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**Economic Integration between South Asia and East Asia:
A Perception Survey of Asian Opinion Leaders**

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Singapore**

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ABSTRACT

Economic integration, which was deepening among the East Asian countries, is now broadening to cover the South Asian region as well. While we are starting to witness the emergence of Pan-Asian integration, a few distinct and yet related questions arise. What are the benefits and costs of South Asia and East Asia (SA-EA) integration? What are the respective roles of market-led vs. regional cooperation policies? Could the integration of the two be an example of “open” regionalism? What are the policies that South Asian countries should adopt under their “Look East” policies to link themselves to production networks in East Asia? What is the role of infrastructure and connectivity? What are the factors that have led to the revival of land connectivity or old South-western Silk Road in Asia? Should efforts to promote ASEAN-India connectivity be supported? Should the membership of East Asian institutions be expanded to cover South Asian countries at an appropriate level? In particular, should India be invited to join the various ASEAN+3 initiatives? Should South Asian countries (other than India) be invited to join the negotiations for the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)? Can the integration of the two regions reinvigorate economic integration in South Asia? This paper assesses the views of South Asian and East Asian opinion leaders through a perception survey conducted in 2013. 390 respondents from academia, business, and various government offices participated in the survey. In general, the opinion leaders in both regions generally feel positive about the integration of the two regions and they feel that it could revive economic integration in South Asia. They also feel that South Asian countries should be given a role in various East Asian initiatives.

Keywords: Economic integration, South Asia, East Asia, “Look East” policies.

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Economic Integration between South Asia and East Asia: A Perception Survey of Asian Opinion Leaders

1. Introduction

During the past two decades, economic linkages between South Asia and East Asia (SA-EA) have grown at a rapid pace, albeit from a low base. Several reasons can be attributed to this, including the economic dynamism of the two regions, market-oriented open door policies of most East Asian countries and the “Look East” policies adopted by the South Asian countries, most notably India. These trends are not new. From a historical perspective, Rana (2012) has argued that during the first 18 centuries of the Christian era, based on the economic strengths of India and China, Asia was not only prosperous but also well-integrated. After a gap of nearly two centuries when South Asia withdrew from the Asian scene and the focus was on East Asia, we are now starting to witness the re-emergence of an integrated and prosperous Pan-Asia.

Despite the above trends, most authors who write on Asian regionalism focus on the growing trade and financial relationships among the East Asian countries, a phenomenon that became topical after the Asian financial crisis of 1997-1998. It is only recently that authors have started to address the subject of economic integration between SA-EA (e.g., ADBI, 2013; RIS, 2012; Francois et al, 2009). Three recent contributions are Rana and Chia 2013a, Rana and Chia 2013b, and Rana and Chia 2014 (forthcoming). Rana and Chia 2013a and Rana and Chia 2013b argue that in order to move to the next phase of SA-EA integration, South Asian countries should (i) improve business environment by completing the economic reform process began in the 1990s; (ii) reduce communication and coordination costs so that supply chains can be managed more effectively; (iii) reduce logistics cost including “at the border” trade facilitation; (iv) enhance regionally physical connectivity; and (v) sign more Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with East Asian countries. Similarly, Rana and Chia (2014, forthcoming) argue that the case for land connectivity between SA-EA has strengthened recently because of the (i) “Go West” policies in China; (ii) “Look East” policies in South Asia; (iii) opening of Myanmar, a node between South Asia and East Asia; and (iv) growing importance of supply-chain trade which required efficient service links.

The major objective of this Perception Survey is to assess the views of the stakeholders in South Asia and East Asia on the relative strengths of the key findings of the three studies mentioned above, and to get their perspectives on (i) the benefits and costs of economic integration between SA-EA; (ii) the preferred modalities and approaches of integration; (iii) the obstacles and barriers; and (iv) the policy actions and institutional arrangements required. A special focus of the Survey is on the reasons for the revival of land connectivity between South Asia and East Asia and the low level of integration in South Asia, and the role of South Asia in various East Asian regional initiatives. As far as we are aware, this is the first time that such a survey is being conducted.

The rest of the paper is organised as follows. Section 2 of this paper outlines the survey methodology, while Sections 3-5 present the results. Section 6 concludes with some policy implications from the Survey.

2. Survey Methodology and Responses

In conducting the Perception Survey we identified a sample of 5300 opinion leaders from South and East Asia countries in five categories: government officials, academics, representative from business sectors, media practitioners, retired bureaucrats and international civil servants. East Asian countries comprise the 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), together with China, Japan and Korea, or the ASEAN plus 3. South Asian countries comprise the 8 member-countries of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). These include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Contact details of the opinion leaders were obtained from an earlier study of Rana et al (2012) supplemented by publicly available contact and mailing lists. The Perception Survey was conducted online for a period of 5 weeks from 4 September to 11 October 2013. Opinion leaders were contacted and invited to participate in the survey. Three reminders were also sent to follow-up to respondents who did not reply.

Two sets of questionnaires were prepared to capture differences in regional perspectives, one for opinion leaders from South Asia and the other for those from East Asia. Each questionnaire consists of 16 questions which were further classified under 8 categories. These included questions on costs and benefits of strengthening economic linkages between the two regions (2 questions), the preferred modalities of regional cooperation (1 question), the obstacles and barriers to enhancing economic linkages between the two regions (1 question), the required policy actions to further enhance economic linkages between the two regions (1 question), the initiatives to promote regional trade integration (3 questions), the initiatives to promote macroeconomic policy coordination (2 questions), and connectivity issues between the two regions (6 questions). Two additional questions were also included in the questionnaire for South Asian opinion leaders asking for their view on the status of integration in South Asia. The questionnaires were designed to take no more than 15 minutes of the respondent's time. English was used in the questionnaires. We did not translate the questionnaires into other languages. The questionnaire used in this paper can be available upon request from the authors.

At the end of 5 weeks, we received a total of 390 responses: 203 responses from South Asia and 187 responses from East Asia, corresponding to seven per cent of the sample. This response rate is reasonable for an online survey. The response rate could possibly have been higher had we used a professional survey firm followed by telephone calls to respondents. The budget for the study, however, restricted us from such an approach. Table 1 summarises the number and percentage of responses by region and category. We had 57 per cent of the respondents from academia, 9 per cent from business sector, 25 per cent from government officials and 9 per cent from others including

media practitioners, retired bureaucrats and international civil servants. Among the 390 responses, 116 of them were from India accounting for about 30 per cent of the total responses, 31 responses or 8 per cent from Singapore, followed by 26 responses or 7 per cent each from Indonesia, the Philippines and Nepal. Countries with less than ten responses included Afghanistan (one response), Bhutan (five responses), Maldives (three responses), Brunei Darussalam (one response), Cambodia (three responses), Lao PDR (four responses), Myanmar (four responses) and South Korea (four responses).

Table 1: Survey response profile

	Academia		Business		Government		Others*		Total
	Num	%	Num	%	Num	%	Num	%	N
South Asia	118	58	20	10	39	19	26	13	203
Afghanistan	0	0	0	0	1	100	0	0	1
Bangladesh	13	93	0	0	1	7	0	0	14
Bhutan	1	20	2	40	2	40	0	0	5
India	65	56	9	8	18	16	24	21	116
Maldives	1	33		0	2	67	0	0	3
Nepal	15	58	5	19	4	15	2	8	26
Pakistan	15	75	2	10	3	15	0	0	20
Sri Lanka	8	44	2	11	8	44	0	0	18
East Asia	105	56	16	9	59	32	7	4	187
Brunei Darussalam	0	0	0	0	1	100	0	0	1
Cambodia	1	33	0	0	1	33	1	33	3
China	19	90	0	0	2	10	0	0	21
Indonesia	12	46	1	4	9	35	4	15	26
Japan	11	79	0	0	2	14	1	7	14
Lao PDR		0	0	0	4	100	0	0	4
Malaysia	10	56	2	11	6	33	0	0	18
Myanmar	1	25	2	50	1	25	0	0	4
Philippines	15	58	1	4	10	38	0	0	26
Singapore	14	45	6	19	10	32	1	3	31
South Korea	2	50	0	0	2	50	0	0	4
Thailand	6	55	1	9	4	36	0	0	11
Vietnam	14	58	3	13	7	29	0	0	24
Total	223	57	36	9	98	25	33	8	390

**Others include media practitioners and retired bureaucrats and international civil servants.*

3. Survey results - Economic linkages between SA-EA and the need for a second round of “Look East” policies in South Asia

As argued by Rana and Chia (2013a), the “Look East” policies (LEP) implemented by South Asian countries in the early 1990s have had some positive impacts on these economies. But now, the way goods are produced and traded around the world is no longer the same as before. Under the traditional theory of comparative advantage, developing countries produced labour-intensive goods which they then exchanged for relatively capital- and skill-intensive goods produced by the more advanced countries. All separate tasks involved in producing a good were done entirely at home. Under the second unbundling (Baldwin 2006, and 2011), production is sliced and diced into separate fragments and production of parts and components can be spread around the world. In order to benefit from these developments, Rana and Chia (2013b) have called for a second round of “Look East” policies or LEP2 in South Asian countries. The five questions that follow focus on these issues and associated policies.

3.1 Costs of strengthening economic linkages between SA-EA

We asked opinion leaders how they rate the costs of strengthening economic linkages between South Asia and East Asia. These costs include (1) possible loss of national sovereignty and loss of independence of national economic policies, (2) exposure to unfavourable shocks that might affect them, (3) loss of markets and increase in poverty, (4) weaker linkages with countries outside the region, and (5) dilution of national identity and culture. Fig. 1 summarises the responses to this question. 19 per cent of the respondents felt that the most important cost of strengthening linkages between SA-EA is the exposure to unfavourable shocks emanating from the other region. The next most important cost is loss of markets and increase in poverty (13 per cent) followed by loss of national sovereignty (10 per cent) and weaker linkages with countries outside the region (10 per cent). Only six per cent of the respondents believe that closer integration between the two regions would lead to the dilution of national identity and culture.

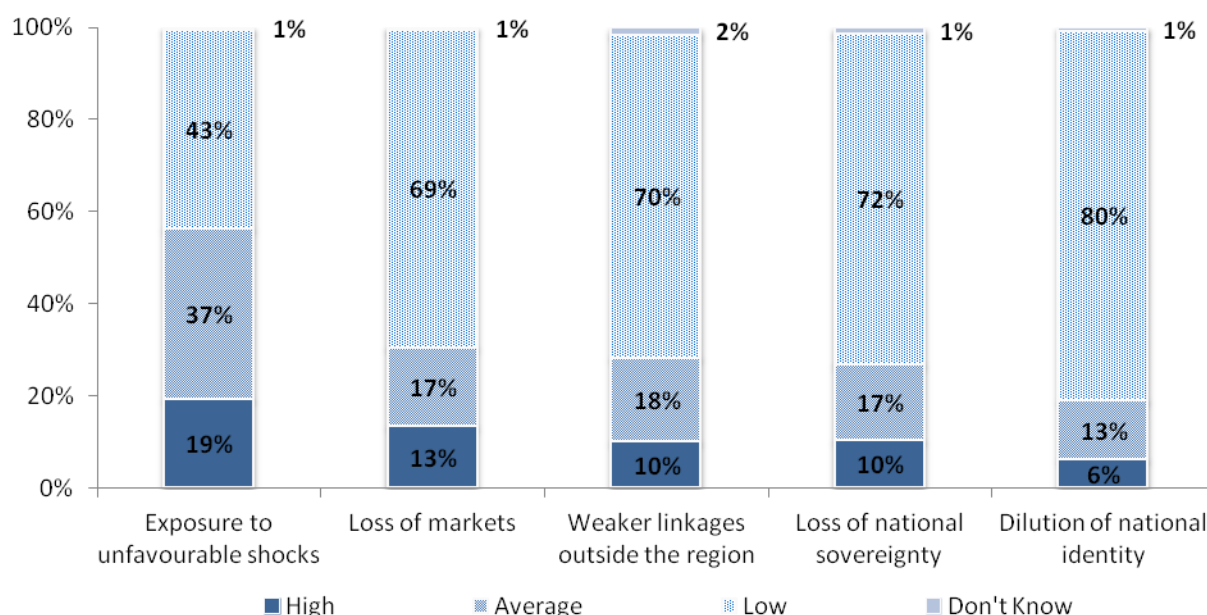


Fig. 1. Costs of strengthening economic linkages between SA-EA. Note: Values are based on total responses (387). The question was formulated as follows: Question 1 – Rate the costs for your country of strengthening economic linkages between SA-EA.

3.2 Benefits of strengthening economic linkages between SA-EA

Figure 2 shows that most opinion leaders were of the view that faster and more resilient growth leading to a win-win situation for both regions (72 per cent) and deeper integration with the global economy (71 per cent) are the major benefits of strengthening economic integration between SA-EA. The latter implies that the concept of “open” regionalism is valid and that both regionalism and globalisation can proceed at the same time. The third largest benefit of SA-EA integration is that it could lead to a stronger voice for Asia in various global fora such as the G20 (66 per cent). The alternative option of providing a regional platform to global international economic institutions (such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank) (41 per cent) and reduction of poverty and improvement of social indicators (39 per cent) are seen to be least beneficial.

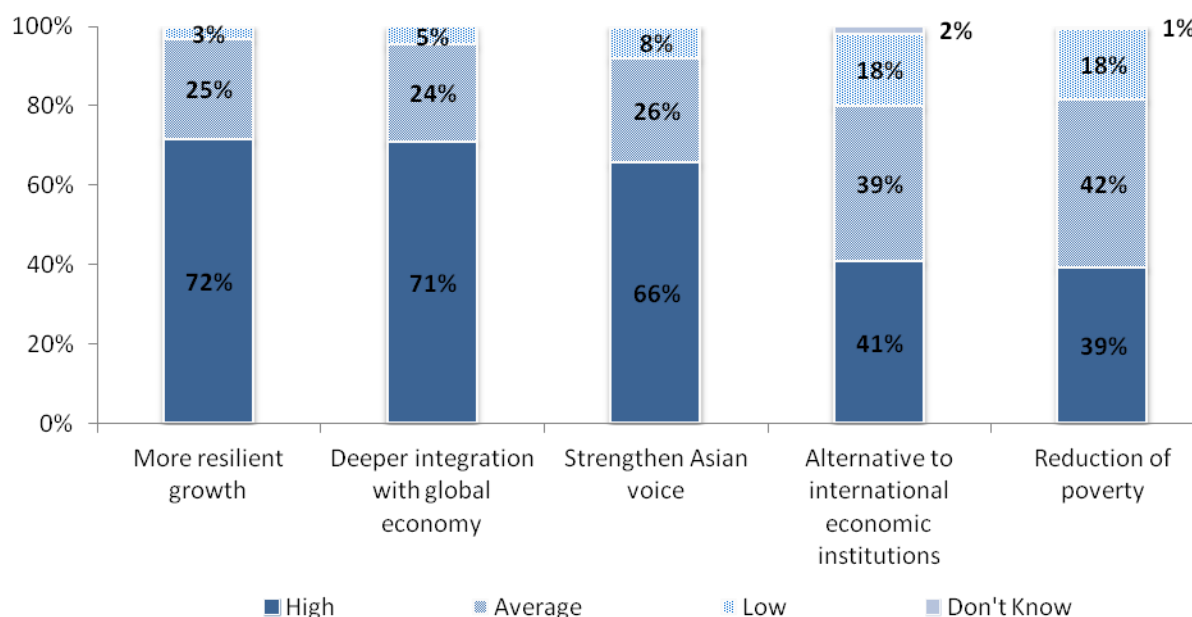


Fig. 2. Benefits of strengthening economic linkages between SA-EA. Note: Values are based on total responses (387). The question was formulated as follows: Question 2 – Rate the benefits for your country of strengthening economic linkages between SA-EA.

3.3 Modalities of regional cooperation between SA-EA

Economic integration between SA-EA could be enhanced through various modalities or approaches. We asked the respondents to rate the various modalities for promoting regional cooperation. Options considered were (i) signing and implementing new free trade and investment agreements; (ii) creating new mechanisms to coordinate macroeconomic and financial policies; (iii) building regional infrastructure in transport, energy and communication to improve connectivity; and (iv) strengthening dialogues on matters of regional securities. We report both the aggregated (Fig. 3) and disaggregated (Figs. 3a and 3b) results. Overall, most respondents felt that improving connectivity between the two regions was the preferred modality for promoting economic cooperation between the two regions (71 per cent). The other modalities were strengthening regional security dialogues (68 per cent), followed by signing free trade agreements (FTAs) (67 per cent), and creating mechanisms for macroeconomic and financial policy coordination (56 per cent). South Asian and East Asian have slightly different perceptions. The disaggregated sample data in Figs. 3a and 3b suggest that unlike in South Asia, respondents in East Asia felt that strengthening dialogues on matters of regional security is the most significant modality to promote economic integration between the two regions (65 per cent). This perhaps is a reflection of the on-going concern on territorial issues between several countries in East Asia and the thinking that resolution of such issues could lead to greater economic integration between them.

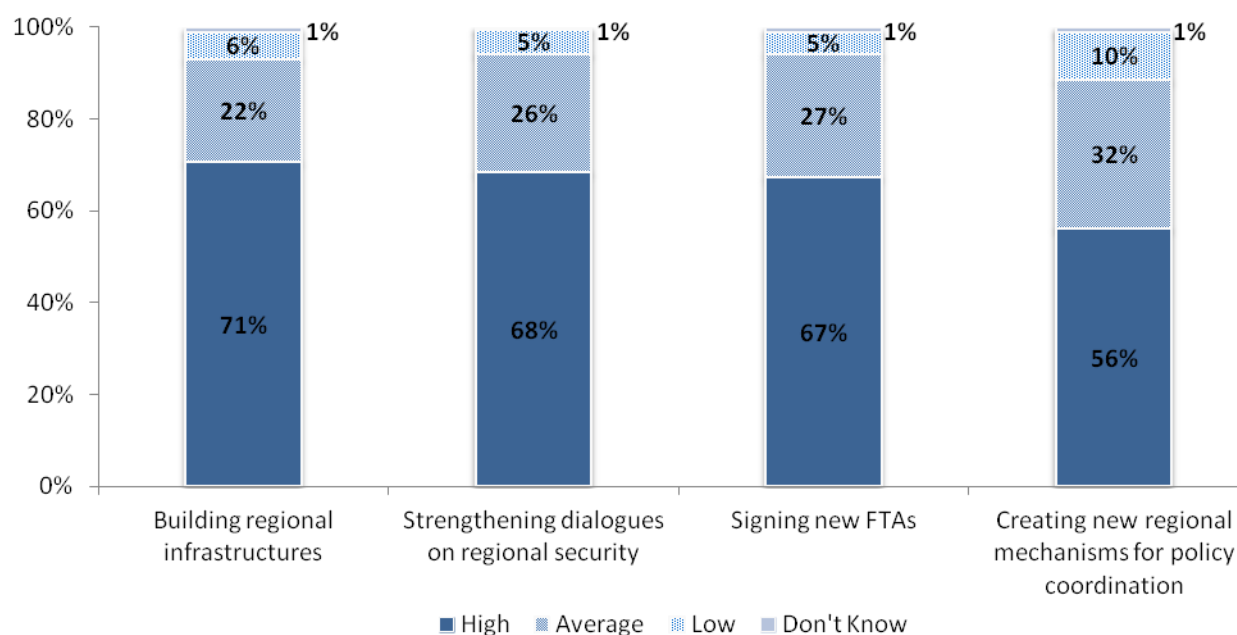


Fig. 3. Modalities of regional cooperation between SA-EA. Note: Values are based on total responses (384). The question was formulated as follows: Question 3 – Rate the preferred modality for strengthening economic linkages between SA-EA.

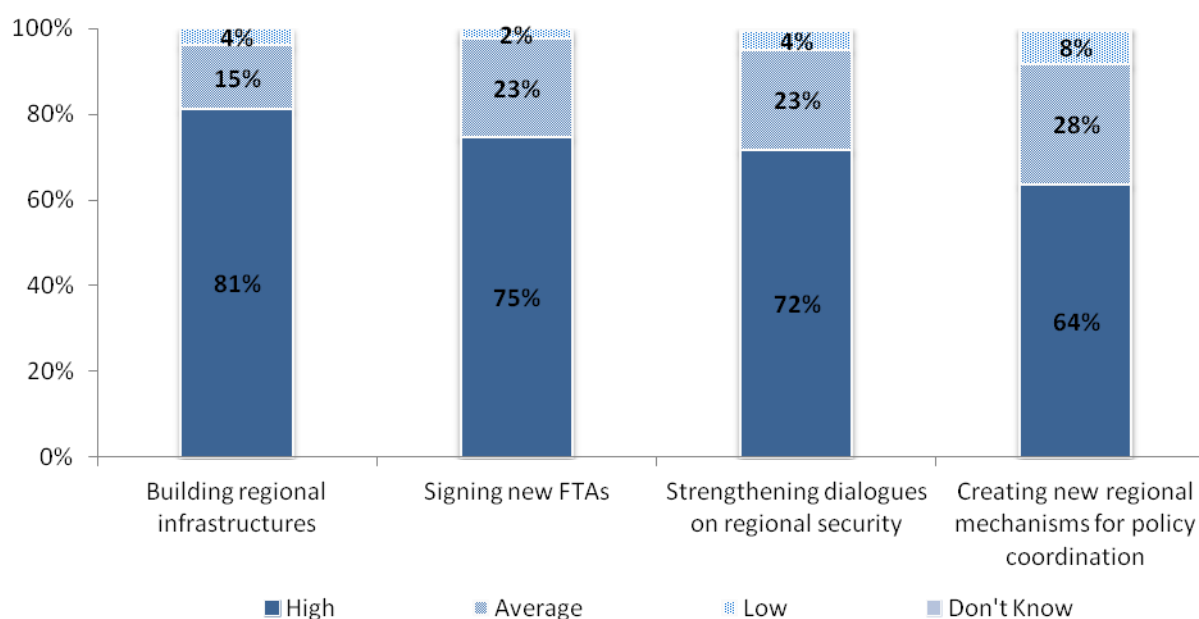


Fig. 3a. South Asian responses to modalities of regional cooperation between SA-EA. Note: Values are based on 201 responses from South Asia.

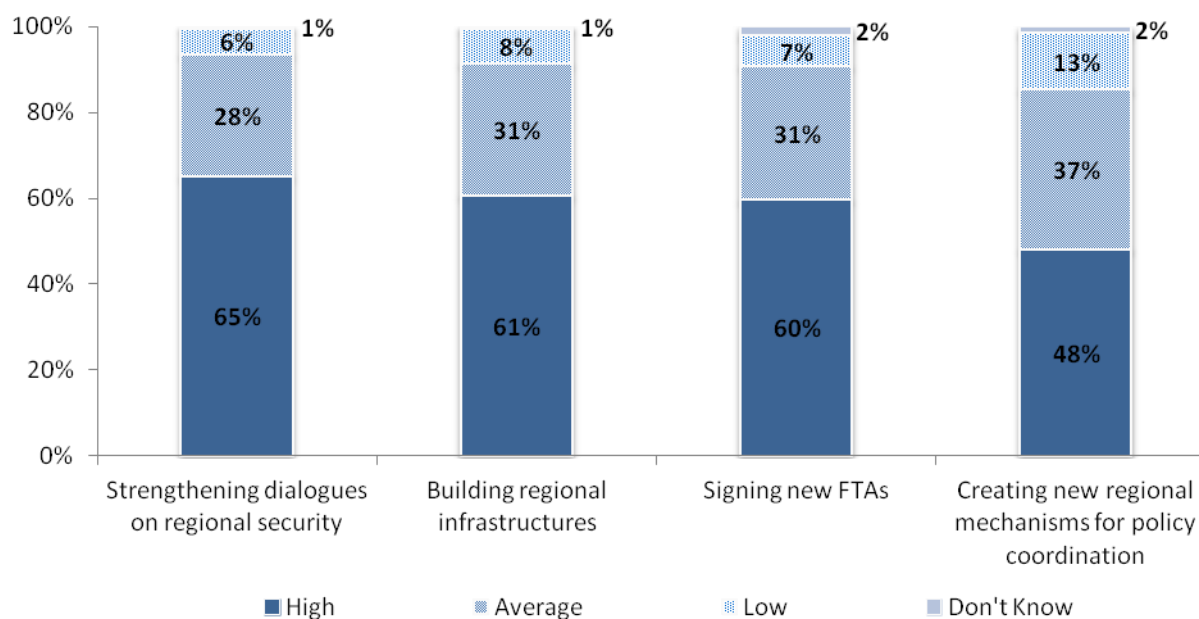


Fig. 3b. East Asian responses to modalities of regional cooperation between SA-EA. Note: Values are based on 183 responses from East Asia.

3.4 Obstacles and barriers to enhancing economic linkages between SA-EA

We also asked respondents to assess the potential obstacles and barriers to further economic integration between SE-EA. As shown in Fig. 4, most respondents (62 per cent) felt that policy constraints behind the border, at the border and beyond the border are the main obstacles to further economic integration between the two regions. The second key constraint is the lack of information on trading and investment opportunities and institutional gap (56 per cent), followed by regional security concerns (42 per cent) and disparity of income and development between countries (39 per cent). This finding suggests that the argument that income disparity reduces the potential for integration is not well-accepted.

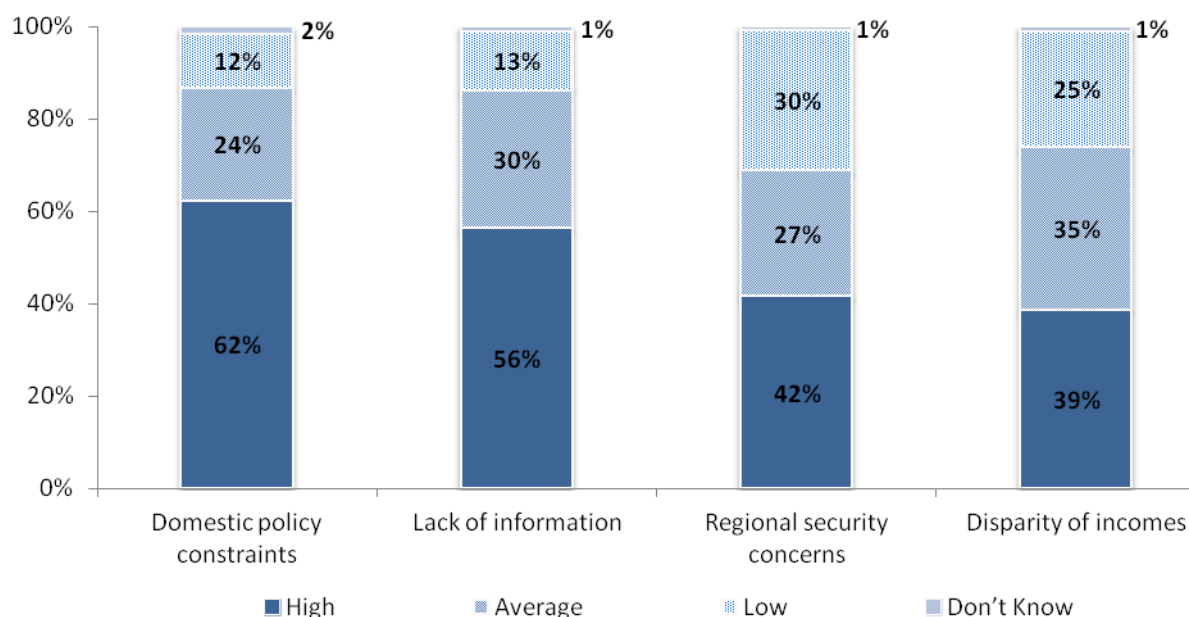


Fig. 4. Obstacles and barriers to enhancing economic linkages between SA-EA. Note: Values are based on total responses (382). The question was formulated as follows: Question 4 – Assess the main obstacles to promoting your country's economic relations between SA-EA.

3.5 Required policy actions in South Asia

Given that inappropriate policies were the major constraint to SA-EA integration (Fig. 4), we were then keen to find out more about the policy actions that South Asian countries should implement to promote economic integration with East Asia. Fig. 5 shows that 83 per cent of the respondents felt that South Asia should enhance physical connectivity, both national and regional, with East Asia. They should also take actions to improve the business environment by completing the reforms that they began in 1990s (80 per cent). South Asian countries should also focus on reducing logistic costs including trade facilitation at the border (76 per cent) and on improving information communication and technology (ICT) system to facilitate management of supply chains (75 per cent). Only 67 per cent of the respondents felt that South Asian countries should lobby to participate in various FTAs in East Asia. This finding suggests that most respondents prefer a market-led approach to integration between the two regions rather than regional cooperation policies such as lobbying to participate in regional trade cooperation in East Asia.

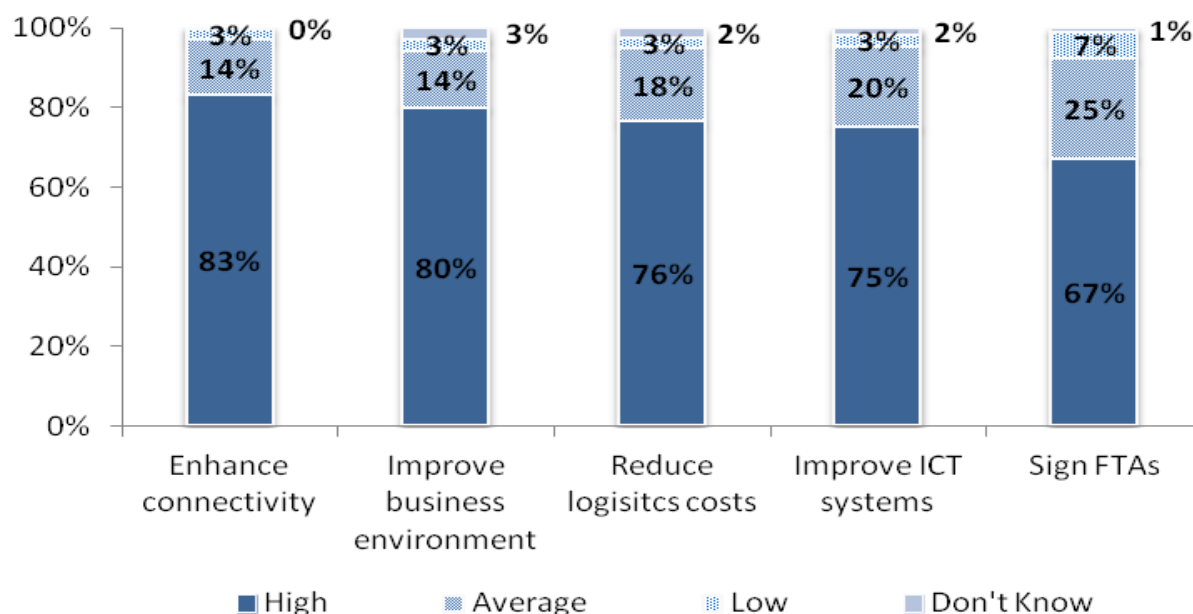


Fig. 5. Required policy actions in South Asia. Note: Values are based on total responses (378). The question was formulated as follows: Question 5 – Rate the significance of policy actions that your country could consider to further enhance economic linkages with East Asia.

4. Survey results – Initiative to promote economic linkages between SA-EA

Going forward, economic integration between SA-EA will proceed along three tracks: cross-border trade, macroeconomic policy coordination, and physical connectivity. What is the role of South Asia in various initiatives to promote such integration in East Asia? Should South Asian countries join these initiatives in some way or should they establish initiatives of their own? Questions 6 to 8 of the questionnaire focused on these issues.

4.1 Initiatives to promote regional trade integration between SA-EA

Despite the preference for a market-led approach to integration (Question 5), as shown in Fig. 6, many respondents (85 per cent) in both regions felt that South Asian countries should join the present bandwagon in favour of FTAs and sign more free trade and investment agreements with East Asian countries. Only 6 per cent of the respondents said that South Asia should not sign more FTAs with East Asia.

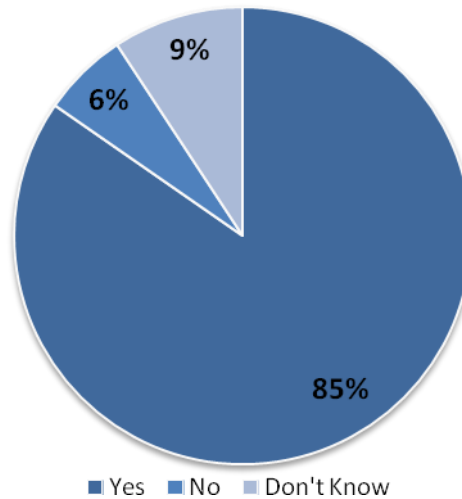


Fig. 6. Initiatives to promote regional trade integration between SA-EA. Note: Values are based on total responses (378). The question was formulated as follows: Question 6 – In order to enhance integration with East Asia (South Asia), should your country sign more free trade and investment agreements with East Asian (South Asian) countries?

While other South Asian countries are not yet involved, India is already active in negotiating the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) which is a free trade agreement between ASEAN+3 countries together with India, Australia, and New Zealand. We asked the opinion leaders to assess whether other South Asian countries should also join RCEP at some stage in the future? Fig. 6a shows that close to 90 per cent of the respondents from non-participating countries actually feel that other South Asian countries should also join the RCEP at some stage in the future.

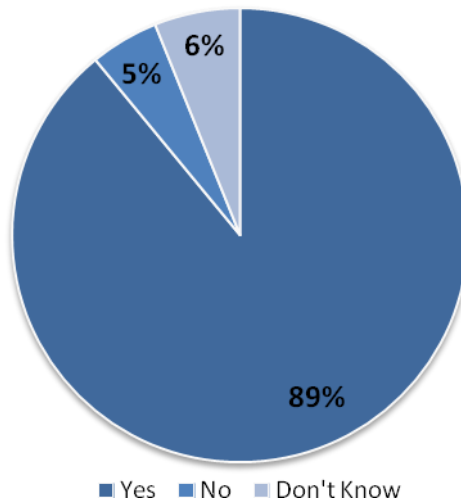


Fig. 6a. Initiatives to promote regional trade integration between SA-EA – for countries not participating in Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Note: Values are based on 82 non-participating countries. The question was formulated as follows: Question 6a – India is already involved in negotiating the RCEP which is a trade agreement among 16 members of the East Asia Summit grouping. Should your country also join the negotiation at some stage?

Over one-half of our respondents felt that the case for Pan-Asian free trade agreement comprising all South Asian and East Asian countries is strong. As shown in Fig. 6b, Support for Pan-Asian trade integration is, however, stronger in South Asia than in East Asia. These findings are consistent with the GTAP analysis in Francois et al (2009) which supports Pan-Asian trade integration.

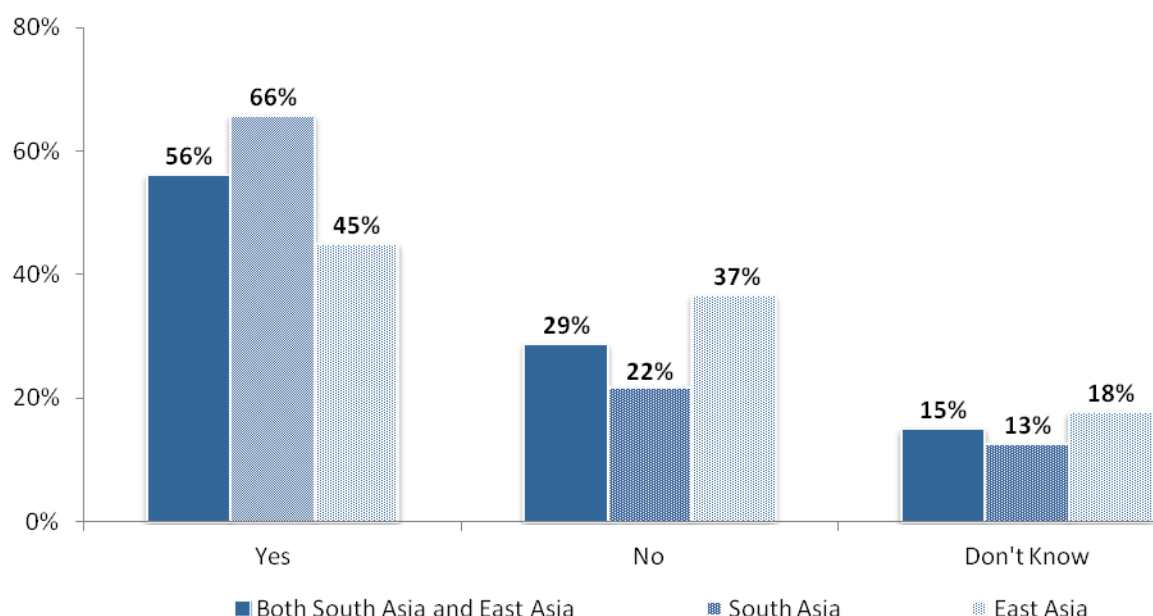


Fig. 6b. Pan-Asian free trade agreement. Note: Values are based on total responses (378). The question was formulated as follows: Question 6b – In your opinion, is the case for a Pan-Asian free trade agreement comprising all East Asian and South Asian countries strong?

4.2 Initiatives to promote macroeconomic policy coordination between SA-EA and possible role for South Asia

In the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis of 1997-1998, East Asian countries have come up with a number of initiatives to promote macroeconomic policy coordination among each other to prevent and manage a crisis. These include the ASEAN+3 Economic Review and Policy Dialogue (ERPD) under which the Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors and their deputies hold dialogues with each other and the ASEAN+3 Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralization (CMIM). Should India be represented in some capacity in the ERDP and the CMIM? As shown in Fig. 7, over three quarters of the respondents (79 per cent) felt that India should be represented. Only, 11 per cent of the responses are negative. While 85 per cent of the responses from South Asia are positive, a slightly lower support of 72 per cent is found in East Asia. This finding supports Sussangkarn (2010) and Rana (2012) who propose to strengthen the participation of India in ERPD and CMIM.

Fig. 7a shows the responses to the question on India's role in the East Asian financial architecture. These highlight that India's participation in the ERPD and CMIM would strengthen Asia's voice in the G20. Again, we see stronger positive responses from South Asia than East Asia with South Asia

reporting 82 per cent of positive responses compared to 71 per cent from East Asia.

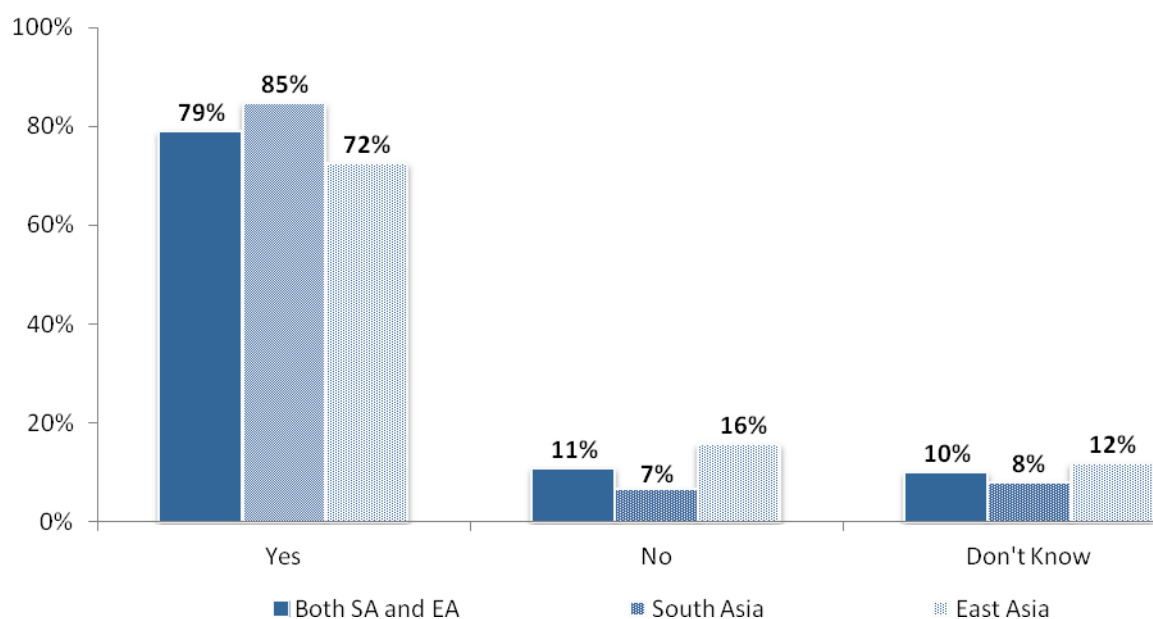


Fig. 7. Initiatives to promote macroeconomic policy coordination in East Asia. Note: Values are based on total responses (376). The question was formulated as follows: Question 7 – In your opinion, should India, the largest country in South Asia, be represented in some capacity in the ERPD and CMIM?

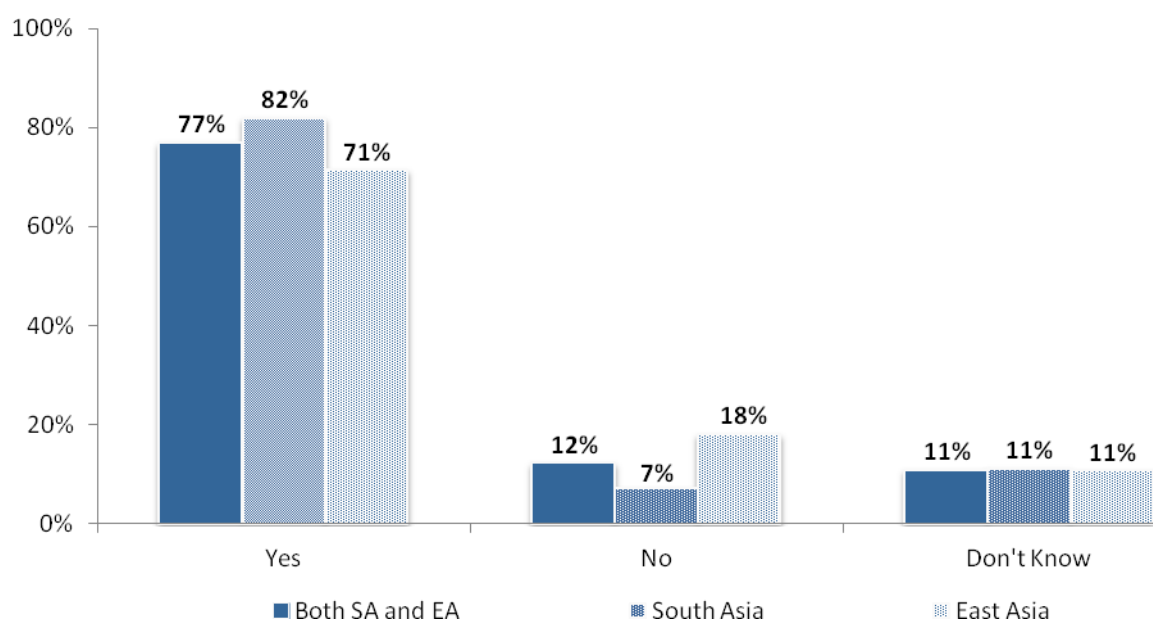


Fig. 7a. Initiatives to promote macroeconomic policy coordination in East Asia. Note: Values are based on total responses (376). The question was formulated as follows: Question 7a – Could India's participation in the ERPD and CMIM strengthen Asia's voice in various global fora such as the G20?

4.3 Connectivity between SA-EA

Historically, land routes or the famous Silk Roads were the major forms of transportation between South Asia and East Asia. In addition to the Northern Silk Road which connected China with Central Asia and Europe, Rana and Chia (2014, forthcoming) have argued that there was the lesser-known South-western Silk Road which connected South Asia with China and the ASEAN countries (Figure 8).

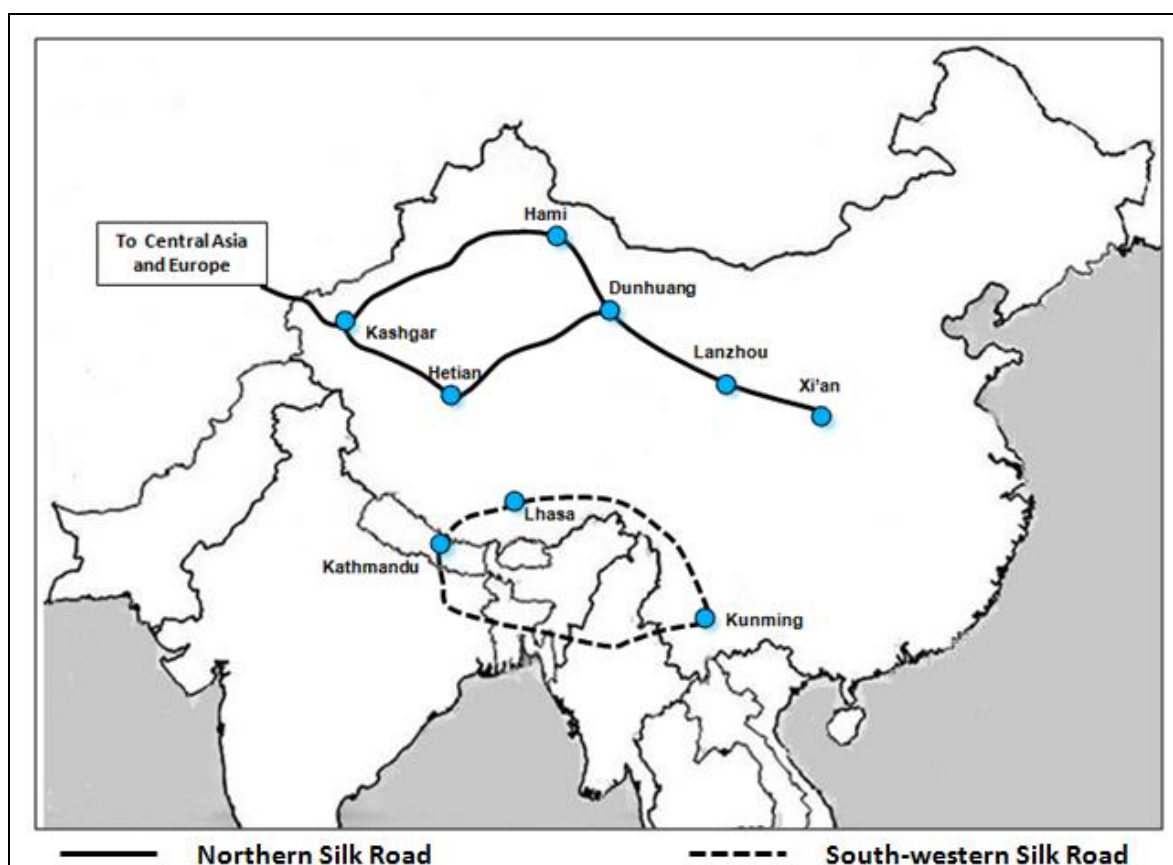


Fig. 8. Northern and South-western Silk Roads. (Rana and Chia, 2014, forthcoming)

The Silk Roads were replaced by sea routes after the discovery of steam engines and steam ships in the 19th century. But now various factors have led to the revival of land connectivity in Asia. In this section, we asked opinion leaders to rate the factors that have contributed to such a revival. Fig. 8a shows that majority of the respondents (70 per cent) felt that the reason for this revival of land connectivity in Asia is the growing importance of supply chains and fragmented trade. The “Look East” policies of South Asian countries (69 per cent) are also viewed as a key contributing factor. This shows a strong awareness among the respondents on the emerging newer ways of producing goods. Surprisingly, economic reforms in Myanmar (59 per cent) and China’s “Go West” policies (48 per cent) are seen to be relatively less important.

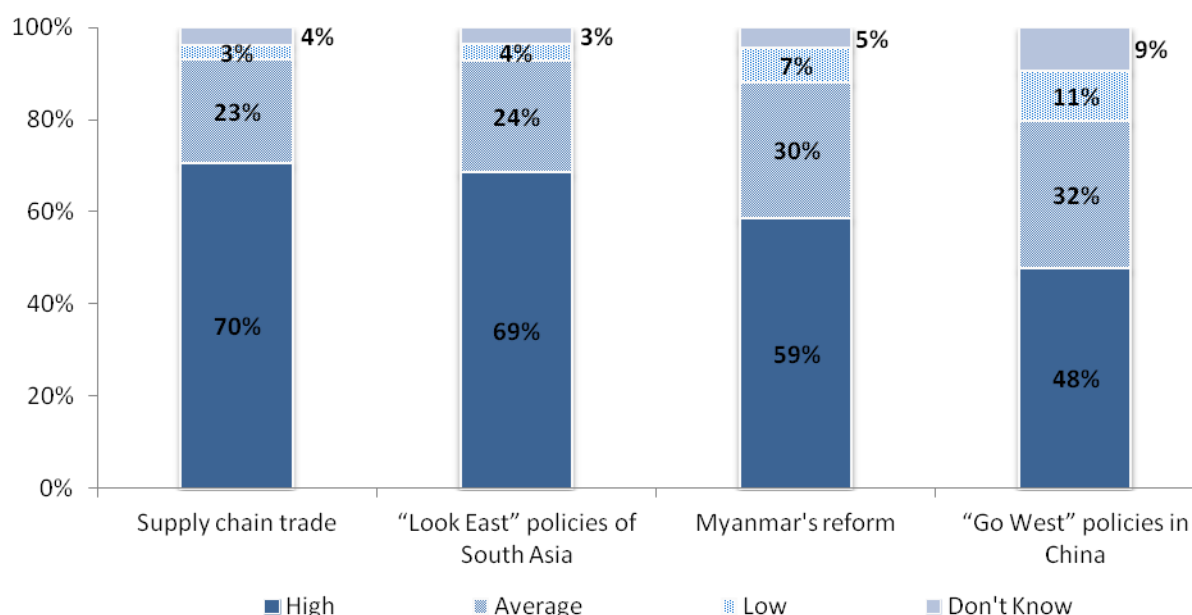


Fig. 8a. Factors that have revived the case for land connectivity. Note: Values are based on total responses (372). The question was formulated as follows: Question 8a – Rate the following factors that have revived the case for land and air connectivity between SA-EA.

In addition to connectivity among its 10 member countries, the Master Plan on ASEAN connectivity also emphasises the importance of ASEAN's connectivity with neighbouring countries such as India and China and the other members of the East Asia Summit. At the request of the East Asia Summit, the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) has developed two projects for ASEAN-India connectivity, namely, the (i) Mekong-India Economic Cooperation (MIEC); and (ii) Trilateral Highway connecting India and Myanmar with Thailand (Kimura and Umezaki, 2011). As shown in Fig. 8b, more than half of the respondents (56 per cent) are aware of these two.

In addition, a large number of respondents (81 per cent) felt that there was a need to consider projects to connect South Asia-China-ASEAN such as the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar or the BCIM Economic Corridor and the Yunnan-Myanmar-India-Nepal-Tibet-Yunnan Economic Corridor or the old South-western Silk Road (72 per cent).¹ A large number of respondents (70 per cent) felt that trilateral cooperation between India-Nepal-China should also be supported to improve connectivity in Asia. Also, many opinion leaders felt that the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) which comprises Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bhutan, and Nepal should play a more active role in fostering regional connectivity in Asia.

¹ The latter finding supports the finding of Rana and Chia (2014, forthcoming).

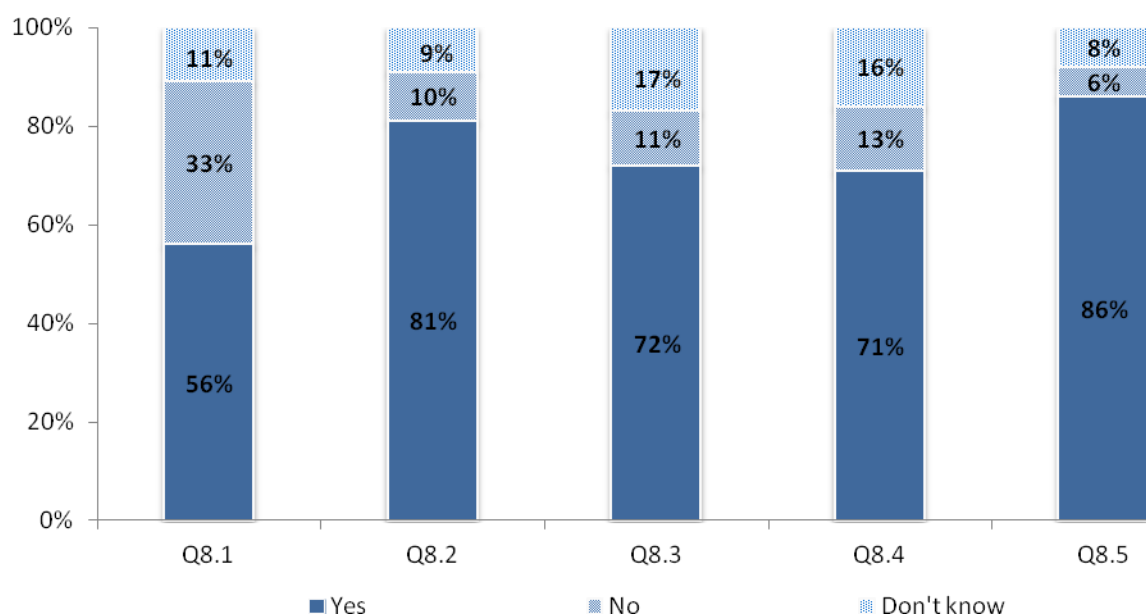


Fig. 8b. The questions were formulated as follows: Question 8.1 – Are you aware of the MIEC and the Trilateral Highway projects which seek to connect India with ASEAN (Note: Values are based on total responses of 372); Question 8.2 – Do you think that Asia needs to consider infrastructure projects to connect South Asia-ASEAN-China such as the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar or BCIM Economic Corridor? Question 8.3 - Do you think that Asia needs to consider infrastructure projects to connect South Asia-China-ASEAN such as Yunnan-Myanmar-India-Nepal-Tibet-Yunnan Economic Corridor or the Old South-western Silk Road? Question 8.4 – Do you think trilateral cooperation between India-Nepal-China should be promoted? Question 8.5 – In your opinion, should BIMSTEC be more active in developing and implementing regional infrastructure projects?

5. Survey results – Economic integration in South Asia

Before World War II, South Asia was a relatively well-integrated region with the level of intra-regional trade of about 20 per cent of its total trade. Soon after the partitioning of India and Pakistan in 1947, the level of intra-regional trade in South Asia fell to about 4 per cent and subsequently to 2 per cent by 1967 (Rana and Dowling, 2009). With the economic reforms of the early 1990s, intra-regional trade in South Asia started to increase slightly and it presently stands at about 5 per cent of total trade. However, the region remains the least integrated region in the world. What was the reason for this development? Could greater integration between South Asia and East Asia revive economic integration in South Asia? In order to answer these questions, two additional questions were posed to opinion leaders from South Asia. A large number of South Asian respondents (91 per cent) felt that political rivalries, border disputes and suspicions in the region are the major factors for the low level of integration in South Asia (Fig. 9). Other factors responsible are the preferences of several countries in the region for bilateral approaches as compared to regional ones (75 per cent) and the lack of regional cooperation initiatives in the region (73 per cent).

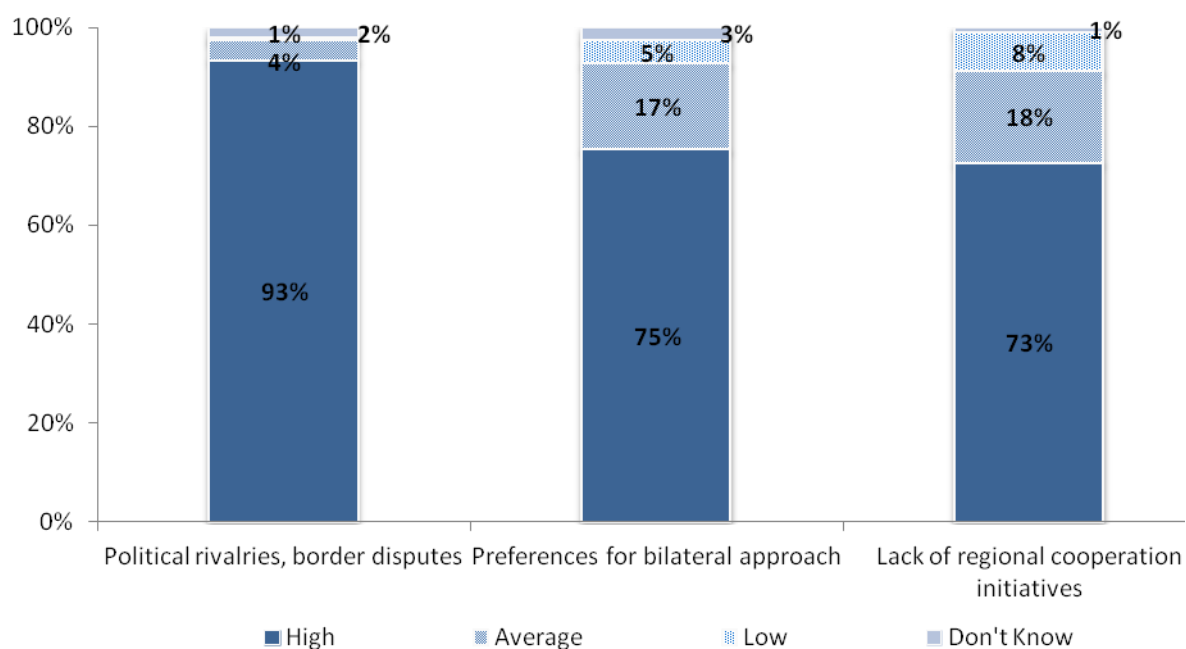


Fig. 9. Factors that led South Asia to become one of the world's least integrated region. Note: Values are based on 190 responses from South Asia. The question was formulated as follows: Question 9 – South Asia which once was a fairly well-integrated region of the world is now one of the least integrated. Rate the following factors which you think could have led to this development.

A large majority of our respondents (95 per cent) are of the view that increased economic linkages between South Asian countries with East Asian countries could lead to a win-win situation for both regions and also to the revival of economic integration in South Asia (Fig. 9a). The view is consistent with the findings of Rana and Chia (2013a).

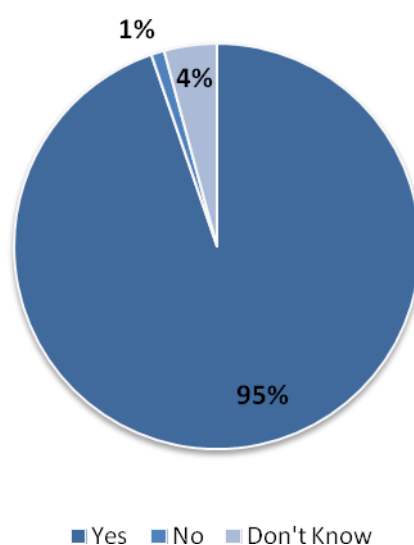


Fig. 9a. Economic integration with East Asia as win-win situation for both regions. Note: Values are based on 190 responses from South Asia. The question was formulated as follows: Question 9a – Could increased economic linkages with East Asia lead to a win-win situation for both regions and also revive economic integration in South Asia?

6. Conclusion

The survey results have a number of policy implications. They present a fairly positive assessment of economic integration between South Asia and East Asia and its prospect. Many respondents, about three quarters of them, believe that the benefits of SA-EA integration would be faster and more resilient economic growth in the two regions leading to a win-win situation for both. A similar number of respondents also felt that integration of the two regions would be a good example of “open” regionalism and also lead to deeper integration with the rest of the global economy. Roughly four out of five respondents feel that integration between SA-EA should be market-led (through improved connectivity and improved business environment). Less than two-thirds favoured regional cooperation policy to promote integration (namely South Asia lobbying to participate in various regional trade cooperation efforts in East Asia).

Over one-half of the respondents also felt that the case for a Pan-Asian FTA comprising all South Asia and East Asia countries was strong, and that the South Asian countries should sign more FTAs and investment agreements with their East Asian counterparts. All South Asian countries should also seek to join the on-going negotiations for the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

Nearly four out of five respondents felt that India should be represented in some capacity at the ASEAN+3 Economic Review and Policy Dialogue (ERPD) and Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralism (CMIM) and that this would help enhance Asia’s voice in the G20. The Survey also establishes the important role of improved connectivity in transport, energy and communication in promoting SA-EA integration. Nearly three out of four respondents felt that improved connectivity should be the major modality for promoting such integration. The survey found that the growing importance of supply chain trade and the “Look East” policies in South Asia were the major factors that had revived the case for land connectivity between South Asia and East Asia. Many respondents felt that the case for ASEAN-India connectivity, as well as South Asia-China-ASEAN connectivity (by reviving the old South-western Silk Road) was strong and that the BIMSTEC should play a greater role in this regard.

Finally, a large number of respondents (over 90 per cent) felt that political rivalries, border disputes, and suspicions in the region were the major reasons why South Asia, which was once a fairly well-integrated region of the world, had become one of the least integrated regions. Roughly, a similar number of respondents felt that closer economic linkages between the two regions could lead to a revival of economic integration in South Asia.

Overall, two broader implications of the survey findings should be noted. First, economic integration between South Asia and East Asia should be promoted using market-led approaches including improved connectivity which reduces trading costs. Second, in addition to ASEAN-India connectivity, connectivity between South Asia, China, and ASEAN should also be promoted. Nepal has a role to

play in this regard. Third, just as they did when the East Asia Summit was formed, ASEAN and ASEAN+3 should invite India to join the ERPD and to pledge funds to the CMIM. Fourth, in addition to India, which is already involved in negotiating the RCEP, at some stage in the future, ASEAN and ASEAN+3 must invite other South Asian countries to join the RCEP.

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