

South Asia Partners Meeting Asian Roundtable on Social Protection

*Dhaka, Bangladesh
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18 December 2014 (Day 1)

I. Opening and welcome

Welcome speech

As the host of the event, **Repon Chowdhury** of the Bangladesh Occupational Safety, Health and Environment Foundation (OSHE) welcomed the participants of the activity in Bangladesh. Repon acknowledged that social protection is a very hotly debated topic right now, especially in the world of work comprised mostly of informal workers. In this context, social protection is very important for South Asian countries. Particularly in the case of marginalised workers, there is a serious need for a social protection that gives guarantee to their families and good future for their children.



Welcome Speech by Repon Chowdhury, OSHE

In both the regional and national levels, pushing for social protection in South Asian countries and in SAARC entails engagement with governments. In relation to this, advocacy and campaign are necessary.

On the other hand, **Sanjiv Pandita** of the Asia Monitor Resource Centre (AMRC) shared that social protection is a very important area of work for AMRC, considering that majority of the population are in the informal sector and belong to the working poor. In fact, in South Asia, there are more poor people compared to sub-Saharan Africa. Because of the inadequacy of the social safety nets, majority of the population are not covered by social protection. Faced with risks and vulnerabilities associated with life cycle and dispossession, the people are forced to go to the cities to look for work. With limited opportunities, they end up in the informal sector.

The challenge for the labour movement is how to organise the informal workers so that they can increase their bargaining power and effectively demand for their just share. Social protection should not be treated as charity. It should rather be examined in the context where livelihoods are taken away and the overall economic system works against the majority of the people. Thus, in order to work together effectively on the issue of social protection, there is a need to understand what kind of social protection the marginalised workers need, the strategies needed to make organising successful, and how to bargain for the demands of the marginalised workers.

Because the first day of the meeting coincides with the International Migrants' Day, **Abul Hossain** of the United Labour Federation (ULF, Bangladesh) proposed to hold the AROSP South Asia meeting in honour of the migrant workers.

Introduction of AMRC and AROSP

Samuel Li Shing Hong

Asia Monitor Resource Centre

Before introducing AMRC and AROSP, Samuel Li Shing Hong of AMRC gave a brief background about social protection. According to Samuel, social protection is a hot issue not only in Asia but also in the whole world. It is being pushed by different international organisations, development agencies, and financial institutions (e.g., World Bank (WB) and Asian Development Bank (ADB)). However, the more important question remains. Do the visions of these organisations on social protection meet the demands of the grassroots people?

Partly, it is due to the non-responsiveness of the social protection policies and programmes to the grassroots needs that the Asian Roundtable on Social Protection (AROSP) was formed. Samuel narrated that the AROSP network was established in 2009. In the past, AROSP tackled the following agenda: (i) basic principles of comprehensive social security; (ii) Asian minima in practice; (iii) social assistance and minimum wage; and (ii) sharpening labour's role advancing social protection for all in Asia.

It was during the fourth AROSP meeting in Manila, Philippines that the network broadened its discourse from social security to social protection. Primarily, AROSP will serve as a platform (i) to provide mutual help and sharing among individual countries in deepening their understanding, capacity, and networks on social protection; (ii) to support and integrate the regional struggle of the development social protection for the poor across various sectors; and (iii) to conceptualise and programmatise the social protection campaign in Asia.

Basically, the AROSP network has members in East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. Such members represent trade unions, grassroots workers organisations, academe, and NGOs working in both formal and informal sector issues. AROSP principally formulates its position on social protection based on the opinions of and narratives shared by the grassroots workers at

the ground. The grassroots-based and -oriented position of AROSP is critical in countering the dominant perspective on social protection by regional and international institutions like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), International Labour Organisation (ILO), ADB, and WB.

Raising the issues of the grassroots workers is very important especially when the general labour conditions in Asia are taken into account. In the past two decades, the economic growth rate of Asia is more rapid compared to the rest of the world. However, such economic growth is not beneficial to the grassroots people. This is evident in the increasing inequality and decreasing labour income share in Asian economies.

The strengthening of global capitalism, informalisation, neo-liberalisation, outsourcing, and contractualisation have been the dominant trends. The economic development in Asia is not accompanied with the improvement of the workers' conditions. While there is a reduction of absolute poverty, there is no corresponding reduction in relative poverty. To illustrate, about 71 per cent of workers in Asia are employed under informal arrangements. Some work in the informal economy; others are informalised workers in the formal economy. Nonetheless, the working conditions in both the informal and informalised arrangements are generally precarious and vulnerable. Workers in the informal economy are also in high risks of occupational injury and diseases but they do not get social protection. Furthermore, they are marginalised, invisible, and excluded in decision-making processes.

Under the informal/informalised working arrangements, there are also segmentations existing. Specifically, the women who comprise the majority of the informal working population also concurrently occupy the lowest segment of informal employment. Thus, there is a serious need to address the women workers' issues.

After providing a comprehensive context, Samuel then proceeded to share the outcomes of last year's AROSP meeting in Manila. First, he laid out the different issues in South Asian countries with respect to informalisation and social protection. Then, he pointed out the key principles that social protection should have. In particular, social protection should be:

- Inclusive;
- Rights-based, non-discriminatory, and accessible;
- Grassroots-oriented;
- Democratic, representative, and transparent in terms of decision-making and implementation;
- Comprehensive;
- Reform-grounded, transformative, and anchored to the overall development policy; and
- Working poor-centred and not private sector-driven.

It is in these principles that the Declaration of the fourth AROSP meeting was formulated. The Declaration states that social protection is a right of all the citizens that restores dignity and

balances the economy. In particular, social protection should ensure a dignified living for all and secure a future freed of uncertainties arising from job, income, social, economic and environmental insecurities. It should also move away from the prevailing neoliberal policies that prioritise financial investments over the citizens' benefits. In this connection, the AROSP network commits to working together through further research, awareness-raising, and intensified advocacy and campaign for social protection in Asia.

As far as the concrete activities of AROSP are concerned, Samuel explained that AROSP's focus for next year will be research. From the research that will be conducted, advocacy and campaigns on social protection will then be built.

II. Organising and bargaining for social protection

Recap of the last South Asia regional meeting

Joy Hernandez

Asia Monitor Resource Centre

On 16-17 December 2013, several partners of AMRC gathered together in Kathmandu, Nepal for a "Sub-Regional Workshop on Organising Strategies for Informal Workers." A recap of what happened during such workshop was presented by Joy Hernandez of AMRC. During the workshop, the following points were discussed:

- Characteristics of informal workers in South Asia;
- Difficulties in organising and building sustainable organisations;
- Experiences in gaining visibility and recognition;
- Different forms of informal workers' organisations;
- Identifying bargaining targets for informal workers;
- Sharing bargaining strategies; and
- Building alliances.

Based on the discussion and sharing during the workshop, the informal sector workers in South Asia are not covered by the labour laws and social protection programmes, low-paid but working long hours, strongly present in the agriculture sector, highly feminised, and dependent on the use of unpaid family labour. Several strategies were employed to organise the informal workers in South Asia. The strategies vary from country to country, sector to sector, and organisation to organisation. However, the main aim is similar: organising informal workers so that they will have increased bargaining power to demand for what they want and what they deserve.

Among the most common organising strategies include: awareness-raising; holding meetings in communities; conducting study circles and surveys among workers; tackling occupational safety and health issues; training of organisers and building leadership skills and capacity of workers; conducting street plays; offering a welfare package or financial services;

paying more attention to the issues of women and children (i.e., the sectors who are very much present in the informal economy), and forming cooperatives and self-help groups.

In relation to bargaining, the workshop discussions tried to identify the bargaining strategies, the bargaining issues, and the bargaining targets of the informal workers. Table 1 shows the summary of the discussion.

Table 1.
Bargaining strategies, issues, and targets of informal workers' organisations in South Asia

Bargaining strategies	Bargaining issues/demands	Bargaining targets
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strikes • Alliance building with other trade unions, NGOs, and political parties • Lobbying at the local, national, and regional levels • Solidarity groups and actions • Mass mobilisations • Use of media to popularise the issues of informal workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wages • Social protection (e.g., maternity benefits for women) • Legal coverage • Occupational safety and health • Support for SMEs and agro-based industries • Right to organise • Land rights • Subsidy for inputs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employers and employers' associations • Local and national governments (particularly the wage boards on wage issues)

Joy also mentioned the different recommendations proposed by the participants of the workshop. Afterwards, she encouraged the participants to have a quick sharing of their organising initiatives in the past year. The following served as the guide questions for the sharing:

- On organising
 - Has there been any remarkably successful organising of marginalised workers that happened in the past year? What are its impacts on the workers' situations?
 - Have there been new strategies used in organised marginalised workers? Have there been new forms of marginalised workers' organisations?
- On bargaining
 - Has there been any successful bargaining by marginalised workers that happened in the past year? If so, on what issues?

Updates on organising in the past year

Menaha Kandasamy of the Ceylon Red Flag Union (CRFU, Sri Lanka) kicked off the discussion by sharing how a local domestic workers' union was formed in Sri Lanka. She considered that the organising a victory because after a long struggle, the domestic workers' union was registered as a union. In Menaha's assessment, the trade union's traditional ways of

handling issues within an organisation will not work in the case of the domestic workers' union. The composition of the domestic workers' union, which is mostly women, is a big factor. So, CRFU changed strategies in order to encourage more women and younger workers take leadership positions. Now, despite the fact that 79 per cent of the domestic workers did not get formal education, they proved that they can take up decision-making roles. Moreover, the women domestic workers are even able to speak themselves when bargaining with the government.

With respect to strategies, Menaha said that most of their organising strategies are spontaneous and unplanned. However, CRFU always ensures that whatever strategy it takes, it will be adaptive to the new things that come up.

The domestic workers' union were able to organise a campaign to get the peoples' support to the domestic workers. The signatures were submitted to the Ministry of Labour. However, some of the people mistook the union as an agency for domestic workers. They started to register all the employers' names. The good thing that came out of this is that the union can provide domestic workers without any charge at all but under the condition that the employer will sign a contract with the domestic worker. The contract stipulates the terms of holidays, sexual abuses, and sleeping place, among others. Currently, there have already been three contracts signed.



Menaha Kandasamy (CRFU) sharing the experiences of the domestic workers union in Sri Lanka

In the case of Sri Lanka, the ratification of the ILO Convention 189 pushed the government to recognise the domestic workers as workers. Menaha said that they have been trying to register the domestic workers' union for six years. Because of the ILO Convention 189, they had no problem with the registration.

At present, the domestic workers are informal workers but the union is not because it is already registered. However, the domestic workers remain uncovered by legal protections. In order to address this, the domestic workers' union submitted a legal draft and held a dialogue with the government. In such dialogue, they represent themselves and articulated their demands really well.

Abul clarified that while most workers in the informal economy are in the agriculture sector, there is also an increasing number of informal workers in the urban areas. In fact, in the labour survey of Bangladesh, majority of the informal workers are in the urban areas. Joy responded that the results of the discussion that were reported cover not only Bangladesh but the whole of South Asia. However, she agreed that in Bangladesh, the largest population of the informal economy are the rickshaw pullers who are mostly in Dhaka, an urban centre.

Antony Raj of Cividep (India) narrated that there is a garment workers' union in India that is run by women. The leader is not highly educated but is very effective in running the union. The union developed a hotline number and a community outreach programme. Through the hotline number which the workers can call secretly to complain, it was able to resolve 48 cases in two months on various issues such as non-payment of project fee, non-issuance of cards, and sexual harassment.



Antony Raj (Cividep) sharing the organising strategies in South India.

In Bangalore, there is no factory-based union because of the loopholes in the Trade Union Act. However, unions are organising independently. The unions hold gate factory meetings and distribute pamphlets on labour laws. Women workers then start to approach the unions, especially when they have problems. It is very important for organisers to develop new ways of reaching out to the workers so that the workers themselves would approach them.

In terms of identifying bargaining targets, Antony said that the labour welfare boards should be targeted and the demands in bargaining should be rights-based. The labour welfare boards are under the Ministry of Labour and they exist in every state of India.

Following Antony's sharing, Surendra Pratap of the Centre for Workers Education (CWE, India) stated that before 1992, the labour movement in India did not talk about the informal sector. However, at the state level, there were initiatives to address workers' problems and protect the workers through the tripartite boards. For instance, in the experience of the workers in the ships (i.e., loading and unloading) in Maharashtra, the tripartite board does not only offer welfare package. It also regulates the working conditions. Because the workers cannot enter the profession without bypassing the board, they have to enrol themselves in the board. The workers eventually became permanent workers. Through this process, the tripartite board somehow created a bargaining power among the workers who were previously unprotected. Now, the wages of those workers amount to not less than Rs. 15,000. A similar scenario also happened in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. In Kerala, the fish workers welfare board is providing social protection above the ILO standards. After 1992, all these initiatives of the tripartite board were gone. The last welfare board, according to Surendra, was the construction workers' welfare board.

Sanjiv added to the discussion by sharing the experience in the construction workers' welfare board. The construction industry is taxed and such taxes are the source of funding for providing social protection measures. Supposedly, the workers who have identity can take advantage of such protection measures. However, the problem in India is not the funding. Even though there is a board and funds, the challenge is the distribution and accessibility of the

benefits especially to workers who cannot establish an employment relationship with their employers.

The tripartite boards are constituted by the government, the employers, and the central trade unions. Surendra expounded that when a tripartite board is formed, the rate of unionisation is accelerated. This is because in some industries like the construction industry, the unions are able to enrol a number of workers. However, such enrolment is limited only to get social protection benefits. Enrolment of workers in the boards does not establish employment relationship because of the multi-level existence of contractors. It also does not guarantee collective bargaining rights. Thus, construction workers held a national strike to pressure the contractors to recognise the workers.

In relation to getting benefits for workers, a grassroots worker and victim of the Tazreen fire on 24 November 2012 in Bangladesh named Zarina shared her experience in getting compensation. According to Chorina, two years have passed since the Tazreen fire incident but the victims have not yet received any support from the government. The victims of both Tazreen Fashions fire and the Rana Plaza collapse started to get organised after the Rana Plaza collapse through the help of OSHE. They will continue the movement until they get what they are entitled to.



Zarina, a victim of Tazreen fire, telling her difficult experience in getting compensation.

Zarina said that the situation of the victims is more vulnerable now than two years ago. The victims are suffering from physical injuries after the tragedies. They are demanding the Bangladesh government and the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) to give them compensation and to comply with the ILO Convention 121 (Employment Injury Benefits Convention). Zarina also argued that the factory owners have to be penalised from what happened.

The buyers also have a role in the struggle of the victims. They should not buy from the factories that have been the cause of the death of thousands of workers. At present, there is a huge gap between the buyers and the workers, primarily because of the difference in educational attainment. The buyers do not listen to the issues of the workers. Zarina expressed that the victims are also human beings who are entitled to the rights to live, to safe working environment, and to decent workplace.

China Rahman of the Federation of Garment Workers (FGW, Bangladesh) explained that some of the victims received compensation from the government. Also, the owner of Tazreen Fashions has been arrested and is currently under the custody of the government. In relation to other issues related to Tazreen fire and Rana Plaza, the Accord is working.

Sanjiv raised the question of whether the money collected in Accord has been given to the workers. Repon responded that in reality, the workers have not yet received any compensation. What were received by some of the workers are not compensation but money from charity and donations. For the compensation, there is a trust fund of USD 40 million that is being set up. However, the trust fund has not yet reached USD 20 million yet. The disbursement of the compensation can only start when the amount in the trust fund reaches USD 20 million.

Repon also clarified that most people are confused about the role of the Accord. The Accord is not responsible for providing compensation. It is set up for a different reason – fire and building safety. It is tasked to check the factories, ensure that they are safe. For the compensation mechanism, the government is at the drivers' seat. The trade unions, the ILO, and other actors are supporting the government to move the process forward. As a neutral body, chairs the compensation mechanism.

In this context, the victims of the Tazreen fire and Rana Plaza formed a network in order to pressure the government to expedite the process of providing compensation. They cannot wait for a long time. In another five years, there might be another thousands of workers who will die from similar tragic incident.

Some of the Tazreen fire victims received three months' wages while the Rana Plaza victims did not receive anything at all. Not receiving compensation makes it difficult for the victims to survive. Those who were injured cannot work anymore. The network of victims are currently active in street campaigns. Their key demands are compensation, social rehabilitation, and livelihood.

In Nepal, Rati Maharjan of the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT) said that there are a large number of informal workers in the health sector and they are paid low wages. In particular, the health sector workers only get Rs. 20,000 in a year or Rs. 200 in a day. In a period of two months, they only get three days' work. To bargain for what they want, they show that dissatisfaction by wearing black arm bands or conducting silent protests.

On the other hand, Feroze Ahmed of the Human Voluntary Organisation (HVO, India) shared how organising is conducted in a conflict-ridden environment like Kashmir. Aside from the usual difficulties in organising, they are also faced with other challenges such as the armed struggle. In Kashmir, there are no factories. Most workers are home-based workers who are not recognised. The workers only get recognised if they have artisan cards that are given by the government when they register. However, such cards do not come with any benefits.

When Kashmir was flooded, none of the workers received compensation except for the Rs. 3,800 for the kacha. Essentially, the workers lost the resources that they need to earn a living. The looms used by the home-based workers were washed away. They are not given alternative livelihood. This crisis situation in Kashmir gave HVO the opportunity to organise. It is a tough challenge to organise because in the 1990s, there were unions in Kashmir but the people lost their faith in the unions. HVO has to make the union's image more favourable.

In their current organising, HVO sees the need to reach out to each household because the workers perform their work within their homes. Feroze also shared the initial results of the AMRC research that they are conducting about the women home-based shawl makers. In terms of the working conditions, the women workers work from 13 hours to 16 hours a day – basically, from morning until about the time that they should sleep. Despite the intense work that they do, their outputs are not being counted in the GDP.

While there are no factories in Kashmir, there is the so-called semi-formal workers. They are municipal workers who are paid only Rs. 4,500 per month. They work on either of the two shifts: 8:00 AM to 2:00 PM or 2:00 PM to 8:00 PM. They work seven days a week (no Sundays off). Organising will be very important in Kashmir because most workers, regardless of gender, do not know anything about labour laws.

Briefly, Joy summarised the discussion. Because the nature of work has changed, the organising strategies have also changed. In addition to the usual factories, the home and the streets also become a workplace. Besides, employment relationships are becoming blurred. Given this context, the traditional ways of organising that apply to the formal sector may not be effective in the informal sector. There are also other challenges to consider. In some countries, the laws that govern organising are restrictive or have loopholes that are not favourable to workers. Amidst the challenges, the organising strategies have to adapt similar to the experiences that have been shared (i.e., hotline numbers for workers' complaints, house-to-house organising for home-based workers, involvement of buyers in case of Rana Plaza/Tazreen, big mobilisations to target an entire industry or a government body, etc.).

Group discussion 1: Social protection from the grassroots perspective

1. *What causes marginalisation and exclusion?*

Marginalised workers have been at the centre of AROSP's discussions. While their issues are always discussed, there has been no in-depth discussion yet of the root causes of their marginalisation and exclusion. The first question in the group discussion aims to understand the marginalisation process from the perspective of the marginalised workers themselves.



Group discussion

The following table shows the different answers given by the participants. As shown Table 2, marginalisation is not a one-dimensional phenomenon. Its causes can be rooted in the economic, political/legal, and social systems. In some cases, some environmental and legal factors also contribute to the people's marginalisation.

Table 2.
Summary of the group discussion on the causes of marginalisation

Causes of marginalisation	
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Globalisation and neo-liberal capitalism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Unequal resource distribution <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dispossession of land, forest, water, and livelihood sources ▪ Precarious work <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - OSH problems in the workplace - Lack of the right to organise ▪ Privatisation that resulted in shrinking public sector ▪ Underdeveloped agriculture sector and other traditional industries (i.e., decline of the jute industry) • Poverty
Political/legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-people development policy • Non-implementation of existing laws and policies • Limited legal protection for marginalised workers • Lack of political will among government officials
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patriarchal system • Caste system • Migration (internal and external) • Lack of education and awareness of rights
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecological destruction (i.e., river erosion in Bangladesh that caused people to migrate from rural to urban areas, flooding in Kashmir, oil spill in Bangladesh that affected the fisher folks) • Natural disasters

What kinds of difficulties/vulnerabilities do different grassroots groups need protection from?

In today's highly globalised neoliberal economy, marginalised workers are facing more difficulties and vulnerabilities than ever. Previously, the vulnerabilities being addressed by social protection are limited to those related to an individual's life cycle such as birth, maternity, illness, and aging, among others. However, marginalised workers face difficulties beyond those associated with their life cycles. The responses of the participants to second question show this reality very clearly. By understanding the difficulties and vulnerabilities that marginalised workers face, it would be easier to identify the kind of social protection that they need.

In general, the participants identified **discrimination** as a difficulty that they experience most of the time. More specifically, they mentioned that marginalised workers often **get harassed and threatened** by the employers and middlemen, among others. Informal workers like the street hawkers are usually threatened with eviction unless they pay bribes to the police.

As regards work-related difficulties and vulnerabilities, marginalised workers listed more. Foremost is the **lack of job security**. This can mean multiple jobs in multiple locations, seasonal work, and part-time work. Workers also suffer from **poor working conditions** (e.g., long work hours, low wages, absence of health facilities in the workplace, etc.). OSH issues are also very common. Marginalised workers, whether in the informal or formal sector, are in constant risk of **occupational accidents and diseases**. In the informal economy, marginalised workers have **no holidays** as they need to continue to work to augment their incomes. There are also rampant cases of **child labour and human trafficking**.

Moreover, **collective bargaining** is quite uncommon among marginalised workers. Marginalised workers cannot demand for what they want and what they are entitled to.

Marginalised women workers are more vulnerable. They usually get discriminated at work by virtue of their gender. They are also the main targets of **sexual harassment**. They also deal with the difficulties during maternity and child-rearing, which definitely affect their work.

On top of the worker-related difficulties that marginalised workers experience, there are also other vulnerabilities that they need protection from. Among those that are identified by the participants are aging and natural/man-made disasters.

A group reported that being subjected to these difficulties and vulnerabilities undermine the marginalised workers' dignity.

2. ***What kind of social protection do the grassroots want and demand?***

There are various social protection programmes. However, they might not be responsive to the needs of the marginalised workers, especially when their difficulties are taken into account. Besides, the marginalised workers are not given the space to articulate the kind of social protection that they want.

In this exercise, the marginalised workers identified the kinds of social protection that they need and demand for.

- **Work and livelihood.** Most of the demands of the marginalised workers are related to work, livelihood, and other income-generating activities.

Interestingly, the most common demands of the marginalised workers are nothing new. Basically, they are the key labour standards such as eight-hour work day and proper wages that ensure living standards for their families. They also demand for paid leaves and overtime pay.

In addition, the marginalised workers demand respect for the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining as well as the right to strike. These demands of the workers reflect that the implementation of the most common labour standards is absolutely ineffective and problematic.

Because marginalised workers in South Asia are very prone to occupational safety and health risks, the workers demand for safe workplaces and sick benefits (including medical treatment). In cases where occupational safety and health standards cannot be observed, they call for adequate compensation for workers who fell sick and got injured as a result of their work. Further, they demand for a financial support system for the families of victims of occupational accidents and diseases.

Marginalised workers also demand for unemployment insurance to support them during the period that they are looking for work.

The above-mentioned demands usually cater the marginalised workers in the formal sector. In the informal sector, workers demand for livelihood assistance. For those working in agriculture, they want subsidy for inputs.

- **Education.** One of the difficulties mentioned is the lack of education of the marginalised workers. Better education opens more and better opportunities for workers. Thus, the workers recognise that free and better education for their children is a very relevant social protection programme that should be made available for free. They also demand for skills development programmes that can help them find better employment opportunities.
- **Health.** Aside from the sick benefits from work, marginalised workers also demand for programmes that will address the health problems of their families. For marginalised workers who can barely support the daily needs of their families, access to free healthcare and medical treatment would be a huge help.
- **Pension.** Old age also makes an individual vulnerable. However, many workers, especially the informal workers, do not have pension. After long years of working, they do not have a safety net that could somehow support them. In some countries like Bangladesh, social assistance are given to poor older persons. However, the amount is so small (Tk. 300) such that it cannot even support the basic daily needs of the older persons.

- **Social protection for women.** Women face gender-based difficulties. Yet, for women, even availing maternity leaves and maternity benefits is not an easy process. Also, some women, like those in the informal sector, are excluded from getting maternity benefits.

At the workplace, women workers also demand to have a sexual harassment committee set up.

- **Non-discrimination.** Although there are no concrete social protection programmes proposed in the group discussion, the participants want that discrimination based on gender, caste, and type of work be eliminated

What are the key principles of a grassroots-oriented social protection?

The WB and the ADB have developed the concept of social protection that they recommend to different states. However, their concept of social protection is very neoliberal and market-oriented. To be able to address the real issues of the marginalised workers, social protection should be grassroots-oriented.

In this regard, the marginalised workers identified the key principles that a grassroots-oriented social protection should have.

- Social **protection** should be **rights-based**. It is not a charity.
- It should be aimed towards **restoring the peoples' dignity**.
- Social protection should **address dispossession**. It should not allow the removal of resources and rights from the people.
- Social protection should be **transformative**. It should transform the whole economic model.
- Social protection should be **comprehensive**.
- Social protection should be **universal and inclusive**. It should not exclude and discriminate certain segments of the society. At present, most of the informal economy workers are excluded from social protection programmes. In Sri Lanka, for instance, the voluntary social insurance is not viable. It essentially does not cover the large number of the informal economy workers such as the fisher folks, stone quarry workers, tea plantation workers, etc.
- The provision of social protection is primarily the **state's responsibility**.

**Group discussion 2:
Organising as a basic tool for achieving social protection**

1. What is the role of organising in pushing for social protection for all — at the grassroots level and nationally?

Organising is very important in increasing the bargaining power of the workers in demanding for the social protection that they want. The participants think that because they are marginalised in the society, they cannot get social protection without being organised. Organising is a critical step in building awareness among workers and eventually getting recognition and visibility. Once organised, marginalised workers can easily get registered in social protection schemes. There are other participants who shared that being part of an organisation makes it easy for informal workers to get licenses to conduct their work (i.e., street hawking).

2. What has been done in organising for social protection by different groups (i.e., trade unions, informal organisations, women workers, etc.)?

There are various strategies used by workers to organise for social protection. Meetings are held at worksites or in the markets to conduct political education. Family members are also included in organising. Organisers identify the most pressing problems of the workers and use them as tools for organising. For instance, issues like health and old age and the lack of social protection that addresses them are used to make the workers aware of their rights.



Group discussion

Once organised, workers set up sector-based structures at different levels – local, national, and regional. To extend the advocacy beyond the workers’ movement, organisations also encourage the media to take up the issues of the workers. They also work in solidarity with other civil society organisations to lobby the government to adopt grassroots-oriented policy changes.

3. What are the challenges in and opportunities for organising for social protection?

In order to strengthen organising for social protection, it is important to evaluate the challenges in and opportunities for organising. In this exercise, the participants identified more challenges than opportunities.

Table 3.
Summary of group discussion on challenges in
and opportunities for organising for social protection

Challenges	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Workers are not aware of their right to social protection. ▪ The employers and the state do not respect the workers' rights. ▪ Trade unions exclude temporary workers from organising. ▪ Women workers are faced with double burden. Young workers, on the other hand, are also difficult to organise. ▪ Workers work for long hours. It is difficult to encourage workers who work long hours to join an organisation. ▪ Informal workers are scattered, making it difficult to organise them. ▪ Workers from different sectors are not recognised. ▪ The invisible supply chain makes organising difficult. ▪ The media does not give attention to the issues of the workers. ▪ Trade unions operate in a non-democratic way. Some leaders have political ambition. ▪ The labour movement is fragmented. There is political rivalry among unions. ▪ The government has no political will in implementing policies and programmes on social protection. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Building alliances with other civil society organisations working on social protection can help make social protection issues more visible. ▪ OSH issues can be used as an entrypoint for organising. ▪ Organisations can take advantage of the experience-sharing and learning activities that the AROSP platform provides. ▪ While the lack of media attention is problematic, there are still opportunities that can be explored to influence the media to cover workers' issues.

4. How can we strengthen organising for social protection?

- The organisers and the union leaders should integrate themselves with the workers.
- Democratise the trade union movement. The workers' organisations should be controlled by the workers themselves.
- Develop an intensive advocacy, campaign, and lobbying on social protection at all levels.
- Develop political bargaining for transformative socialism.
- Network with national, regional, and international networks.
- Mobilise resources.
- Work towards trade union unity to develop a common strategy. Build solidarity.

- Intensify political education for class consciousness. Question why the state is withdrawing from its responsibility.
- Organise the unorganised.

19 December 2014 (Day 2)

III. Recap of Day 1



Feroze and Menaha doing the recap of the first day's discussions.

Menaha and **Feroze** led the recap of the first day's discussion through a creative TV show format. The process was participatory as they gathered insights and learnings of the participants from the previous day's discussions. Menaha and Feroze summed up the recap by saying that the key principles for a grassroots-oriented social protection are clear. In the past, there are some successes on organising for social protection. However, there are also a lot of failures. Trade unions and marginalised workers organisations must build solidarity to pressure the government to seriously take up its responsibility of providing social protection to its citizens.

IV. Regional issues and developing strategic interventions for social protection in South Asia

The labour and social protection challenge in South Asia

Surendra Pratap

To provide a background on regional issues, Surendra presented the labour and social protection challenge in South Asia. He started by posing the question, "Why social protection?"

The corporate-led globalisation and liberalisation have exceptionally higher level of vulnerabilities and uncertainties in the life of the people and almost completely removed the

dynamics of redistributive justice. In this context, the people need additional cover of social protection.

The working class in South Asia face a lot of threats economically. The combined system of international division of labour, international mobility of capital, and the export-led growth models based on FDI force a war against the working classes. Regional integrations like SAARC and SAFTA are going to increase labour and social problems at alarming levels. With the regional integration of South Asian economies in SAFTA and SAARC, a common structure of labour relations and social protection emerges as an important agenda of the South Asian labour movement.



Surendra Pratap presenting the regional issues

Yet, the huge workforce of South Asia is not covered by social protection. Access to better social protection only applies to workers in the formal sector. Majority of the workers are self-employed or in the informal sector. The women and other socially excluded sections are also predominant in the informal economy, so they are doubly excluded.

In India, the Employees Provident Fund Act, Maternity Benefit Act, and Payment of Gratuity Act apply only to establishments with ten or more workers; the Employees State Insurance Act applies to establishments with 20 or more workers.

Only the organised workers are able to compel the employers to comply with the laws. However, overall, trade union rights are not respected.

Surendra then presented the labour force and other economic indicators in different South Asian countries. Taking India as an example, he explained the extent of exclusion that informal workers and other marginalised sectors suffer. He also showed the trend in informalisation that continues to grow. On the contrary, unionisation remains focused on the formal sector. Organising excludes the informal workers in mainstream trade unions. While labour and social security reforms were made in India after 2000s, there are still proposed anti-labour amendments such as shifting the enterprises with less than 50 workers to the informal sector and the informalisation of the workforce in enterprises with less than 300 workers.

In the whole of South India, Surendra critiqued that there is a very low spending on social protection. The public health expenditure as a percentage of GDP in Asia and Pacific is only 1.68

percent, even less than Sub Saharan Africa (2.51 per cent). It is only 0.59 per cent in India and 0.4 per cent in Pakistan. Smaller South Asian economies have higher public health expenditure. In Maldives, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, it is 5.49, 2.84, 1.89 and 1.63 per cent, respectively.

For Surendra, regional floor wage and social protection floor may be misleading and not achievable for the following reasons:

- To practically achieve any policy changes, there is a need to collectively bargain with an authority capable of enacting and implementing these policies. At the sub-regional level there is no such kind of authority in South Asia.
- Equalisation of wages and social protection benefits in any region cannot be achieved if the labour market is not regional. Also, labour is not able to collectively bargain at the regional level.
- The level of socio-economic development varies from country to country. The wages and the benefits may not be equal in all countries. Besides, labour has also different levels of collective bargaining power.

Given the aforementioned, rather than having regional floor wages and social protection, the agenda of labour can be a common structure of social protection. However, without a common structure of labour relations, it is difficult to have a common structure of social protection. Therefore, the demand for regional social protection structure is linked with the development of a common regional structure of labour relations.

Surendra said that social protection should consist of the basic social protection and contingent social protection. The components of the two types of social protection are summarised in Table 4 below.

Table 4.
Basic and contingent social protection

Basic social protection	Contingent social protection
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Right to sustainable livelihood and incomes at least equal to minimum wages as legally enforceable right for all ▪ Unemployment compensation as legally enforceable right for all unemployed youth, and workers facing long term/seasonal unemployment ▪ Subsidised education, health and sanitation, housing, etc. for all ▪ Food protection for all (subsidized food by Public distribution system) ▪ Ecological protection for all, by way of maintaining the ecosystems and prohibiting any activity disturbing it, to protect the people from eco-disasters ▪ Subsidized inputs for small farmers; and other self-employed producers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Compensation for unemployment created by dismissal/retrenchment/layoff or closure of industries: Compensation equal to six months' salary to be paid by the employers and thereafter if the unemployment continues for more than six months then unemployment compensation needs to be paid under basic social protection ▪ Employment injury compensation: Total wages for whole period when workers is unable to work, and treatment cost + compensation for any minor or major disabilities created by the injury ▪ Death or major disability of workers: Disability pension or alternative livelihood to survivor + compensation and free education and health cover to the family

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Old age pension (equal to that part of minimum wages, including basic wages, dearness allowance, housing rent + free travel and free health care) for all who do not retire with pension benefits ▪ Disability pension (equal to the part of minimum wages, including basic wages, DA, housing rent and maternity benefits + free travel with one assistant, and free health care) for all disabled who are unable to work ▪ Maternity benefits to all women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Livelihood destruction and displacement: Decent alternative livelihood ensuring comparable income + rehabilitation along with compensation ▪ Loss of income or increase in expenses (environmental crisis/accidents/crop failure/inflation etc): Enough support to compensate for the losses and to regenerate their livelihood protection
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Critical to this is having a system to support the provision of social protection. Such system should be adherent to the following:

- All South Asian countries must spend at least 10 per cent of their GDP on social protection.
- All countries must ratify the ILO Convention on Social Security.
- Social protection must not be privatised and financialised.

In order to effectively implement social protection, the following recommendations are proposed by Surendra:

- A new labour legislation system needs to be instituted. It should contain five labour laws – labour relations law, working conditions law, wage (determination, increment, and payment), Social Protection La, and Welfare Cess Law. These laws must be simple and with universal applicability of their provisions in all occupations and to all workers without any exception.
- Social security for formal workers may be implemented by the existing system for formal workers. For other sections of workers, social security may be implemented through occupation/industry boards funded by tripartite contributions. Boards may regulate workin conditions and implement social protection is occupations.
- Welfare and Cess Act must be applicable to every sector. Cess collected from industrialists and other businessmen must contribute the major share of funding to boards. The boards may also help and support the self-employed workers in making their livelihoods sustainable.
- The labour law must include a section on outsourcing. Brands and first and second tier companies must be made responsible for compliance. The cost of compliance to labour standards and providing social protection must be shared across the value chain.

With respect to the wage law, Surendra recommended the following:

- Minimum wage should apply to all wage workers and home-based workers, without any exception.
- Minimum wage must take into account: (i) four consumption units for one earner; (ii) food; (iii) clothing; (iv) house rent constituting 30 per cent of minimum wage; (v) fuel and lighting accounting for 20 per cent of the minimum wage; (vi) cost of education's children, medical needs, and other requirements (i.e., festivals, marriage, etc.) equal to 25 per cent of the minimum wage; (vii) local conditions and other factors influencing the wage rate; and (viii) travel and communication costs.
- Minimum wage revisions must be declared with head-wise allocations.
- The law must clearly declare that minimum wage is for fresh workers and wages must increase after six months of experience. Annually, there should be additional increments.

For the informal sector, below are Surendra's proposals:

- Land reform should be implemented to increase the average size of holdings.
- The rights of the self-employed producers and communities on the resources that they use for their work and livelihood must be broadened, i.e., rights of fish workers on water bodies and rights of forest workers on forests.
- Support should be given and extended for the integration of the self-employed workers in organisations like cooperatives.

At the regional level, there is a need for the workers to come together. Attaining a regional common social protection structure and a regional common structure of labour relations requires a regional coalition of working class movements. If the capital is integrating itself at the regional level, the working class and the peoples' movement should also integrate themselves at the regional level. To force the force inclusion of the agenda of social protection and labour relation in the process of SAARC and SAFTA, the labour movement needs to actively engage in debates of regional institutions.

Plenary discussion on regional issues

Sanjiv started the discussion by pointing out that some people think that things were better before. However, things were never better. The colonial times were horrible; the partition and war were horrific. Majority of the workers were never better off. It is true that there is redistribution of justice but it should come along with a transformative process. The challenge is how to challenge the existing system.

He also argued that the problem with wages is that a wage increase becomes a justification of exploitation. The people should be demanding public and common good. If we do so, wage will be immaterial. How can we demand this common good?

TMR Rasseedin of Ceylon Federation of Labour (CFL, Sri Lanka) agreed that there is a need for transformative social protection. The marginalised workers' key demands should then be formulated. In this context, the Constitution should be amended. With respect to the ILO Convention on social security, it should be evaluated if ratifying will be relevant in our respective countries.

On the issue of wages, TMR Rasseedin believes that wages are still relevant. However, wages should be living wage and it should be stipulated at the national level. Amulya Nayak of Shramajeevi Adibvasi Sangathan Odisha (India) seconded TMR Rasseedin's argument on wage. He said that the word 'minimum' in minimum wage is problematic because the workers will always be put in the minimum. Wages should be living and decent wage.

For Khalid Mahmood of Labour Education Foundation (LEF, Pakistan), the minimum wage concept is not working anywhere. It is not being implemented. Minimum wage should not be discussed under social protection issues. The workers should be focusing on the basic rights, which is now becoming secondary among the priorities.

According to Menaha, including the social protection demands in the Constitution is important. However, everyone should be reminded to be careful about how social protection is implemented. The rule of law is a serious problem in many countries. As for the ILO convention, we should be aware of how difficult it is to implement.

In the opinion of Ume Laila Azhar of Homenet Pakistan, wage is a cross-cutting issue. It should not be ignored; rather, there should be more interventions. There are already some success stories on the issue of wages. For instance, the informal workers in Pakistan are already in the new category of wage regulation. If we take out the issue of wage, how can the lives of the marginalised workers be improved? Social protection is a broader set of demands, including wages. It may also be present in some Constitutions but how can they be improved and transformed?

Also, Laila mentioned that those in the government, especially the ones sitting in the parliament, are capitalists. The marginalised workers are not represented in running the state. A possible strategy is to form a political party and build a political programme.

Raj Kamal Tewary of Workers Initiative (India) agreed with Sanjiv on his observation that the situation in the past is not better than now. On the issue of minimum wage and social protection, Kamal argued that wage is a thing and social protection is many things. They should not be put in the same place. He also questioned, "Who determine the wage? Who determine the percentage allocation for social protection?"

Adding to the debate, Abul shared that in Bangladesh, the Constitution contains all the issues mentioned. However, they are not implemented. On the informal-formal discourse, he

said that there are various efforts to formalise the informal sector. As for the minimum wage, the labour contribution in the industry's value added should be considered as an element in minimum wage determination. On the other hand, social protection should be focused on sustaining the people's livelihood.



Sanjiv Pandita explains the importance of bringing together the workers inside and

Sanjiv clarified that the meeting is about marginalised informal workers. He explained that South Asia was predominantly agriculture until it was transformed into industry. Some workers work inside the factory. Some enjoy their rights as workers; others are even able to set up factory-based unions. But what happens to the workers outside the factories? How can the unions address the problems of those working in agriculture and outside the factories? These workers are invisible. Even the trade union movement is focused mostly on the workers inside the factories.

In this regard, Sanjiv argued that the main challenge is how to bring together the workers inside and outside the factories. Social protection – the fight for the common good – is the common denominator.

There are more challenges, according to Kamal and Khalid. Kamal said that aside from the informalisation that happens outside the factories, there is also a growing informalisation in the formal sector. Khalid, on the other hand, pointed out that what makes the challenge of bringing together the formal and informal workers more difficult is the fact that even the workers in the formal sector are very divided and fragmented.

Meanwhile, Shahnaz Iqbal of LEF drew the attention of the participants to also put the women workers' issues into perspective. Despite comprising the majority of the informal workers, women workers remain invisible and excluded. How can we work towards the inclusion of women workers?

TMR Rasseedin that there is no contention about the transformative social protection. However, in order to achieve the long-term transformative social protection, transitional demands should be made. Decent living wages might not be the ultimate goal but it is important and it must be included in transitional demands.

**Group discussion 3:
Identifying priority issues and bargaining targets and
developing alliance-building strategies at the sub-regional level**

Social protection is a very broad issue. In order to develop a strategic and targeted advocacy and campaigns, it is important to identify the key issues that have to be addressed and the bargaining targets/targets of campaigns and advocacy.

Moreover, solidarity among workers regardless of which sector they come from is critical in bargaining for social protection. Thus, strategies in building an alliance working towards social protection must be developed.

In this session, the participants were divided into four groups. They were to identify the:

- Top three common issues at the sub-regional level;
- Target/s of campaigns and advocacy; and
- Alliance-building strategies.

Table 5 summarises the results of the group discussions.

**Table 5.
Priority issues, bargaining targets, and alliance-building strategies
at the sub-regional level**

Group	Top 3 issues	Target/s of campaign and advocacy	Alliance-building strategies
Group 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recognition and visibility (especially of women workers) ▪ Neoliberal state (i.e., privatisation, lack of common goods) ▪ Grassroots democracy (lack of democratic space for self-organising and representation at the local, national, regional levels) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SAARC ▪ National and state/provincial governments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inclusion of the grassroots by involving them in the national and local processes and reaching out to existing networks on social protection ▪ Formation of the South Asian Roundtable of Social Protection as a representative organisation ▪ Development of a Peoples' SAARC Social Protection Charter
Group 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child labour ▪ Informalisation and unemployment ▪ Lack of comprehensive legislation on social protection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Employers ▪ State ▪ SAARC ▪ ILO 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Compulsory free education and simultaneous strengthening of income of parents ▪ Organising informal sector workers and working for their recognition ▪ Establishment of education centres for women migrant workers ▪ Build inter-sectoral alliances

Group 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Exclusion of informal workers ▪ Absence of national framework for the informal sector (invisibility) ▪ Lack of information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Micro: local and national level labour organisations, women's groups, CSOs, community-based organisations, local government, public representatives, media ▪ Meso: networks of like-minded organisations, academe, CSOs, provincial government, media, municipal government, welfare boards, parliament members ▪ Macro: women's commission/caucus, parliament, planning commission, chamber of commerce, watch groups ▪ Regional: SAARC, ASEAN, UN Asia Pacific bodies, ILO Regional Offices, regional networks, ADB 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Research-based dialogues (social audits as a mechanism to identify issues, data on informal workers and their contributions, regional framework for the inclusion of informal workers, analysis of development models [rural vs. urban, alternative livelihood, budget analysis]) ▪ Lobbying with SAARC (towards formation of Regional/National Commission on Informal Workers and Regional/National Framework for Informal Workers) ▪ Lobbying with UN sub-regional/Asia-Pacific bodies (requires national data collection about informal workers, capacity building of CSOs, trade unions, and government, peer group learning, and resource mobilisation)
Group 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Organising ▪ Legal protection ▪ Gender equity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Informal workers (Start from informal workers – raise their awareness and organise them). ▪ Labour organisations ▪ State/government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Solidarity actions ▪ Exchange and exposure ▪ Collective workers' leadership (with focus on women) ▪ Bringing new groups together ▪ Social actions (research, capacity building, awareness raising)

For the ways forward, the participants discussed in the plenary concrete actions to push social protection for all, especially the marginalised workers. Among the preliminary suggestions were conducting more meetings/discussions on social protection at the grassroots level, formation of a South Asian Alliance on Social Protection (SAASP), and reaching out to existing networks.

The South Asian Alliance for Social Protection

1. **Immediate tasks of SAASP.** Everyone agreed that forming the SAASP is a good idea. The immediate task of SAASP is to consolidate the alliance nationally. This can be done by going back to the grassroots and getting their insights on social protection and their feedback about having an alliance on social protection. This is very critical in ensuring bottom-up planning.

2. **SAASP members and national coordination.** The members of the SAASP per country and their preliminary action plans are shown in Table 6. The members will choose and designate the national coordinator.

Table 6.
Members of the SAASP and their proposed coordination/action plans

Country	Organisations	Coordination/Action Plan
Bangladesh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bangladesh Occupational Safety, Health and Environment Foundation (OSHE) ▪ Labour in the Informal Economy (LIE) ▪ United Labour Federation (ULF) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coordination: National coordination will be rotational. OSHE will be the coordinator for the first year. The nature of the network will be issue-based and membership-based. ▪ Action Plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - List all the organisations that can potentially be part of the social protection network. - Include grassroots organisations.
India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cividep ▪ Centre of Workers Education (CWE) ▪ National Association of Street Vendors in India (NASVI) ▪ Workers Initiative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coordination: Cividep will take lead in South India, CWE will be in charge of North India, and NASVI will be in charge of the whole India. However, Surendra will be the point person for communication. ▪ Action Plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify the agenda of the organisations involved and the common issues in which the organisations can work together. - Find out what other organisations/networks on social protection and ensure that there will be no duplication of efforts (i.e., the National Alliance for Social Security is currently undertaking research on gaps in social security).
Nepal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT) (to be confirmed) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Leadership of GEFONT has to be consulted first.
Pakistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Labour Education Foundation (LEF) ▪ Homenet Pakistan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coordination: National coordination will be rotational. ▪ Action Plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - LEF, Homenet, and other organisations will form an alliance on social protection. Homenet is already involved in national advocacy on social protection. - Review the existing resources and research on social protection. - Map the organisations that work on the issues of the informal workers. - Map the available resources. - Play a role in taking recommendations at the policy level. - Clarify the focus. Workers or general public (i.e., social protection for ALL?)
Sri Lanka	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ceylon Red Flag Union (CRFU) ▪ Ceylon Federation of Labour (CFL) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coordination: CRFU ▪ Action Plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Map the informal sector in Sri Lanka. Identify the marginalised and the excluded. Identify the organised and unorganised. - After getting such information, determine what needs to be done.

3. **Principles of alliance building.** Principally, the member-organisations of SAASP will build the alliance in a **bottom-up and inclusive** process.
4. **Timeframe.** The agreed timeframe for consolidating the national alliances is six to eight months.
5. **SAASP regional coordination.** At the South Asia level, the coordination will also be rotational every two years. Being the host of the South Asia AROSP meeting, **OSHE** was chosen as the first coordinator. The tasks of the coordinator are creation of a Google group for SAASP, distribution of newsletter (to be confirmed), and collection and sharing of information. The coordinator will also be responsible for drafting the concept paper on the aims of the alliance. The concept paper will serve as a living document that can be changed, reviewed, and improved regularly. It was also suggested that a simple membership form should be distributed among those who want to be part of the alliance.
6. **Launching of regional campaign and advocacy.** The regional campaign and advocacy will be built based on the campaigns at the ground. Also based on the demands at the grassroots level, SAASP can develop a grassroots charter.
7. **Official formation of SAASP.** The SAASP was formed on 19 December 2014 during the South Asia Partners' Meeting of AROSP in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Research Workshop

The next part of the meeting was the workshop on the research project being undertaken by the AROSP network. The background of the research was presented by Joy of AMRC.

The idea of undertaking a research project was brought up during the AROSP conference in Manila in 2013. The rationales for the research are to have a clear understanding of the social protection programmes in place vis-à-vis the demands of the marginalised working people in Asia and to build a progressive, grassroots-oriented discourse on social protection. Armed with data and clear arguments, it would be easier to strengthen the advocacy and campaign for social protection and to formulate a common social protection agenda that can be pushed at all levels.

The objectives of the research are:

- To critically examine the existing social protection systems in various Asian countries.
- To challenge the widespread and popular notions on social protection of neo-liberal organisations such as the World Bank, ADB and ASEAN by developing a grassroots-defined and grassroots-oriented concept of social protection.

- To consolidate the demands on social protection of grassroots' communities in the region and document their organising and bargaining strategies in pursuit of social protection for all.
- To build up the discourse on social protection as an instrument for social transformation.

The research questions are as follows:

- On social protection:
 - What are the existing social protection policies and programmes in your country? What social protection programmes are specifically available to women?
 - What are the limitations of the existing social protection schemes (in terms of framework, coverage, and benefits, for example)?
 - How are the social protection policies and programmes implemented? What are the gaps in policy and implementation?
 - Where do the budget and/or funds for social protection programmes come from? How are the social protection funds managed? How are they invested?
- On the grassroots perspective on social protection:
 - What does social protection mean for the marginalised grassroots working people? For the marginalised women workers?
 - What are social protection demands of the marginalised working people? Of the marginalised women workers?
- On organising and bargaining for social protection:
 - What are the initiatives of the labour movement on organising and bargaining for social protection?
 - How does the labour movement campaign and advocate for the kind of social protection that they want? What are the strategies?

The proposed methodology will be a combination of desk research and case studies and/or consultations with marginalised workers. Those who want to take part in the research are reminded that the key element of the research is the marginalised workers' participation.

The expected outputs of the research project are the social protection resource book (compilation of all the research studies, regional and sub-regional analyses, and essays on special topics, i.e., financialisation of social protection, social protection for women workers, etc.) and the social protection manual (short, simplified version of the resource book that can be used for awareness-raising at the grassroots level).

Joy shared that the research process has started in the Philippines and Indonesia. For South Asia process, she encouraged the organisations to participate.

After the presentation on the research, the participants grouped themselves according to country to discuss their participation in the research as well as the potential focus of the research. They also identified the national research coordinators.

Table 7.
Research coordination and plans for the research

Country	Coordinator	Focus of/Plans for the research
Bangladesh	Bangladesh Occupational Safety, Health and Environment Foundation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mapping of social protection schemes in Bangladesh from the marginalised workers' perspective - Provision and implications of social protection for marginalised workers - Prospects and challenges of providing social security for informal workers
India	Centre for Workers Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identification of gaps in social protection in India based on the existing literature ▪ Plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collection of existing research studies on social protection will be done before February. - A meeting will be held on 20-21 February to plan the research.
Pakistan	Labour Education Foundation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collect all available information on social protection. Hold another meeting by the end of January. - Hire an expert to conduct a desk research. - Link the research to the alliance building on social protection in South Asia. - Expected timeframe: 6-8 months
Sri Lanka	Ceylon Red Flag Union	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mapping of informal workers in Sri Lanka - Assessment of the informal workers' understanding of social protection - Gap analysis of the social protection system in Sri Lanka ▪ Plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research will be connected to women workers' organising.