

Widening understanding, creating inter-linkages, and identifying barriers to sustainable development

Asia-Pacific People's Forum on Sustainable Development (People's Forum) 2018;
Fifth Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) 2018

25-27 March 2018; 28-20 March 2018; Bangkok, Thailand



The High Level Political Forum is the United Nations platform to follow up and review the progress of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In 2018, its theme is "Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies" with focus on the Goals 6 (clean water and sanitation), 7 (affordable and clean energy), 11 (sustainable cities and communities, 12 (responsible consumption and production, 15 (life on earth) and 17 (partnership for the Goals).

In preparation for the HLPF to be held in the UN Headquarters in New York in July 2018, the UN Economic and Social Commission in Asia and Pacific (ESCAP) convened the Fifth Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) from 28-30 March 2018. The APFSD was preceded by the Asia Pacific People's Forum on Sustainable Development (APPFSD/People's Forum 2018) which was organised by the Asia Pacific Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism (APRCSEM) in collaboration with UNESCAP and UN Environment.

Asia Pacific People's Forum on Sustainable Development (Peoples' Forum)

25-27 March 2018, Bangkok, Thailand

The Asia Pacific Civil Society Forum on Sustainable Development, or the People's Forum, with the theme, 'Defending the Environment and Redefining Resilience: Our Collective Actions for Development Justice', was a space for civil society organisations (CSOs) to work together and consolidate their positions and recommendations for a regional sustainable development agenda. Asia Pacific CSOs from different sectors and countries explored common ground and actions, developed common messages, and coordinated strategies for more effective participation in the national, regional, and global intergovernmental processes on sustainable development.



The theme of the People's Forum was 'Defending the Environment and Redefining Resilience: Our Collective Actions for Development Justice'. CSOs came together and consolidated their recommendations for a regional sustainable development agenda.

The aims of the People's Forum were to -

1. Foster the sharing and learning from the variety of experiences of organisations and constituencies and to enhance capacities of civil society participants on sustainable development at the national, regional, and global levels. It also aimed to enhance capacities on the opportunities and modalities for engaging these processes, including identifying and dealing with key systemic issues/barriers to the achievement of sustainable development.
2. Help build an understanding of sustainable development as a comprehensive whole with strong inter-linkages across its various dimensions and components; therefore, to also link the work of various other CSO campaigns, peoples' movements, grassroot constituencies, and scientific and academic communities across national borders.

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3. Dialogue on the structure and content of the APFSD with its theme, '*Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies in Asia and Pacific*', as well as formulate joint positions, and strategise interventions at the APFSD, High-Level Political Forum.
4. Reflect on the work of Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism (APRCM) and agree on joint actions and follow-up to civil society positions adopted to strengthen and support each other's ideas, plans, and actions across national borders.



One of the aims of the People's Forum was to build an understanding of sustainable development and its links to civil society campaigns and people's movements.

Approximately 250 civil society participants from the Pacific, East/North Asia, North/Central Asia, South/Southwest Asia, and Southeast Asia participated in the People's Forum. The different constituencies represented at the Forum were NGOs, women, youth, members of social and community enterprise initiatives, farmers, trade unions/workers, representatives from the field of science and technology, indigenous people, urban poor, migrants, persons with disabilities, people living and affected by HIV/AIDS, representatives of the LGBTI community, older people, people affected with conflict and disasters, fisherfolks, and local authorities.

Through 7 thematic plenary sessions and 24 parallel workshops clustered under 4 themes, the People's Forum generated discussions and widened the understanding on relevant SDG targets. The themes of the plenary sessions were - Systematic Barriers in Achieving Transformation; Relevance of SDGs to our Lives; Means of Implementation; Achieving Development Justice within Planetary Boundaries; Accountability and Monitoring; Power of Peoples' Movements; and Building Collective Strategy.

Discussions at the People's Forum also focused on definitions of resilience based on country contexts. Arising from the discussions, some of the key points from civil society included -

- Philippines: Resilience is not only surviving and bearing the suffering but importantly changing the system that impact on people's lives.
- Thailand: Resistance is protecting our lives and the lives of our next generation.
- Indonesia: Working for development justice that includes everyone and protect the lives of people for the better.
- Fiji: Collectively working with each other and fight for our rights in light of government renegeing on its commitments to human rights.
- Resistance as a form of resilience.



Some of the key recommendations made by civil society regarding the different country contexts of resilience were changing systems that impact people's lives and collectively working together for development justice and human rights.

The People's Forum called attention to the authenticity of the VNRs as they provide only glowing reports of governments and do not address the key challenges (systemic barriers, contradictions, inequity) in ensuring the implementation of Agenda 2030.

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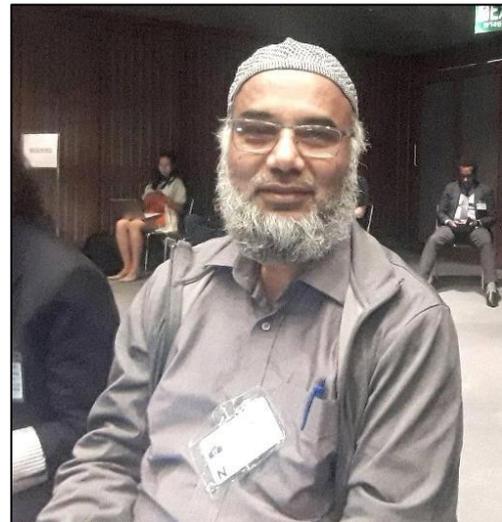


ASPBAE delegates met in the lead-up to the People's Forum to discuss how they can argue for the foundational role of education and learning in all the SDGs. Some of the issues raised were on access to comprehensive sexual reproductive health education for children, youth, and adults, and engaging marginalised young people through participatory approaches.

Towards building its intersectoral advocacy in the SDGs and give prominence to education in all the SDGs, ASPBAE encouraged its members to participate in both the People's Forum and the APFSD. Eight member organisations, including ASPBAE, applied for the events. Of the nine applications, four organisations – Coalition for Educational Development-Sri Lanka, Afghanistan National Education Coalition (ANEC), Pakistan Coalition for Education, and Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM) received invitations to both events. Due to difficulty in getting a visa on short notice, only Ehsan Rahman of DAM, who also represented ASPBAE, and Kamal Herath of CED-Sri Lanka were able to participate in the two forums, while Thea Soriano of ASPBAE joined the People's Forum.

ASPBAE delegates met a day before the People's Forum to discuss how they can argue for the foundational role of education and learning in all the SDGs. In the themes addressed in workshops at the People's Forum, they raised issues on:

- The importance of wash and sanitation in schools which impacts on learning of female and male students.
- Access to comprehensive sexual reproductive health education for children, youth, and adults.
- Engaging marginalised young people in urban cities and rural communities through participatory approaches and recognising their ability to take action for sustainable development.
- The role of education and learning in school and community towards sustainable consumption and lifestyles as well as building capacities for sustainable production.
- Ensuring government's financing of the all the SDGs, especially implementing strategic policies and programmes that will benefit and empower marginalised sectors.
- The critical importance of human rights education and broader citizenship education so that people are aware of their rights and hold governments to account (democratic governance).



ASPBAE Executive Council Member, Ehsanur Rahman, was the rapporteur in the breakout session on 'Inclusive Policy Making: The role of academia in supporting civil society in addressing systemic issue'.

These key recommendations have been notably incorporated in the People's Forum Statement.

Ehsanur Rahman was the rapporteur in the breakout session on 'Inclusive Policy Making: The role of academia in supporting civil society in addressing systemic issue'. One key recommendation was that, "Academic and action research can be a basic premise to bring CSO/NGO and academic institutions for proper documentation and publication of experience, impact assessment, mapping of good

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practices, and equipping/capacity building for evidence-based advocacy for policy formulation and programme planning.”

The outcome of the People's Forum was a collective [statement](#) where several key issues were identified for taking forward at the Fifth Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD). The intersection of education in the SDGs were articulated in the Statement such as:

- Education and awareness raising to empower girls with factual information about their bodies and how to look after it especially in case of menstrual hygiene which is a main cause of girls' dropping out from school; integrating menstrual hygiene in the school curriculum
- Achieving Goal 11 on sustainable cities and communities through an integrated approach and linking it to the other goals such as poverty eradication, food security, provision of key services such as health, education, water, energy, climate change and disaster risk, employment and industrialization, bio diversity and others.
- CSOs and governments together must spread more awareness about laws and rights of residents including legal aid, and jointly undertake urban studies on neighbourhoods, transform participatory planning principles into action planning level, and prompt local peer learning among local authorities.

Fifth Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD)

28-30 March 2018, Bangkok, Thailand



The Fifth Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) provided an opportunity for dialogue on the readiness of the region to identify resilience capacities needed to effect the transformations envisioned in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Fifth Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) was held with more than 600 stakeholders reviewing regional progress made on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This year's APFSD provided an opportunity for dialogue on the readiness of the region to identify resilience capacities needed to effect the transformations envisioned in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Several issues such as progress in implementation, assessment and interlinkages of the SDGs, Voluntary National Reviews (VNR), regional road map of SDGs, and partnerships were discussed and debated at APFSD. Some of the side events focused on sharing innovative practices and examples in resource management, community-led approaches, making cities resilient, social entrepreneurship, energy efficiency, the VNR process, health and well-being, and water management, amongst others.

Many Ministers and government delegates made references to the key importance of education in achieving the SDGs. In the panel discussions on transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies, Faimalotoa Kika Iemaima Stowers, Minister of Women Affairs, Social Development of Samoa, emphasised the development of education programmes to cope with natural disasters. Stowers shared her country's experience in improving the understanding of risk drivers, identifying the main vulnerable groups, and increasing local communities' awareness of potential disasters through training

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programmes¹. Also, on disaster risk reduction, Haoliang Xu, UN Development Programme (UNDP), cited how the designation of evacuation routes, cellphone mediated alerts, and educating school children can significantly reduce human fatalities.² During the sharing of progress of SDG 12, the presentation on the ESCAP-led survey mentioned consumer information and education as one of the issues requiring increased attention.



Many Ministers and government delegates made references to the key importance of education in achieving the SDGs.

The final Report of the APFSD made clear references to the importance of education for resilience and development justice:

"...The Forum noted efforts in the region to identify and empower poor and vulnerable populations, including women and children, and to strengthen resilience through social inclusion, health, education, housing, nutrition and food security, water and sanitation strategies and awareness programmes. Capacity-building and regional cooperation were also discussed as opportunities to develop mechanisms for mutual support, with a view to defining common approaches, strengthening climate change response and building resilient communities, including in coastal areas and low-lying islands."

Participants also called for early warning systems for preparedness in cases of natural disasters and even economic shocks, to be integrated in education systems.

Click [here](#) to read the APFSD report.



The APFSD final report made clear references to the importance of education for resilience and development justice.

The APFSD, likewise, provided a platform for countries to share regional perspectives, support the presentation of their voluntary national reviews, and assess progress made on the regional road map for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific.

Sri Lanka is one of the countries that will submit a Voluntary National Review (VNR) on its country's progress in implementing the SDGs in the forthcoming High Level Political Forum (HLPF). The coalition, CED-Sri Lanka, has been actively engaging the Ministry of Sustainable

Development and Wildlife before coming to the preparatory meetings in Bangkok. It participated in the deliberations of the Sri Lankan Stakeholder SDG Platform, and advocated for issues on education and SDGs to inform the VNR process and report. Post APFSD, it urged the Ministry of SDGs and Wildlife to hold a broad consultation on the VNR. On 23 April, the consultation was organised by the Ministry

¹ Summary of the Fifth Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development: 28-30 March 2018, APFSD Bulletin 2 April 2018 Vol. 208 No. 22

² Ibid.

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and attended by more than 200 civil society organisations and where two representatives from UNESCAP participated.

In addition to government's VNR processes, the Civil Society Stakeholder Platform-Sri Lanka also organised a consultative workshop on 26th April 2018 to develop the Voluntary People Review on SDGs. In this effort, CED-Sri Lanka will lead the SDG-04 cluster with the participation of civil society organisations, Ministry officials, and education officials.



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This write-up is based on information appearing on the [UNESCAP website](#) and contains excerpts from reports by Ehsanur Rahman, Dhaka Ahsania Mission (Bangladesh), and ASPBAE Executive Council Member representing South and Central Asia and Kamal Herath, Board Member of CED Sri Lanka.

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