

## **FEEDBACK FROM ASEAN PEOPLE’S FORUM WS1 “TRANSFORMATIVE ECONOMIC MOVEMENTS AT THE ASEAN GRASSROOTS: HOPE & INCLUSION”**

Workshop 1 (WS1) of the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN People’s Forum (ACSC/APF) 2018 was coordinated by Datuk Dr. Denison Jayasooria (Malaysia) of ASEC (Asian Solidarity Economy Council). The ASEC panel of resource persons/case writer-presenters were Ben Quinones (Philippines), Eri Trinurini & Chandra Firmantoko (Indonesia), Boonsom Namsomboon & Daodol Rummanpol (Thailand), & Kon Onn Sein (Malaysia)

About thirty people participated in WS1 held on Nov 3, 2018 from 11am to 1pm at ACSC/APF 2018 in Singapore

### **1 Describe the key challenges identified in the workshop discussion**

*Identified multiple challenges.*

The first, is that majority of the participants of ACSC/APF did not have an understanding of sustainable development goals (SDG) nor the theme of social solidarity economy (SSE) or that of the ASEAN Community vision 2025. They had no idea of what are alternative economic systems. We found that people could identify issues & concerns but not focused on finding strategic and effective solutions. While participants had a good idea of specific human rights violations they did not have a holistic intervention strategies especially that of SDGs & SSE as a window of involvement with their governments particularly those in restrictive countries.

Second, the ASEC workshop identified challenges faced by specific vulnerable & disadvantaged communities through the case studies presented such as the indigenous people/ forest based communities, street vendors/ informal economy, urban poor communities, women in the B40 categories, rural families & communities. These also include migrants both those from rural to urban from poorer/lesser developed ASEAN countries to richer countries in search of jobs and better living. These communities faced economic, social & human rights abuses of lack of access to resources and opportunities.

### **2 Why is this a challenge?**

Human rights violations addressed by most of CSOs participating in ACSC/APF are brought about basically by the model of development of neo liberal capitalism where markets and big business including big investments are given priorities for economic growth. Development is being measured by GDP and rate of investments. A balanced SDG understanding is lacking so much so that the concerns of people (human rights, socio-economic) and environment, (sustainability) are not taken into account in the practice although highlighted in political rhetoric of governments and international development agencies.

Many grassroots communities in the B40 (bottom 40 % of the socio-economic ladder) are marginalised and side-lined. They are disempowered, lacking basic info of their rights especially in very restricted political environments.

Migration is taking place because the focus of development is at the city level and therefore jobs/employment opportunities at the rural/village are limited. Consequently, people have to leave their traditional places in search of jobs and better livelihood opportunities and for a better quality of life in the Metropolitan centre or abroad. Much of the services such as schools, hospitals and entertainment are available in the urban locations while rural and small towns are neglected.

### **3a Who are the affected/discriminated groups**

*Vulnerable & disadvantaged communities include:* the indigenous people/ forest based communities, street vendors/ informal economy, urban poor communities, women in the B40 categories, rural families & communities, and migrants both those from rural to urban from poorer/lesser developed ASEAN countries to richer countries with work permits or without work permits.

### **3b Who are the stakeholders**

Civil society, NGOs, local communities especially grassroots leaders or leaders of community groups such as informal sector or indigenous people or village leaders. Also government officials of relevant agencies, academics & researchers, international aid agencies, UN agencies

### **3c Who should be involved in overcoming the challenge**

CSO/NGOs such as those working with the vulnerable & disadvantaged communities, academics & researchers (local universities), policy advocacy people who are taking up the cause at local, sub regional, national, regional and global levels. Also relevant government agencies and institutions, ASEAN institutions such as ASEAN human rights commission etc, UNDP, UNHCR etc

## **4 How can the challenge be overcome?**

Overcoming is through:

- Organising & empowering the vulnerable & disadvantaged people to know their socio-economic & human rights (right to development via SDGs & SSE)
- Awareness raising & policy advocacy. Networking with UNESCAP via the SDG dialogues like the Asia Pacific CSO engagement mechanism and the APSD Forum at Bangkok and the UN High level political forum

- Strengthening of networking and cooperation among the local cso/ngo and local communities.

## **5 What can civil society do now before the next ACSC/APF?**

Need to document best practices. In its ACSC/APF 2018 workshop, ASEC provided a link between SDG & SSE with the ASEAN community vision. We highlighted 4 case studies. There are so many grassroots community-based initiatives which are alternative to the dominating models of big corporate business. We need to make the people's alternatives visible as sustainable alternative socio-economic models which are operating at the ground and which are sustainable.

In this we can list the challenges & issues but using the SDG – goals, targets & indicators we can undertake a major mapping exercise.

In addition to advocacy & protest methods, work with affected people in finding alternative socio-economic and environmental solutions is needed. People have to survive within the prevailing circumstances in the meantime that CSOs advance their advocacies and protest actions. Ordinary people can be taking handouts from advocacy/protest CSOs, but the strategic action that needs to be given greater emphasis is to build people's capabilities in struggling for both political empowerment & socio-economic empowerment.

Important for CSO/NGO is to have a clear conceptual understanding of SDGs from both socio-economic development & human rights concerns with a firm commitment to environmental sustainability. Notably, no SDGs can be achieved without addressing human rights, and the realisation of SDGs is a concrete approach towards upholding human rights. It is important to link principles and values as we need to confront the ideological level at the one hand and the practice level on the other - seeking to bring change via people's action at the grassroots.

Get the cooperation of all the ASEAN CSOs to undertake a mapping exercise with the 17 SDG goals, 169 targets and 230 indicators. Do this review using SSE and compare this with the ASEAN community vision 2025. We need to show the ASEAN leadership that ASCS/APF is a strategic stakeholder and partner in the implementation & achieving the ASEAN 2025 agenda of creating an ASEAN community

## **6 Where is the challenge & where would the proposed action take place?**

The challenge with CSO/SDG is at local, national & regional levels. Many are not aware and have not taken SDGs seriously although it is the UN 2030 agenda. Many are caught up with the funding sources to monitoring human rights violations. CSOs can keep to their core work but they can also extend their horizon by monitoring human rights concerns based on economic, social & cultural rights along with economic & social. SDGs provide an excellent opportunity for engaging the public sector in addressing these rights.

We can take up SDG 5 & SDG 10 addressing discrimination including that of gender and SDG 16 which is a focus on justice, peace and accountable institutions. In this context sustainability (environmental) concerns can also be addressed using several SDGs related to forest or consumption.

## **7 Recommendations**

**Recommendations 1:** Undertake a study on SDGs -2030 agenda & ASEAN community agenda 2025 that seeks to map out the agreed positions by ASEAN governments on addressing discrimination (like SDG 5, 8, 10 & 16). This could be done by assigning the task to a team of academic and policy advocates among CSO/NGO. Host a study consultation before next APF and at the next APF present the study to CSO/NGOs ie one year process (Nov 2018 – Oct 2019). ASEC can assist in this process.

**Recommendations 2:** Undertake a collecting of grassroots case studies of community based projects on the ground of local people who take action in building alternative people's economy. ASEC has shown that this is not a difficult process by highlighting 4 case studies during ACSC/APF 2018. ACSC/APF can gather 100 case studies of ground actions in 10 ASEAN countries – 10 per country x 10 = 100 stories from the ground on how ordinary people are challenging big business with their alternative socio economic model based on community solidarity.

ASEC can provide the framework for documenting the stories of alternative people's economic initiatives and train the research/study teams in the 10 ASEAN countries (between Nov 2018 & Oct 2019). A publication of documented stories can be published on the web by Nov 2019.

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