



Third Annual Conference of the South Asia Women's Network (SWAN)
WOMEN OF SOUTH ASIA AND THE GREEN ECONOMY

2 - 3 July 2011, BIAM Foundation, Dhaka, Bangladesh



South Asia Foundation (SAF)

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Third Annual Conference of the South Asia Women's Network (SWAN) on

Women of South Asia and the Green Economy

Dhaka, 2nd-3rd July 2011

Organised by

South Asia Foundation, Manusher Jonno Foundation and

Jamia Millia Islamia University (New Delhi)

Conference Report

The South Asia Women's Network (SWAN), which is headquartered in the Academy of Third World Studies of Jamia Millia Islamia University in New Delhi, emerged from the Conference on "Women of South Asia: Partners in Development" in 2009 through establishing eight South Asia Women's Networks (SWANs). Through these networks members of SWAN share experiences, learn from each other, identify best practices and work towards issue-based collaboration across Asia through agreed plans of actions. The eight SWANs cover the sectors of Micro-credit, Education, Arts and Literature, Women in Peacemaking, Environment, Health, Crafts and Textiles; and Media and Women. SWAN is convened by Professor Veena Sikri.

This year the South Asia Foundation, Manusher Jonno Foundation and Jamia Millia Islamia University jointly organized the 3rd annual conference of SWAN at the BIAM Foundation in Dhaka from the 2nd to the 3rd of July. The theme of the conference was Women of South Asia and the Green Economy. 71 members from the 9 participating countries, namely Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka attended the conference. The list of the participants is given in Annexure 1.

The chief guest at the conference was Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chowdhury, Honourable State Minister, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, Government of Bangladesh. Alongside the conference a Crafts Fair was organized at the premises where the countries, participating in

SWAN, displayed their local products. The Crafts Fair was inaugurated by Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chowdhury on the morning of the 2nd of July before the commencement of the conference.

Before the inaugural ceremony a dance performance of the Raibeshi form, which is both a form of dance and combat, was presented.

The welcome address was made by Ms. Shaheen Anam, the executive director of Manusher Jonno Foundation. In her inaugural speech Ms. Shaheen Anam talked about how women today have shown that there is nothing they cannot do if given the opportunity and how they are marching ahead in all professions including politics. Ms. Shaheen Anam cited Bangladesh as an example where many high positions are held and public offices are run by women. She mentioned that despite these achievements there is another story of killings, trafficking, bride burning and poverty and there are countless women who live their lives in utter misery. She recognized pulling all women out of this situation as one of the challenges of all the members of SWAN. For that, she mentioned, the need of greater solidarity among the members, the need for the members to mentor and assist one another, the need of forging more partnerships and more networks and the necessity of coming up with innovative solutions.

Ms. Anam also emphasizes how it is not possible to prosper in this globalized world while one's neighbours languish in poverty and that every one needed to think beyond borders. Some concrete ways for the SWAN members to stay linked, proposed by Ms. Anam, were to use technology, spend a few hours every month to share good ideas, learn from best practices and most importantly care enough to give more of themselves to each other. She ended her inaugural speech by thanking everybody for being present and by acknowledging the proud privilege of Manusher Jonno Foundation of hosting the event.

The convener of SWAN, Professor Veena Sikri, Ford Foundation Chair, Academy of Third World Studies of the Jamia Millia Islamia University, introduced the conference saying that this year SWAN has come of age. She talked about why SWAN was conceptualized; she said that throughout 37 years as a career diplomat, she found that most of the interactions between countries, particularly in South Asia, remained at esoteric levels. Diplomats rarely mingle with the peoples of each other's countries, they never really understood each other's sorrows and

never shared each other's joys. Diplomacy remained a government to government concept and was never a people to people concept. This is what SWAN was formed to achieve. : a platform where the women of South Asia can bond and develop confidence and trust in each other through shared activities aimed at seeking common solutions to the similar socio-economic problems we share.

SWAN brings the women of South Asia together in friendship, understanding and in harmony. Professor Sikri says that the inequality faced by South Asian women is holding them back and there cannot be any poverty alleviation in South Asia without women having greater access to resources. In each South Asian family the woman plays a central role, she is the centrifugal force of the family; she takes care of the children, she takes care of the family, she works but very little of all this is considered for inclusion in the calculation of the GDP. Professor Sikri pointed out that in terms of accessing resources, including access to education, access to health services and equal job opportunities, women in South Asia are facing great barriers. The Global Gender Gap Report (prepared each year by the World Economic Forum), which measures the gap between genders by measuring the difference in the extent of access to resources by the genders, indicates a very poor position for most countries in South Asia. Thus, SWAN was created to bring women together sector wise by establishing 8 different SWANs. She said that women are the anchor of the family and they should now be allowed to be the anchor of society; unless women get just remuneration for what they are doing they will not be able to move forward.

In the two years since its inception, SWAN has had a tremendously productive outcome. Apart from discussing their plans for the upcoming year at the annual meetings, individual SWANs pursue their agreed programmes and agendas. She mentioned last year's South Asian Women in Media meeting in Goa. The SWAN on Arts and Literature also held the first ever South Asian Women's Theatre Festival last year. Ms. Sikri ended by talking about their plans to create beautiful products under the SWAN in Crafts and Textiles, which would be marketed as SWAN products. Keeping the theme of this year's annual meeting in mind she talked about the

problems faced by women, how SWAN could participate in solving them and what projects could be created which would bring the issues of the environment to the forefront.

In her address, the Honourable Justice of the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka, Shiranee Tilakawardane, further talked about the oppressions, biased behaviour and inequality faced by women in society through a few anecdotal examples. She pointed out that the problem was when resources were scarce the vulnerability of the women increased manifold and this was not because of differences in physical strengths of men and women, thus, helping the former to access greater amounts of resources, but, because the distribution of power between the two genders in society was unequal. She was of the opinion that for equality to be achieved it was necessary for organizations to be equally representative and power needed to be shared on an equal basis.

Ms. Pramila Acharya Rijal the Chairperson of SAARC Chamber Women Entrepreneurs' Council (SCWEC) introduced SCWEC briefly. This council was formed 10 years back with the aim of bringing together economic leaders of the South Asian region because, the advancement of women in the economic sector is very crucial. Ms. Acharya herself strongly advocates the economic empowerment of women. According to her, without being economically empowered individuals themselves, women could not address problems no matter what the problems were, what they tried to do or how they tried to solve it; women could empower others only when they successfully empowered themselves.

Throughout the past 10 years the SCWEC has been working on issues where the members can learn from each other and can replicate projects which address issues on a regional basis. She described the impact of regional networking by citing the example of a project that had worked successfully in India and how the SCWEC on seeing this had taken the initiative of replicating the project in Nepal. She proposed that SCWEC and SWAN could collaborate on certain issues saying that the best way would be to harness the skills of women in the SAARC region. She acknowledged Ms. Jaya Jaitley for a viable proposal of hers which could be replicated in all the countries through such regional forums; Ms. Acharya also appreciated her for showing a very good example, through her brainchild, the Delli Haat, of working through one platform and

making sure that women are empowered through different mediums. She talked about forging a partnership between SWAN and SCWEC; saying that they could address challenges more effectively by coming together instead of working in isolation.

The next address was made by Ms. Shinkai Zahine Karokhail, Member of the National Assembly of Afghanistan. She described it as an honour to be speaking as a representative of the youngest SAAR member country and she thanked all those who had supported them in becoming one. Ms. Karokhail expressed her pride in being a part of South Asia which, she said, had numerous ideal leaders who were leading the continent towards development. She also mentioned Aung San Suu Kyi as a great and a model Asian woman who stood against dictatorship. Ms. Karokhail felt that despite having more women leaders compared to the rest of the world, South Asian women still suffered from discrimination and could not enjoy equal opportunities. She explained how the geo-political situation of Afghanistan and the persisting terrorism dilemma made it extremely difficult for women to lead a normal life in a country which had the lowest rate of literacy among women in the region. In her speech Ms. Karokhail emphasized that contact between the women of the South Asian region was important in order to create opportunities for and strengthen South Asian women.

The chief guest for the day, Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chowdhury, Honourable State Minister, Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, next came to the podium. She congratulated SWAN on its third annual conference. She said that SWAN provides an excellent opportunity to share common issues especially those relating to women, affecting the lives of women in different ways, poverty eradication, holistic empowerment of women, attaining gender equality etc and that it will help in sharing the best practices and finding solutions to common problems and struggles. Keeping in line with this year's theme, Ms. Shirin added that promoting green economy is a globally acclaimed prime agenda; into the second decade of the 21st century protection of the environment and the preservation of the natural resources has become of utmost importance in ensuring the survival and well-being of human beings both at present and in the future. She said it is crucial to account for and acknowledge the role that women have been playing in this sector, unknowingly for years, and, to also ensure that their contribution

can be interwoven in an effective manner in promoting sustainable green economy. She said that the topic “Women and Green Economy” is very contemporary and the need of the hour. Ms. Shirin thanked Manusher Jonno Foundation, South Asia Foundation and Jamia Millia Islamia University for organizing this conference in Bangladesh.

The inaugural session was concluded with the vote of thanks made by Ms. Mariana Baabar, Diplomatic Editor, The News, Pakistan, where she acknowledged the privilege of Pakistan to have had the opportunity of making the vote of thanks. She talked about how SWAN on Women in Media could use the recent developments in social networking, through technology, to their advantage. She said how support for women in neighbouring countries could be conveyed via technology by citing the example of millions of people who showed their support, via technology such as social networking sites, online forums etc., for the women of Saudi Arabia who were fighting for their right to drive.

Another example she mentioned was when the Afghan government had decided to take over the shelters for destitute women; many women and NGOs had expressed their displeasure about the decision; a SWAN member from Afghanistan spread the news in the country and Ms. Baabar disseminated the news in Pakistan through her newspaper. Ms. Baabar stated how that act had an effect on many people in Pakistan, those who were interested in what went on in Afghanistan.

Talking about militancy and terrorism, Ms. Baabar said that it was very necessary for the countries in the region to be together to fight terrorism in the region because it was not possible for one country to do it on their own as these people were well armed and well funded with an established network. She concluded by saying that it was not necessary for people to give up on the traditional forms of communication such as newspapers and television, but that technology was definitely much more effective.

The first plenary session began with Dr. Vandana Shiva’s key-note address on “Women of South Asia and the Green Economy”. Dr. Shiva began with thanking the organizers and said she loved, “the opportunity to think together and work together.” She stated that she believed that from this region of South Asia, it would be possible to defend Earth.

She said that while there were some serious outcomes from the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, including the legally binding climate treaty and the convention of biological diversity, the ecological situation has deteriorated over the past 20 years since the summit. She pointed towards the increasing frequency and intensity of natural disasters, including cyclones, floods and droughts.

Dr Shiva affirmed that the biodiversity around the world is depleting at an alarming rate. The UN only recognized this threat in 1995, by which time 75% of the biodiversity of our region had been lost. We are losing 1000 to 10000 types of species every year, because our economic system

- a) is incapable of working with diversity,
- b) has a fear of diversity, because diversity means freedom.

She declared that a system that seeks to control cannot tolerate that freedom.

She warns that there is an increasing drive by corporations to install a system that would privatize biodiversity. Corporations that used to draw profit from oil are now joining other corporations that work with agriculture and biodiversity to converge into - what they term as - the 17 trillion dollar green economy. She sums up their objectives as:

1. Every life-form should be branded, owned;
2. 75% of biomass that women will make: The economies of energy, fuel, fodder, housing; this should be commoditized.

Among these converging companies and industries are BP, Shell, Exxon Mobil, Chemical companies like BASF, Dupont, Monsanto and numerous agribusiness giants, who wish to create monocultures to replace diversity. This will generate biomass for a fossil fuel based economy, which will lead us back to the primary source of climate change.

She explains the idea of bio-fuel, where food and plant are converted to bio-fuel, which is a net negative energy system according to scientists, i.e. they use more fossil fuel than they produce. The net negative energy is at 1.43, yet this venture is flourishing. That is only because of

subsidies the various governments give. She brings our focus to USA giving subsidies to convert corn and soya into fuel for cars. According to Dr Shiva, 75% of world food price rise is due to this reason. 15% of corn for bio-fuel is currently replacing 1% demand for fossil fuel in US. Using all the corn will replace only 7% of US fossil fuel demands which is why, these corporations, through the US government, will have to put pressure on other countries and chop down rainforests in Indonesia, take over lands of Africa and cut down the Amazon to grow soya. This system of total control will annihilate life.

She refers to this as an Earth Grab, pointing out similarities between this situation and the conduct of the East India Company in the subcontinent during the colonial years. While the East India Company mostly dealt in spices and textiles, they didn't touch the rest of the economy, because they couldn't. But today, with changing technology and property rights, the situation has altered and a greater pressure can be put on water, land, seed and biodiversity, leaving nothing for the poor to have.

She mentions the fight against what is referred to as bio-piracy, the patenting of traditional knowledge and biodiversity, mentioning the cases of Neem, Basmati and the ancient wheat variety. Monsanto currently controls 95% of genetically engineered wheat planted anywhere in the world and is daily acquiring or controlling local seeds.

Dr Shiva refers to the incident with BT Cotton, introduced in India by Monsanto. It has a toxic gene that fights a pest called bollworm. But the bollworm has become resistant, seed costs have increased by 8000%, seeds have become non-renewable and have to be bought. The resistance of the pest and emergence of new pests resulted in 13-fold increase in pesticide use whereas it was primarily supposed to reduce pesticide use. This increased expenditure in pesticide when it came to cotton farming, led the farmers into debt and caused farmer suicides in India. There have been 250000 farmer suicides in the last decade. There is now an attempt for a Pakistan-India agreement to take Monsanto seeds via the government of India to Pakistan. She emphasized the urgency of SWAN-led campaigns for organic cotton and open pollinated seeds so that an alternative path can be established.

She elaborated further into another example: the \$33million grant for the golden rice movement in Bangladesh by the Gates Foundation. While Bangladesh has plenty of greens to provide iodine and Vitamin A, golden rice attempts to provide Vitamin A as well. But in order to have the daily requirement of that Vitamin [750microgram], one would have to consume 3kgs of golden rice. She stated that there are better women-centered options, such as coriander and curry leaves, which have 1300 micrograms of Vitamin A; 70 times more efficient. Golden rice is also hazardous because of genetic manipulation, antibiotic markers and a carcinogen as a vector, which is escaping from the plant and entering the open environment. These corporate inefficient technologies are causing new diseases.

She expressed her concern that the investors who created the subprime crisis have jumped on to two resources: land and food; thus turning green from the color of life into the color of greed, the dollar note.

She said that the most important issue of SWAN's green economy is to protect nature so that people have their food and water, and their welfare and well-being. That's why in the women's green economy, technology has to be redefined through craft based technology. She stressed the importance of "life enhancing, life giving technology and livelihood generating technology."

She also pointed out that the economy needs to be redefined as well. She declared that it must be based on the free enterprise of millions of people. That's why entrepreneurship is embedded in ecological responsibility. "Our economies are based on biodiversity; they are women and nature centered, and they are need based. Corporate centered green economy is based on monocultures and is trying to make the entire planet a commodity. It is based on speculation and not on real value creation."

Dr Vandana Shiva's key note address was followed by, the Executive Director of Bangladesh Centre for Advance Studies, Dr Atiq Rahman's take on the matter. He mentioned that collectively, the governments of SAARC have decided to speak up on two issues: a) green economy, b) global environmental governance. He said that governments have mistaken governance for administration and that for most governments, governance is "my period and

how do I make the most for me and my cousin". Not for the whole nation and not for the poor. In the UN system, this tendency is somehow reflected and greed takes over.

He said that what is needed is a poverty convention. There is an average amount of nutrition received by every baby when it is in the mother's womb. The moment the baby is born, the divergence in nutrition is then more noticeable. This inequity must be solved.

He likens the state of human reaction towards global warming to fever in a human body. When it is 2 degrees, you call the doctor. When it is 4 degrees, you go to the hospital. When it is 6 degrees, you think "what am I supposed to do now?"

Dr Atiq stated that at the moment, there is enough food in the world to feed everyone. He clarified the point by saying that Food Growth, food yield, is what happens in the agricultural sector; Food Availability is how much food is in the silos; Food Security is how much food is available on an individual's plate. There is a huge gap there, which points to the mismanagement of food.

He said that the fundamental issue with Green Economy is sustainable development that is environmentally sound and socially just. He criticized the fact that we have put in place a system that is flawed. It is not the farmers or the women at the political showdowns. Yet in the local and global scenarios, the politicians are allowed to bring up agenda that does not fit a developing country. He mentions how Bangladesh has become better able to fight against cyclones, in that, the damage and impact of the cyclone are still vast, but mortality has been brought down due to various factors such as governments, NGOs and the local people working together and the quick mobilization of resources.

"We're not helpless. There are things we can do. But as Vandana rightly said, it has to be done by the community, preferably by the women, because they know and understand the need of the family better. We have to provide every citizen with food security, energy security, water security, livelihood security and health security." He emphasized that we have to think in the right perspective and not hand everything over for profit.

Ms. Khushi Kabir, coordinator of Nijera Kori, spoke next on the issue. She said that it is the woman's role that is crucial at the micro-level and the current systems, specifically political economy, are taking their contributions away. In Bangladesh, there is a great disparity and this affects especially the rural women who work from home living below the poverty level, and who have to fend for themselves for the sake of their families. When their issues are raised, the people speaking up for them are labeled as anti-development.

She paints a picture of the ship breaking industry, which is destroying the coastal ecology for the benefit of a few people. She speaks of the issue of deforestation and then reforestation with rubber plants, which are harmful to the environment. These rubber plantations have often taken place in the lands of the indigenous people, taking away their symbiotic relationship with their surroundings. The rise of the tobacco industry has destroyed large tracts of agricultural land. Tobacco cultivation is negative on two fronts: a) it is taking away the nutrients from the soil without giving anything back and, b) women and children work in the smoking houses where tobacco leaves are cured and they face grave health risks. She says that since the wetlands are being taken over by real estate companies, a clear demarcation of the land and the river is necessary.

She speaks of Jholok dhan from China, which has caused problems in the south of Bangladesh. She speaks out against contract farming, because the farmers are no longer in control of the seeds, no longer in control of the market, they are no longer in control of what they are producing. And women's control over seed cultivation, what is to be produced, such as vegetables and greens, is no longer there. It has bowed to commercial ventures. The pollution of our rivers has continued unchecked. The shrimp cultivation, hailed as a great export opportunity, is a ruse. Cultivated industrial shrimp for export is less than 1%.

Ms. Kabir was of the opinion that a few companies controlling most of these operations go against the democratic system.

Mr. Uchita D. Zoysa, Executive Director, Centre for Environment & Development, Colombo (Sri Lanka) spoke next about the sudden emergence of Green Economy after the fall of the Wall Street. He wonders if this is wisdom coming after all this time, and questions what this new

version of Green Economy is going to give us. He points out the absence of women as Secretary Generals of UN, as chairs of environment summits, saying this is why SWAN is so important.

He mentions that according to some, Green Economy is sustainable development and clarifies that it should be sustainable economy rather than sustainable development. Sustainable economy has to replace inequity, destruction and greed. It needs to ensure social equity, economic sufficiency and ecological balance. It needs to ensure sustainable development for well being and happiness of all.

In the South Asian context and global context, women should have greater opportunity in playing the role that women believe they can play. Mr. Zoysa says, "Opportunity is not enough. Inclusivity is very important. It's not just engaging the people, the civil society. Inclusivity has to be embedded in the economic system."

The first plenary session thus, ended.

At the second conference plenary session coordinators from each SWAN presented their reports. The reports were presented, in order, by:

- Dr Rasheda K Choudhury, Coordinator of the SWAN on Education
- Ms. Shinkai Zahine Karokhail, Coordinator of the SWAN on Women in Peacemaking
- Ms. Shaheen Anam, Coordinator of the SWAN on Microcredit, Livelihood and Development
- Ms. Jaya Jaitly, Coordinator of the SWAN on Crafts and Textiles
- Dr Vandana Shiva and Dr Uchita de Zoysa, Coordinators for the SWAN on the Environment
- Ms. Nandini Sahai, Coordinator of the SWAN on Women in Media
- Dr Mira Shiva, Coordinator of the South Asian Women's Network on Health, Nutrition and Food Security
- Professor Veena Sikri, Convener of the Conference and Coordinator of the SWAN on Arts and Literature

The first day of the SWAN conference ended with the third conference plenary session where a set of SWAN members made presentations on their papers. The list of the topics of the papers and presenters are mentioned below:

Plenary	Paper presentation and discussion on
Ms. Pativa Shrestha-Nepal	"Women and Education: Findings from a Research Study"
Dr. Saryu Doshi -India	"The Traditional Arts as Inspiration for Contemporary Indian Art"
Mr.. Isaac Khen -Myanmar	"Gender and Development Issues in Myanmar"
Ms. Farida Akhter -Bangladesh	"Seed as Empowerment of Women"

The second day of the conference began with the fourth conference plenary session where the paper presentations continued in the following order:

Plenary	Paper presentation and discussion on
Ms. Madeeha Gauhar-Pakistan	Women's theatre in the time of Jihad
Ms. Kunzang Tshering-Bhutan	
Professor Salima Hashmi –Pakistan	"Young Women Artists of South Asia : A Unique Experiment"
Ms. Shaheen Anam-Bangladesh	"Micro Credit and Changes in Women's life"
Ms. Sadia Dehvi-India	"Women and Sufism"
Ms Shalini Joshi-India	"Education for Empowerment"
Ms. Vidyani Hettigoda-Sri Lanka	Empowerment of women

The paper presentations ended with the fifth conference plenary session. The following presented their papers:

Plenary	Paper presentation and discussion on
Ms. Sabrina Islam-Bangladesh	"Using Technology for Micro Enterprise Growth"
Ms. Aminath Shaneez Saeed-Maldives	
Dr Durre Sameen Ahmed -Pakistan	" Women and Religion in South Asia"
Professor Madhu Khanna- India	"Rediscovering Indigenous Sources in South Asia"
Ms. Rohini Nanayakkara-Sri Lanka	

During the two days of the Conference, a draft of the Dhaka Declaration, the statement of SWAN’s position on all issues concerning the emerging Green Economy, was prepared under the guidance and leadership of Dr Vandana Shiva and Dr Uchita de Zoysa. The final Dhaka Declaration was adopted after discussions in the penultimate session just before the Valedictory Session.

The Dhaka Conference created and signed the Dhaka Declaration as an assertion of the solidarity women in the region offer to each other. SWAN believes that the local economies of South Asia have always been in harmony with nature, have used resources prudently, and shared them equitably. Today, those who have created the ecological crisis talk of the Green Economy. For them, the Green Economy is appropriating the remaining resources of the planet for profit — from seed and biodiversity to land and water as well as our skills, such as the environmental services we provide.

However, the Dhaka Declaration recognises that sustainable development is not possible without peace in this region. A critical concern of all women in the region is about the women of Afghanistan, who are on the verge of determining their future, and that of the next generation. The peace SWAN seeks cannot ever be at the expense of women’s rights. SWAN acknowledges that there can be no sustainability and Green Economy without peace. SWAN supports a conflict free Afghanistan with the inclusion of women in every process and decision. SWAN is working on the South Asia Women’s Peace Charter in order to present their collective views on issues of peace in South Asia.

SWAN stands committed to peace in South Asia and strengthening the life-giving traditions of this region. SWAN will deepen this concept and make it the basis of defining the Green Economy. As women, SWAN will work towards retrieving the frayed geo-political and ecological

condition of this region. The members of SWAN collectively commit themselves to working together to show that a better world is possible for South Asia through regional cooperation. The South Asia Women's Network (SWAN) stands committed to forging ahead on sustained regional cooperation through each of the eight individual SWANs. The Dhaka Declaration emphasizes SWAN's commitment to making the voices of the women of South Asia heard at all important regional and multilateral forums where these issues are being discussed

The conference ended with the valedictory speech by Ms. Irene Khan, former Secretary General of Amnesty International. In her valedictory speech she said that the work that SWAN was doing was incredibly important and that the network they had built by crossing boundaries and breaking barriers was the methodology for peace. Women's perspective could change dynamics in the field of human rights was what Ms. Khan felt. She talked at length about women's rights being synonymous to human rights. She said that the feminist definition of human rights, for her, would be to have economic, social and cultural rights along with civil and political rights.

Talking about South Asia she said that this was a wonderful region of deep contradiction where four of the nine countries have had women heads of government, a higher average than any other region in the world. She analyzed that along with commendable economic growth over the last two decades, in this region, had come great inequality and marginalization. According to a UN report, published last year, South Asia was the second worst in terms. of gender equality ratio and that half of the women in South Asia were illiterate with a life expectancy five years shorter than their male counterparts. South Asian women had a high mortality rate and high rate of school drop-out.

Ms. Khan felt that no country in the world would even dream of putting the kind of discrimination on the basis of race that they put on the basis of gender. Speaking about Bangladesh, she said that there are some very good laws for the equality of women, but few of them are being properly enforced on the ground, in many situations due to flaws in the system. She spoke against eve-teasing, saying it is a word designed to hide the true nature of the crime, which is sexual and gender harassment. She praised the progress in terms. of stands against the fatwa, but blamed the politicians, political leaders and religious leaders for being silent and not moving the country forward.

She stated that women are still a population without a voice, forced to comply with the decisions made by someone else, even in their own households. She mentions the issue of abortions and sexual reproductive rights which cause a lot of dissention even in Europe and said that discrimination against women is not restricted to select parts of the world. This lack of voice is further emphasized by the fact that only 30% of women, who borrow money from banks, are directly involved with the spending of it and payment of interests. The rest borrow mostly for their husbands and have no control over the money.

She suggested that these issues have to be taken head on by organizing proper networks for women including political, local and social domestic networks. And that the governments have to be pushed until they take action. She ended by saying that the world has made progress; the current generation of women is far ahead of the previous generations and the future generations will travel further still. But this change comes from the women's collective effort and this is why SWAN is so vital.

The conference was concluded by a few final words of good-bye by the Convener. Professor Veena Sikri thanked Ms Pramila Rijal, Chairperson of SCWEC, for her graciousness in agreeing to co-host the Fourth Annual Conference of SWAN in Kathmandu, Nepal in 2012.

Annexure 1 (List of participants)

AFGHANISTAN:

1. Ms. Shinkai Zahine Karokhail, Member of the National Assembly of Afghanistan: Coordinator of the SWAN on Women in Peacemaking
2. Ms. Razia Sadat, Member of the National Assembly of Afghanistan
3. Ms. Elay Ershad, Member of the National Assembly of Afghanistan
4. Asila Wardak Jamal, Director, Human Rights & Women's International Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kabul
5. Ms. Monireh Hashemi, Theatre Director, Simorgh Film Association of Culture and Art (SFACA), Herat,
6. Ms. Frozan Rahmani, Correspondent, Pajhwok News Agency, Kabul
7. Ms. Hasina Safi, Afghan Women's Education Centre (AWEC), Kabul.

BANGLADESH

8. Ms. Shaheen Anam, Executive Director, Manusher Jonno Foundation, Dhaka (Bangladesh) : Coordinator of the SWAN on Microcredit, Livelihood and Development
9. Dr Rasheda K Choudhury, Executive Director, CAMPE (Campaign for Popular Education), Dhaka (Bangladesh) : Coordinator of the SWAN on Education
10. Ms. Sabrina Islam, President, Women Entrepreneur's Association, Dhaka
11. Ms. Farida Zaman, Professor & Chairman, Dept of Drawing and Painting, Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Dhaka
12. Ms. Tropa Majumdar, Theatre Director, Dhaka.
13. Ms. Munni Saha, Head of News, ATN News, Dhaka.
14. Ms. Lubna Marium, Creative Director, Sadhana, Dhaka
15. Ms. Khushi Kabir, Coordinator, Nijera Kori, Dhaka
16. Dr Kaosar Afsana, Associate Director Health, BRAC, Dhaka
17. Dr Meghna Guhathakurta, Executive Director, Research Initiatives Bangladesh, Dhaka
18. Dr Niaz Zaman, Professor, Department of English, University of Dhaka
19. Ms. Rubi Ghaznavi, Managing Director, Arannya Crafts, Dhaka
20. Sara Zaker, Deputy Managing Director, Asiatic Marketing Communications, Dhaka
21. Suraiya Chowdhury, Director of Design, Prokritee, Dhaka
22. Ms. Rokeya Sultana, professor, Department of Print Making, Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Dhaka
23. Ms. Kanak Champa Chakma, Contemporary Free Lance artist
24. Ms. Jharna Dhara Chowdhury, Secretary, Gandhi Ashram Trust, Jayag, Noakhali

BHUTAN

25. Ms. Kunzang Choden Tshering, Chief HR Officer, Ministry of Economic Affairs, Thimphu
26. Ms. Roseleen Gurung, Microfinance Specialist, Tarayana Foundation, Thimphu.
27. Ms. Namgay Wangmo, Project Officer, Bhutan Association of Women Entrepreneurs (BAOWE), Thimphu
28. Ms. Meena Rai, Programme Officer, Bhutan Association of Women Entrepreneurs (BAOWE), Thimphu

INDIA

29. Professor Veena Sikri, Professor, Academy of Third World Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi (India) : Convener of SWAN and Coordinator of the SWAN on Arts and Literature
30. Dr Vandana Shiva, Director, Navdanya and Research Foundation for Science, Technology & Ecology, New Delhi (India), Co-coordinator of the SWAN on the Environment
31. Dr Mira Shiva, Director, Initiative for Health, Equity and Society; and Founder Member, Diverse Women for Diversity : Coordinator of the SWAN on Health, Nutrition and Food Security
32. Ms. Jaya Jaitly, Founder President of the Dastkari Haat Samiti, New Delhi (India): Coordinator of the SWAN on Crafts and Textiles
33. Ms. Bharati Chaturvedi, Director, Chintan Environmental Research and Action Group, New Delhi.
34. Professor Madhu Khanna, Director, Centre for Comparative Religions and Civilisations, Jamia Millia Islamia University
35. Dr Saryu Doshi, Author and Art Historian, Mumbai
36. Ms. Shalini Joshi, Co-Director, Nirantar, Centre for Gender and Education, New Delhi
37. Dr Sabiha Hussain, Associate Professor, Dr KR Narayanan Centre for Dalit and Minority Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia University
38. Ms. Sohaila Kapur, Theatre Director and Playright, New Delhi
39. Ms. Sarita Kumari, Social Activist, Ghanerao, Rajasthan
40. Ms. Sadia Dehlvi, Editor, Curator, Author and Art Historian, New Delhi
41. Ms. Usha Ganguli, Theatre Director, Rangakarmee, Kolkata
42. Ms. Arati Jerath, The Crest Edition, Times of India, New Delhi
43. Dr Saryu Doshi, Author and Art Historian, Mumbai

MALDIVES

44. Ms. Yudhra Abdul Latheef, Attorney-at-Law, Deputy State Attorney, Attorney General's Office
45. Ms. Aminath Shaneez Saeed, National President 2011, Junior Chamber International, Maldives,
46. Ms. Thoiba Saeedh, Director, Encore Theatre Productions, Male
47. Ms. Aishath Rishtha, Programme Manager, SWAD, Society for Women Against Drugs, Male

MYANMAR

48. Ms. Cherie Aung Khyn, CEO & Designer, Elephant House Co. Ltd, Yangon
49. Ms. Nu Nu Yee, Vice President, Myanmar Women Entrepreneurs' Association, Yangon
50. Mr. Isaac Khen, Executive Director, Gender and Development Initiatives, Yangon,

NEPAL

51. Ms. Pramila Acharya Rijal, Chairperson, SAARC Chamber Women Entrepreneurs' Council (SCWEC).
52. Mr. Bidur Thapa, Director of Field Programmes and Operations, SEARCH-Nepal, Kathmandu
53. Ms. Pratiba Shrestha, Coordinator, Status of Women in Nepal Report, Shtrii Shakti, Kathmandu,
54. Ms. Radha Kayastha, Madhesh Foundation for Peace and Development, Kathmandu
55. Ms. Abha Jha, Madhesh Foundation for Peace and Development, Kathmandu

PAKISTAN

56. Professor Salima Hashmi, Dean, School of Visual Arts and Design, Beaconhouse National University, Lahore

57. Ms. Madeeha Gauhar, Artistic Director, Ajoka Theatre, Lahore.

58. Ms. Madiha Kazi, Textile Designer, Thardeep Rural Development Programme, Karachi

59. Dr. Durre Sameena Ahmed, Chairperson and Senior Research Fellow, Center for the Study of Gender and Culture, Lahore

60. Ms. Marianna Baabar, Diplomatic Editor, The News, 27 A, Harkey Street, Rawalpindi

61. Ms. Zoia Tariq, CEO, ZEST Media/Events/Publications, Lahore

62. Ms. Ambreen Waheed, Executive Director, Responsible Business Initiative, Lahore

63. Dr Faiz H Shah, Head, Development Management, Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok.

64. Ms. Tabinda Alkans Jaffery, CEO, Asasah Microfinance, Lahore

65. Ms. Zehra Arshad, National Coordinator, Pakistan Coalition for Education, Islamabad.

SRI LANKA

66. Hon'ble Justice Shiranee Tilakawardane, Justice of the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka, Colombo

67. Mr. Uchita de Zoysa, Executive Director, Centre for Environment & Development, Colombo (Sri

Lanka) : Co-coordinator of the SWAN on the Environment

68. Ms. Vidyani Hettigoda, Chairperson, Women's Chamber of Industry and Commerce, Colombo.

69. Ms. Nishani Jessica Marina Dissanayake, Foreign News Editor, Lakbima (Sinhala daily), and Editor, Samudra (Sinhala magazine)

70. Ms. Mano Alles, Managing Director, Abans Financial Services, Colombo

71. Ms. Rohini Nanayyakara, Chairperson and Board Member, Lanka Orix Leasing Company Ltd, and

Lanka Orix Microcredit Limited, Colombo

72. Ms. Chandramali Liyanage, National Crafts Council of Sri Lanka, Colombo.