



# Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism

## AP-RCEM POSITION PAPER FOR HIGH LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM: Ensuring that No One is Left Behind

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*Asia-Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism (RCEM) is a civil society platform of more than 450 organisations aimed to enable stronger cross constituency coordination and ensure that voices of all sub-regions of Asia Pacific are heard in intergovernmental processes in regional and global level. The platform is initiated, owned and driven by the civil society organisations (CSO), and has been set up under the auspices of UN-ESCAP and seeks to engage with UN agencies and Member States on the Post-2015 as well as other development related issues/processes. As an open, inclusive, and flexible mechanism, RCEM is designed to reach the broadest number of CSOs in the region, harness the voice of grassroots and peoples' movements to advance development justice.*

### Introduction .

The 2016 HLPF is one of the first opportunities to test the sincerity and political will of member states to honor commitments made in September 2015. Critically, it will set a precedent to determine whether the promise that follow up and review mechanisms will “promote accountability to our citizens (and) support effective international cooperation in achieving this Agenda”<sup>1</sup> is honored. It will test the ability of states to ‘address challenges’ and ‘emerging issues’ that threaten the achievement of sustainable development and the promise to renew the Global Partnership between states as well as to support, value and respond to civil society partnerships and movements.

This submission is made by the Asia Pacific Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism <sup>2</sup>(RCEM). As an inclusive and transparent civil society platform expanding on the major groups, the RCEM has established a model of regional partnership capable of both enhancing accountability to citizens and supporting the most important ingredient for sustainable development - local, powerful social movements dedicated to advancing development justice. We continue to assess efforts to achieve sustainable development through the lens of ‘Development Justice’, the model demanded by members of the RCEM that requires Redistributive Justice, Economic Justice, Environmental Justice, Gender and Social Justice and Accountability to the Peoples.

The submission aims to provide inputs to the HLPF in 4 areas:

1. Assessment of progress toward the theme of ensuring no-one is ‘left behind’

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<sup>1</sup> A/ RES/70/1, paras 72 and 73

<sup>2</sup> Development Justice was articulated through the [Bangkok Declaration](#) and remains the unifying lens for the platform.

2. Identifying future HLPF review themes in order to address the systemic / emerging barriers that result in groups being 'left behind'
3. The role of regional civil society partnerships to ensure no-one is left behind
4. Progress toward meeting regional commitments contained in Agenda2030

## I. Assessment of progress toward the theme of ensuring 'no one is left behind'

To achieve a sustainable, inclusive world by 2030 we must recognise that exclusion is the result of deliberate policies, practices and decisions designed to enrich and empower a few at the expense of others. Communities are not forgetfully 'left behind'. Instead, some are catapulted ahead through global economic and political systems that depend on exclusion and exploitation.

Since governments committed to producing a new set of Sustainable Development Goals, at the Rio Summit in 2012, inequality has deepened, new record temperatures have been set, the refugee crisis has worsened and further evidence that the wealthiest individuals and corporations are using all means to hide wealth and influence political decisions has been revealed.

**Rising Inequality** - In 2015 inequality between the richest and the rest of the world accelerated at a rate even faster than predicted to the point that 1% of the world now own 50% of the world's resources and wealth and 62 people own as much as the poorest 50%<sup>3</sup>. Even these statistics are an underestimate - it doesn't include the estimated \$32 trillion dollars held in offshore bank accounts. In Asia, economic growth in recent years has channeled more wealth and power to High Net Worth Individuals. The wealth of the HNWI population in Asia-Pacific in 2014 increased 11.4% to US\$ 15.8 trillion. Their net wealth now outstrips the total wealth of LDCs in the region. Inequality both directly robs billions of people of livelihoods and resources, leaving the poorest further behind, it depends on and results from the ability to capitalize on the world's finite resources and concentrating decision making in the hands of a tiny obscenely rich minority.

**Increasing emissions and Global warming** –With 2015 the hottest year on record<sup>4</sup> and further evidence that warming may be occurring faster than anticipated,<sup>5</sup> it has been alarming to see increasing approvals of fossil fuel mining. For the Asia Pacific region, the most disaster prone region in the world, this has had devastating effects. While all regions and people are impacted by climate change, it is clear that the effects are felt more deeply by women, those living in poverty, rural, people with disabilities, Indigenous and excluded groups.

**Increasing displacement** – UNHCR reported that the number of displaced people hit an all-time high in 2014, at 59.5 million people with numbers likely to grow<sup>6</sup>. In Asia and the Pacific, the urban population grew faster than in any other region. More than half of the world's mega-cities (13 out of 22) are now found in Asia and the Pacific. Internal migration is the main factor behind urban growth. Moreover, the Syrian war is emblematic of the cause, impact and responses that 'leave people behind'. More than 11 million people, half the country's pre-war population, have been killed or forced to flee their homes.

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<sup>3</sup> Oxfam, 'An Economy for the 1%' 2016. <https://www.oxfam.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/An-economy-for-the-1-percent.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> NASA - <http://www.nasa.gov/press-release/nasa-noaa-analyses-reveal-record-shattering-global-warm-temperatures-in-2015/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/apr/07/clouds-climate-change-analysis-liquid-ice-global-warming>

<sup>6</sup> UNHCR, Global Trends 2014: World at War, June 2015. <http://www.unhcr.org/558193896.html>

## II. Identifying future HLPF review themes in order to address the systemic / emerging barriers that result in groups being 'left behind'

Identifying and tackling systemic drivers of inequality must be central to the annual review of Agenda 2030 to ensure the agenda is truly universal. Systemic drivers of inequality include neoliberalism, fundamentalisms, militarism and patriarchy, which are largely co-constituent of each other and could form the basis of thematic reviews. Themes should include:

- **Uni, Bi and Multilateral Economic, Financial and Trade Measures that impede Development Justice** - Paragraph 30 of Agenda 2030 strongly urges states to “*refrain from promulgating and applying any unilateral economic, financial or trade measures not in accordance with international law and the Charter of the United Nations that impede the full achievement of economic and social development, particularly in developing countries*”. Yet trade agreements that conflict with both Agenda 2030 and the UN Charter<sup>7</sup> were pursued immediately after the agreement was signed<sup>8</sup> and states continue to use the World Trade Organisation arbitration to prevent pro-poor and environmental protections.

Preferential trade and investment agreements require states to privilege capital over their Responsibility to Act in the interests of the citizenry. In addition to agreeing to broad legislative and policy changes that enable land, resources and knowledge to be dominated by foreign capital, they give multi-national corporations unprecedented and undemocratic powers to challenge national policies designed to advance environmental protections, human rights, fiscal policies, labour rights, affirmative action policies, public health and protections that guarantee public access to basic needs and services. In doing so, PTAs accelerate the power of the wealthiest, magnify existing inequalities and have been found to have a discriminatory impact on **women<sup>9</sup>, Indigenous peoples<sup>10</sup>, people living with HIV or other illnesses, people with disabilities<sup>11</sup>, older people, rural communities, workers and those dependent on state support, living in poverty** or those already 'left behind'.

- **Land and Resource distribution** – Land tenure policies expose communities that are directly dependent on land and natural resources to risks of being 'left behind' and denied livelihoods. **Indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, landless, rural communities and subsistence farmers** face increasing threats to their livelihoods and settlement due to eviction from land concessions awarded to corporations, large scale 'development' and infrastructure (including those conducted under the guise of 'green growth') and from climate change. Governments have

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<sup>7</sup> The UN Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable order stated that preferential trade agreements contravene both the supremacy clause in the UN Charter (103) and the state Responsibility to Act (R2A) to advance human rights, including the right to development. <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/IntOrder/Pages/Articles.aspx>

<sup>8</sup> The Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement was finalized since the signing of Agenda2030 while negotiations for 3 other 'mega-agreements' continue. In the Asia Pacific region, as of February 2016, 5 framework agreements are signed, 64 have launched negotiations, 11 are signed but not yet in effect, 140 are signed and in effect, totaling to 220 with another 67 FTAs being proposed.

<sup>9</sup> The United Nations Interagency Network on Women and Gender Equality (INWGE) contend that “Women tend to be more affected by the negative side-effects of trade liberalization”

[http://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/trade/gender\\_equality\\_and\\_trade\\_policy.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/trade/gender_equality_and_trade_policy.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> The report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples contends that “investment clauses of free trade agreements and bilateral and multilateral investment treaties, as they are currently conceptualized and implemented, have actual and potential negative impacts on indigenous peoples' rights, in particular on their rights to self-determination; lands, territories and resources; participation; and free, prior and informed consent.”

<http://unsr.vtaulicorpuz.org/site/index.php/en/documents/annual-reports/93-report-ga-2015>

<sup>11</sup>Nine UN experts issued a joint statement expressing concern over the adverse impact of trade and investment agreements on human rights and specifically the concern that they negatively affect the rights of indigenous peoples, minorities, persons with disabilities, older persons, and other persons living in vulnerable situations.

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=16031#sthash.9vOZ0jgP.dpuf>

pursued policies to attract investment from large corporate entities both domestically and internationally, to undertake projects on state owned “undeveloped” land that promise to bolster the economy and create jobs. Normally these projects involve large-scale plantations for the cultivation and processing of key agricultural commodities for export abroad, but they also include mines, hydroelectric dams, special economic zones, tourist resorts and other projects. Conflict emerges when the land is in reality occupied by smallholder subsistence farmers and / or Indigenous peoples. Often the process of relocation is violent as the farmers resist relocation and are forcibly removed by agents for the investors. For indigenous peoples, collective land and resource rights underpin their culture, identity and wellbeing.

Cross-border activity in real estate volumes grew by 334% from \$65 billion to \$217 billion between 2009 and 2015<sup>12</sup>. The wealthiest are buying up the world’s real-estate and resources while the world’s poorest are losing land and their livelihoods.

- **Militarism and conflict** - By 2030 as many as half of the world’s extreme poor will live in countries affected by fragility, conflict and violence<sup>13</sup>. Conflict, the presence of state and non-state armed forces and military spending are systemic drivers of inequality that cause affected populations directly and indirectly to be ‘left behind’. The drivers of conflict increasingly intersect with core issues of Agenda2030 - resource scarcity, climate change, extreme inequalities and poverty. Consequently, reducing militarism is both a driver and an outcome of inclusive, sustainable development. **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, people with disabilities, children and the already economically marginalised face deeper risks and less ability to seek safe refuge. Given the recent political responses to conflict and asylum, a thematic focus on militarism and the drivers of conflict is required.
- **Corporate influence** – It is increasingly evident that the interests of many trans-national corporations and the interests of ‘people and planet’ conflict. Of the largest economies in the world, 51 are now corporations. The revenue of the top 200 corporations exceeds the value of the economies of 182 countries combined. They have more than twice the economic power of 80% of humanity<sup>14</sup>. The UN Secretary General recognized that “a lack of clarity about additionality; a risk of misalignment of private sector and country priorities; and diminished transparency and accountability” make public-private partnerships a questionable way to advance sustainable development. Corporations are increasingly able to engage in manipulative price transfers, tax evasion and avoidance and avoid environmental and social responsibility. As state sovereignty and policy making power has been diminished and increasingly handed to the private sector, no corresponding system to ensure regulation and accountability of the private sector has emerged. This needs to be addressed to ensure the 2030 agenda is not ‘left behind’.
- **Patriarchy and fundamentalisms** - A systemic driver of inequality can be found in ideologies that rigidly limit opportunities, participation and autonomy for some members of the population. Patriarchy - the belief that power and decision making naturally reside with some men, permeates lives, relationships and policies at the family, community, national and international levels. Fundamentalisms, whether cultural, religious, political or economic, similarly ascribe rigid beliefs about the roles and value of different groups of people. In doing so they commonly focus on women’s bodies, sexuality and decisions. When these ideologies shape

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<sup>12</sup> [http://www.savills.co.uk/research\\_articles/188297/198667-0](http://www.savills.co.uk/research_articles/188297/198667-0)

<sup>13</sup> [www.worldbank.org/en/topic/fragilityconflictviolence/overview](http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/fragilityconflictviolence/overview)

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/221-transnational-corporations/47211.html>

policies and laws **women, sexually and gender diverse groups, single or unmarried women, women human rights defenders** are 'left behind'. While Goal 5 sets some important targets that measure some of the consequences of patriarchal policies, a more holistic review of the systemic causes of inequality as a review theme would allow the intersectional nature of the Agenda to be interrogated.

### **III. The role of regional civil society partnerships to ensure no-one is left behind**

Procedural and recognitional justice<sup>15</sup> are crucial to ensuring that no one is left behind. It is very important that the institutional framework for follow-up and review - globally through the HLPF, and at all other levels, remains inclusive.

The RCEM came about as a result of lessons learnt through CSO engagement in the Major Groups system in the Rio+20 process. One major motive was to make engagement more strategic and inclusive. CSOs in the region decided to add eight additional groups<sup>16</sup> to the original nine Major Groups, because they felt the original nine groups no longer captured the diversity of civil society. The RCEM as such is designed "...to autonomously establish and maintain effective coordination mechanisms for participation in the high-level political forum and for actions derived from that participation at the global, regional and national levels..." (Para 16).

The founding resolution (A/RES/67/290) for the functions and decision making of the HLPF remains important to carve a constructive space for CSO involvement in the accountability functions of the HLPF and the regional forums. To make the resolution meaningful CSOs should not only be permitted to attend official meetings but must receive access to all official information and documents at the same time as governments. This is enable critical function, namely that CSOs to develop their own capacity to submit documents and present written and oral contributions, make recommendations and intervene in official meetings - not only raising red flags and reminding governments about the ambitions of the agenda, but also to provide robust and substantial thematic inputs as partners to development.

It will be important that the HLPF, through its mandate to mainstream sustainable development across the UN, works to equally institutionalise stakeholder engagement. With broader ownership of different parts of the agenda and strong civil society engagement threading the processes together, it will be easier to prevent the agenda from being left behind. Agenda2030 will be successful if it amplifies and connects movements based on development justice and other normative standards that are non-negotiables, such as stakeholder engagement, access to information, procedural and recognitional justice.

Despite clear progress in the Asia Pacific region in establishing a self-organised stakeholder group with strong collaboration from the ESCAP Secretariat, the recent APFSD sought to impose more restrictive measures on civil society. To realize the ambition of Agenda2030, resolution 67/290 must apply to regional process and engagement.

### **IV. Leaving Regional Commitments Behind**

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<sup>15</sup> Recognitional justice means recognising all groups and identities as equal rights holders with the right to be represented

<sup>16</sup> constituencies of urban poor, migrants, people with disabilities, older people, LGBTIQ, fisherfolk and HIV affected communities were added with flexibility to incorporate others.

Despite acknowledging the clear and critical role of regional bodies and regional cooperation (Agenda2030 includes the term ‘regional’ 33 times), a small number of governments are preventing those commitments from becoming a reality. Member states acknowledged “the importance of the regional and subregional dimensions, regional economic integration and interconnectivity in sustainable development. Regional and subregional frameworks can facilitate the effective translation of sustainable development policies into concrete action at the national level<sup>17</sup>.

Member states committed to follow and review mechanisms at the regional level in four separate paragraphs (73, 77, 80, 81) and yet some states appear to be backtracking on that commitment. The outcome documents of the recent Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) lack ambition and fail to provide clarity on the ways that the regional review will enhance accountability (as promised in para 73) nor on the process to establish the regional frameworks promised in target 1.b<sup>18</sup>, target 2.5<sup>19</sup>, target 11.a<sup>20</sup> and target 17.6<sup>21</sup> in 2030 Agenda.

The HLPF should review progress made to strengthen regional cooperation and address key barriers to regional progress. This process needs to serve as a forum for mutual accountability without putting undue reporting or financial burdens on the Member States. Furthermore, the HLPF must also encourage Member States to ensure that secretariats of the regional commissions are adequately equipped with human and financial resources to carry out this task.

ESCAP’s collaboration with the RCEM has been lauded as exemplary achievement within and outside the UN system. The HLPF should encourage other regional commissions to emulate and help establish such engagement mechanisms at regional levels which ensures full and complete, transparent and inclusive, and meaningful engagement owned and driven by the MGoS.

## V. Recommendations on National and Global Review

**On national reviews**, the HLPF should encourage Member States to adopt a ‘whole of society’ approach in conducting national reviews, with the full and complete involvement of MGoS in a manner that is inclusive, transparent, and accessible and utilizes information and data accessed not only from the National Statistical Organizations but also through non-government sources. National Review reports must reflect the extent of participation and inputs of the MGoS, and must be subject to oversight of Parliaments and other relevant Institutions. The flexibility in devising the each country national strategies, institutions and choosing emphasis in pursuance of the SDG should not result in “cherry picking” of goals and targets. Member States should provide complete justification for tany self-differentiation, with guidance from the the HLPF.

**On Global reviews**, The HLPF must reiterate that voluntary reviews are meant to support national Implementation of Agenda 2030. The HLPF must propose elements of a road-map on how this gap-filling function of the HLPF will be addressed, to incentivize countries to make voluntary presentations.

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<sup>17</sup> Para 21

<sup>18</sup> 1.b Create sound policy frameworks at ... **regional** ... levels, based on pro-poor and gender-sensitive development strategies...

<sup>19</sup> 2.5 By 2020, maintain the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants ... through soundly managed and diversified seed and plant banks at ... **regional** ... levels ...

<sup>20</sup> 11.a Support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and **regional** development planning

<sup>21</sup> 17.6 Strengthen **regional** and international cooperation on and access to science, technology and innovation

Besides demonstrating Member States' accountability to their citizens such presentations must also include their accountability for actions (including actions of their national agencies) affecting people and environment beyond national territories.