



Asia Programme Strategic Directions

Regional Context

South Asia (including India) ranks among the world's most densely-populated regions. About 1.6 billion people live here – about one-fourth of all the people in the world⁽¹⁾. As such, the region is facing serious environmental crisis. Additional new challenges have emerged in recent years:

- Increased trans-border trafficking of women and children due to economic poverty, gender biases and social exclusion of already disadvantaged communities.
- Deterioration of quality of health care provision and education due to

decreasing government spending on basic services.

- Resource depletion, poor sanitation, lack of access to clean water, environmental degradation and vulnerability to environmental disasters.
- International terrorism.
- Challenges associated with economic liberalisation and changing international development priorities.

The human development indicators in the table below illustrate statistics in the Asian countries that Skillshare International works in, current and proposed. The statistics relate closely to the Millennium Development Goals.

	Bangladesh	Cambodia	India	Nepal	Pakistan
Population (millions) 2004	139.2	13.8	1,087.1	26.6	154.8
Population below national poverty line (%) 1990-2003	49.8	35.9	28.6	30.9	32.6
Net primary enrolment ratio (%) 2004	94	98	90	78	66
Gross tertiary enrolment (ratio of female to male) 2004	0.50	0.45	0.66	0.41	0.80
Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)2004	56	97	62	59	80
Births attended by skilled health personnel (%) 1996-2004	13	32	43	15	---
Prevalence of HIV (% ages 15-49)2005	0.1	1.6	0.9	0.5	0.1
Prevalence of tuberculosis (per 100,000 people)2004	435	709	312	257	329
Population with sustainable access to an improved water source (%)2004	39	41	33	35	59
Official Development Assistance (ODA) received per capita (US\$)2004	10.1	34.7	0.6	16.1	9.2

Table 1 - Source: UNDP Human Development Report 2006

(1) - Source: www.wikipedia.org

(2) - WHO SEARO Regional Health Report 1987

(3) - HIV and AIDS in South Asia, World Bank 2005

Background to Skillshare International Working in Asia

Skillshare International had, in its former embodiment as Skillshare Africa, only worked, in the last 30 years, in Southern Africa to support social change and organisational development. In July 2000, Action Health joined Skillshare Africa. Consequently there was a geographical broadening of the programme. This partly included the expansion to the Asia region.

Action Health had already been present in India since 1984 and involved in the placement of volunteer health trainers. The focus of our programmes in India was predominantly in the health sector due to our history with Action

Health and poor health indicators in the region. Programmes have since expanded to cover other areas of Skillshare International's priority sectors.



Village children in the Nilgris, India

Regional Strategic Objectives

Geographical focus

In Asia, Skillshare International's activity has been focused in India, Nepal and Cambodia with India being our main programme. We understand that there is potential to add value through working with partners and communities in other countries in Asia.

In the next five years we will:

- *Research the potential to expand our programme activity to other countries in South Asia and Southeast Asia.*
- *Explore the potential for expansion of our programme in Cambodia beyond Peace Building.*

Health

Sector Background:

The South Asia region accounts for 40% of the world's maternal deaths⁽²⁾. According to a UNIFEM study, there are more than 70 million missing females across South Asia – these are often women trafficked or denied their right to life through female foeticide, infanticide or sheer neglect.

Despite a remarkable improvement in health indicators during recent decades, it is clear that these benefits are not spread equitably across all socio-economic groups.

In the South Asia Region, low nutritional status, inadequate access to health care and sharp economic poverty often contribute to both congenital and acquired impediments in physical and/or mental faculties. People with different abilities especially among already excluded groups face more discrimination and lack basic support such as access to social safety nets, education, health services, and gainful employment.

More than 6 million people in South Asia are living with HIV and AIDS⁽³⁾. Although the infection rate in the general population is still low, in absolute numbers India has one of the largest HIV-positive populations in the world.

In the next five years we will:

- *Build capacity of communities to manage health care systems.*
- *Create awareness and strengthen community responses to HIV and AIDS.*
- *Assist partner organisations to address stigma and discrimination against HIV positive people especially women and children.*
- *Support partner organisations to develop Care Continuum as a model in the region.*
- *Develop cross regional programmes to share best practices.*
- *Train development workers on issues around HIV and AIDS.*

Environment

Sector Background:

Resource depletion and environmental degradation, toxic and hazardous waste generation and vulnerability to disasters (cyclones, floods, drought and more recently the tsunami) are some of the environmental problems faced by developing countries in South Asia.

There is a lack of access to clean water supply and sanitation with only 41.5% of the

population having access to an improved water source in 2004*.

In the next five years we will:

- *Develop and support new programmes in environment /natural resources in the context of the rights of indigenous communities and other disadvantaged people like landless and marginal farmers.*
- *Focus on community ownership through promotion of co-operatives.*

Education and Training

Sector Background:

Poor countries can be expected to have particular problems in providing basic education, but South Asian countries are under-performing far more than others in spite of having similar income levels.

In 2004, South Asia had a very low adult literacy rate of about 58.3%*.

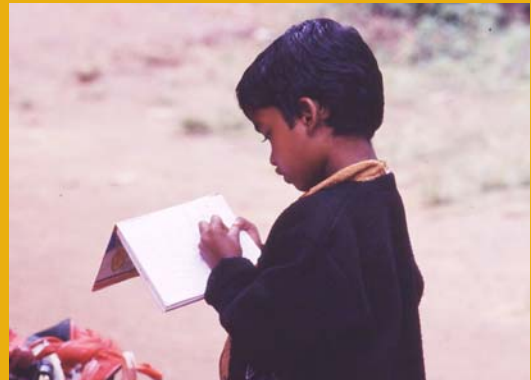
There are also gender disparities in literacy rates primarily due to age-old traditions and norms that discriminate girl children and women from gaining economic opportunities and freedom through education.

In the next five years we will:

- *Promote education as a right, especially for girls.*

- *Build skills training in economically productive activities for women and other vulnerable groups.*
- *Create a sustainable local pool of teachers, educators with child centred approaches.*

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Boy at ASHWINI school, India

Economic Empowerment

Sector Background:

Despite considerable progress, the region continues to face fundamental constraints of sustainable development, including unbalanced economic growth and persistently low levels of human development resulting in low status for women.

The region is home to 40% (560 million) of the world's poor*, most of whom live in rural areas. The majority of the poor are women and children.

In the next five years we will:

- *Facilitate new economic opportunities for socially excluded people like indigenous communities, fisherfolk, Dalits and traditional artisans.*
- *Develop regional programme to enable economic security for traditional artisans.*
- *Develop livelihood strategies for trafficking-prone zones in border districts of Bangladesh, India and Nepal.*

Peace Building

Sector Background:

The South Asia region, along with many other regions in the continent, has seen violent conflict between different political forces. This has resulted in losses of thousands of lives, damage to the economy and impact on the social fabric of societies.

Peace is essential for social and economic development in a democratic context where communities and peoples have the opportunity to thrive and prosper in an environment that nurtures equality and social justice.

Strengthening peace building and conflict transformation initiatives are paramount to development from the community to the national levels.

Skillshare International has been working with Action Asia and the Alliance for Conflict Transformation (ACT) supporting peace building initiatives and strengthening the capacity of peace networks.

In the next five years we will:

- *Continue to support Peace Building initiatives and strengthening the organisational capacity of Action Asia and ACT to deliver its vision and purpose.*
- *Promote learning between peace building and development organisations in the region.*
- *Support partner organisations to mainstream peace-building into their programme activity.*

Other Objectives

In the next five years we will:

- *Develop effective strategic leadership for Skillshare International partners through enhancement of management and leadership skills.*
- *Engage partners in sharing best practices amongst themselves by establishing active regional networks across our partners.*
- *Develop policy influencing and advocacy skills of partner organisations and their client communities to influence policy change at regional, national and global levels.*
- *Engage effectively at regional, national and global levels in dialogue around critical policy issues.*

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