



**SID, Society for International Development**

**Chapter Bonn**

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***“Economic Democracy through Pro-Poor Growth”:  
Lessons from the Ground to Sustainability and Poverty Eradication***

***Illustrative Case Study and Dialogue with  
Dr. Ponna Wignaraja***

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Vice Chairman, Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation, (SAARC, 1992)  
Secretary-General of the Society for International Development (SID, 1980-1986)*

**Vision and Mission:  
Sustainable Pro Poor Growth  
with  
Economic Democracy  
and  
Conflict Transformation.**

**Towards a New School of Thought  
and  
New Social Contract between the State and the Poor**

Dr. Wignaraja was Vice-Chairman of the 1992 SAARC Poverty Commission. The Report of the Commission was picked up by the World Bank and the German Government, who immediately organised major policy dialogues in Washington and in Bonn. Today, the SAPNA study is being launched in several countries around the world.

With the endorsement of the unanimous Poverty Commission Report by the Heads of State of SAARC at their Summit in 1993, SAPNA was able to position itself as an independent follow-up group in support of the official SAARC process, to advocate the recommendations in the Report and its vigorous implementation.

- The first major message in the 1992 Poverty Commission Report was that:  
*“The magnitude of poverty in the Region, no matter how you measure it and complexity of the problem, is staggering. When coupled with the multi-faceted crisis currently facing South Asian countries, the problem is becoming unmanageable, not only putting democracy at risk but also posing a threat to the fabric of South Asian societies, leading to an unmanageable polity”.*
- The second message in the Report read:  
*“The conventional development interventions over the past fifty years have resulted in a growth rate too low to have an impact on levels of living and human development of large numbers of poor. Whatever growth that occurred in the public and private sector failed to ‘trickle down’ or be administratively redistributed to the poor.”*
- The third constructive message, beyond dissent, indicated that:  
*“A closer study of the positive experience on the ground showed that the poor were efficient and when empowered through their own organizations, they could themselves contribute to additional and a qualitatively different pattern of growth to complement growth from the public and private sector.”*
- The final message was as follows:  
*The perspective for poverty eradication should be unambiguously Pro Poor. The new premises for action should move on two fronts simultaneously.*
  - (i) The open-economy industrialisation front;*
  - (ii) The pro poor poverty alleviation front.**These two parallel thrusts should have longer and shorter timeframes and be harmonised as the processes evolved, ensuring a net transfer of resources to the poor in the short run.*

Twenty five years after the first SAPNA warning and nearly a decade after the 1992 SAARC Poverty Commission Report’s message to South Asian Heads of State, the President of India in an Indian Independence Day message, restated the challenge as follows:

*“Fifty years into the life of our Republic we find that Justice – social, economic and political – remains an unrealised dream for millions of our fellow citizens. The benefits of our economic growth are yet to reach them. We have one of the world’s largest reservoirs of technical personnel, but also the world’s largest number of illiterates, the world’s largest middle class, but also the largest number of people below the poverty line, and the largest number of children suffering from malnutrition. Our giant factories rise out of squalor, our satellites shoot up from the midst of the hovels of the poor. Not surprisingly, there is sullen resentment among the masses against their condition erupting often in violent forms in several parts of the country. Tragically, the growth in our economy has not been uniform. It has been accompanied by great regional and social inequalities. Many a social upheaval can be traced to the neglect of the lowest of society, whose discontent moves towards the path of violence”.*

This message is being restated by Heads of State in South Asia and elsewhere in the world today.

SAPNA has persisted with its mission, not content to continuing critiquing the existing process of development and economic growth as it had been unfolding in the previous quarter century or the evolving processes of centralised governance which ignored the emergence of a real democratic polity linked to economic democracy. SAPNA pursued its pioneering intellectual quest to identify further critical micro macro elements of a coherent conceptual framework towards the new School of Thought required to inform a relevant transitional response to the multifaceted crisis of Governance and Poverty in South Asia.<sup>1</sup>

SAPNA's eight published studies give coherence to critical elements in an alternative development paradigm for sustainable development with growth and equity in South Asia.

(1)

Towards a Theory Of Rural Development

**By G.V.S. De Silva, Wahid-ul-Haque, Niranjan Mehtha, Anisur Rahman, Ponna Wignaraja  
Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, Sweden 1977 and Progressive Publishers, Pakistan – 1988**

(2)

The Challenge in South Asia: Development, Democracy and Regional Cooperation

**By: Ponna Wignaraja , Akmal Hussain(eds)  
Sage Publications, India – 1989**

(3)

Women, Poverty and Resources

**By Ponna Wignaraja  
Sage Publications, India, 1990**

(4)

Participatory Development: Learning from South Asia

**By: Ponna Wignaraja, Akmal Hussain, Harsh Sethi, Ganeshan Wignaraja Oxford University  
Press & United Nations University Press – 1991**

(5)

New Social Movements in the South: Empowering the People

**By Ponna Wignaraja (ed)  
ZED Books, U.K. & Sage Publications, India – 1993**

(6)

Readings on Pro-Poor Planning Through Social Mobilisation in South Asia: The Strategic  
Option for Poverty Eradication (Vol. I)

**By: Ponna Wignaraja & Susil Sirivardana (eds)  
Vikas Publications, India – 1998**

(7)

Pro Poor Growth and Governance in South Asia: Decentralisation  
and Participatory Development

**By: Ponna Wignaraja & Susil Sirivardana (eds)  
Sage Publications, India – 2004**

(8)

Economic Democracy Through Pro-Poor Growth

**By: Ponna Wignaraja, Susil Sirivardana & Akmal Hussain (eds)  
Sage Publications, Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore – 2009**

The recent publication „*Economic Democracy through Pro-Poor Growth*“ edited by Ponna Wignaraja, Susil Sirivardana and Akmal Hussain and released in 2009, shows that SAPNA has deepened their understanding of new challenges of globalisation, the poverty crisis, the related issues of national and regional security and a rights based holistic approach to sustainable development. Dr. Wignaraja will be presenting one of these success stories in Nepal, entitled „*A Life in Dignity*“. The illustrated holistic approach and methodology towards Sustainable Development through Social Mobilization, Community Building and Participatory Democracy

<sup>1</sup> Extracts of the Foreword by Karan Singh: *Economic Democracy Through Pro-Poor Growth* (2009): Ponna Wignaraja, Susil Sirivardana, Akmal Hussain (eds.). Sage Publications: Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore.

should catalyse the following discussion at the SID Chapter in Bonn.