



Asian Civil Society Space in Government Process of Implementation SDGs is little and facing barriers; Local, National and Global Coalition and Combine Voices need along with Positive Engagement with Government

1. Background:

On 24th to 26th February 2017 Regional Workshop on National Implementation of SDGs

Voluntary National Review (VNR) of UN High-level Political Forum (HLPF) held at IBIS Bangkok Riverside Hotel, Bangkok. As a representative of EquityBD I participated from Bangladesh. Around 43 participants from 13 Asian countries including representatives of UNDP and CSO from Switzerland and South Africa participated in

the workshop. The workshop jointly organized by the Asia Development Alliance (ADA) and Asia Civil Society Partnership for Sustainable Development (APSD).

2. Key learning:

Civil Societies in most of the Asian countries are straggling while raising their voices especially on human rights, democracy and governance. Governments are giving limited space for civil society inclusion in efforts of respective governments towards addressing some specific SDGs. But they are not

interested on SDG 16. So the primary approaches for Asian Civil societies would be create spaces in National Government's efforts towards SDGs achievement. At the eve of SDG – High Level Performance Forum meeting on Voluntary National Review by respective governments will be first target to be inclusion of civil society. A part from this on behalf of Asian Civil Society we will make a review of SDGs implementation by the UN and CSOs, and assessed the CSO engagement with the government on SDG implementation for UN High-level Political Forum (HLPF).



3. Sessions and Consultations;

Session 1: Update and Briefing about International Processes on SDG implementation – UN and International Organizations

Session 2: Update and Briefing about International Processes on SDG implementation – Civil Society

Session 3: Review of National CSO Engagement on the SDGs – Voluntary National Review of the HLPF 2017, South Asia

Session 4: Review of National CSO Engagement on the SDGs – Voluntary National Review of the HLPF 2017 – East Asia

Session 5: Thematic Working Group A. Inequality (Goal 10) and B. SDG 16 – Violence against children (VOC), Human Rights, Democratic governance, anti-corruption, etc.

Final Session: Regional Consultation on the State of Democracy and Civic Space in Asia – Challenges and Opportunities

4. Overall learning:

During 24th to 26th February CSO representatives from 11 countries; Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand presented respective country contexts. They uphold status of their government and engagement of CSO in the implementation of SDGs and preparation of the Voluntary National Review (VNR) of the UN High-level Political Forum (HLPF). Having observed the following major findings on CSO engagements on SDG implementation at the national level:

4.1 Good CSO Practices

- 1) Various types of CSOs such as human rights groups, social movements, development NGOs, environmental groups, grassroots organizations and others are using the SDGs as a framework to come together in a national platform to pursue the SDGs and monitor and review its implementation, such as in Malaysia as organized by the Society for the Promotion of Human Rights and the CSO Coalition on SDGs in Indonesia. In others, CSOs even lead the formation

of loose coalitions working on the SDGs to include business, government, academic and media organizations, such as the ZeroExtremePoverty2030 Movement in the Philippines.

- 2) CSOs are able to participate in the government's national processes and committees on the SDGs, providing researches and improving government data, such as in Malaysia and Indonesia. Another example is that of the Japan NPO Center, which provided technical assistance to the national government in facilitating its SDG Promotion Roundtable Discussions that involved representatives from various stakeholders.
- 3) It is more effective to engage with the bureaucracy and local governments on the SDGs, especially if the national government is indifferent to CSOs, such as in the Philippines.
- 4) Regional CSO mechanisms have been established for CSO participation such as the ADA, APSD, APRCEM, Asia DHRRA and others. These are helpful platforms for learning exchange and policy advocacy at the national, regional and global levels.



4.2 Gaps in the implementation of the SDGs at the national level:

- 1) Civic space is increasingly shrinking. The situation is particularly difficult for CSOs working on human rights, justice and peace, and environmental issues, particularly in Pakistan.
- 2) The governments' SDG targets are not ambitious enough and prioritize only those which can be easily reached or where data is available.
- 3) Availability of government data for the indicators is generally poor. The country cases cited that there are either no mechanisms to collect relevant SDG data, or that government data is either interpreted selectively, not disaggregated by age, sex, and disabilities, or - such as in the case of Pakistan - manipulated to report situations positively. There should be mechanisms for CSOs' data and researches, particularly for thematic areas, to inform government data.
- 4) The governments' voluntary reports to UN are often not rigorous enough. They should not replace national and local accountabilities.
- 5) At the grassroots where the monitoring and review of the SDGs matter most, awareness and participation are very limited. SDG materials are either mostly in English, too technical or not localized to their contexts.
- 6) Implementation of the SDGs will require significant resources; it is important to ensure that national policies and budgets, as well as the priorities of development finance institutions align with the SDGs.
- 7) Governments' processes for the SDG implementation, particularly on targets prioritization, monitoring and financing,

are not inclusive, leaving behind the needs of the most vulnerable sectors.

4.3 Recommendations to Governments and International Organizations in Asia and beyond

- 1) Ensure free, active and meaningful participation of CSOs and grassroots organizations directly representing marginalized and vulnerable sectors in the preparation of VNR at HLPF at the national and international level,
- 2) Address shrinking civic space and enabling environment for CSO engagement for SDGs as top priority at the national and international level such as UN HLPF,
- 3) Support the creation of an online depository of CSO alternative reports and outcomes of CSO side events for public communication and outreach,
- 4) Consider SDG 10 on equality as a cross-cutting issue which need to be included in all VNR report to the UN HLPF,
- 5) Consider SDG 16 as a means of implementation which need to be reviewed annually together with thematic priorities at UN HLPF like SDG 17,
- 6) Support and ensure corporate accountability in promoting public,



public-private and civil society

- partnerships (Target 17.17) at the national and international level taking into account the para. 67 of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which includes UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of Child (CRC),
- 7) Develop concrete human rights-based accountability mechanism by linking SDG monitoring to the existing UN human rights monitoring bodies such as human rights treaty monitoring bodies and special procedures and Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the UN Human Rights Council.
 - 8) Ensure that national development cooperation agencies in Asia such as Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) work in partnership with national and international CSOs for effective implementation of SDGs specially goal 10, 16 and 17.
 - 9) Linking SDG monitoring to regional organizations in Asia such as ASEAN and SAARC to ensure policy and institutional coherence at the international level (Target 17.13-15),
 - 10) Engage with other international organizations, processes and multilateral institutions such as G7, G20, BRICS, ADB, New Development Bank (NDB), Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), Green Climate Fund (GCF), etc. to ensure their contribution to the full implementation of SDGs,

4.4 Call to Action and Strategic Guidelines for CSOs engagement on SDGs in Asia and beyond

- 1) Highlight shrinking civic space and enabling environment for CSO engagement for SDGs in CSO policy advocacy and campaign,
- 2) Continue to improve collaboration coordination among CSOs to overcome silos and fragmentation,
- 3) Engage with national development cooperation agencies in Asia such as JICA and KOICA for effective implementation of SDGs specially goal 10, 16 and 17,
- 4) Initiate an independent monitoring report on SDGs, specially SDG 10 and 16 with relevant indicators,
- 5) Highlight Target 4.7 on global citizenship education as a means of public awareness-building and outreach,
- 6) Continue to build capacities of CSOs specially among youth on policy engagement and monitoring within and among the countries,
- 7) Continue to maintain independence and autonomy as CSO while engaging critically and constructively with other stake-holders, governments and international organizations like UN
- 8) Engage more strategically with sub-national governments in implementation and monitoring of SDG to promote bottom-up approach in SDG implementation within the country,
- 9) Engage with governments and international organizations and processes or multi-lateral institutions such as G20, ADB, World Bank, NDB, AIIB, etc. to ensure policy and institutional coherence for SDGs,
- 10) Engage with relevant CSOs and their networks to ensure the effective mainstreaming of SDGs in regional organizations such as ASEAN, SAARC, etc.



Shawkat Ali Tutul

Assistant Director, SA & DRR