



Asia Pacific Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism (APRCM) Sectoral Paper for High Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development 2019

Despite progress serious challenges remain for the achievement of SDGs. Most of SDGs targets are off track and not likely to be met. In Asia Pacific, there are widening inequalities and poverty exacerbated by mega-free trade agreements, regressive tax systems and illicit financial flows, resource grabbing, patriarchy and fundamentalism, human rights violations, degradation of the environment, denial of peoples' access to resources and services, climate change, militarism, and shrinking democratic spaces. Such systemic issues will continue to compromise the achievement of the goals under review and the entire Agenda 2030.

To realize the ambition of Goal 4, education needs to be reframed as a basic human right and a public good guaranteed by the state. Concretely, governments in the region must allocate at least 4-6 per cent of GDP and 15-20 per cent of total expenditure to education. Teachers' rights, welfare, and empowerment must be guaranteed to recognize and facilitate their meaningful contribution to policy development and fulfillment of education goals.

If Goal 8 is to be truly transformative, it must enable women and men to move out of low productivity, informal, insecure, and vulnerable work. It must promote a rights-based and human-centered employment policy that will create decent jobs that will fully respect workers' rights, especially the right to association and collective bargaining, and will promote universal social protection and genuine social dialogue. Decent work is integral to sustainable development by eradicating poverty, addressing inequality and ensuring productivity growth with a just transition for climate justice as well as full-utilization of technological advances. There is an urgent need for a Universal Labour Guarantee based on fundamental workers' rights to ensure adequate living wages, limits on hours of work, and safety of workplaces for all.

For Goal 10, we need to challenge economic policies, and institutions that entrench inequalities and discrimination. We have to overhaul trade rules skewed to developed countries and their elites. To redistribute wealth, individuals and corporations should pay their fair share by taxing their assets, using the collected revenues to finance social services. We urge governments to promote social enterprises to increase opportunities and income generating activities and contribute to reducing inequalities.

Goal 13 must translate to adequate and appropriate climate finance contributed by countries on the basis of historical responsibility for global warming and to make reparations to all affected parties. We must put an end to fossil fuels and to market solutions to climate change. Climate action must be prioritized in the mainstream budgeting and planning processes across countries in the region.

Achieving Goal 16 requires addressing the systemic issues at the root of conflict and marginalization in the region. Critically, governments must shift resources away from military spending to social services. Civil society space must not only be recognized but progressively expanded. Urgently, state authorities must put an end to all forms of attacks and harassment against rights defenders.



Goal 17 is the most vital component of the Agenda 2030; thus a business-as-usual approach is not an option. The long-standing commitment of developed countries to dedicate 0.7% of gross domestic income to ODA should be met unconditionally. Trade should protect policy space for development and peoples' rights. States must make human rights, environmental and SDG compatibility impact assessments of tax policies, trade and investment agreements and new technologies. Member States should put in place a regional tax body to reform the taxation architecture and synergize regional cooperation on taxation.

Recognizing the significance and resolving structural and systemic barriers is necessary and should be given due attention. The way forward is to recast development as a process organized and lead by the people to achieve development justice.

People's Forum Statement

for Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development 2019

Strengthening People's Power for Development Justice in an Unequal and Divided World

24-26 March 2019 | Bangkok, Thailand

Chapeau

We, representatives of more than 200 people's organizations and civil society groups in Asia and the Pacific converged at the People's Forum on Sustainable Development 2019 to share experiences and discuss multiple dimensions of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, and the demands for accountability and justice. With the theme "Strengthening People's Power for Development Justice in an Unequal and Divided World", we are bound together and committed to work in solidarity, and to strengthen the inter-linkages among rights, development and sustainability. We demand accountability from our governments and key institutions in the delivery of the SDGs in our respective countries and constituencies. We reiterate the need for inclusive planning, implementation and monitoring of the SDGs with democratic participation of the most marginalized groups--indigenous peoples, women, especially rural women, farmers, workers, fisherfolk, urban poor, LGBTQI, people living with HIV/AIDS, people living in conflict, older people, youth, migrants, people with disabilities and Dalit and discrimination based on work and descent populations.

While we acknowledge some progress on the SDGs, there is still a big gap, especially with implementation and monitoring. We express our disappointment on our governments for their lack of commitment and action on the SDGs. As seen in the recent ESCAP progress report on the SDGs, more than two-thirds of the SDGs targets are off track and not likely to be met in this region. While there is recognition from governments in Asia Pacific on the importance of the SDGs, there is still lack of political will and different priorities at the local level.

The region is home to the poorest and most marginalized communities. There is widening inequality between the rich and the poor, worsening poverty exacerbated by regressive tax systems and illicit



financial flows, increasing human rights violations, further degradation of the environment, deprivation of people's access to resources and services, worsening impacts of climate change, and shrinking democratic spaces. Shrinking space is a threatening trend for civil society in our region. It takes various forms from political restrictions, physical arrests, enforced disappearances, and killings. It's business-as-usual at the national level. Corporations continue to enjoy the space given by the governments to access resources while limiting people's spaces and furthering depriving them of their rights. The influx of corporate investments into the areas of marginalized communities have led to massive displacements, environmental destruction and human rights violations.

"Leaving no one behind" is recognizing and addressing the root causes and systemic barriers that continue to hamper people's development. These barriers that have led to the current situation will continue to adversely affect peoples while benefiting a few around the globe and hinder the achievement of the SDGs if they are not confronted and addressed.

Strengthening Peoples' Power for Development Justice in an Unequal and Divided World: Unpacking Systemic and Structural Barriers

This year's theme of the Asia Pacific People's Forum on Sustainable Development reflects our aspirations and demands towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in the region. The peoples of Asia Pacific, the grassroots and marginalized communities are fighting for rights and demanding accountability from governments.

The world we live in remains unequal and divided. Inequality widens as seen in the large gap between the income of the world's richest and poorest populations. In 2018, the world's 26 richest people own as much as the poorest 50%. The region exemplifies the symptoms of unbalanced development, as we have the fastest growing economies but at the same time also have millions of poor people living on less than USD 1.9 a day. This reality persists in a context where states are politically captured by elite interests and multinational corporations who utilize tax, trade and investment regimes that benefit a few.

The rise of authoritarian and patriarchal regimes in the region, the rising military power and anti-people policies continue to facilitate mega free trade agreements, large-scale land acquisitions and commercialization of natural resources. They have greatly impacted on the peoples' right to development and have caused destruction of the environment and worsening poverty.

But the people's movements are growing and expanding. We are rebuilding despite repression and silencing from the governments and corporate interests. The people of Asia Pacific are reclaiming their rights and demanding accountability and development justice.

We reiterate the call for a genuine transformative development agenda framed on Development Justice. The current development paradigm of neoliberal globalization is not working, it continues to push people to the margins and usher profit-seeking corporations to access and control our resources. The



Development Justice Framework seeks to address the pervasive injustice we face today through the Five Foundational Shifts -- Redistributive Justice, Economic Justice, Social Justice, Environmental Justice and Accountability to the Peoples. Guided by these principles, we commit to strengthen our movements, harness people power and demand accountability and justice from our governments and big corporations who have perpetrated grave human rights violations.

Focus Goals for 2019

Goal 4 Quality Education

In many developing countries, education is designed to prepare learners with skills for work in and out of the country, while education for emancipation and empowerment remains on the sidelines.

Privatization, commercialization and corporate capture of education has caused inequitable allocation of government resources and is depriving peoples of their right to education. Gender inequality, patriarchy, casteism and untouchability practices, communalism and institutionalized racism are also major barriers that undermine the right to education.

Education is a basic human right and a public good that should be guaranteed by the State. It should be framed within a lifelong learning framework and implemented through a rights-based approach.

Governments must increase efforts to overcome barriers to equitable and inclusive education, including adoption and implementation of stronger policies. Investment in quality education should be increased progressively, adhering to the benchmarks of at least 4-6 per cent of GDP and 15-20 per cent of total expenditure to education.

Instruction in and study of one's own language including signed languages must be emphasized and promoted to preserve peoples' culture, to ensure inclusivity and to utilize a more effective medium of instruction.

Teachers' rights, welfare, and empowerment must be guaranteed to recognize and facilitate their meaningful contribution to policy development and fulfillment of education goals. The UNESCO/ILO joint recommendation upholding the status of teachers should be complied with.

Goal 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth

Our current development model, which uses GDP growth as the main proxy for progress, associates value with systematic exploitation of natural systems and people. Despite claimed economic achievements in the region, high decent work deficits persist. Almost 70 per cent of informal workers work for excessive working hours. Every year, more than 1 million workers are killed in occupational accidents or work-related diseases.



Decent work for all is integral to sustainable development not only in eradicating poverty and addressing inequality but also in ensuring productivity and growth. Its promotion is a prerequisite for a just transition for climate justice. We strongly push for a rights-based and human-centered policy on labor.

Workers also have to contend with the technological advances, often referred to as the 4th industrial revolution. While it can open up opportunities for work just like its predecessors, operating under the same system and structure will exacerbate informalization and labor outsourcing, which are most prevalent in the Asia-Pacific region. It can result to massive displacement of workers, race-to-the-bottom working conditions and wages, and lead to further curtailment of freedom of association and right to collective bargaining. Social protection is a much-needed remedy to the immediate impacts of digitization, but high deficits in social protection in the region prevail with 61.1 per cent of its total population having no access to it. To attain decent work, there is an urgent need for policies to align with the broader framework of just and equitable transition anchored on development justice.

We highlight some impacts on some groups to emphasize the need to leave no one behind:

- Migrant workers, both internal and external and in all sectors, despite recognition on their valuable contribution to this region's GDP, remain vulnerable and unprotected. They are denied their basic labor rights including the fundamental right to association. They have restricted participation in policy-making and decisions. Governments of destination countries, more so, of the countries of origin, should take greater responsibility in ensuring the rights and welfare of migrant workers and their families including health and occupational safety that is not reliant on private businesses.
- For women, especially young women, employment rates remain low, especially in south and south west Asia with women more likely to be in vulnerable employment. Despite advances in technology, jobs frontiers are marred by cultural norms, care responsibilities, safety concerns, lack of mobility and access to education, vocational training and services. There is still no recognition and redistribution of unpaid care work by women.
- Persons with disabilities continue to have limited opportunities for employment within the mainstream labor market and have no option but to work in segregated employment settings where they do not earn a living wage. They are paid lower wages compared to their counterparts without disabilities and face other barriers including inaccessible workplaces and lack support services.
- Caste based discrimination in employment and job segregation persist, with many Dalit workers including child laborers trapped in bonded labor. They are forced into occupations like manual scavenging and sewerage work, which result to severe health hazards and deaths.

We strongly push for a rights-based and human-centered employment policy that fully respects fundamental workers' rights, especially the right to association and to collective bargaining, and promotes universal social protection and genuine social dialogue.



With increasing informality, there is an urgent need to design and implement a Universal Labour Guarantee covering fundamental workers' rights, adequate living wages, limits on hours of work, and safety of workplaces.

In the context of 4IR, regulation of the development and application of new technologies, especially digital technology is imperative to ensure protection of workers. Since there is still limited understanding and analysis of 4IR related impacts, government should adopt a more cautionary approach.

Concepts and practices such as social and community enterprises that cut across all four strategic dimensions of the decent work agenda should be considered. These enterprises open up opportunities specifically for the marginalized and put in place social governance models that can provide a new way forward.

Goal 10 Reduced Inequalities

Inequalities have been on the rise in Asia-Pacific. The region is now the home to the highest number of billionaires in the world. In 2017, the net worth of the region's billionaires was more than seven times the combined GDP of the region's least developed countries (LDCs). The region's combined income inequality measured by the Gini coefficient has increased by over 5 percentage points in the last 20 years, which is far from the situation of almost all other regions.

Current global and national economic models are rigged against women. Our economies run on unpaid care and domestic work. For free! Our economies would crash without it, yet we rarely see it discussed by policy makers. Data from the World Economic Forum shows that at current rates of change, it will take 217 years to close the gap in pay and employment opportunities between women and men. The ground-up exploitation of women and girls makes a few super rich.

These inequalities have been exacerbated by the corporate capture of peoples' lands, resources, public services and policy-making through the use of corporate driven public-private partnerships and increasing militarization. It has been aggravated by various systems of patriarchy, class, caste and other forms of oppression and marginalization. Many countries in Asia-Pacific allocate more government budget on the military than they do on public services. Social protection expenditure of Asia Pacific countries is currently at 28.1 per cent, which is lower than the global average of 34.9 per cent. In contrast, direct taxes account for roughly a third of the region's total tax revenue at 36.1 per cent, in comparison to more than half in OECD countries.

Challenging these inequalities therefore requires challenging the economic and accounting policies and institutions that entrench these inequalities and promote discrimination. These policies include changing tax and trade rules that have ensured that wealth and resources continue to flow from developing countries to developed countries and into the hands of the few. Challenging inequalities would also include putting an end on reliance on migrant workers' remittances as means of reducing inequalities, which happens at the expense of the lives of migrant workers. It also entails eliminating discriminatory laws, policies, and practices against women, LGBTIQ, sex workers, people who use drugs, people with



are living with and affected by HIV, migrants, refugees, internally displaced peoples due to conflict and climate change amongst others.

Making rich individuals and corporations pay their fair share, and using those revenues to boost public schools, healthcare and other social services is a powerful one-two punch against inequality and for women's rights. If women and girls can get quality education and access to healthcare including sexual and reproductive health and rights, they have greater freedom and choices over their own lives and can participate in sociopolitical activities.

We call upon governments to increase commitments to social protection and our public commons, and ensure universal access to health, education, water, energy and other social protections which are necessary to redistribute wealth and remedy inequality. There is also evidence on the correlation between high rates of unionization and higher levels of income equality, indicating the importance of ensuring workers' rights to unionize and to collective bargaining. In this context, we urge governments to promote social enterprises in light of their redistributive philosophy, which increases opportunities and income generating activities, thereby contributing to the important objective to reduce inequalities.

Goal 13 Climate Action

Climate change continues to threaten not only the poor and vulnerable communities but the future of humanity. The impacts of climate change are faster, graver, and more unpredictable than expected. The decoupling of emissions and economic growth is proving elusive as the use of fossil fuels remains on the rise. The world is currently heading to more than 3 degrees Celsius rise in temperature by the end of the century, and in all probability 1.5 degrees ceiling breached in less than 12 years. Climate change has become everyday reality of communities on the frontlines. The false narrative of industrialized countries' efforts to stem emissions falls flat in the face due to huge inequality in emissions and resource consumption in so called developed countries. Much of the fossil fuel development projects not only increase greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions but also prevent communities from being resilient and destroy their adaptive capacities to deal with impacts of climate change.

An ever-growing number of academic research, scientific projections as well as lived realities ask for urgent reduction in the emissions (including the consumption emissions). There is need for immediate enhancement in ambitions of countries who have developed at the cost of development space for the middle- and low-income countries. Support to developing countries in charting a low carbon development pathway (including energy systems that are rooted in energy democracy) through technology and capacity and bridging the adaptation gap and compensation to the affected communities and countries is also necessary. But the lack of ambition and leadership is allowing climate impacts to surge far ahead of climate action.

Climate change exacerbates poverty, inequality, crises in agriculture, food, and water, climate and disaster induced displacements, destruction of biodiversity and ecosystems, and ravages women, persons with disabilities, indigenous populations, forest-dependent, Dalits and other marginalized communities.



Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism

Coupled with the pollution of land, air and water through carbon and chemical contamination, it is claiming an ever-growing number of lives year after year primarily in the countries and communities who still have negligible ecological footprints. The capitalist economic architecture driven by the logic of profit for the few sustains the destruction of our livelihoods, lives and habitat by offering false solutions in the form of geo-engineering, genetic engineering, and other techno-fixes; the system persists with piecemeal and halfhearted solutions that fail to respond to the demands of science and calls of humanity. The renewable energy revolution; the single bright spot in the climate action is hugely insufficient to tide over the crises of sustainability, accountability, morality, courage and leadership facing us. The just energy transition besides sustaining fossil fuel phase out, reskilling and protecting jobs, also must support and look into the importance of reducing wasteful energy use in industrialized countries, and must ensure that energy as a common good requires community and democratic control.

We also need to emphasize trade related and net energy consumption rather than territorial consumption as discussed predominantly in the climate action, as the majority of the countries are net exporter of emissions for goods and services consumed by the developed countries.

While we welcome language on human rights-based approach and focus on peace justice and rule of law and inclusion, we are also witnessing a worrying trend within ESCAP that central principles like global cooperation, polluter pays principle, and intergenerational equity and ecological integrity are being undermined. We want to remind all of you that sustainability cannot be ensured unless these principles are adhered to the letter and in spirit. The ESCAP also has a responsibility to reiterate these in the global negotiations as regional priorities.

Solutions on climate change must address its root causes. We must put an end to fossil fuels. We must also put an end to market driven solutions to climate change that exacerbate social, gender, economic and ecological problems. Geo-engineering is not a solution. Countries have to keep their commitment for climate finance that is distinct from and additional to existing financing. Climate action must be prioritized in the mainstream budgeting and planning processes across countries in the region, adhering to respective recommendations of Climate Public Expenditures and Institutional Review under the Paris Agreement. Finance for development must not be used to pay off the responsibilities of developed countries for their historical GHGs emissions. Climate finance should be channeled to the climate vulnerable communities and not to create social and economic burden to communities. Communities that experience exclusion in disaster response like Dalits and women need special protective mechanisms for inclusive and equitable humanitarian aid

Communities at the forefront of climate change are also the ones who can provide the solutions to climate change. Community-led programs and initiatives must be supported, enhanced and provided to ensure local communities become resilient and can adapt to the impacts of climate change.

A just and equitable transition of the workforce with creation of decent and green jobs as confirmed by the Paris Agreement and reiterated by global and regional commitments is an integral part of the paradigm shift towards a zero-greenhouse gas and climate resilient economies and societies for all and



sustainable consumption and production. In this regard, governments must take into consideration just transition, while preparing and implementing nationally determined contributions, national adaptation plans and national long-term low greenhouse gas emission development strategies in cooperation with social partners and CSOs.

It is expected that climate action could create 65 million jobs and generate economic gains worth USD 26 trillion until 2030. Similarly, the International Labor Organization estimates that climate mitigation action would create a net addition of 14.2 million jobs in Asia and the Pacific by 2030. In order for people in our region to benefit fairly from this process, there should be no delay in implementing inclusive government policies for a just transition, anchored on respect for human and workers' rights, including ratification and implementation of internationally recognized core labor standards, implementation of universal social protection, and promotion of skills education and training.

Goal 16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

SDG 16 is not only a goal on its own but a means and an accelerator to achieve Agenda 2030. Yet, progress on this goal has been disappointing as realities point to growing militarism, human rights violations, and shrinking civic space in Asia Pacific.

Militarism is a growing concern in the region as competing global powers spend billions for arms, deploy military and naval forces, and expand their bases to mark respective zones of influence and protect strategic resources and markets.

Foreign-financed and government-backed megaprojects such as on transportation, energy, special economic zones, and natural resource extraction are increasingly militarized. Private and government security forces target with impunity local leaders defending their communities and peoples from displacement and environmental harm and destruction.

Human rights violations are rampant with the rise of authoritarian, macho-fascist regimes in the region.

Civil society organizations contend with new restrictive NGO laws and regulations that compromise their mandate and fiscal and organizational independence. Spaces for peoples' meaningful participation in the development process at the local, national, and regional levels are not only limited but closing. New mega trade deals that will have grave implications not only on countries' policy space and peoples' rights are being negotiated behind closed doors, without the benefit of public participation and debate.

The democratic deficit becomes more untenable as leaders and members of peoples' organizations face intimidation through terror tagging, illegal arrests and detention, enforced disappearances, and extrajudicial killings. Particularly made vulnerable are peoples' movements working for farmers, workers, indigenous peoples, Dalits, women, children, LGBTQIs and other marginalized sectors.



Prisons across the region remain overcrowded and lack health and rehabilitative programs and facilities. Shortage of public defenders and congested courts in addition to harsh sentences for minor offenses further diminish peoples' equitable access to justice.

Curbing illicit financial flows, including tax avoidance by multinational and transnational corporations is important not only for mobilizing new and additional resources for sustainable development but for fostering accountability and democratic governance as well.

Achieving peace, justice, and inclusion will need nothing less than addressing the systemic issues at the root of conflict, situations of violence, and marginalization in the region today. This means the comprehensive and coordinated realization of development justice in all its aspects: redistributive justice, economic justice, gender and social justice, ecological justice, and accountability to peoples.

Critically, governments must shift resources away from military spending to ensure equitable financing towards social services and other programs to help alleviate inequalities and discriminations at the root of conflict, violence, and insecurity in the region.

Counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency laws and policies that violate human rights and disregard international human rights standards at all levels must be repealed. Urgently, state authorities must put an end to all forms of attacks against human rights defenders.

Civil society space must not only be recognized, but progressively expanded to ensure the meaningful participation of people at all levels of the development process.

There is a need to exact accountability not only from the state but also the private sector for the consequences and impacts of their operations to peoples and the environment. A binding treaty on TNCs and other business enterprises with respect to human rights is a step in the right direction and must be complemented together with strengthening domestic government regulation.

We support the establishment of a regional tax body under UN-ESCAP to reform the taxation architecture and synergize regional cooperation on taxation concerns in Asia Pacific.

Public access to justice must be promoted by ensuring equitable access to court facilities, legal services, and court processes.

We must strive to end all substituted decision-making regimes and guarantee full legal capacity for all persons with disabilities. Independent support for decision-making should be made available, but the right to refuse support must also be respected. Laws that violate the persons with disabilities' fundamental freedom of liberty and security of person must be abolished. In particular, persons with disabilities demand protection against community practices of shackling and confinement, and the deprivation of liberty in psychiatric institutions and forced psychiatric interventions.



Interlinkages between goals and an integrated approach

Agenda 2030 consists of goals and targets that are intrinsically interlinked and cut across all the 3 dimensions of sustainable development. The broader goals of the agenda cannot be met unless a holistic approach is carried out. Policy coherence must be ensured at different levels - local, national, regional and global, across the 17 goals and across other policy spaces beyond the SDG policy arena. Policy incoherence can be overcome through appropriate policies that are carefully designed and implemented based on the principle of indivisibility of human rights, by moving away from narrow sectoral approaches, and through the active and meaningful participation of people. Governments must conduct proper policy coherence mapping and policy screening for institutional coherence at all levels of governance. At the national level, the legislative and executive branches of state power, other state authorities and local self-governments need to be involved centrally in all stages of implementation. The role of civil society, peoples' organizations and communities in collective planning at micro and macro level must not be undermined. Governments need to work with grass-root communities and underrepresented constituencies such as rural population, farmers, women, indigenous peoples, social enterprises and cooperatives, and workers, both in planning, implementation and monitoring of their policies and programs to ensure that interlinkages and integration issues are addressed. This should include safe, inclusive and progressive representation of groups at risk in all platforms related to SDG in national, regional and international advocacy.

Partnership

Overt emphasis on partnerships with the private sector, particularly large corporations, steadily erode the State's role in development and sidelines the role of civil societies and other rights holders as independent development actors while at the same time calling them equal "stakeholders". It is a matter of concern that the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) along with the bilateral and multilateral financial institutions are pursuing blended financing, leveraging private investments or Public-Private Partnerships in infrastructure, energy, public services and climate finance projects uncritically and without precaution to their negative knock-on effects on peoples and the planet. This continued push for Public-Private Public partnerships both by states and by the UN are ignoring the growing evidence of the failure of PPPs and how it has in many cases exacerbated inequalities.

International financial institutions and bilateral donors should ensure compliance of social, environmental and human rights safeguards. States should enforce a strong binding legal framework to regulate the private sector, in particular multinational corporations and other business activities and ensure their adherence to human rights and accountability standards such as through the proposed Legally Binding Treaty on Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprise. Small enterprises, as well as community and social enterprises should be supported instead of large corporations.



A real partnership should be rooted in the recognition and respect of communities' and human rights and their rightful involvement in all development processes. Any form of partnership should be with rights holders and based on the recognition of their human rights. Governments should work in partnership with civil society towards meeting SDGs should be based on mutual respect, desist from overt focus on commercial interest, uphold development effectiveness principles, respect human rights, ensure private sector accountability, align donor country priorities with people's development priorities, and rescind all forms of repression of civil societies and conscription of their spaces.

Means of Implementation

For obvious reasons, the SDGs need resources like development finance to be realized. For years, wealth and resources continue to flow out of developing and poor countries to rich and developed countries due to illicit financial flows (IFFs). Conservative estimates show that developing countries have already lost about USD 7.8 trillion in IFFs from 2004 to 2013. The loss of revenue, which includes trade mispricing and tax avoidance by multinational corporations and the wealthy seriously undermines SDG implementation in developing countries.

ODA is an important resource to finance SDGs. However, it has been predominantly used to catalyze private sector engagement, to achieve trade, military and political objectives of donor countries, and is now also used in climate financing, which should be additional to ODA obligations. If bilateral climate finance were recognized as a distinct flow and additional to ODA commitments, total ODA would have declined by 14 per cent less in 2016, which is worrying. Efforts are also being made to divert already scarce ODA resources towards less tested and trusted instruments like blended financing, equity investment, and trade insurance that do not have and express a public interest character. The narrative around such instruments suggests opportunities only for the private sector, and rarely takes into account opportunity costs and associated risks, which have the potential to undermine human rights.

Further, accountability and transparency are required in how finance, including ODA, is spent. Special attention must be paid to finances for marginalized constituencies, e.g. public allocation of budget on gender equality and women's empowerment.

Trade has been recognized as a critical MOI in the 2030 Agenda. Clearly most of the SDGs cannot be achieved without fair trade rules, especially for poorer countries. For this, the current trade institutions and architecture *must* be reformed, not in favor of corporations, but in a manner that is consistent with sustainable development and the needs of developing countries, their people and natural resources. The attack on marginalized constituencies in the name of special and differential treatment for developing countries and the push for new forms of liberalization must stop. The trade and investment agreements, especially the new mega FTAs, investment treaties and the WTO, continue to be unduly influenced by megacorporations pushing for aggressive inroads into markets including through rules on e-commerce, government procurement, and investment liberalization and investor protection, including the now



infamous ISDS. These policies are threatening governments' development policy space and challenging access of our people and grassroot communities to key financial, natural and human resources. Trade policy must be re-oriented towards transparent, participatory and redistributive global trade rules that are people-oriented and infuse grassroots perspectives.

Technology poses major opportunities as well as major challenges. We call for re-energizing of the Technology Facilitation Mechanism and for it to fulfill its mandate. We also want to draw attention to digital technology, the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and its widespread impacts on our economies and our people. While technology can be immensely beneficial, current policy approaches reflect limited understanding and recognition of the extensive and often adverse economic, social and environmental impacts of technology especially if it is highly concentrated in a few mega-corporations. These span impacts on employment & incomes, citizen's privacy, policy independence across sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, services, health, finance and environment, and on grassroot constituencies. The rapid expansion and control of such technology are dehumanizing our peoples and humanizing the machines. We request Member States and the UN-ESCAP to undertake more analysis of all kinds of new technology including digital technology and to note of the new regulations that are being brought by some governments in the region to ensure future policy space, protect domestic businesses and protect the privacy of citizens.

We demand that states restore the primacy of human rights over inconsistent international obligations - whether they are trade rules, tax rules or other economic policies. This can be done by making compulsory ex-ante, periodic and ex-post human rights, environmental and SDG compatibility impact assessments of all tax policies, trade and investment agreements. Asia-Pacific Member States should now put in place the regional tax body that they had agreed on last year. Genuine systems of accountability must be put in place to ensure that both governments and private sectors can be held accountable when they violate existing human rights frameworks, including ILO and UN protocols, UN guiding principles on Business and Human Rights, and the OECD guidelines for MNCs. We call upon governments to commit to the Binding Treaty on Transnational Corporations & Other Business Enterprises and Human Rights. We strongly urge governments to promote social dialogue as an institution to ensure democratic governance for sustainability and inclusiveness in social-economic development with accountability and transparency being strengthened. It should reflect comprehensively across trade agreements that do not reduce the protection of workers' rights. We also ask governments to develop and build Social Entrepreneurship-SDG Multi-Stakeholder Innovative Platforms, which are multi-level, spanning national to regional levels for SCEs to scale up their reach and impacts.

Monitoring and Accountability

The Agenda 2030 makes a very fleeting mention of accountability with a weak voluntary process to review the progress of the SDGs implementation.



Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism

There has been little progress in setting up local and national institutions and mechanisms to ensure that voices of civil society and people are reflected in the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs. Effective monitoring and review, at both national and local level requires high-quality, timely, reliable, disaggregated and accessible data. The access to information should also extend to state policies and budget allocation.

It also requires capacity building at all levels of government and its institutions. SDG implementation also takes place at the local levels. Encouraging local governments to monitor, review and collect data through the Voluntary Local Review (VLRs) led by local and sub-national governments with a robust peoples and civil society engagement at the local level should be supported. States should also look at strengthening parliamentary oversight over the organs of the state and effectively address lopsided government spending that draws resources away from basic public services.

In many countries, peoples' data and bottom-up peoples monitoring and review of SDGs implementation do not have any space or are not recognized within government's own implementations and reviews. Citizen-led data collection and reporting should be encouraged, and civil society shadow or 'spotlight' reports be made widely available in a timely manner along with government reports.

The accountability of and interlinkages between the intergovernmental processes at the sub-regional, regional and global levels remains uncertain. At the sub-regional level, there is a need to strengthen the participation of civil society groups, which currently varies according to the different sub-regions. At the regional level, the APFSD has only been a space for governments in to exchange and learn of their respective implementations on the SDGs. While at the global level, the HLPF, which is central to the implementation, follow up, review and provision of political guidance and leadership for the Agenda 2030, has failed to provide any genuine accountability. The current SDGs accountability framework needs to learn from and be informed by other review mechanisms within its own UN systems, such as its treaty processes. It also needs to directly confront difficult questions of development and rights rather than sweeping them under the carpet to remain relevant in support of global transition to sustainability.

Regional Roadmap

We are concerned about the lack of coherence and synergy in actions at national, sub regional, regional and global level. While sub regional level actions need more synergy and inclusiveness among various dimensions of the Agenda, the regional priorities underpinning the process is wanting. We are also concerned about the regional priorities falling off the table in the global discussions.

For the past 3 years, we have watched the Regional Roadmap initiative that was launched by UN-ESCAP in 2016 and endorsed by Member States in 2017. The Roadmap has identified areas of work that could “tackle obstacles and create opportunities” (page 5) including issues such as ageing, migration, disabilities, gender equality and women's empowerment, and acknowledges that inequalities and social protection should be studied to enable better policy advocacy (page 13).



The Roadmap was designed to foster regional cooperation on 11 priority areas including critical Means of Implementation (MOI) that need efforts above national levels. The document highlights “data and statistics, technology, finance, policy coherence and partnerships” as some of the deliverables. These have to be based on a partnership between governments supported by stakeholders that helps the poorer countries in the region, which are especially dependent on MOI to help implement their SDG commitments. This process has the power to act as a replicable model for other regions for sharing both learning and resources at a regional level.

We as CSOs of the Asia Pacific region have always strongly supported the Regional Roadmap process as we feel it can do more than just provide a discussion forum, and can actually deliver much-needed regional MOI in a targeted and needs-oriented manner, helping support the Least Developed countries (LDCs), Small Island Developing Countries (SIDs), Countries with Special Needs, and other developing countries, most of whom still suffer from massive poverty and high inequality and lag behind on most of the SDGs. CSOs have repeatedly affirmed this position in the CSO statements during APFSD 2016, 2017 and 2018, and in the Busan and Ulanbataar Declarations on Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies in Asia and Beyond (January and February 2019).

However, we see very limited efforts so far on effective and meaningful development of either process or content of the Roadmap. Implementation has been difficult as there are very few clearly identified actions to implement. Not only are instruments on important sections missing, the document remains too general and fails to include specific innovative solutions that can meet current and emerging challenges in the region. Further there are no resources that have been promised to support this process without which it cannot move. The document is meant to be a living document, but we have not seen any movement in the last 2 years. The Progress Report shows a clear lack of advancement on many important areas.

So, in moving forward, we have the following recommendations that also respond to the guiding questions;

First, while the mandate is general, the success of this initiative will lie in being able to rise to current challenges and come up with very specific solutions and actions at a regional level that are more difficult to achieve at global levels. It must, for example, respond to the climate crisis in the region by harnessing climate finance and technologies, plug illicit financial flows and foster tax cooperation, promote aid facilitation and management, ensure fair trade rules that ensure policy space for development, foster capacity building of poorer countries, and foster technology that are accessible and beneficial to the people at large and engage on emerging issues such as digital technology, which, while of great benefit, have major regulatory and privacy issues. In particular, its unfinished work on creating a regional tax forum needs to be finished as it addresses a critical issue in the region.

Second, we also feel that the Regional Roadmap should be further shaped to contribute to specific needs of marginalized and grassroots constituencies in our countries to support their efforts to meet sustainable development objectives and breach economic & social divides. This is very much in keeping with its mandate. For example, it can work on the localization of access to financial resources aid & technology,



to foster participation of communities in trade negotiations and policy development, helping garner community data to supplement data gaps and so on.

Third, the current mandate itself cannot be cast in stone. It should be open to further discussion and should include issues that are important for the region. We see trade for example, as an important missing element given the increasing number of trade and investment agreements in the region and their extensive and intensive coverage. This could perhaps lead up to doing regional SDG compatibility impact assessments of trade and investment agreements for one.

Fourth, process is key, and we see the absence of a clear process of how these priorities and specific issues and actions will be identified and pursued. This needs to be worked out based on discussions among Member States with inputs from key stakeholders especially civil society, in an institutionalized manner

Fifth, we ask for dedicated resources to support this process. If the Regional cooperation mechanism has to deliver actual actions, it cannot be done without financial and non-financial resources, which the UN and Member States, especially the advanced countries in the region, could provide.

Sixth, for the Regional Roadmap process to succeed, there needs to be a robust accountability mechanism to monitor and review its progress. While UN-ESCAP is trying to monitor it as we see in the Progress of RR Report, it needs a clearer and more accountable process that will actually help it deliver more and better results.

Finally, we strongly ask for a dedicated and institutionalized civil society mechanism for the Roadmap that will engage, monitor, recommend and support Member States' and UN-ESCAP's efforts to take it forward from an independent perspective based on the principle of "leaving no one behind". It is critical that while CSOs engage in the APFSD, they need to be embedded in this specific action-oriented, & longer-term process in a systematic way.

So, we call upon all the Member States to put sincere efforts in this initiative to make it a meaningful and effective one and ensure that it reflects and responds to current needs and does not die an untimely death.

CSO Perspectives, Key Tasks and Key Recommendations

Amidst inequality and exclusion in the region, peoples in the region continue to assert and reclaim what is rightfully theirs. Peoples in the region continue to struggle and resist policies, programs and projects that threaten their lives, homes, and livelihoods, by creating ways to confront issues and effect meaningful and relevant changes despite hurdles set up by the current socio-political and economic system. Peoples are using various ways to overcome limitations due to shrinking democratic spaces, disabilities, and illiteracy, to push for their rights. People and communities are also at the same time creating various ways of pushing for a people-centered and people-driven sustainable development anchored on human rights, equality, inclusion and development justice.



Achieving development justice starts with having a common understanding of not only the symptoms of our failed development model, but also of root structural and systemic causes of development injustices. Recognizing the significance and ultimately resolving structural and systemic barriers is necessary and should be given due attention to achieve development that is just and fair for all. We cannot assess progress on the targets and goals without assessing the significance of these hurdles.

The way forward is to harness the power of the people. A power that is further amplified by cooperation and solidarity from the community level to the national, sub-regional, regional and global level to ensure that no one is left behind. Various forms of self-organizing and solidarity and cooperation within and among constituencies and sectors of society is key because the fundamental problem of the issues we face are the same. The people are the most significant aspect of sustainable development and therefore the most potent agents for achieving it.