

Civil society organisations meet at forum in lead up to UNESCAP South Asia meeting preparing for HLPF 2019

3 October 2018, New Delhi, India



The aim of the civil society forum was to strategise the participation of civil society organisations and build consensus on the statements and messages on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

ESCAP's sub-regional offices organised similar meetings in other sub-regions to facilitate dialogue between government officials, civil society, and other stakeholders on the theme of the HLPF 2019 – '*Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality*'. The meetings provided a platform to link regional and global discussions and agreements with sub-regional actions and follow-up, promote dialogue on the theme among various stakeholders, share information on the sub-regional implementation efforts of the SDGs, and define perspectives on the global theme for the 2019 HLPF.

The civil society forum prior to the sub-regional meeting was a concerted effort to strategise the participation of civil society organisations (CSOs) at the sub-regional meeting and build consensus on the statements and messages on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). ASPBAE's Susmita Choudhury, along with representatives from NCE India, Azad Foundation, Nirantar, Afghan National Education Coalition (ANEC), and CED Sri Lanka participated in the forum.

Each of the SDGs to be reviewed in the 6th APFSD and HLPF 2019 were critically reviewed in relation to the sub-regional situation. Jawid Omari from ANEC shared the socio-political challenges in implementing SDG 4. Chitrakshi from Nirantar highlighted the systemic exclusion of ethnic minorities, *dalits*, migrated children, single-parent families, transgender people, and riot victims from education and learning opportunities.

Underscoring the increase of privatisation, Ramakant Rai of NCE India highlighted that commercialisation of education is a threat to the right to education, especially for girls and marginalised children. Underlining the decline in women's participation in the labour force across South Asia, Meenu Vadera of Azad Foundation pointed out the gender disparity of wages and denial in access to social protection. She emphasised life with dignity as the central pillar of the 2030 Agenda.



Participants discussed a just and gender responsive climate framework that respects and promote human rights and gender equality, ensuring sustainable development and environmental integrity.

There was a specific discussion on SDG 13 where participants discussed a just and gender-responsive climate framework, eco-system-based approach that respects and promotes human rights and gender equality, ensuring sustainable development and environmental integrity. Participants developed statements on specific goals to be read out at the official sub-regional meeting. NCE India, ANEC, CED Sri Lanka, and ASPBAE jointly prepared the statement on SDG 4.

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The UNESCAP South and South West Asia sub-regional meeting was organised by UNESCAP, NITI Aayog, and Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS) from 4-5 October 2018 in New Delhi. Government representatives from Nepal, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Maldives, Bangladesh, and India were part of the panel.

To plan for CSO engagement at the official event, CSOs grouped themselves along the Goals under review for HLPF 2019. It was clear that agreed collectively advocacies were to inform CSO interventions in the official processes where several CSO representatives were invited as discussants, panelists, and speakers.



Discussions at the sub-regional meeting focused on, amongst other things, the SDG Means of Implementation in South Asia – identifying gaps in finance, technology, and capacity building.

To maximise CSO participation in a meaningful manner at the official event, it was agreed that Jawid Omari from ANEC would read the CSO statement on SDG 4 and Meenu Vadera, Azad Foundation and ASPBAE Executive Council member representing South and Central Asia, would read the CSO statement on SDG 8. Sheila Rashid (Bangladesh) was identified to read the overall CSO statement. Ramakant Rai was selected by UNESCAP as a panellist in the SDG 4 working group.

The statement on SDG 8 highlighted that progressive public policies and government employment programmes can play a significant role in addressing the decline of women's participation in the labour force and in reducing wage disparities.

Ramakant Rai, National Coalition on Education (NCE), India, speaking as a panellist on behalf of the group on SDG 4 emphasised the efforts by national governments to strengthen public education systems and develop a strong regulatory mechanism for private sector participation in education to ensure that education is a public and common good.

Day two of the official meeting was dedicated to discussions on the SDG Means of Implementation in South Asia - identifying key gaps in finance, technology, and capacity building. The meeting concluded with an agreement on the ways forward including processes leading up to the APFSD and HLPF, and consolidating sub-regional inputs for the APFSD 2019.

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