

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was founded on December 8, 1985, with the aim of fostering regional cooperation and development among its member countries. The initial members included Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Over the years, SAARC has made progress in various areas, but it also faces challenges that have hindered its full potential.

SAARC's primary objectives are to promote economic and regional integration, enhance social and cultural ties, and work towards peace and stability in South Asia. One of its notable achievements is the establishment of the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) in 2006, aimed at reducing tariffs and promoting trade among member countries. However, progress in trade integration has been slow, with various non-tariff barriers and political tensions impeding smoother economic cooperation.

Another notable achievement is the initiation of the South Asian University in 2010, headquartered in New Delhi. This institution aims to foster academic collaboration and regional understanding by bringing together students and scholars from SAARC nations. The university has the potential to contribute significantly to educational and cultural exchanges within the region.

Despite these accomplishments, SAARC has faced challenges in its journey. Persistent political differences and conflicts among member countries, particularly between India and Pakistan, have often led to a lack of consensus on key issues. This has hindered the organization's effectiveness in addressing regional problems and realizing its full potential.

The 19th SAARC Summit, scheduled for 2016 in Islamabad, was indefinitely postponed due to heightened tensions between India and Pakistan. Such instances of political discord have not only impeded progress but have also raised questions about the organization's ability to function effectively in the face of bilateral disputes.

Moreover, SAARC has been criticized for its slow decision-making processes and the limited implementation of agreed-upon initiatives. The organization's structure, which requires unanimous approval for major decisions, has contributed to delays and challenges in moving forward.

In recent years, there have been calls for reinvigorating SAARC and exploring alternative approaches to regional cooperation. Some suggest that smaller sub-regional initiatives within SAARC, such as the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), might offer more flexibility and effectiveness in addressing common challenges.

In conclusion, SAARC has made progress in certain areas, particularly in economic cooperation and cultural exchanges. However, persistent political tensions among member countries have impeded the organization's ability to fully realize its potential. Assessing SAARC's achievements and challenges underscores the need for greater political will, flexibility, and innovative

approaches to overcome existing obstacles and promote meaningful regional cooperation in South Asia.