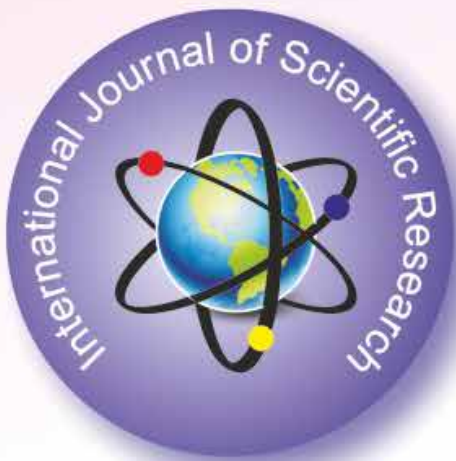


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A Study Of Trade Diversifications In Saarc Region



Economics

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ABSTRACT

The study analysed the trade diversification among SAARC region and reveals the facts that India's trade is mostly diversified within the region while the least trade diversified economy is Bhutan. By using the Herfindahl- Harschman Index, the study indicates that on the basis of export diversification/ concentration and import concentration/diversification, India and Pakistan are the most competitive economy in the region while Bhutan and Nepal are the least competitive. Therefore, Bhutan and Nepal including the rest of the economies in the region i.e. Bangladesh, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan are recommended to diversify their trade within the region so as to achieve the higher status for international trade in the phased manner

Introduction-

Interest in economic analysis of preferential trade liberalization has increased with the rise of regionalism in recent years. It is argued that trade liberalization and regional economic integration can help a region increase intra-regional trade by exploring the size of the market. This may in turn yield efficiency and bring benefits not only by exploration of economies of scale but also by dynamic and upward shifts in production function. By exposure to a regional market, previously shattered domestic firms become more competitive and gain the confidence to enter into global competition. Driven towards integration by the pressure of economic interest of the region, seven South Asian countries- Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka- formed the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 1985. They formed the SAARC Preferential Trading Agreement (SAPTA) in 1993 and transformed it into South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) in 2004 with a view to enhancing their productive capacity and the region's trading interests. Afghanistan became a member of SAARC in 2007.

However, since the emergence of SAARC, the achievement has been considered very insignificant and the level of intra-regional trade and trade diversification among SAARC countries is still very low. With the present low level of intra-regional trade and the trade diversification among the SAARC countries, a question has arisen whether regionalism would benefit countries of this region. Based on this question, this study has attempted to analyze the level of trade diversification and concentration among seven SAARC countries. Thus, the main objective of this study is to examine the prospects and challenges of trade diversification in South Asia.

In this backdrop the present paper is an attempt to study and analyse the export and import diversification and concentration among the SAARC economies.

South Asia, with more than 1.4 billion people, is one of the most densely populated regions in the world. Population density is 275 people per sq km which is six times higher than that of the world average population density. This region is the home of 23 percent of the world's population comprising an area of only 3.8 percent of the total global land. Considering the market-size in terms of population, SAARC is one of the largest economic blocs in the world. This region covers almost 67 percent of the low income population of the world economy. However, as measured by GDP as well as per capita income, the size of the economy of this region is very small compared to the rest of the world. It accounted for 2.2 percent of world's GDP with US\$ 691 GNI per capita in 2005. Similarly, in terms of shares in the world trade, South Asia is considered as an insignificant region which accounts only for 1.70 percent of total global trade.

Table 1
Macro Economic Indicators (2009)

ITEMS/Units	AF	BAN	BH	IN	MA	NE	PA	SR
GDP at Constant prices National Currency	615.08	6545.6	61.25	60712.76	24.85	988.05	39.002	56.96
Total investment % of GDP	31.67	24.39	44.19	37.14	20	31.53	12723.9	4835.29
Vol. import of goods and services % change	24.33	16.94	14.85	8.32	-14.75	n.a	18.215	24.43
Vol. of export of goods and services % change	26.72	15.66	11.87	.831	-13.38	n.a	-10.65	-6.98
Unemployment Rate % of total labour	n.a	n.a	4	n.a	n.a	n.a	-17.68	-17.17
General Govt. Net Debt % of GDP	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	5.46	5.9

Source- Comtrade data base and IMF data base . n.a- not available

AF-Afghanistan, BAN-Bangladesh, BH- Bhutan, IN-India, MA- Maldives, NE-Nepal, PA-Pakistan, SR-Sri Lanka

Table-2
Macro Economic Indicators (2010)

ITEMS/Units	AF	BAN	BH	IN	MA	NE	PA	SR
GDP at Constant prices National Currency	729.90	7409.1	71.73	73555.36	26.56	1170.99	36.05	57.92
Total investment % of GDP	26.26	24.58	43.80	35.41	15	35.81	14836.54	5602.32
Vol. import of goods and services % change	-9.81	17.02	10.27	16.48	56.53	n.a	15.36	27.15
Vol. of export of goods and services % change	-1.88	19.56	-2.63	21.58	85.11	n.a	2.56	21.58
Unemployment Rate % of total labour	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	18.8	16.74
General Govt. Net Debt % of GDP	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	5.55	4.9

Source- Comtrade data base and IMF data base n.a- not available

AF-Afghanistan, BAN-Bangladesh, BH- Bhutan, IN-India, MA-Maldives, NE-Nepal, PA-Pakistan, SR-Sr Lanka

Literature

There are a number of studies conducted to analyse the trade concentration and diversification in the different regional blocs in the world. The study done by Ferdous, Farzi binti, (2011), found that export diversification was almost steady over the years (1998-2007), in east Asian economies with the help of HH Index, while all the countries in the study were concentrated trade in manufacturing products. Furthermore, greater economic integration in East Asian economies leads to export diversification whereas exchange rates and tariff rates have significant negative impact or specification. In contrast GDP of exporting country trends to be positively rated with the specialization of that economy. B.A Karim, A.Arip and L.S. Yee in 2010, examined the relationship between export diversification and economic growth in Malaysia. They used annual data from 1980-2007 and time series techniques of co-integration and Granger causality tests to examine the long run relationship and dynamic interactions among the variables. The results show the presence of a unique co integration vector among the four variables. Consistent with previous studies, they found that export diversification plays significant roles to economic growth in Malaysia. Jain, Rajeev and Singh J.B, 2009, by applying the HH Index and similarity Index among the SAARC member countries, found that India has relative trade comparative advantage in a large number of industry group. In terms of export and import and other countries Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka trade diversification or specialization and intra-trade is growing only at a slow pace. Manuel R. Agosin, 2005, attempted to find out the relationship between the diversification of export and economic growth by using the HH Index and GL Index, found out that export diversification is indeed associated with higher economic growth and speculate that there are two channels through which diversified export growth simulates outflow volatility, which in turn results in lowered output volatility and second dynamic benefit associated with successful efforts to diversify comparative advantages. This may very well be an as indication that rapid export growth cum diversification is powerful incentive to investment

Data And Methodology-

In this study diversification/concentration has been measured on the basis of commonly used tool i.e. The Herfindahl Index also known as Herfindahl - Harschman Index (HHI). This study uses HHI as a measure of diversification/concentration which accounts for export /imports values across a given range of countries. This index ranges between 0 and 1. Higher the value represents greater concentration/specification and lesser diversification. This study uses the HHI to measure the degree of diversification/ concentration of exports and imports among the SAARC member countries during 2003 to 2010. For some economies as Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal, data were not available for the all selected years.

The HHI is sum of squared values of exports/imports shares of all countries included within the region and these shares of exports/imports are squared in the calculation to place the more weightage on the countries with higher share and less weightage on countries with low share. If there are 'n' countries within the region/union i.e. SAARC etc., Then,

$$S1^2 + S2^2 + S3^2 \dots \dots \dots Sn^2$$

Where, Si is market share of exports and imports of ith country or group of countries.

$$Sit = \sum ik(Sitk)^2$$

i.e. Sk it is the share of exports /imports of group of countries such as SAARC.

The data for the present study are collected from the official sites of COMTRADE DATA BASE and IMF.

Descriptions-

The level of concentration or diversification among the SAARC member countries in terms of export and import have been calculated by using HHI during the study period 2003to 2010 and represented in this section through Table-3. During the period 2003-04 for Bhutan, 2004-08 for Nepal and 2008-10 for Bangladesh, the data were not available.

Table-3
HHI of Export Diversifications

YEARS	AF	BAN	BH	IN	MA	NE	PA	SR
2003	n.a	0.40	n.a	0.31	0.97	0.95	0.37	0.53
2004	n.a	0.45	n.a	0.26	0.95	n.a	0.32	0.62
2005	n.a	0.51	0.89	0.28	0.90	n.a	0.41	0.76
2006	n.a	0.65	0.93	0.25	0.87	n.a	0.38	0.68
2007	n.a	0.69	0.96	0.24	0.80	n.a	0.34	0.65
2008	0.56	n.a	0.93	0.24	0.75	n.a	0.41	0.58
2009	0.60	n.a	0.93	0.21	0.80	0.81	0.44	0.56
2010	0.58	n.a	0.90	0.49	0.75	0.79	0.41	0.62

Source- Author's own calculations. AF-Afghanistan, BAN-Bangladesh, BH- Bhutan, IN-India, MA-Maldives, NE-Nepal, PA-Pakistan, SR-Sri Lanka

n.a- Not Available

The HHI of Afghanistan export for all SAARC countries explains (table-3) consistency in export-concentration for year 2008 to 2010 and diversification varies between 0.44 and 0.4 for the same duration. For Bangladesh's HHI shows that there is a movement or secular trends from the diversification to concentration or specification, i.e. from .4 to 0.69 over the period of 2005-2010. The HHI of Bhutan indicates that, despite of the high concentration export, the level of concentration is increasing consistently during the study period from .89 to .93, and diversification varies from .11 to .57, which is not a healthy sign for the economy. India's HHI explains the level of concentration is decreasing consistently i.e. from .3 to .21 during the study period indicates the higher diversifications of exports showing a better status of India from the export diversification point of view in the region. The diversification varies from .79 to .70 during study period. For Maldives, HHI explains that in initial period there is high concentration (low diversification) but a declining tendency is observed during the 2003 to 2010 i.e. from .95 to .75. HHI for Nepal, indicates that despite of non availability of data from 2004 to 2008, there is high concentration of export in year 2003, 2008 & 2009. Pakistan's HHI indicates that level of concentration is low but it varies alternatively ups and down within small range i.e. .37 to .44 and mean level of diversification of exports varies between .63 and .56. For Sri Lanka, HHI explains that there is a tendency of increasing the concentration from .53 to .76 up to the year 2005 and then increasing diversification is observed as .68 to .56 export for 2010.

Table-4
HHI of Import Diversifications

YEARS	AF	BAN	BH	IN	MA	NE	PA	SR
2003	n.a	0.83	n.a	0.28	0.49	0.98	0.53	0.84
2004	n.a	0.91	n.a	0.28	0.48	n.a	0.62	0.83
2005	n.a	0.79	0.96	0.27	0.53	n.a	0.76	0.83
2006	n.a	0.84	0.96	0.22	0.50	n.a	0.68	0.83
2007	n.a	0.84	0.97	0.20	0.51	n.a	0.65	0.87
2008	0.70	n.a	0.97	0.21	0.51	n.a	0.58	0.87
2009	0.62	n.a	0.95	0.19	0.52	0.99	0.56	0.78
2010	0.73	n.a	0.95	0.19	0.53	0.99	0.61	0.51

Source- Author's own calculations AF-Afghanistan, BAN-Bangladesh, BH- Bhutan, IN-India, MA-Maldives, NE-Nepal, PA-Pakistan, SR-Sr Lanka

The HHI of Afghanistan's import shows (table-4) that the level of concentration moves from .62 to .73 over the period 2008 to 2010 even though there is high level of concentration of import that means low diversification which varies from .38 to .27, which indicates that wider scope of improvement in the import diversification of Afghanistan. Bangladesh's HHI indicates that the high level of concentration varies alternatively during the years of the study period within the small ranges between .79 and .91, which seems to be a better picture for import diversification for Bangladesh. The HHI of Bhutan's imports explains that there is high level of concentration over the study period which varies from .95 to .97, which means a low level of diversification i.e. .5 to .3, which is not in favour of Bhutan's economy. India's HHI for imports explains that import diversification is better showing a positive trend during the study period, i.e. from .72 to .812. Maldives' HHI for imports shows the moderate level of concentration which varies between .48 to .53 over the study period and vice versa for diversification. Nepal's HHI for imports explains that there is a high level of import diversification over the three years period i.e. from .98 to .99 for the years 2003 and 2009 to 2010. That may not be considered a satisfactory picture for the economy. For Pakistan, the import HHI explains that there is a moderate level of import concentration during the period of study indicating the diversification from .53 to .76. As far as the import diversification of Sri Lanka is concerned, its HHI indicates that, despite a high level of concentration, there is a tendency to decrease the concentration after 2009, which may be explained as the increasing status of diversification that may be because of the better policy implications for the economy as well as for the trading partners of Sri Lanka.

Conclusion-

The present paper may be concluded with the remark that the purpose for which the SAARC block was formed is yet to be achieved and there is a little has been done and a lot of is still to be done. There are a number of studies indicating that after the formation of SAARC the trade performance of almost all the member economies is not presenting encouraging picture. The present paper also elaborates that the trade diversification for imports and exports are healthy for India and Pakistan, the larger economy in the region, in comparison to the rest of the economies of SAARC. That may not be because of the formation of SAARC but because of better and internationally acceptable policies of the trade.

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