



ASIA PACIFIC REGIONAL CSO ENGAGEMENT MECHANISM

COMMUNIQUÉ

ASIA PACIFIC FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT 2016

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"I'm here in the hope that I can inspire you to make this important meeting famous for its ambition, but also famous for decisions that have real impact, not just words on paper, so as to make the Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, and its regional roadmap an integral part of shifting our world and our region to a more just, sustainable and equitable planet. I am one out of India's 356 million youth population between 10-24 years. Imagine the number of young people whose lives will be impacted by the decisions made today!"

Sanjeet Aggarwal
Youth and Civil Society Opening
Speaker, APFSD 2016

As the third edition of the Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development closed on April 5, we, the members of the Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism (APRCM) reiterates the call for development justice, a new development framework that aims to reduce wealth, power, and resource inequalities between countries, between rich and poor, between men and women and other social groups. We call on the APFSD to outline an ambitious, inclusive and transformative roadmap that ultimately dismantles the barriers to sustainable development.

Nothing less than a wholly transformative roadmap is required to fulfill the international commitments of the past and the present. It must produce concrete processes to achieve outcomes and tackle structural root causes. It must be based on the principles of redistributive justice, economic justice, social justice, environmental justice, and, accountability to peoples.

The processes, moving forward, should be with accountable, transparent, participatory, and just institutions. Civil society participation in these sustainable development processes and mechanisms must be institutionalized based on the principles of non-regression, democracy and equality, as guided by the High Level Political Forum and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development itself.

REGIONAL PRIORITIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The Asia Pacific region faces uniform as well as diverse set of challenges spanning all three pillars of sustainable development. We as civil society want to highlight some overarching trends that will make the SDGs impossible to realize and advance our recommendations on the same.

The dominant macroeconomic policy regime in the Asia Pacific region has resulted in increasing privatization, liberalization and deregulation across sectors. Anti-poor and inequitable macro policies have led to increasing suppression of interests of the people at large, especially of those who are economically and socially weaker and unable to participate in the process of policymaking. This inequity is reflected in how the poor, small farmers, workers, women, migrants, indigenous peoples, Dalits, the disabled, the elderly and other marginalized communities face a denial of social protection and human rights. Moreover food security and sovereignty is challenged by the expansion of corporate led agriculture that has not only made food costly but also unhealthy, destroyed natural ecosystems and bio-diversity, thus triggering widespread hunger and malnutrition in the region.

Moreover, trade and investment agreements, including the WTO and FTAs, have created major challenges for the developing and least developed countries in the region and challenged access to food, land, livelihoods, critical services and resources, and development policy space in general. Governments have increasingly withdrawn from public provision of essential and quality social services such as health care and education, as well as access to clean and safe water, housing, energy and land.

Asia Pacific has been particularly plagued by environmental degradation and climate change. This tendency is heightened by current production practices, both in agriculture and industry, which become environmentally unsustainable with adverse impacts on the ecosystem, and the health and lives of the people. The operation of the extractive industries have destroyed natural ecosystems, displaced communities, undermined human rights, and contributed to health hazards.

APRCM reiterates that discrimination and marginalization must be eliminated if the SDGs are to be realized. Underlying structures of inequality and marginalization (i.e. caste, patriarchy, sexual orientation, ageism, racism, sexism, among others) remain deeply embedded in historical processes of discrimination and inequitable development in the region. Indeed, those who have been left behind for so long still find themselves socially, politically and economically excluded and marginalized from national development and governance processes, with few opportunities for redress. Furthermore, the cross-cutting issues of marginalized populations have not yet been fully explored, understood and incorporated in the sustainable development framework.





REGIONAL ROADMAP

APRCM appreciates the concerns of Member-States that more time is required to develop a robust, ambitious and inclusive roadmap. We agree that the process of elaborating the roadmap should be time-bound and completed expeditiously, allowing the decisions of this year's General Assembly to be taken into consideration. It should, however, remain dynamic and open for future evolution.

We stress that the elaborative process should honour the commitments made to ensure this is an inclusive and transparent process, the methods employed the Open Working Group to reach consensus on the SDGs sets as a valuable precedent.

However, AP-RCEM expresses disappointment that the APFSD outcome document lacks clear timeframes or details on processes that can produce a more meaningful regional blueprint for action on SDGs. Moreover, substantive part of the APFSD's work, which is embodied in the original Road Map, has been watered down, and will need further discussions and possible negotiations. While it was far from complete or perfect, the draft roadmap as it was initially presented had offered significant ideas in pursuing meaningful regional cooperation and evaluation, which would have been of great value to all countries as they set out to implement the 2030 Agenda, especially the developing and least developed countries (LDCs), Land Locked Developing Countries (LLDCs), and countries and populations with special needs including Small Island Developing States (SIDS). The failure to include more substantive language into the outcome document represents a missed opportunity for our governments and our people across the region, and much of the headway made in recent years is being backpedalled.

Further, there are thirty-three (33) references to regional processes, cooperation and initiatives in the 2030 Agenda resolution.¹ These provide a starting point for the roadmap as the agenda also enables the Forum to address new and emerging issues, particularly those requiring regional cooperation. Despite the overwhelmed facts on the role of regional forum like APFSD, none of these references were acknowledged in the outcome documents.

¹ - Para 21 mentioned about the importance of regional dimension and how regional framework can facilitate the effective translations of sustainable development policies; There are 4 targets (target 1.b, target 2.5, target 11.a, and target 17.6) specifically mentioned about processes in the regional level to achieve this targets; para 65 about exchanges of experiences, improved coordination and better and focused support of the regional organisations; Most importantly, for Follow Up and review, the role of regional processes are clearly stated on Para 73, para 77, para 80 and 81.

FORM AND FUNCTION OF THE APFSD

APRCM sees the Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, being the first regional forum to convene after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as the best possible opportunity and space for Member-States from Asia and the Pacific to critically reflect, learn, collaborate regionally, provide political ownership and be accountable to peoples, if we are committed to leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind first.

The Asia and the Pacific civil society organizations anticipate to the creation of a regular, multi-stakeholder robust and dynamic review and follow-up mechanism, which fosters knowledge sharing, reciprocal learning and promote shared accountability for regional challenges and opportunities. This role needs to be clear, deliberate and accountable. This work should be reviewed as part of broader UN reform that assesses the composition and democratic nature of UN regional bodies, ensuring equal, democratic and accountable intergovernmental bodies that truly reflect the interests of the populations of the region.

To ensure that mistakes of the past are heeded, we recommend that ESCAP together with regional partners prepare a lessons learnt study of the years with the CSD. The UN must strive to engage broader sectoral ministries responsible for the different aspects of the 2030 agenda. This requires commitment from member states to send responsible delegations that reflect the integration of the SDGs at their capital level to participate regionally and globally on reviewing progress.

After long negotiations, governments finally agreed to have APFSD as an annual inclusive intergovernmental forum and that it remains a multi-stakeholder, inclusive space for engagement, respecting the commitments made by the UN General Assembly at the Sustainable Development Summit in September last year. We laud Sri Lanka, Australia and Indonesia who negotiated hard to keep the APFSD this way.

However, we regretted that the form and function of APFSD does not make any clear reference to resolution 67/290 on a format and organisational aspects of the high-level political forum on sustainable development. The resolution clearly stated on the role of UN regional commissions to contribute to the work of the forum, including through annual regional meetings, with involvement of other relevant regional entities, major groups and other relevant stakeholders. The resolution made clear reference on the consultative role and participation of the major groups and other relevant stakeholders.

Some Member -States conveyed their strong concern regarding the cost and efficiency of having multiple regional processes, including APFSD. In that regards, AP-RCEM sees the value of incorporating other regional processes into APFSD to cut down on duplication and enhance coherence.

APRCM WANTS TO ENGAGE IN THESE PROCESSES AS IT BELIEVES THAT SUCH WILL SUPPORT THE POOR, MARGINALIZED AND THOSE LEFT BEHIND. CIVIL SOCIETY MUST NOT BE MERELY CONSULTED, BUT ENGAGED AS AN EQUAL PARTNER IN ALL POLITICAL PROCESSES TO CO-DETERMINE A BOLD, TRANSFORMATIVE AND PEOPLE-CENTERED SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.

"Like me, there are many young women around the world taking risks to create the world we want. I encourage you to take some bold, maybe even courageous steps to deliver a roadmap for the APFSD that makes our work and vision possible, delivering Development Justice!"

Mai Naomi Thang
Youth and Civil Society Opening
Speaker, APFSD 2016