP)

Guidelines

1. The basis of our understanding and involvement of partnership

The WCC Regional Relations and Ecumenical Sharing Team affirmed in a theological summary that “diakonia” and “koinonia” are inseparable. Building regional relations and facilitating ecumenical sharing contributes to the deepening and broadening of the ecumenical fellowship by upholding the expression of the local and regional church experience within the ecumenical family and by interpreting the global ecumenical situation at the regional level. This seeks to ensure the integrity and coherence of the one ecumenical movement in all regions, as an expression of visible unity, confessional and cultural diversity of the churches. Based on the experience and struggle of people and communities in the regions, the RREST understand diakonia as reconciling, compassionate, transformative, justice seeking and prophetic. They affirm that ecumenical diakonia nurtures human dignity and sustainable community through the churches. Prophetic diakonia addresses the root causes of injustice while also addressing human suffering and brokenness, seeking long term and sustainable responses to urgent challenges and human needs. This diakonia emphasise capacity building, empowering regions to contribute to the building up of the Oikumene and Christ's service. This diakonia also involves participation in the struggle for a just and equitable sharing of resources. Such sharing emphasises the mutual responsibility and accountability of churches and ecumenical partners. Sharing must be married to justice, contributing to a " cycle of empowerment" so that " all may have life in all it's fullness" (Jn.10:19) and shares in the biblical vision that " each shall sit under their vine and fig tree and live in peace and unafraid" (Mic.4:4).

The Advisory Group of WCC RRES team emphasised the need for affirming biblical understanding of diakonia as reconciling, compassionate, transformative, justice seeking and prophetic. Within this framework that the RRES Team initiated programmes on 'Development of Decentralised Capacities for Solidarity and Sharing'. The RRES Team Advisory Group which met in Johannesburg, South Africa from 8-14 March 2002 endorsed and affirmed this programme on development of own capacities for solidarity over and above traditional instruments and patterns in specific countries and regions. Specific issues included with in the framework of this programmes are process of decentralised solidarity and sharing mechanisms leading in some cases, to establishment of Regional Solidarity programme Funds, Special programmes and the co-ordination of the ecumenical diaconal programmes. The issues addressed by this programme are increased effectiveness and consistency of church sharing and co-operation. The expected result of this programme was identified and seethed in motion at least two regions of a decentralised solidarity and sharing mechanisms leading, in some cases regional partnership programmes like, e.g.: South East Europe, and South Asia.

2. South Asia Ecumenical Partnership Programme for Solidarity and Sharing

South Asian Context

South Asia, one of the most diverse regions on the planet is fast emerging as the poorest, the most illiterate, the most malnourished and the most deprived region in the world. South Asia presents a devastating picture of colossal human deprivation in South Asia. Human deprivation in South Asia is colossal in scale in the global context. Nearly one half of the world's illiterates and forty percent of the world's poor live in South Asia: around 500 million people live in absolute poverty; one half of the adults are illiterate and over one fourth of the total population, 350 million is unable to access the daily necessity of safe drinking water. 830 million people have no access to basic sanitation. Over 400 million people go hungry every day. Nearly forty percent of world's poor live in South Asia. The adult literacy rate in South Asia is only 48 per cent, which is now lowest in the world. South Asia's share of world's total illiterate population is twice as high as its share of the world's total illiterate population.

The extent of widespread human deprivation in South Asia contrasts with large armies, modern weapons and expanding military budgets in the region. South Asia is the only region where military spending as a portion of GNP has gone up since 1987, although it has declined substantially in all other parts of the world after the end of the Cold War. The Central Committee of the WCC which met in Geneva from 26 August to 3 September adopted a Statement on South Asia highlighting the precarious situation in South Asia.

The spread of HIV infection, which has taken root in South Asia, poses a threat to development and poverty alleviation efforts. The trend of increasing HIV infections, combined with heightened social and economic vulnerabilities that are fuelled by extensive commercial sex, injecting drug use, population movements such as cross border rural urban migration and trafficking, etc. highlight the need to act quickly and effectively. While overall prevalence rates remain relatively low at this stage, South Asia has about 5 million HIV infected persons of the world's 34 million people living with HIV / AIDS.

Ethnic conflicts, civil war, religious conflicts, political violence, atrocities against women and children, etc., have been increasing in South Asian society. Communal hatred, growing religious fundamentalism, politicisation of religion, etc., are reasons for intensifying social tensions, conflicts and violence. Christianity being a minority religion in South Asia is faced with innumerable problems and many a times, the churches in South Asia cannot respond to the emerging societal problems. Churches in South Asia generally lack capacities to respond to some of these pressing concerns and a real dearth of potential leadership is weakening the mission and witness in a pluralistic society in South Asia.

The ecumenical family has been concerned on the alarming situation in South Asian countries and discussed at various levels the need to accompany the Churches and ecumenical councils in South Asia to be in solidarity with them in their struggle. As the problems and issues are so complex and the capacity of the churches and NCCs in South Asia need to be strengthened in order to respond to the pressing issues they are confronting in their day to day situation, the three consultations organised by the WCC and the CCA on Ecumenical Response to Social and Human Development in South Asia (July 2002, Colombo, Sri Lanka) Ecumenical Agenda to Combat HIV / AIDS in South Asia (July 2002, Colombo, Sri Lanka) , and Consultation of Ecumenical Partners and South Asian Church leaders on Towards New and Effective Ecumenical Partnership in South Asia (September 2002, Geneva) expressed the need to develop a co-ordinated approach for ecumenical family's programmatic involvement in South Asia. The three Consultations came up with proposals to accompany the churches in South Asia through a ecumenical partnership programme. Based on the proposals of those three Consultations, it was agreed to develop a South Asia Ecumenical Partnership Programme with foci on four areas for future involvement of the Churches and ecumenical councils in South Asia in co-operation with the ecumenical partners and churches from the North, CCA and WCC.

Within this background, as part of the global ecumenical family's commitment to develop decentralised capacities for sharing and solidarity the WCC initiated the SAEPP with following aims:

- To promote co-ordination and co-operation and closer linkages among Churches, NCCs, ecumenical partners in South Asia region, to facilitate a more effective ecumenical response to the pressing issues and needs.
- The SAEPP will focus on four programmatic areas for joint involvement of the South Asian NCCs, Churches, ecumenical partners and churches from North, CCA and WCC.

The Objectives of the SAEPP include:

- Assist CCA - WCC member churches in the region to establish/ develop and implement appropriate programmes in these four areas.
- To foster capacity building and human resource development programmes with the churches, and NCCs in the region

- To promote church/ ecumenical involvement in initiatives to promote peace and reconciliation
- To promote positive inter-church and inter religious relations and a better understanding of the ecumenical movement and organisations in the region. In other words, the revival of the ecumenical co-operation and involvement through a joint ecumenical partnership programme in the South Asia region.

The four specific areas of programmes are :

- An ecumenical Agenda for Combating HIV / AIDS in South Asia
- Capacity Building/ Human Resource Development
- Equipping Churches in their mission for Peace and Reconciliation
- Assisting Churches to nurture Inter-religious co-operation

3. Participating Partners

National Council of Churches in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, Ecumenical Development Agencies and Churches from Northern Countries, World Council of Churches, Christian Conference of Asia (CCA)

5. Specific Programmes

- **An ecumenical Agenda for Combating HIV / AIDS in South Asia**

Objectives:

- To develop an ecumenical programme to combat HIV/ AIDS at national level
- To motivate and sensitise the Churches and NCCs in South Asia to address the problem
- To develop an appropriate mechanism and strategy for the ecumenical family's involvement at the national and sub-regional level.

Co-ordination

- To develop an appropriate co-ordination mechanism and select a co-ordinating/ lead agency to implement the programme at the national and sub-regional level
- To form Advisory Groups at national and sub-regional levels

- **Capacity Building/ Human Resource Development**

Objectives:

- To equip the South Asian Churches to develop local leadership at various denominations and NCCs in five South Asian countries.
- Initiate and strengthen ecumenical leadership formation in South Asian countries
- Develop human and organisational and potential enhancement in various fields

- **Equipping South Asian Churches in their mission for Peace and Reconciliation**

Objectives:

- While recognising the fact that peace and reconciliation is a primary need for human development and the ecumenical family has the responsibility of empowering South Asian Churches and NCCs in their ministry of promoting peace and reconciliation, a systematic approach and programmes need to be developed in South Asia.

- **Assisting Churches to Nurture Inter-religious co-operation**

Objectives:

- In view of the fact that South Asian countries becoming more and more religiously intolerant, and religious conflicts and violence hinder the peace and communal harmony which ultimately hinder social and human development in South Asia, it is significant that the minority Christians need to develop programmes aiming at confidence building measures.
- Equip the South Asian NCCs and Churches to undertake the task of meaningful co-operation with other religions such as Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists.

4. Mechanism

4.1. SAEPP Annual Meeting/ Forum

- An annual Meeting/ Forum of SAEPP will be convened by WCC.
- The members of the Forum will be South Asian NCC representatives and other Ecumenical Actors in the region, Ecumenical partners and Churches from Northern countries, CCA and WCC.
- WCC will be the Co-ordinator of the Annual Forum meeting
- The Annual meeting will be a Forum for information sharing, analysing the emerging trends and events in the sub-region
- Discussing the programme proposals of the South Asian NCCs and local implementing partners in any of the specific programme identified.

4.2 Core Group

- A Core Group will be appointed by the Meeting/ Forum with the purpose of enabling a process of joint planning of further common actions, reviewing/ evaluating.

The composition of the Core Group of the SAEPP will be:

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| • Ecumenical Partners | 3 (Europe-2, North America – 1) |
| • South Asian NCCs | 2 |
| • CCA | 1 |
| • WCC | 1 |

WCC Asia Desk will be the Co-ordinator

The duties and responsibilities of the Core Group will be to:

- Discuss and approve the programmes and priorities based on the proposals of South Asian NCCs;
- Develop co-ordination and networking among ecumenical partners and other stakeholders involved in the partnership in the region
- To support and enable the planning at the sub-regional level .
- Identify appropriate local actors for effective implementation in co-ordination with South Asian NCCs.
- To delegate responsibilities to local and international partners for programme implementation
- Prepare and approve budgets for SAEPP and seek funds from the ecumenical partners to cover the budget.
- Lead agencies/ partners for programme implementation will be identified by the Core Group.

(Draft adopted with changes at the Geneva Consultation 4-5 September)

