Confronting Corporate Power and Demanding State Accountability for Just and Equitable Recovery from the COVID-19 Crises in Asia and the Pacific

​​

**ASIA PACIFIC PEOPLES’ FORUM FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

22-25 March 2022 via Zoom

**Context**

Two years since the outbreak of COVID-19, many nations across the world are still struggling to recover from the myriad of crises they’re facing as worsened by the pandemic. The exposed failure of the existing neoliberal economic framework has further crippled the socioeconomic foundations on which people rely — from healthcare to other basic social services — and has aggravated the conditions of the people, especially in marginalised sectors in the global south. The challenge in achieving sustainable development and transformative change has come to an indefinite halt.

Looking at the world today, there is uneven development and recovery among regions from COVID-19. In particular, peoples of Asia and the Pacific region find themselves being left behind in the path towards just and equitable recovery, in the midst of an increasing sovereign debt crisis, shrinking Official Development Assistance commitments, unjust trade and investment rules that further cement corporate capture, exacerbate vaccine inequity, and perpetuate business as usual are further impoverishing peoples of the global south, denying their rights to public services, and deepening systemic violence and oppressions caused by patriarchy, casteism and, feudalism. Moreover, inequalities within the countries keep getting wider, with growing concentration of power among the elites and increasing human rights violations by patriarchal authoritarian governance worsened by militarism and fundamentalism. And also, as the world shifts to virtual engagements due to the pandemic, there is also the widening digital divide further marginalising vulnerable sectors of the population.

In contrary to the governments’ claims of being inclusive in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as COVID-19 recovery, we still see how marginalised communities are still further left behind, and how COVID-19 measures are being used to further oppressed peoples movements, land and environmental rights defenders, trade unions, activists, and women human rights defenders. This proves the widening gap that needs to be bridged between the government’s priorities and the people’s needs. In May 2020, the Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism (APRCEM) released a comprehensive [statement](https://apwld.org/statment-solidarity-and-system-change-the-antidotes-to-covid-19/) on peoples’ demands for inclusive and effective COVID-19 recovery but two years into the pandemic, we see that the situation has worsened where corporations are profiting more and governments are further suppressing peoples’ democratic rights. It is now that we emphasise to uphold the call towards a more inclusive and peoples-driven approach as opposed to the government’s exclusionary and anti-people policies.

The People’s Forum is also a space to reiterate and demand the need to democratise spaces for accountability in the Agenda 2030 processes. Despite clear evidence of corporate capture of governance around the world, we see that there is growing influence of the corporate sector across UN processes contrary to the transformative ambitions of the Agenda 2030. This is evident through visibility of corporate foundations in the development processes led by the UN. The challenge for civil society to engage and claim these spaces has also become more difficult during the pandemic as meetings shifted to virtual mode, further widening the digital divide and time zone challenges to peoples of the global south.

The worsening effects of the digital divide paired with the corporate takeover of policy forums have manifested into the inaccessibility and exclusion of marginalised sectors in the engagements, leaving little to no room for meaningful input from civil society on peoples’ perspectives. The pandemic has brought major setbacks and challenges in terms of the sustainable development goals; this includes democratisation of the spaces and the challenge of “leaving no one behind.” In the aftermath of COVID-19 having exposed our systemic vulnerabilities and reinforced the need to fundamentally restructure the current model of development, it is imperative to assess the effectiveness of the Agenda 2030 as a global social contract. This requires looking beyond Agenda 2030 while realigning its relevance to the current needs of the world as well as ensuring that local, national, and regional mechanisms for development are inclusive, transparent, and accessible.

As part of its effort in consolidating the voices of different constituencies and sectors in Asia and the Pacific to engage and claim our space in the Agenda 2030 and related development processes, the Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism’s (APRCEM) annual Peoples’ Forum this year entitled “Confronting Corporate Power and Demanding State Accountability for Just and Equitable Recovery from the COVID-19 Crises in Asia and the Pacific” aims to unpack the neoliberal orientation and lack of accountability of governments in the region, as well as put forward people’s policy recommendations and demands and consolidate people’s stories of resistances and development initiatives towards the achievement of the SDGs from Development Justice perspectives.

**Target audience**

The intended participants are mainly CSOs and people’s movements from Asia-Pacific engaged in sustainable development at the local, national, and regional levels working on economic, social, and environmental issues. With APRCEM’s structure covering 5 sub-regions and 17 constituencies, the Peoples’ Forum will reach out to a broader number of CSOs to encourage new and relevant organisations to engage with regional civil society efforts on sustainable development, as well as engage with the UN mechanisms and institutions.

The forum aims to consolidate and engage more than a hundred participants from different organisations in the Asia Pacific, with consciousness to thematic, sectoral, and gender representation to cultivate diversity of perspectives and stories from sectors. Geographical scope includes organisations from (1) Pacific, (2) East/North-East Asia, (3) North/Central Asia, (4) South/Southwest Asia, (5) Southeast Asia. Participation will include grassroots and local organisations as well as national and regional organisations from the following groups: (1) NGOs, (2) Women, (3) Youth, (4) Social and Community Enterprise, (5) Farmers, (6) Trade Union/Workers, (7) Science and Technology, (8) Indigenous Peoples, (9) Urban Poor, (10) Migrants, (11) Persons With Disability, (12) People living and Affected by HIV and AIDS, (13) LGBTI, (14) Older People, (15) People affected with conflicts and disasters, and (16) Fisherfolks and 17) Dalits. CSOs across thematic areas relevant to sustainable development are also targeted as participants.

We welcome applications from those who are based in Asia and the Pacific and from civil society organisations working on the 2030 Agenda and sustainable development processes, and especially those who are:

● Members of grassroots constituencies, and/or working directly with grassroots constituencies;

● Engaged in implementation and promotion of the SDGs and the Agenda 2030 specifically for goals 4, 5, 14, 15 and 17; and,

● Engaged in the 2030 Agenda and SDG-related processes on the global/regional/national/local level, including but not limited to civil societies coming from countries delivering VNR in 2022: Philippines, Tuvalu, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Kazakhstan.

**About APRCEM**

APRCEM is a civil society platform aimed to enable stronger cross constituency coordination and ensure that voices of all subregions of Asia Pacific are heard in intergovernmental processes at the regional and global levels. The platform is initiated, owned, and driven by the CSOs, and seeks to engage with UN agencies and the Member States across the region on the issue of sustainable development. 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 that address the inequalities of wealth, power, resources between countries, between rich and poor and between men and women

**Objectives of the Forum**

1. Foster sharing and learning from the variety of experiences of organisations and constituencies and enhance capacity of civil society participants on sustainable development at the national, regional and global levels and on the opportunities and modalities for engaging these processes, including identifying and dealing with key systemic issues/barriers to the achievement of sustainable development from Development Justice perspectives;
2. Build a deeper understanding of Development Justice and its position on 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, scientific and academic communities across national borders;
3. Conduct dialogues and build critical analyses on the structure and content of the APFSD and HLPF with its theme “*Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,*” formulate joint positions, as well as strategize interventions at the APFSD, HLPF, UN General Assembly, FfD and other processes related to 2030 Agenda, as well as other relevant processes in tackling systemic barriers in achieving Development Justice;
4. Collectively build positions and recommendations to be forwarded to the process and member states on peoples’ demands for Development Justice vis-a-vis commitments to Agenda 2030;
5. Reflect on the work and structure of Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism 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, as well as continue fostering solidarity among movements, advocates and civil society groups in Asia Pacific and with other global regions.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Day 1 | March 22 | 1:00-4:00PM** | | |
| 30 mins | **Opening**  **Participants Introduction**  **Programme Run-down**  **Welcoming Remarks**  ESCAP rep  APRCEM co-chair  **Development Justice Video** | In Search for Development Justice  **What is People’s Forum Video** – including how APRCEM is defining the space, why are we organising People’s Forum especially in the context of COVID-19 |  |
| **Plenary 1. Regional People’s Realities and Challenges in Achieving Agenda 2030**  This session will discuss regional trends, issues, and barriers that impact the achievement of sustainable development in the region, particularly in relation to “just and equitable recovery” including the impact of neoliberal economic policies, trade and investment policies, land and resource grabbing, militarism and conflicts, patriarchy, casteism and authoritarianism to the peoples. The session will also discuss the politics behind the SDG framework as well as general progress and setbacks in the region, and interrelations with the other parallel development processes. | | |
| 40 mins | Panel 1. Systemic Issues  Moderator: TBC  Shrinking ODA, widening debt traps, unjust trade rules, and the big tech takeover  Health crisis and vaccine inequity  Threat of war and conflict  Forced migration, massive unemployment and poverty  Increasing gender violence and state oppression | This panel will situate the multidimensional crises in the region induced by corporate capture, exclusive policy patterns and systemic violence, and the need for accountability to peoples especially in the context of achieving Agenda 2030 amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. |
| 30 mins | Panel 2. Achieving People’s Agenda and Development Justice Amidst COVID-19  Moderator: Roots for Equity  People’s Demands/Resistances   * People with disabilities * Farmers/Indigenous * Women Workers * Social and community enterprises | This panel will discuss the grounded realities on the impact of COVID-19 to diverse constituencies in the region, as well as stories of resistances and initiatives, and present people’s development demands. |
| 50 mins | Panel 3. Achieving Agenda 2030, Challenges and Barriers  Moderator:   * Agenda 2030 in the region: Progress and Setbacks * Means of Implementation–including setbacks in Financing for Development, Trade * Corporate Capture of Agenda 2030 and related processes–Exposing how Our Common Agenda, Digital Compact and Summit of the Futures, etc are opening more spaces for corporations * Agenda 2030 Progress from civil society perspectives–local and national processes and how and why CSOs engage | The panel will focus not only on the process, but the context and politics behind the SDG framework, as well as perspectives from the civil society. It will expose the business as usual approach in Our Common Agenda and also highlight Development Justice as an alternative for addressing the politics of development. |
| 30 mins | Open Forum and Closing |  |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Day 2 | March 23 | 1:00-4:00PM** | | |
| **Plenary 2. Peoples’ Priorities: Unpacking the Goals - Fact Sheet Presentation**  The session will elaborate on APRCEM collective fact sheets on the goals that will be discussed at APFSD and HLPF 2022. The goals are as follows: 4, 5, 14, 15 and 17. In addition, APRCEM also develops other important fact sheets: People’s Solutions, VNR, SRHR and Corporate Capture.  Moderator: TBC | | |
| 90 mins | Fact Sheet Presentations  Cluster 1   * Goal 4 * Goal 5 * Goal 14 * Goal 15 * Goal 17   Cluster 2   * People’s Solutions * VNR * SRHR * Corporate Capture | Can be done in a form of (1) breakout groups in which we will let participants choose the factsheet they want to participate in or give their inputs in (we can use Miro board to collate the comments) (Pros: interactive, Cons: can be time-consuming if not checked and if participants are unequal for each factsheet group) or (2) factsheet leads can share the executive summary of their factsheets (can be 7-8 mins each) then have time for open forum after to accommodate comments/questions from the floor. |
| **Plenary 3. Monitoring and Accountability at the national level - VNR and Shadow Report**  The session will discuss the progress of VNR processes in the countries reporting at the HLPF 2021 this year. Guiding questions for the speakers for this session as follows: (1) What are the progress and the major challenges (refer to systemic barriers)?, (2) What are the structure of country implementation and CSOs engagement? (3) What are the barriers for civil societies and grassroots participation?  Moderator: TBC | | |
| 80 mins | VNR Countries in Asia and the Pacific   * Philippines * Tuvalu * Sri Lanka * Pakistan * Kazakhstan   Open Forum  Synthesis and Preparation for the HLPF |  |
| 10 mins | Closing |  |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Day 3 | March 24 | 9:00AM-6:00PM** | | |
| **Peoples’ Workshop Theme 1.0: People's’ Realities and Achieving Agenda 2030: Unpacking the goals under review and current systemic barriers in the time of COVID-19** | | |
|  |  |  |
| **Peoples’ Workshop Theme 2.0: Demanding Accountability and Actions: Looking at Sustainable Development from an Accountability and Monitoring Lens** | | |
|  |  |  |
| **Peoples’ Workshop Theme 3.0 : Harnessing the Power of Peoples’ Movements for a Fairer, Just and Equitable Asia Pacific** | | |
|  |  |  |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Day 4 | March 25 | 1:00-5:00PM**  Moderator of the day: TBC | | |
| 9-10AM  10-11AM | Sub-regional Meetings  Constituency Meetings | This is dedicated time for the sub-regions and constituencies to meet as a group to discuss, prepare and finalise their collective positions for APFSD. This includes updating and/or review of recommendations and outcomes from the sub-regional forums held in 2021.  Outcomes from these parallel meetings will be shared in the afternoon plenary. |
| 11AM-1PM | Lunch Break |  |
| 60 mins | Report back of sub-regional and constituency recommendations | \*guidelines |
| 60 mins  30 mins | Report back and drafting of key recommendations from meetings/workshops  CSO Statement Presentation |  |
| 30 mins  30 mins | Reaffirming Development Justice and Looking beyond Agenda 2030  Orientation to APFSD |  |
| 10 mins | Closing  *\*include dissemination of feedback form* |  |
| 30 mins | AP-ROR (Asia Pacific Regional Online Rally) |  |