

## **Prosperity for Whom?**

### **Asserting Development Justice in a Changing Asia Pacific**

Statement of CSO Forum 2017

#### **Chapeau**

We, participants of the Asia Pacific Civil Society Forum on Sustainable Development from 150 Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) met in Bangkok from March 26-28, 2017 to further the regional recommendations of CSOs for consideration and action at the Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development and UN Environment Assembly.

Sustainable development remains a major concern for the people of Asia Pacific. Two years into the implementation of the Agenda 2030, CSOs still remain strongly concerned about the system that allows a few elite to amass wealth at the expense of the wider population. This region continues to be characterized by growth on one hand, but widening inequalities in wealth, power and resources between and within countries, between rich and poor, and between men, women, LGBTIQ, across different age groups and disabilities, among others. The 2016 year-end update report of the Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific released by ESCAP acknowledged that while the region has indeed experienced growth, it “has not translated into commensurate increases in decent jobs, which has also contributed to heightened income inequality”.

This system is further promoted by the neoliberal economic order that dominates the Asia Pacific region and the world. It is propping up the various injustices committed against peoples and the planet as it is premised on continuous growth – in extraction, production, consumption and waste – generating vast amount of pollution and bringing the Earth closer and closer to environmental tipping points wherein impacts will be extremely hard, if not impossible, to reverse.

Development Justice is continuously being sidelined in the region because of the worsening systemic drivers of unsustainable development that remain unresolved: unjust free trade and

investment agreements, land and resources grabs, militarism and conflict, increasing corporate power and greed, and patriarchy and fundamentalism.

These systemic barriers reinforce each other and they need to be collectively broken down in order for the region to achieve development justice and make progress on the SDGs across the board.

### **Regional Trends and Systemic Barriers**

Economic, financial, and trade measures in conflict with Agenda 2030 are strongly being pursued in the region. Harmful provisions of the TransPacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA) are being salvaged and revived in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (RCEP). These will reinforce RCEP's capacity to further undermine redistributive justice in the region through provisions that will allow corporations to grab lands, ocean and seas and other resources, control patents to medicines and seeds, and restrict access to services such as water, health, and education by making them only available to those who can pay. Trade and investment agreements increasingly contain investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) which gives corporations undue influence in policy making by allowing them the right to sue governments. With these implications, we recommend that trade agreements be transparent and negotiations accessible to stakeholders. Governments should also refrain from negotiating trade agreements which contain ISDS.

Indigenous peoples, dalits, ethnic minorities, landless, rural communities and subsistence farmers face increasing land and resource grabs that threaten their livelihoods and survival. They are being evicted from their lands and territories awarded as concessions to corporations, large scale 'development' and infrastructure (including those conducted under the guise of 'green growth' and 'renewable energy'). These include mining operations, large scale palm oil plantations, tourist facilities, 'green' cities and villages, among others.

Militarism in the region poses one of the most serious threats to people's rights and sustainable development in the region. Military and paramilitary forces are sent to communities to quash protests and clear the way for the incoming investments such as extractives and plantations, leading to violations of people's rights, violence against women and girls, and dislocation of farmers and indigenous communities. Territorial, resource, and ethnic conflict between and within several Asia Pacific countries is further fuelling the import of arms, making Asia Pacific the most militarized region. Stateless people and those who migrate from conflict zones are most likely to be forced into cheap, exploitable labour or trafficked into slavery like conditions. Within these populations,

women, older persons, people with disabilities, children and the already economically marginalised face deeper risks and less ability to seek safe refuge. Military spending of Asia Pacific countries in 2015 amounted to USD 1.62 trillion. This huge budget can be re-allocated towards supporting sustainable development such as supporting small and indigenous farmers particularly in the indigenous peoples' territories, supporting climate adaptation for vulnerable groups, universal access to education and health, and so on.

Patriarchy and fundamentalism are still strong in Asia-Pacific. Together with neoliberal economic policies and militarism, patriarchy and fundamentalism shape policies and laws and result into the marginalization and violation of the rights of women and girls, particularly women workers, women performing unpaid family work, grassroots and indigenous women, women with disabilities from the global south, sexually and gender diverse groups, single or unmarried women.

Together, these systemic barriers worsen poverty and inequality, violate people's rights, and commit massive damage to the planet, causing people to migrate in order to escape aftermath of environmental disasters, and the violence of both conflict and poverty. Asia Pacific is the biggest source of migrants, who are subjected to marginalization, long working hours, and low wages among others in receiving countries.

CSOs are still faced with shrinking civic spaces even if they have been officially recognized as development actors in their own rights. Across Asia-Pacific, there is an ongoing trend of government regulations making it extremely difficult for CSOs to engage, and even exist, while at the same time, private corporations are increasingly gaining access to decision making. Corporate influence in the implementation of the SDGs in the region has been increasing through allowing corporations a bigger role in sustainable development. Expansion of the corporate capture of development is being implemented through corporate partnerships with the UN, public private partnerships, and trade and investment agreements.

Since the adoption of Agenda 2030, there also has been a rise of political parties and governments (or state actors) that engage in extremism and carry out rhetoric and policies that further restrict and impair freedoms and human rights of their citizens, including civil and political rights. Groups including but not limited to women, older persons, human rights defenders, farmers, youth, indigenous peoples, dalits, trade unions, and environmental activists continue to be subjected to exclusion and criminalization and even violence and killings. These actions contribute to systemic

barriers to the fulfillment of the SDGs, as they hinder the effective and meaningful engagement of civil society in the implementation and review,, as well as other development processes.

We therefore urge governments to fulfill their obligations to defend and promote human rights, and enable an environment conducive to democracy and open society. We also urge the UN to ensure that there are international mechanisms to protect the rights and freedoms of all, especially vulnerable communities.

## **People's Priorities on Sustainable Development**

This year, the HLPF will review six cluster goals namely: Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere; Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture; Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages; Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls; Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation; Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

### *Goal 1*

The goal on poverty is complex, multi-faceted and multidimensional. It cannot be linear as its economic, social and environmental aspects should be addressed. Failure to do so can reinforce poverty and accentuate inequality. The achievement of all SDG goals contributes towards full and effective poverty alleviation as it cuts across all thematic issues.

In achieving the goal on poverty, rural poverty cannot be ignored as majority of people still live in rural areas in the Asia Pacific region. Barriers on poverty eradication of rural people include structures of production, feudalism in many countries of the region, increasing instances of unlawful land grab and land monopolization controlled by government and the corporate sector. It is also important to address migration triggered by and, at the same time, perpetuating poverty. Particular attention should also be given to the working poor, poor women, children and youth, and poverty among the older people.

To this end, States must: 1. Give strong focus towards issues of inter-connectedness of ending poverty; 2. Address the root causes of poverty in order to solve the root causes of forced migration and other interlinking issues by creating livelihood opportunities, and; 3. Ensure better distribution

of wealth including just share in the fruits of production through, among others, collective bargaining agreements, cooperativism and social enterprises.

### *Goal 2*

Ending hunger, achieving food security and improving nutrition; and promoting sustainable agriculture cannot be done without farmers, rural women and girls, and indigenous peoples. In Asia Pacific, land grabs facilitated by militarization and control of agrochemical TNCs on agriculture is widespread. Trade agreements are also posing a risk to the rights of local communities, indigenous peoples including indigenous nomadic pastoralists tribes and small scale family farmers. All over the region, we are experiencing loss of local species due to GMOs, as well as loss of farmers. In India, 300,000 farmers committed suicide from 1995 to 2014. From 2003 to 2013, 5 million family farmers left agriculture in Indonesia; in India, 2035 farmers are leaving agriculture every day.

To this end, Governments must: 1. Make the necessary measures to realize and institutionalize the full and effective participation of family farmers in particular, small-scale farmers and indigenous peoples in the decision making processes that may affect them and, in the design, implementation, and, monitoring of public programs on land and agriculture; 2. Take the necessary measures to ensure the availability of data disaggregation beyond gender and age to meet the needs of indigenous peoples and small scale farmers and to make them visible in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and; 3. Ensure transparent, participatory and democratic negotiations of trade agreements that do not harm the rights of small scale farmers, family farmers and indigenous peoples that must be with communities' Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC).

### *Goal 3*

The right to health entails accessibility (physical, economic, social, political), affordability, availability and quality of health services for all particularly the most marginalised, including of young people, children and adolescents and women who are poor, older persons, people of diverse sexual orientation and gender identities and expressions (SOGIE), people with all forms of disability (PwD), people living with and affected by HIV, ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples, people living in remote, rural and slum areas, sex workers, people who use drugs, migrants, displaced, refugees, precarious workers, and people with limited education. Big pharmaceutical companies continue to reap profits through their control of patents to medicines under intellectual property protection enshrined in trade and investment agreements that allow them to keep medicines inaccessible through high prices. Poverty, gender inequality, cultural beliefs and practices, religious beliefs, discriminatory existing laws and policies, perpetuate stigma and discrimination against

people on the basis of their age, SOGIE, ethnicity, migration status, citizenship status, HIV status, and disability, also impact of their access to health care information, services, and commodities.

In order to achieve health and well-being for all, States must: 1. Address the social determinants of health and to put in place programmes and policies which effectively address structural issues e.g. big pharmaceutical's control over medicine patents, lack of financing, issues of availability, affordability and accessibility, and lack of evidence/data for monitoring and review, and legal and policy reform to reach the most marginalized and promote equitable healthcare access; 2. Ensure that CSOs, adolescents and young people and all marginalised communities are meaningfully engaged in all aspects of health programming, including planning, implementation, monitoring and review at all levels, and; 3. Recognize sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for everyone as well as inclusion in the universal health coverage provision of comprehensive sexuality education, and access to safe and legal abortion. People/person living with HIV (PLHIV), people who use drugs, sex workers and people of diverse sexualities should be decriminalized to ensure that their specific health needs are effectively addressed. Public health services including geriatric care and services should be prioritized to ensure that poor people and marginalised communities have access to health services.

#### *Goal 5*

The Asia Pacific region has been witnessing conflicting trends in women's rights. There have been some gains in political participation of women with the enactment of gender quota laws, the formation of commissions on women, introduction of gender budgeting and development plans geared towards women's empowerment. This however, is juxtaposed against the increasing inequality in the region. 8 men currently owns the same as the world's bottom half population, and it is mainly women who make up the 2.5 billion of the world's poor. Challenging gender inequality requires directly challenging economic policies, institutions and accounting that have entrenched social inequalities and often undermined the regulatory capacity of States.

The prevailing economic model perpetuates, and often relies on, the systematic discrimination and disadvantage experienced by women in order to generate growth. Women's cheap labour are viewed as the source of competitive advantage for corporations, thereby keeping their wages low. The rationalisation of cutting social safety nets and essential public services is made possible by the availability of women's unpaid labour to fill the gaps in care work. Women's unpaid work, whether at home or in family business, are continue to be undervalued and unrecognised. While poverty,

militarization and conflicts displace women forcing them to migrate from their villages and countries into vulnerable work.

Women and girls are the largest producers in the agriculture and informal sectors; yet they own and control the least amount of resources. Women defending their land and livelihood, are often subjected to intimidation and violence. Violence against women continues to be on the rise, as fundamentalisms and patriarchal systems threaten the human rights of women and girls and prevent their ability to have control over and make informed decisions over their bodies, and the ability to express their sexuality free from discrimination, coercion and violence. Added to this pervasive harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation and early, child and forced marriage have adverse consequences on the sexual and reproductive health of girls and women, inhibiting their ability to fully participate in society.

In order to address the intersection of race, caste, class, sexuality and the economic system in its violation of women's rights, we urge Governments to the following major recommendations: 1. Actively promote women and girls' participation in development decision-making at all levels including the localization, implementation, monitoring and reporting processes of the SDGs; 2. Ensure women's equitable rights and access to land, natural and alternative resources, and; 3. Ensure access to justice for women and girls facing violence and displacements. And ensure that laws, policies and practices respect, promote and fulfill women and girls' rights and gender justice.

### *Goal 9*

SDG 9 is key to achieving many of the other goals and is perhaps one of the best examples of cross-cutting, cross-sectoral goals, particularly for goals such as poverty eradication, addressing inequality, and several service related goals such as on water, sanitation, clean and modern energy access, sustainable cities and human settlements, sustainable management of terrestrial, ocean and freshwater ecosystems, health, education, and so on. The indicators of Goal 9 clearly reflect this interrelation. The progress in sustainable infrastructure development and the quality of its implementation will directly affect progress in achieving other SDGs.

For Goal 9 to achieve its true essence, its implementation must balance between differing interests on industrialization, infrastructure and innovation and be grounded on development justice. It is therefore necessary to explore how the multifaceted positive impacts of industrialization, infrastructure development, and innovations can be reinforced for maximizing social, economic, and environmental objectives and benefits.

We recommend the following: 1. Recognize the diverse sources of innovations and knowledge and make guarantees that these knowledge and innovations should be used for the general economic benefits of the people particularly the marginalized; 2. Apply new technologies to reduce emissions from existing infrastructure, adopting best practices and standards such as the **Standard for Sustainable and Resilient Infrastructure (SuRe)**; and ensuring implementing the latest appropriate technologies into new infrastructure, governments and businesses can manage their infrastructure more sustainably and along a low-carbon path; 3. Use existing mechanisms and instruments that are already in place to guide industrialization, infrastructure and innovation. The **UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles Concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy** and ongoing consultations around a possible UN Business and Human Rights Treaty can be major handles to frame industrialization, infrastructure, and innovation.

Civil society recommends redefining public-private partnerships that are anchored on scaling up outreach and impact to really transform the lives in Asia and the Pacific, including but not limited to strengthening of social dialogue, human rights based approach to development, and exacting accountability. We also push allocation of resources to strengthen the capacities of people in scientific research and industrial technologies, and encourage innovation through incentives.

#### *Goal 14*

Oceans are a primary income source of millions of people in the region whose lives depend on fisheries, particularly for small-scale fisheries. We strongly believe that protecting marine areas in Asia and the Pacific region will significantly contribute to the poverty reduction in region and will positively impact progress on a number of SDGs including SDGs 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 15, and 16. However, improving ocean health requires a strong commitment from governments.

Issues that urgently need to be addressed are including the ongoing marine pollution of industrial waste, overfishing, illegal unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, large scale marine conversion for tourism, carbon capture and storage in seabed, ocean fertilization, reclamation activities, land, coastal and freshwater grabbing, marine terrestrial conflicts, militarization, foreign investment, energy exploration such as gas leaks to ocean pollution, waste from vessels and ships from the ocean, marine litter, genetically engineered fish and seafood. All of those issues pose a threat to marine ecology and ocean health and have contributed to a significant decrease of the incomes of fisherfolks and gradually eliminating small scale artisans from the value chain system. Coupled with climate change impacts, degradation of ocean health has a direct negative impact on poverty



reduction and is a major cause of migration and displacement.

To this end, we urge the Asia and the Pacific Governments to: 1. Enhance the full and effective participation of fisherfolks, coastal and rural communities in the planning, implementation, review mechanism and knowledge sharing at all levels. Build, maintain and strengthen partnerships with fisherfolks, coastal and rural communities to develop and implement action plans for marine and ocean resources preservation. Increase the awareness raising initiatives and empowerment of youth, women, children, indigenous peoples including persons with disabilities and older people on environmental conservation; 2. Put in place enabling regulations to protect the right and access of fisherfolks, coastal and rural communities towards marine resources, and; 3. Institutionalise policy coherence at all levels that enable development justice that puts people first and conserves the environment and endangered species.

### **Means of Implementation for Development Justice**

Trade can act as a tool for garnering resources for financing sustainable development goals, but the current framework of trade agreements and policies can also act as a critical barrier to their implementation. While the SDGs refer to the WTO, they remain silent on the stark reality of the bilateral, plurilateral and regional trade and investment agreements that proliferate the region. The current and impending agreements such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) can challenge several of the sustainable development objectives; including ensuring food security and farm livelihoods; industrial job creation; access to critical services such as health, education, water, energy; conservation of natural resources and environmental protection; and most important, the policy space of developing and least developed countries to design and implement their own economic, social and environmental policies, and in particular, development policies.

We demand the recognition of indigenous, traditional and local knowledge systems as vital component of diverse sources of knowledge that serve as foundation of science, technology and innovations (STI) necessary for the achievement of the SDGs. Such recognition must provide for measures to ensure protection of indigenous, traditional and local knowledge systems from misappropriation, and must respect the free, prior and informed consent of indigenous communities.

We urge the UNESCAP secretariat and member-states to establish a regional mechanism for the

evaluation of potential environmental and socio-economic impacts of new and emerging technologies that are promoted as solutions to development challenges and crises. The participation of potentially affected communities and stakeholders in technology assessment must be ensured and the capacity of the UN, governments, civil society and communities in technology assessment must be developed.

We call on Asia Pacific governments to actively engage in the work of the UN Technology Facilitation Mechanism (TFM) by sharing environmentally-sound, gender-responsive and socially equitable technologies and innovations in the Global Online Platform and in the annual multistakeholder STI Forum. Governments should support and enable the participation of civil society and communities in the STI Forum to share useful technologies and innovations for the achievement of the SDGs.

Official Development Assistance (ODA) remains a major and crucial source for addressing systemic poverty and financing of the SDGs by 2030. However, ODA has decreased and has remained tied to neoliberal interests and demands of high-income donor countries. ODA flows to recipient countries remain largely conditional and inadequate in the past five years in the effort of high-income donor countries to downplay their commitments and shift the focus on the role of corporate foreign investments, remittances, and domestic resource mobilization. ODA is also being leveraged to support private sector participation without accountability, oftentimes with sovereign guarantees, through Public-Private Partnerships that often facilitate human rights abuses, labor rights violations, land grabbing, and displacement.

To be an effective source of development finance and mechanism in the Regional Roadmap, ODA should not only grow in quantity but also improve on its quality and effectiveness. ODA should be harnessed to support social sectors and economic growth to improve the lives of the people.

With the unmet commitments from ODA, developing countries are left on their own responsibility to finance its own social and economic development.

Growing public spending requirements for infrastructure, interventions in social sectors and the need to deal with environmental challenges now call for strengthening tax systems in Asia and the Pacific. The effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development require additional domestic resource mobilization, and progressive tax systems. However, presence of tax competition in the region, along with tax incentives that benefit large corporations, impedes the

generation of adequate public domestic resources for investment in development. The lack of space in debating and shaping norms of international taxation further hinders the process of developing countries being able to generate domestic resources.

The growing trends of illicit financial flows from Asia and the Pacific also require consolidated action and positions among countries in the region. Countries currently lose out on crucial revenue because of huge losses to illicit financial flows.

## **Regional Roadmap**

An effective pursuit of the SDGs requires a stable, forward-looking and long-term redistributive financing. Fundamental changes in the international economic and financial systems are needed to ensure a sustainable future that leaves no one behind.

Available financial resources are either not appropriately channeled or not sufficient to meet the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda. Surprisingly, the **Regional Roadmap** is largely silent on the critical issues of science and technology, trade, tax and illicit financial flows, and official development assistance.

A transformative and holistic Regional Roadmap relies on addressing structural impediments and systemic barriers. It must take into serious consideration targeted and sustained commitments on development finance and co-operation as well as inclusive collection and disaggregation of data to track the gaps and progress condition of the marginalized sectors. The Roadmap and other regional processes must effectively ensure means of implementation that adhere to international human rights framework, accountability standards in partnerships and cooperation, and development justice.

## **Follow up and Review for Achieving People's Priorities for Development Justice**

At least 11 countries from this region are presenting their progress at this year's APFSD and HLPF. Nine of those 11 countries were represented at the CSO Forum and were from Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Iran, Maldives, Malaysia, Nepal, Japan, and Thailand. The following observations on Follow-up and Review were deliberated:

First, it is encouraging that many committees', commissions, SDG promotion offices, and sectoral

workshop groups have been set up to incorporate the SDGs into national policies and plans. Some countries are comparing the proposed 2030 indicators with data available at national and subnational levels. It is the expected way forward, but it is just the beginning. From report of CSOs, a lot of work remains to be done.

First, several countries seem to have taken the easy approach to just rebrand existing activities as 'SDG relevant' without ramping up, or devoting additional budget for implementation. What is worse, other countries are increasing their military spending immensely or are signing regional trade-agreements, that are examples of policy action that jeopardises progress on SDGs, including in key areas such as the environment, education, and inequality (SDGs 4, 10, 14, and 15). Without adjusting such offsetting investments, the SDGs will continue to remain a fringe narrative to destructive business as usual.

CSO reports also find that more resources need to be dedicated especially to poverty/inequality, gender, disaster/climate change, and rural revitalization. Moreover, work on oceans and ecosystems (SDG 14) remains too low a priority among many VNR countries in the region. This points to a clear need to mobilise action on ocean ecosystems from national as well as regional perspectives. We request large oceanic countries such as Australia, supported by Indonesia, to take the lead in bolstering action on SDG 14.

A good practice in some countries is that governments constitutionally guarantee engagement with CSOs although many hurdles remain to effective participation. Other countries must recognise that without broad engagement they will fail to meet the SDGs.

Good practices include embedding the 2030 Agenda in specific cultural and traditional practices that are relevant to countries, such as leveraging the value of ethnodiverse communities or combining the SDGs with Sufficiency Economy or other locally embedded philosophies. We must all find our own diverse ways to interpret the agenda helping increase national relevance and ownership. At the same time, we caution from embedding the SDGs in the mainstream neoliberal narrative that is already unmaking achieved progress on justice and sustainability.

Moreover, we note that larger principles on leaving no-one behind as well as disaggregating indicators to check for progress on this principle still remain unaddressed in several countries of the region. Governments tend to engage with the large international NGOs, while NGOs that work with grassroots are excluded and are not currently participating on equal footing.

All countries should commit to report at least 3 times between now and 2030 at the HLPF. In between, there will be a gap of several years where governments should allocate funds and continuously update national progress reports. Continuous reporting will be helpful to gauge whether countries are on (or off) track to meet the SDGs.

To be transformative governments should confront politically sensitive topics such as human rights infringements, land grabbing, the concerns of marginalized and stateless people. Any policy should be accompanied with indicators that reflect their concerns, such as for instance the proportion of smallholder farmers engaged in organic agricultural practices, sustainable fisheries, community based natural resource management and other valuable practices.

If they do not deal with these issues, governments have to be reminded that civil society will find alternative ways to report on country situations.

Finally, it may be about time for the UN to restructure its accreditation mechanism, which currently allows only accredited organisations to participate at official meetings. While the list of accredited organisations is extensive, and accreditation is an important element of civil society accountability to Member States, accredited organisations for instance include the arms trade sector and others not normally associated with sustainable development. It has to become easier for marginalised and other key stakeholders to participate in relevant processes.

The APFSD must provide institutionalized space, including appropriate funding and technical support for widest possible stakeholders' participation at all levels as laid down in the High Level Political Forum Resolution and ensure principle of non-regression in civil society participation. At the national and local levels, governments must ensure the rightful participation of CSOs as a major stakeholder in the events leading up to the preparation of reporting and review in the HLPF.###