Change the System, Shift the Power: Advancing People’s Demand for Development Justice!

Chapeau

We, the representatives of civil society and peoples’ organisations, organised as 17 constituencies and 5 subregions from 38 countries in Asia and the Pacific, are united in our commitment to work in solidarity, strengthen the interlinkages of peoples’ rights, development, and sustainability, and demand accountability from governments and key institutions in the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) across the region and beyond.

Almost a decade into the implementation of the SDGs, there is no denying that progress remains alarmingly slow and targets are still out of reach. The absence of emphasis in addressing systemic barriers entrenched within the social, economic and political structures impedes the full realisation of these goals. There are widening inequalities and poverty exacerbated by free trade regimes, regressive tax systems and illicit financial flows, liberalisation of trade and agriculture, the triple planetary crisis of biodiversity loss, pollution and climate change, exacerbating debt distress, resource grabbing, occupation and genocide, patriarchy and fundamentalism, human rights violations, denial of peoples’ access to resources and services, militarism, and shrinking democratic spaces. Beneath these atrocities lie a structurally flawed, neoliberal development model that prioritises private profits and corporate interests over the well-being of both people and the planet.

The convergence of crises underscores the urgent need for transformative action. Recent, multilateral summits, especially the SDG Summit Political Declaration 2023, acknowledge the urgency of the situation but fail short of mobilising consensus over critical priorities. Moreover, the focus has now shifted towards the Summit of the Future (SoTF), proposed as a measure to accelerate the SDGs. While it promises critical reforms, as reflective of the zero draft of the Pact of the Future (PoTF), it threatens to divert political will and focus away from the SDGs, and its emphasis on ‘networked multilateralism’ risks engendering the further corporate capture over the multilateral order, undermining prospects for just and sustainable development.

We refuse to accept this status quo. The SDGs will not lead to transformative change unless the structural causes of unsustainable development are addressed by dismantling the neoliberal model of development that fails to protect the most basic needs of the people. We call upon the governments to prioritise the needs of people and the planet over corporate interests, to uphold the principle of policy coherence and non-regression, to promote a holistic, people-centred, and rights-based approach to development, and to ensure that the right to development underpins all policies, programs and practices.

Lastly, changing the system entails recasting development as a process organised and led by the people. This amounts to shifting the locus of decision-making to the people, especially the marginalised groups of Indigenous Peoples, women, rural and urban poor, smallholder and landless farmers, workers, fisherfolk, herders, LGBTQIA+, people living with HIV/AIDS, people living
in conflict and disaster, youth and children, elderly, migrants, persons with disabilities, Dalits, and Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD), and recognising them as agents for change.

Regional Implementation and Progress

Having crossed the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda, the Asia Pacific region is faced with a myriad of crises. The UNESCAP Asia and the Pacific SDGs Progress Report 2024 shows that out of the 116 measurable targets, only 11% are on track to be achieved by 2030 while the region is likely to miss on the remaining 89% of the targets. SDG 1 and 9 have made some progress, but it is disparate across targets within, whereas SDG 13 is regressing and SDG 5 and 16 have insufficient data. The report shows that the SDG 14 and 17 targets have regressed against the 2015 baseline. Apart from the 13 targets that are on track, all the other measurable targets require rapid acceleration and a complete reversal of negative trends in the case of 20 other targets. The report underscores the dismal rate of progress at merely 17% in the region, with the estimated achievement not in sight until 2062.\(^1\) The projection is based on the 52% available data, while the missing 48% poses alarming unpredictability testament to the lack of political will necessary.

Despite COVID-19 induced regressions, it is important to note that the goals were already off-track even before the pandemic. This is compounded by the emergent crises manifested in the worsening triple planetary crisis, surging economic instability, increasing militarism and conflicts, and the rise of patriarchal authoritarian governance throughout the region. This calls for the urgent need for a complete overhaul of development programming committed to decolonise, decarbonise, de-liberalise and democratise to realise development justice.

While data shows some progress in Goal 1, it is still contrasting to the rise of unemployment rate globally reaching 208 million last year, and rampant decline in the quality of work. ILO’s report also projected that the labour market outlook and global unemployment will worsen this year. An extra two million workers are expected to be looking for jobs, raising global unemployment from 5.1% (in 2023) to 5.2%. This is coupled with the rising prices of basic goods and commodities due to the inflation–with the global rate reaching 9%, its highest rate in nearly two decades. Wages also continue to stagnate—or worse, decline. The ILO’s Global Wage Report 2022 estimated that global monthly wages fell in real terms to -0.9% in the first half of 2022, the first negative global wage growth recorded since the first edition of the report in 2008.

Progress in Goal 2 is also very slow. Overall progress as of 2023 is at 17%, which is way below the 50% target in 2022, with efforts toward mitigating hunger “requiring heightened attention for substantial improvement”. The UNESCAP SDG Progress Report also shows that most concerning is Goal 2.1 on undernourishment and food security, whose trend is deteriorating for the majority of the subregions except for East and Northeast Asia and South and Southwest Asia. The recent UN FAO’s State of Food Insecurity and Nutrition in the World Report (December 2023) states that out of the 735 million undernourished in the world in 2022, 402 million, or more than half, are from our region. The prevalence of undernourishment and the number of undernourished people in 2022 remain the same as the pandemic levels (at 9% or around 400 million people). At this rate, almost one out of every four in the region’s population is facing moderate or severe food insecurity.

The regression in Goal 13 is the most alarming despite commitments from the Paris Agreement and the agreement on the Loss and Damage Fund. The rise in temperature in the past years has been

\(^1\) [https://www.unescap.org/kp/2024/asia-and-pacific-sdg-progress-report-2024]
detrimental and extremely damaging, especially to communities living in poor and disaster-prone areas. In 2022 alone, extreme weather claimed over 7,500 deaths, impacting over 64 million people and causing economic damage estimated at USD 57 billion. The region is home to 70% of the global population susceptible to sea-level rise, and about one-third of total employment is in natural resource-based sectors conditioned by climate, such as agriculture and fisheries. Destruction of habitats and sources of livelihood is also detrimental in relation to Goals 1 and 2. This while climate solutions being advanced including transition to clean energy is too corporate-driven and further exacerbates marginalisation of communities with the increased extraction of minerals needed to produce these technologies.

There is a lack of data in measuring the progress in Goal 16. With the rise in state and domestic violence during the pandemic, it is imperative to measure access to justice especially of marginalised communities. The UNESCAP report also states the need to measure and tackle the increasing rates of internally-displaced persons in the region. This while the rise of authoritarian and fundamentalist governments are threatening democratic rights across the region. The unequal distribution and abuse of power by states and corporations in many communities in the region is also alarming. Targets in Goal 16 should also be tackled in relation to the other goals, especially Goal 1 and 2, as it addresses the lack of access to justice of communities affected by massive resource exploitation.

Progress in Goal 17 is also very slow. In the past couple of years, many countries in the region have increased debt due to pandemic-related borrowing. According to the UNESCAP report, 19 countries in the region today are facing a high risk of debt distress largely due to the low output growth at 3.3% and record-high inflation at 7.6%. There is also a decline in Official Development Assistance—many donor countries failing to uphold their historical commitment to appropriate 0.7% of their Gross National Income (GNI) towards development assistance. In 2022, aid only reached USD 204 billion, with only five countries meeting the mark. This is also alongside continued extraction through trade and investment agreements where flow of wealth and resources from developing countries are diverted through illicit financial flows, tax evasions, capital flows, asset stealth, trade mispricing, and profit shifting by multinational corporations. Public Private Partnership also continues to be recognised as an approach to development projects, which often sideline peoples’ participation.

In 2024, we are faced with more questions and doubts in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. The lack of data to measure the progress of the goals is telling of the government's commitments, and at the same time a reflection of the reality on the ground with business-as-usual approaches, unbridled extraction and exploitation, and rampant violation and abuse of human rights.

**Priority Goals**

**SDG 1 - NO POVERTY**

The Asia and the Pacific region continues to feel the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, manifested in the biggest cost-of-living crisis of the century. The resulting multidimensional challenges and pressures have mostly affected people with the least resources and opportunities. An estimated 47 million people in the region have been pushed into extreme poverty (Ecker et al. 2023), although it is impossible to identify the most severely affected social groups because the data on poverty is collected about households, not individuals, and limiting
disaggregation. Different groups face different socio-cultural and economic barriers with differing levels of vulnerability to poverty, requiring multidimensional vulnerability for holistic analysis.

Location remains a key factor in determining levels of multidimensional poverty and inequality based on accessibility. People living in rural areas face pronounced disadvantages, such as limited access to basic drinking water and sanitation facilities, lower availability of clean cooking fuels, and restricted attainability of essential services. The urban areas exhibit better conditions, yet paradoxically, it is within these areas that the poorest boys and girls face significant hurdles in completing upper secondary education. This requires an in-depth multidimensional approach to assess poverty beyond GDP terms to assess acute deprivations in terms of human development including health, education, standard of living, and access to services for a dignified and fulfilling life.

Recommendations

1. On multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that create and sustain inequalities of outcomes and opportunities.

- A holistic, rights-based and inclusive approach to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and COVID-19 recovery based on recognition and redress of the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination is critical to ensure equality of outcomes for all.

- Governments must ensure a sustainable redress of the cost of living crisis, exploitation, income inequality and inflation as well as provision of social security to lift people out of poverty.

- Recognise and strengthen support for the traditional occupations of Indigenous Peoples and for social enterprises to enable people and communities to advance their own self determined development.

- Design and implement comprehensive poverty reduction programs that support Dalits, CDWD and other marginalised people by including provisions for low-cost housing, income-generating activities and flexible credit opportunities.

- Promote decent work – with social dialogue, fair and equal pay with living wages, and in sustainable sectors, and ensure access to decent work for all, including migrant workers, women in care work, and marriage migrants, among others.

- Governments of origin and destination countries must ensure social protection for all migrants, including temporary migrant workers, marriage migrants, domestic workers and all those in care work, agricultural workers and sea-based migrant workers, incorporating access to health care, day care for migrants’ children, inclusion of social security and pension funds.

- Increase investment in pro-poor, gender-responsive and disability-responsive social protection towards the global average of 11% of GDP, prioritising universal transfers across the lifecycle to support a minimum standard of living for all.

- Ensure coverage of informal sector workers, poor families and people experiencing multiple forms of vulnerabilities through Universal Social Protection Floors (USPF).
• Increase attention to the rights, needs, interests and voices of diverse Indigenous Peoples, especially those facing intersectional barriers including elderly, women, children and persons living with disability, dalits and communities discriminated based on work and descent (CDWD).

2. On accountability

• Governments must resist and regulate trade agreements and its impacts to local markets to ensure accountability through effective regulatory mechanisms.

• Conditionalities resulting from investment agreements and loans from international financial institutions must be challenged to avoid policy incoherent and unsustainable austerity measures that further exacerbate poverty.

• Digitalisation and Artificial Intelligence must be regulated and governed, as well as ensuring just and equitable transition to avoid massive job losses, and the deepening digital divide affecting millions of the digitally deprived. The tech takeover must not enable informalisation and blur employer-employee relationships to safeguard labour rights such as social protection, unionisation, and collective bargaining.

• International development cooperation should prioritise LDC, LLDCs, SIDs and conflict affected countries.

• Establish and sustain institutionalised spaces within local, national, regional, and global policy spaces for participation of social justice movements can participate equally, meaningfully, and effectively increase multi-year flexible transformative funding for and support for feminist, women- and youth- and adolescent-led organisations and movements, prioritising those formed and led by people historically marginalised on the basis of gender identity and expression, class, caste, sexual orientation, indigeneity, race, ethnicity, disability, or religion.

• Demand public financing for SDG stimulus packages that prioritise inclusion of the most marginalised segments, and young people, to accelerate the pace of transformative economic, social and environmental change towards just, equitable and sustainable development.

• Tax incentives and fiscal incentives could be given to small and medium enterprises employing and prioritising people with disabilities, and other progressive employment and social protection policies prioritising labour and environmental standards.

3. On disaggregated data

• Allocate adequate resources, technology transfer, and training to strengthen statistical commissions for disaggregated data collection to make the invisible visible. Invest in the collection, analysis, and use of quantitative and qualitative data, including individual-level and civil society generated data on multidimensional poverty and inequality, disaggregated by gender, age, race, ethnicity, caste, migratory status, marital status, disability, income, geographic location, vulnerability and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.
SDG 2 - ENDING HUNGER

In our region, almost 25% of the population faces moderate or severe food insecurity, which is just the same as in 2021. Forty percent or 809 million people, can be found in South Asia, which has the highest prevalence of severe food insecurity (mostly women and children from marginalised groups). Across all the cited reports, food prices (Goal 2.c) were a major concern in the region and worldwide, especially in low and middle-income countries. The cost of healthy diets in Asia and the Pacific, Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean increased by more than 5% – higher than the 4.3 global average – from 2020 to 2021. Of the 3.1 billion people in the world who cannot afford a healthy diet in 2021, 61% or 1.9 billion come from Asia. South Asia is the highest in number and proportion, registering almost twice the regional prevalence average (FAO SOFI, 2023). The top countries that have experienced high food prices in 2020 are Australia, Pakistan, and Bhutan (UNESCAP 2023).

The SDG Summit 2023 listed food systems as one of the key transitions with multiplier effects across the Goals, including poverty, hunger, and climate. We must radically transform our food systems to shift away from the big corporate, fossil-fuel-heavy, and agrochemical-dependent model and towards a people-centred and people-led agricultural and food production model that prioritises food sovereignty needs of the people.

Overall, we believe that sustainable food systems and nutrition patterns demand uncompromised focus on food and seed sovereignty agroecological approaches, enhanced protection to small farmers and food producers including women and youth farmers, and dismantling of corporate control over agriculture and the food system.

1. **On governance**

   - Complement measures and programs with strategic policies that address the root causes of food insecurity and malnutrition, including the guarantee of the right to land and genuine agrarian reform.
   
   - Enact comprehensive policy reforms to curb inequitable land distribution, widening inequality traps, and marginalisation of the poorest in Asia Pacific.
   
   - Curb and regulate corporate control and consolidation in the food, agriculture, and nutrition sectors such as land use conversation, use of hazardous pesticides, predatory trade practices, and dumping etc. through stringent competition policies and global oversight under the UN.
   
   - The UN must capacitate developing countries to adopt rights-based data governance frameworks to regulate collection, use and dissemination of data. Respect for free and prior informed consent should be a central principle to protect privacy and the right to say no from government-initiated surveillance systems for collection of data on food and nutrition and data from farmers and communities.

2. **On social protection**

   - Small farmers, women food producers, indigenous peoples, dalits and CDWD, and other rural populations should be provided with social protection, access to decent
health care, quality education and jobs parallel with sensitisation and empowerment programs to enable smallholders and rural populations make informed choices. Social protection policies should promote fair and decent value to farmers' labour and products, extending to marginalised communities - including persons with disabilities and their families - facing greater food insecurity especially in developing countries.

3. **On women's human rights**

- Adopt more equitable measures to genuinely recognise the status, contribution and rights of women farmers through mechanisms giving special attention to the requirements of women and children, especially in rural and indigenous, dalit and CDWD communities.

- Address gender and women's human rights issues in the design and deployment of policies and programs and take into account traditional, local and indigenous knowledge and skills held by women in agriculture, food, and nutrition. Ensure women's access to and rights over productive resources, markets, technology and skills.

- Disaggregation of data on food and nutrition based on gender, age, caste and disability must be prioritised to end mal practices and myths related to nutritional diet for pregnant women, and menstruating women and girls.

4. **On investment and financing**

- Increase public investments in rural development supporting smallholders in recognition of the real value of farmers' labour, particularly women farmers, their genius, and contributions to society.

- Public-private partnership is not a panacea, and is not the solution. Strategic investments in agroecology, education and the public health systems, as well as on disaster and pandemic preparedness must only come from the public sector and as part of basic rights of citizens. Strong partnership between the people and democratic government based on mutual trust, responsibility, solidarity and recognition of each other’s contributions is a far more strategic and bottom-up approach to investment and financing and shall be promoted.

5. **On short value chain, direct relations between producers and consumers**

- Enable direct linkage between farmers and consumers to enable farmers and rural women to manage and determine fair price for their produce as well as sensitise the urban consumers.

- Recognise and adequately support urban agriculture and the key role of women in local food security and nutrition. Enabling short value chains is critical as it serves as additional sources of income for the urban poor and builds resilience in times of crisis and pandemic.

- Optimise the use of publicly-owned vacant and underutilised lots, including food production using containers and rooftops in urban areas.
6. **On science, technology and innovation**

- Recognise the role of small farmers and herders in policies and programs on food security, nutrition, and sustainable ecological agriculture as the foundation of a sound and inclusive STI that promotes diverse sources of knowledge and people-led climate action. Technological innovations in laboratories and formal institutions must respond to the actual needs and conditions of farmers and should be culturally appropriate, gender responsive, economically feasible, and ecologically sustainable.

- Encourage and promote local innovations, indigenous knowledge systems and endogenous technologies, not reliant on technological options alone.

- Promote and adopt appropriate technologies for sustainable farming to make agriculture economically viable for poor and indigenous, dalits and CDWD communities and contribute to the mitigation of the climate catastrophe.

- The UN should undertake more in-depth assessment of new and emerging technologies including digital technology to prevent their adverse impacts on livelihoods, economy, culture, peoples’ rights, and climate.

7. **On conflict and wars**

- Address and solve the socio-economic root cause of conflicts, fragility, and violence, while protecting the right to food and nutrition of people living in conflict areas.

- Ensure strict compliance of International Humanitarian Law enforcing that provision of humanitarian aid and relief, including food, is unconditional, sufficient, and that it immediately reaches the affected population in need. Delink food, nutrition and medical aid from the short-term security or military objectives of the conflicting parties or donors. Ensure the alignment of aid intervention under national or local development plans or programs that respond to the specific needs of conflict-stricken communities.

- Hold the UN and intergovernmental bodies (e.g. ASEAN) accountable in strategically addressing conflicts in the region.

**SDG 13 - CLIMATE ACTION**

The Asia Pacific region is not on track to achieving SDG 13, in fact, moving in the wrong direction. Fossil fuel dependency, climate adaptation deficit, and increasing climate-related loss and damage remain persistent challenges. These intersect with pre-existing inequalities, further amplifying the disempowerment and marginalisation of communities of Indigenous Peoples, women and children, rural and urban poor, smallholder and landless farmers, workers, fisherfolk, LGBTQIA, people living with HIV/AIDS, people living in conflict and disaster, youth, elderly, migrants, persons with disabilities, Dalits, and peoples discriminated based on work and descent.
The increasing vulnerability of the region to the catastrophic impacts of the triple planetary crisis is the result of the continuing inaction of developed countries to reduce their emissions and provide new, additional, adequate, and predictable climate finance to developing countries based on the Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDRC) clause. Instead of fulfilling their historical obligations to pay their climate debt, developed countries, big corporations, and multilateral development banks are using the climate crisis to capture critical resources in the region, co-opt the energy transition agenda and entrench corporate control and power, peddle market-based false solutions, and shift the burden of climate action on the already vulnerable frontline communities and peoples. Moreover, the environmental, land, and rights defenders are subjected to repression, attacks, and human rights violations.

Civil society and peoples' movements in the region push for the following recommendations in line with the principles of climate and development justice, inside and outside official negotiations and spaces:

- To keep global temperatures from rising 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, global North countries and corporations must take the lead in the deep, rapid, and sustained GHG emissions reductions in line with their historical obligations and without resorting to offsets and other false solutions.

- There should be a moratorium on new oil and gas projects, establishing a definite timeline to phase them out, and clamping down on subsidies, tax breaks, and financial incentives for the fossil fuel industry. Emerging economies in the region must also meet their fair share but will require climate finance, means of implementation, and other international support mechanisms according to their respective circumstances to implement additional reductions.

- The shift towards renewable energy must involve communities by putting emphasis on decentralising energy systems. It should be publicly owned, wherein the people are allowed to exercise democratic control over energy systems based on their contexts, priorities, and development needs cognizant of resource allocation, overall environmental impact, and long-term economic sustainability.

- There must be equal focus on adaptation. The region needs to have better community-based inclusive disaster risk reduction frameworks to avert losses from weather events, quickly improve capacity, and implement early warning systems. Increased investment in adaptation would require domestic and international support through public financing. Moreover, mainstreaming adaptation into development planning entails the full engagement of all marginalised sectors and will complement country progress against the Climate Public Expenditure and Institutional Review (CPEIR).

- None of the region's climate ambitions are realisable without the provision of new, additional, adequate, and predictable climate finance by countries with stronger economies, more fiscal space, and greater historical responsibility for climate change. Developed countries should go beyond their existing commitments and significantly increase their financial contributions that come with ambitious and concrete timelines of delivery, not repackage existing finance flows and aid. It should be delivered in the form of grants as compensatory funding and not as loans or for-profit investments. This also includes building the capacity of stakeholders to monitor commitments of governments and hold them accountable.
Developed countries should provide immediate financial assistance to developing countries as reparations for the destruction caused by the climate crisis. There needs to be a mechanism in place for national governments to share accurate and transparent assessment of losses and damages caused by rains, floods, and climate-related impact with the public and provide immediate relief and appropriate compensation during disasters. Rebuilding of properties destroyed by climate-induced disasters should be borne by the governments. Additionally, governments should waive all loans taken by rural communities, especially small and landless farmers.

Direct support, including funding and resources, should be provided to CSOs to create awareness on the importance of climate-resilient health care services that are affordable, accessible and easily available to women and girls in all their diversities, including women with disabilities, especially those who are vulnerable to extreme weather events.

Rather than patronising false and market-based ‘solutions,’ governments should support rights-based and community-led climate responses that take into account communities’ struggles, experiences, and indigenous knowledge. These solutions include the promotion of agro-ecological farming systems and food sovereignty, community conservation of biodiverse ecosystems, and securing land and tenure rights for Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

Access to data disaggregated by sex, age, ethnicity, caste, disability, and other relevant characteristics is crucial for identifying gaps and informing equitable responses to the climate crisis. Measuring the number of deaths, missing persons and persons affected by disasters among persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups is key for a comprehensive disaggregated data.

To address risk and vulnerability, there must be a strong focus on inclusivity. Governments must recognise that gender equality and women’s empowerment and Indigenous Peoples’ and other vulnerable groups’ meaningful engagement across planning, implementation and monitoring processes are central to socio-economic and environmental sustainability. Policies to protect environmental, land and rights defenders should be in place. There must be support mechanisms for these individuals, such as legal protection against harassment, violence, and unjust legal proceedings. This includes fostering an environment conducive to open dialogue, where activists feel empowered to express their concerns without fear of reprisal or censorship.

Strengthen the role of education as a strategic resource that can be employed to proactively adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change from a human rights and climate justice perspective by mainstreaming and integrating education for sustainable development (ESD), climate change education (CCE), and education in emergencies (EiE) into the curricula and into formal and nonformal education, including adult learning and education (ALE) and lifelong learning opportunities.

Ensure the sustainable management of forests and the protection, restoration, conservation and sustainable use of important landscapes by recognising the vital role of Indigenous Peoples as stewards of the forests and biodiversity; and commit to protecting and implementing the rights of Indigenous Peoples under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and international human rights law.
In the rehabilitation and reconstruction phase following severe natural and climate change related disasters, people's participation in all their diversities at all levels of planning, development, implementation, and monitoring processes is critical.

- Adopt gender and vulnerability-sensitive approach in climate action by designing and implementing policy and programs that take into account all the diversities within genders and sexual orientation and custodians of natural resources e.g., Indigenous Peoples.

- Ensure that communities and CSOs participate meaningfully in the deliberations in the 4th International Conference on Small Island Developing States where a new decade of partnerships and solutions for a resilient and sustainable future in the SIDs will be agreed upon by governments.

SDG 16 - PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

The progress on SDG 16 remains bleak, evident from the rise in authoritarian regimes, persecution of dissent and marginalising governance. The UNESCAP Report 2024 revealed significant data gaps, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region, hindering our ability to accurately assess development justice. Despite efforts to enhance data availability, challenges persist in monitoring key indicators, particularly those related to violence, trafficking, access to justice, corruption, and the under-representation of marginalised groups in decision-making processes. The transformative 16+ conceptualisation, also factoring the vertical governance at regional and global levels, remains a far cry while horizontal governance at the national level is in peril.

As CSOs, we recognise our crucial role in addressing these challenges and driving progress towards the SDGs achievement. Through our advocacy, research, and grassroots initiatives, we actively work to bridge governance gaps, promote human rights, and advocate for inclusive policies. We understand the importance of strengthening data collection, promoting transparency, and amplifying marginalised voices to overcome existing hurdles.

In line with the recommendations outlined in the assessment, we call for:

- Inclusive development must ensure the integration of contextualised SDG targets into national development plans, establishment of a whole-of-a-society governance architecture, and increased partnership with civil society, especially marginalised groups.

- Repressive laws at the national level that target CSOs, activists, and people's organisations must be repealed.

- The supremacy of Access to Justice and the Rule of Law requires equitable allocation of increased budgets for independent judiciaries and legal aid services, implementation of robust anti-corruption frameworks, and reform of the legal systems to ensure non-discrimination for respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights.

- Protection of Vulnerable Groups and Human Rights requires the utilisation of bottom-up approaches to address root causes of violence and crime, enactment of comprehensive anti-discrimination laws, and strengthening mechanisms to combat human trafficking and gender-based violence.
• Enact and implement anti-discrimination laws in line with international human rights standards by keeping the provision of criminalising the ‘work and descent-based discrimination’ along with other discriminations based on identities to ensure their access to justice.

• Fostering Peace and Security requires the redress of root causes of conflict through comprehensive development strategies, investment in peaceful conflict resolution mechanisms, and mainstreaming women, youth, peace, and security in relevant agencies.

• Promoting Transparency and Accountability should involve implementation of open-government initiatives, strengthening whistleblower protection mechanisms, and ensuring transparent, accurate, and timely public information.

• Leveraging Technology for Good must ensure harmonisation of technology to improve access to justice and government services, combat online censorship, and promote digital literacy.

• Strengthening Regional Cooperation must be promoted to facilitate cross-border collaboration, development of regional mechanisms for accountability, and support for regional CSO networks to advocate for collective action.

• Addressing data gaps related to SDG 16 through innovative approaches, ensuring systematic quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis, and including CSOs in sustainable development follow-up and review processes.

• Strengthen supportive environments for civil society engagement, expanding civil society space, and establishing mechanisms for objective reporting and CSO accountability.

• And lastly, we also support the call for an immediate ceasefire guaranteed by the UN to ensure protection for the Palestinians in Gaza. We demand security council intervention to hold the perpetrators and colluders accountable for the war crimes and genocide in Gaza that have destroyed the people’s food systems and have used food, water and medicine as a weapon of war. We also demand for expeditious adjudication of the South African appeal in the International Court of Justice for a timely verdict on permanent ceasefire as well as strict sanctions on perpetrators for its blatant disregard of human rights and values.

In solidarity with our fellow CSOs, we pledge to continue our efforts to foster inclusive, just, and peaceful societies in the Asia-Pacific region. Together, we remain committed to realising the vision of SDG 16, ensuring that every individual, regardless of their background, can enjoy their fundamental rights and contribute to sustainable development.

Beyond the Goals

SRHR and Gender

Gender inequality, patriarchy, religious fundamentalism and increasing militarism are limiting the opportunities and capabilities of nearly half of the population in Asia and the Pacific - women and young people. The region is facing a polycrisis, with the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic exacerbating these pre-existing structural inequalities, at the forefront of the climate crisis, and
increases in conflict, which are intersecting with poverty, governance challenges, limited access to basic services and resources. The rising geopolitical tensions and increasing conflict across the region disproportionately impact women and marginalised communities. Several governments have undertaken undemocratic measures by closing civic space and undermining accountability processes, with increasing mobilizations of what can be broadly termed an ‘anti-gender movement’, all of which is negatively impacting the achievement of bodily autonomy for women, girls, LGBTIQ+, migrants and forcibly displaced persons, climate change affected young people, indigenous women, women living with HIV, women with disabilities, sex workers, women from Dalit and DWD communities, and other marginalised communities.

The systemic barriers faced by women, LGBTQIA+, Dalits and DWD, and marginalised communities in Asia Pacific perpetuate the cycle of poverty, including discrimination, stigma, and a lack of understanding in different social dimensions, which contribute to compromised mental and physical well-being. Hunger and malnutrition in all its forms have gender and age dimensions, and are closely linked to health outcomes, including SRHR. Added to this, the high cost of healthcare and out-of-pocket expenses especially impacts women, young people, women with disabilities and marginalised groups from accessing their right to health.

- Enact laws and policies that will enable universal access to SRHR and achieve bodily autonomy for all, and remove unnecessary legal and regulatory barriers including to abortion services. This also includes elimination of harmful practices such as forced sterilisation, ECFM, and female genital mutilation
- Ensure UHC incorporates quality comprehensive SRHR services, and ensure services are adolescent, youth-centric, and disability friendly and incorporate transgender health, including affirming primary care, mental health, and gender-affirming services
- Address all forms of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) in conflict, including ECFM, gender-related and ‘honour’ killings, dowry murder, and sex trafficking, as well as attacks on women in public life, lack of access to SRHR services and education. Similarly, governments should ratify ILO Convention 190 to eliminate harassment and GBV in work settings.
- The Pact of the Future must commit to the creation and protection of a safe and enabling environment for civil society, and ensure full participation and respect for human rights in Asia and the Pacific, including reaffirming the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action. Invest in funding for feminist and intersectional CSOs. The leadership, meaningful participation and voices of women and young people in all their diversities must be promoted in decision-making including planning, implementation and monitoring processes
- Implement existing policies and strategies that include integrating climate change adaptation and mitigation measures and establish special SRH services for women and youth in all their diversities in particular in severely impacted areas such as coastal, island and mountain regions.
- Recognise, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work burden on women by providing support systems and bringing in equal pay policy, skills upgrading for women and implement policies to address gender-based discrimination.
Militarism, Conflict and Wars

The propensity of states to pursue warfare and militarism has drastically increased throughout the decades. It has evolved into a complex and powerful system that makes use of several strategies and modalities that cater to the interests of superpowers led by the US, China, Russia, their respective allies and transnational corporations. Military expenditure recently crossed the 2 trillion dollars mark while development financing barely mobilised 10% of that lacklustering around 200 billion dollars.

The renewed interest of world superpowers in the Asia Pacific Region amid their intensifying multipolar struggle has exposed the most vulnerable nations to the violation of people’s rights and national sovereignty. Economies have turned to war economies leading to the abandonment of basic social services, breaches of human rights, and peace being reduced to mere lip service.

The SDGs, to some extent, acknowledge the milieu and the problems that beset the world. However, it refuses to hold the world superpowers especially US, China, Russia and their allies accountable for endangering the people and the entire planet. None of the 12 targets in SDG 16 indicate a strong commitment to end militarism, war, conflict, curb military industrial complex, or end the use of military forces and machinery for the unabated plunder of the world’s resources. Agenda 2030 and the SDGs fail to recognise that government-imposed militarist policies continue to persist and often lead to human rights violations, especially of women, indigenous peoples and other marginalised sectors of society.

Halfway through the implementation of the Agenda 2030 timeline, it is crucial to build various forms of alliances across issues, sectors, at different levels globally towards the struggle for urgent basic social reforms and to put an end to all unjust wars perpetuated by the most powerful nations in the world. It is imperative for people to pursue a just and transformative framework that promotes people’s rights, dignity, well-being, solidarity equality, and fosters global peace and security based on social justice.

- Re-channel military expenditure to social spending and financing for achieving peace and social justice.
- End foreign occupation; and recognise, respect, and uphold the right to self determination and people’s right to development, especially of communities under attack.
- Abrogate all lopsided military agreements that allow military superpowers to use vulnerable nations as military strongholds.
- Counter the influence of anti-rights and anti-gender actors who incite to violence and contribute to the radicalization of populations.
- Ratify the Rome statute and hold war criminals accountable through the ICC and ICJ.
- Development of comprehensive strategies for the physical and psychological recovery of survivors of militarism and putting in place Transitional Justice mechanisms for communities ravaged by militarism.
- Provide reparations and protection, for countries and communities ravaged by militarism.
- Centering the issue of sustainable development and all proposed solutions on rights of the communities most impacted by militarism.
● Uphold people's right to stay and right to return; and the principle of non-refoulement.
● Reforms in the Security Council to democratise its mandate for lasting peace in favour of the smallest countries as opposed to legitimising P5 and their allies' wars.
● Push for the proactive role of the international institutions and the entire international community on issues concerning militarism, conflict, war.

Corporate Capture

The development agenda has been subsumed under a neoliberal model that hinges on the unrestrained exploitation of the global South, replicating colonial relations and patterns, to cement corporate capture enabled by hegemonic trade regimes, restrictive conditionalities and invasive arbitration mechanisms like ISDS eventually eroding the state policy space.

These have led to the widening of inequalities, violation of people's rights, and worsening of persisting development challenges. In Asia-Pacific, 3.9% of the population or 155.2 million people are living in extreme poverty. While the rise in poverty is attributed to the “cost-of-living crisis” due to inflation, it has also been caused by “greedflation” or the unrestrained accumulation of profits by global North corporations. Companies in the largest economies, especially in the energy and food sector, increased their profit by 30% in the past three years. In 2022, the largest companies ranked in USD 41 trillion in revenue. Despite the negative impact of IFIs and corporate entities on the people and the planet, the UN continues to promote the mobilisation of private financing for development as in case of SDG Stimulus to facilitate progress towards the 2030 Agenda, with a prominent role being given to IFIs and banks, further cementing corporate capture of multilateralism.

We reject such naivety of thought and action and demand:

For governments

● Governments must fulfil the rights of people to quality public social services such as health, education, drinking water, irrigation and other infrastructure rather than relinquishing to the private sector.
● States should fulfil their responsibility to provide education and health as public goods and ensure free, inclusive, equitable, and quality services.
● Strengthen the public education system for equitable and quality education for all; prevent the privatisation of digital learning platforms and efficiently regulate private education.
● Governments must monitor the transparency and accountability of the private sector’s actions and projects.
● Adopt policies to combat the corporate capture of development, ensuring that transnational corporations and IFIs cannot capture public policy spaces.
● Address the digital divide, including the digital gender divide, by providing democratically-owned digital infrastructure to ensure access and connectivity. Invest public finances towards building a publicly-owned digital infrastructure system that can facilitate inclusion and catalyse provision of services.
Policy emphasis on digitalisation and technological advancements must ensure a governance mechanism in place, and a thorough review of the potential adverse effects on livelihoods, the economy, environment, society, culture, and civil and political rights of the people.

For the United Nations

- The UN technology facilitation mechanism enshrined in the 2030 Agenda needs to be strengthened to provide policy guidance in participatory assessment of actual and potential impacts of new technologies including digital technologies introduced and developed by big transnational corporations.

- Corporations that have direct and irreconcilable conflict of interest with the 2030 Agenda must not be allowed to interfere with public policy making space at the international, regional, national or sub-national level.

For international financial institutions (IFIs)

- Permanently cancel debts and end conditionalities that promote trade liberalisation and privatisation of services further impoverishing developing countries.

- Cease the corporate capture of development that discards the democratic rights of the marginalised and vulnerable, and uphold rights-based and environmental standards to ensure a transformative, people-centred sustainable development.

- Foster effective development cooperation that promotes self-sustaining economies as well as the growth of local industries, social and community enterprises, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

For corporations

- Private sector entities must comply with international standards and regulations regarding labour, gender, the environment, and other human rights issues. Corporations should respect core labour standards of the International Labour Organisation, adopt UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, among others.

- Uphold transparency and accountability over business activities on social, labour and environmental standards.

- Provide grievance redress mechanisms to employees to address issues and concerns regarding rights violations, environmental destruction, and safety risks, to ensure pathways to provide remedy.

- The principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) for all the projects must be implemented, and corporations must be made accountable to the farmers, local and indigenous communities.
Financing and Means of Implementation

Means of Implementation (MOI) continue to be Missing In Action (MIA) even having crossed the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda, painting a bizarre halfway there, yet, nowhere near picture. The rocketing debt distress levels, in the absence of financing for development, are compounded by exploitative trade regimes enabling flow of wealth and resources from the already enfeebled global south countries in an uphill battle against COVID 19 recovery and the SDGs.

The promises enshrined in the zero draft of the PotF concerning reforms in the financial architecture, macroeconomic governance and futuristic transformations would only translate if their essence is not diluted already in the much-contested negotiation process ahead.

We propose the following recommendations for holistic reforms:

1. **Enact progressive tax policies to increase fiscal space for low and middle-income countries**
   - Enact and implement progressive and transparent tax policies including elimination of tax havens.
   - End over-reliance on “indirect” taxes like sales tax and VAT, which tend to take a bigger bite out of the income of poorer people.
   - Challenge regressive tax policies and increase rates of “direct” taxes on the incomes of high earners and the most profitable businesses.
   - Lift the constraints on the ability of governments to manage their own common wealth and end the Washington Consensus.
   - Demand the UN Tax Convention to create an inclusive and binding global tax body capable of ensuring that corporations are taxed to curb illicit financial flows such as increasing minimum corporate tax to 30%.

2. **Cancel sovereign debt payments and provide financing that does not create debt for developing countries**
   - Permanently cancel all principal, interest and charges on sovereign external debt and it should not accrue into the future.
   - Trade and international financial agreements need to be reviewed in consultation with the Civil Society.
   - The establishment of a fair, timely, comprehensive and transparent multilateral framework for debt crisis resolution that includes private debtors under the UN must be enacted, and increase liquidity available to the poor through rechanneling SDRs.

3. **Undertake civil society led human rights assessment of trade and financial stimulus packages**
• Establish independent mechanisms to systematically undertake civil society led human rights assessments of loan conditions or macroeconomic policy advice of IFIs.

• Increase the influence of women over international financial institutions through negotiation and raise awareness on women's human rights so they could use them in negotiating trade agreements with a conscious concern.

• Promote, develop and strengthen the capacity and competence of women, disability, migrants and others in financing.

4. **Suspend patents and lift trade rules that impede access to products and technologies**

• Suspend trade rules that impose corporations' interests through ISDS, which undermine the regulatory capacity of the states to protect public interest as well as prohibit nationalisation or expropriation of public services or of private facilities for production.

• Rather than pushing the poorest countries for economic self-reliance, AAAA and the Financing for Development processes should help them address macro-economic pressures embodied in hegemonic trade agreements involving conditions of market deregulation, massive privatisations, asset stealth, and corporate capture of resources and governance; debt distress pushing poor countries into generational debt traps; and neoliberal instruments like ISDS, having crossed a 1000 mark, among others, designed to plunder nations while restricting their state policy space.

• Trade, recognised as a critical means of implementation and engine for development, needs to be democratised through structural reforms prioritising people and the planet over profits, parallelly upholding the social and environmental dimensions of the Agenda 2030.

• Regional reform entities should be established for SDGs Compatibility Impact Assessment of tax policies, trade and investment agreements and new technologies. Robust accountability mechanisms must ensure corporate compliance with human rights frameworks, including ILO supervisory mechanisms and UN protocols, UN guiding principles on Business and Human Rights, and the OECD guidelines for MNCs.

5. **On ODA and Development Finance**

• Meet and exceed the 0.7% GNI target without further delay and separate from in-donor refugee costs, debt cancellation and principal purpose projects for climate finance.

• Meet the 0.2% GNI commitment to LDCs and other countries in chronic conflict and state of fragility.
• Establish a human rights-based framework and anchor all forms of development finance on the four development effectiveness principles.

• Increase country programmable aid, grants, demand-led technical cooperation, and support for domestic resource mobilisation rather than loans, informal and formal tied aid.

• Deploy ODA only in projects directly related to building capacities of the developing country's private sector, i.e. social and community enterprises that support the creation of decent jobs and livelihoods.

• Stop shaping humanitarian and development strategies according to their own foreign policy, geopolitical and security interests

• Respond to the climate emergency without diminishing ODA or provision of loans for these purposes

• The UN must assume its responsibility to steer the ambitious UN/FfD-centred process to assess the crisis and agree on responses leading to an International Economic Reconstruction and Systemic Reform Summit under the aegis of the United Nations.

6. On Technology

• Corporate control of data, as the raw material for the 4th industrial revolution, and concentration of technological innovation in the hands of a few technology giants, must not be allowed to compromise privacy, hinder technology transfer, impede the capacity of developing countries to develop their technological capacity, marginalise human workforce, or undermine subordinate local knowledge systems.

• Policy emphasis on digitalisation and technological advancements must ensure a thorough review of the potential adverse effects on livelihoods, the economy, environment, society, culture, and civil and political rights of the people.

• The UN technology facilitation mechanism enshrined in the 2030 Agenda needs to be strengthened to provide policy guidance in participatory assessment of actual and potential impacts of new technologies including digital technologies.

• The UN should capacitate global, regional and national institutions to have thorough understanding of the implications of the 4th industrial revolution on peoples, society, economy, rights and the environment, and enable efforts on democratic governance of the technology sector to ensure equity, transparency, accountability, fairness and inclusiveness.

• Support research and access to scientific and technical knowledge on disability inclusion and facilitate access to and sharing of accessible assistive technologies.
7. On Partnerships

- Waive TRIPS as a minimum, and even abrogate it, together with other neoliberal trade and investment rules of the WTO.

- End all corporate-driven public private partnerships, and demand transparency and accountability from governments on impacts of these projects, and ensure democratic decision-making inclusive of the right holders.

- Reverse the shrinking and closing space for CSOs as development actors and rights-holders.

- Promote the use of CSO or citizen-led data collection and monitoring, as a way to address the lack of transparency and accountability of other development actors.

- Closely consult and actively involve persons with disabilities and their organisations in all efforts, including by establishing formal consultative mechanisms in decision-making processes related to international cooperation.

- Strengthen safe, meaningful, equitable and inclusive participation of children and young people in decision-making processes and implementations contributing to the SDGs.

**Right Holders’ Engagement and the Voluntary National Review Process**

The 2030 Agenda was compromised due to lack of adequate accountability of member states when it was diluted into the Follow Up and Review Process with ‘Voluntary’ National Review (VNR). The critique of HLPF on the other hand, following the goals under review model, is well placed with the member states choosing to report on certain goals leaving quite a few perspectives behind in the absence of a post-review follow up cycle. Nonetheless, VNR is an important gauge to track the progress of the SDGs in the country, despite it being a government driven process and is expected to be open, transparent, inclusive and participatory. This year 7 countries—Laos, Nepal, Micronesia, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu are reporting at the HLPF 2024 through the VNR process.

Despite member states from the Asia Pacific region practising the VNRs since 2016, we observe some issues and challenges in terms of procedures, reporting and post VNRs actions. These include data gaps with almost all countries failing to present disaggregated data, lack of political will to complement through qualitative data, failure to establish inclusive monitoring and accountability mechanisms, and inadequate institutional capacity vis a vis limited funding with the government agencies to conduct the VLRs, particularly in low-income countries, ultimately affecting efficient VNR reporting prospects. Inconsistency of reporting is another issue preventing an accurate reflection of people’s problems and sufferings such as inequalities, discriminations, corruption, abuse of authorities, attacks on civic freedoms, land grabbing impacting indigenous peoples and small farmers, environmental crimes, and financial crimes etc. are not reported. Governments tend to report only progress on socio-economic targets focusing on the low hanging fruits leaving issues concerning equity, justice and transformation behind in the VNR reports. Most of the countries are unable to formulate Follow-up Action Plans to implement the recommendation of the VNR reports and the failure of HLPF to require so further dampens the prospects for improvement.
Inclusion and meaningful participation of the stakeholders has always been an issue in the VNR process leaving critical voices behind. It fails to galvanise multi-stakeholder partnership, especially civil society. Whereas the corporate gradually continues to capture policy spaces. The Asia Pacific region is witnessing an alarming shrinking civic space situation as the CIVICUS report recently exposed that civic space has shrunken in 58% countries.

We have observed that some local governments are doing voluntary local reviews (VLRs) to assess their SDGs’ progress, but they are yet to be recognised by the central governments and VLRs are not reflected in the national reports. Local governments are also advocating for their meaningful participation in the VNR processes. CSOs and the coalitions are also preparing their own reports by using tools such as people’s scorecard, Voluntary Peoples Review (Nepal, Sri Lanka) and other relevant tools such as civil society spotlight reports but unfortunately these reports neither have any space in the national mechanism nor in the UN-System.

- We call on all the member states of our regions to give priority to equity and justice in their reports. We urge to move the VNRs beyond the GDP Growth narrative prioritising systemic barriers and inequalities within and between countries.

- Member states must create a rightful civic space and policy environment for CSOs meaningful engagement and embrace the principle of data democracy by ensuring greater transparency and access to data used in VNR.

- Member states must develop their statistical capacity at national, sub-national and local level, to be able to present disaggregated data by gender, caste/ethnicity, location, ability and income status and encourage the integration of local experiences and civil society and citizen-generated data, for complementarity through qualitative insights.

- We call on member states to ensure localisation of the SDGs to ensure systemic and meaningful integration encouraging the VLRs and build local governments institutional capacity.

- VNRs process and their reports must ensure meaningful inclusion of the marginalised peoples, strengthening the participation of poor, women, workers, farmers, Indigenous peoples, LGBTQ+ community and other marginalised peoples across all phases of the VNRs to ensure that it is not merely tokenistic.

- We urge member states to ensure accountability and action after each VNR process and go beyond reporting progress, translate VNR recommendations into concrete action plans and improve accountability of duty bearers. This should be combined with policy coherence and integrated approaches in national plans, policies, budgets and institutional structures aligned with local plans and priorities.

- Member states must ensure rights-holder participation in the VNR process and they must build an integrated monitoring system tying local data to national progress tracking (Vertical integration). They must overcome the challenges related to collecting and compiling data from ministries.

- We call on member states to interlink human rights review progress and VNRs integrating the civil society major groups and stakeholders insights covering the review of all the goals as suggested by UN VNR Guideline.
They must discourage hiring consultants in VNR process, data collection, report writing etc. and instead integrate legitimate representation from the ground, especially civil society. Besides, the roles of parliaments, NHRI, Supreme Audit Office and other oversight bodies should be encouraged in the VNR processes.

- Governments must consider gender equality, governance and MOI, as cross-cutting emphasises while reporting specific goals to ensure holistic insights into the country's progress on sustainable development.

**Challenges in Multilateralism**

The world today is at an inflection point in the global governance, sustainability and wellbeing of humanity. Poverty reduction has stalled, hunger and inequality is rising. Violent conflicts and wars refuse to abate and pose serious questions to international peace and security. Recovery from the pandemic is incomplete and uneven. Trade and economic cooperation have hijacked the aspirations of shared prosperity. Climate crisis, biodiversity loss and pollution seem irreversible and the SDGs seem unachievable. Countries after countries are falling deep into a debt crisis and are confronted with soaring cost of living. Multilateralism, a hallmark of the post-cold war “liberal era” seems to be folding. The normative foundations of a global international society seem to be cracking. Many states are retreating into independent, hyper nationalist and isolationist strategies away from multilateralism. The United Nations, an institution guaranteeing multilateral norms itself, is under scrutiny and criticism as it grapples with the increasing abyss between the north and the global south while increasingly being corporatocratic. Multilateralism faces never before challenges in governance, legitimacy and efficiency.

Beyond the halfway mark, the SDGs have only achieved 17% overall progress. One of the fundamental flaws with the framework, despite named sustainable development goals, is its over dependence on economic indicators. The financing gap for the developing countries (USD 4.2 B) outstrips the much talked about SDG Stimulus of the Secretary General (USD 500 B).

Perhaps the failure of multilateralism is nowhere more apparent than in climate, nature and biodiversity. We are still at the precipice of getting close to 3 degrees celsius rise in temperature by the end of the century. About 3 billion people in developing countries live in energy poverty, 38% of the world's population has access to less than 10 gigajoules of energy per capita, while the energy consumption remains 130 gigajoules per capita in the global North (OECD and the rest of Europe). Just energy transition is impossible unless there is rapid emission reduction in the global north to allow appropriate development space to the global south. Therefore, high energy consumption in wealthy areas in creating variety of injustice to the people in the global south including (i) depriving them from energy access, (ii) using their land for mitigation with attendant dangers of loss of land and sovereignty, competing for land required for food production, biodiversity loss and monoculture, adverse impact on water, forests and food systems. Despite these contradictions, the west is going lock stock and barrel on the nature based solutions, which is based on inappropriate scientific evidence, inadequate definition and extremely deficient standards (social and environmental) and guidelines.

After almost 30 years of its existence, global trade led by the WTO has further impoverished the poor by liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation. Perhaps the failure to prevent wars and ensure peace is the biggest, putting serious questions on the existence and functioning of the UN
and multilateral “rules-based order.” In the Asia-Pacific region, escalated tensions between US and China over Taiwan, QUAD and AUKUS in the Indo Pacific, and many nuclear powers in the region bring prospects of a real and deadly war.

Global inequality has widened much further in the past couple of years. The World Bank and the IMF both have worked to keep developing countries poor and indebted. Their structural programme coupled with neoliberalism, free trade and globalisation have brought doom to millions by tightening fiscal space, lowering tariffs, privatisation of resources and public services.

Recovery in the Asia-Pacific has been weak and the economic prospects for the next few years are timid (except for a handful of countries). Inflation and the cost of living crisis are hurting, financing costs are exacerbating, and public debt is excruciating. Asia Pacific countries have accumulated 35.3% of the total global public debt. The post-pandemic government debt to GDP ratio increased to an 18-year high of 49.5% (2021) from 40.6% in 2019 (ADB, 2023) and is likely to remain so through 2027 (ESCAP, Economic and Social Survey, 2023). There are 19 countries at high risk of debt distress (WB-IMF debt sustainability framework, 2023). However, the debt distress fails to convey the actual reality as it is defined from a creditor’s perspective and only captures the likelihood of sovereign default in debt service devoid of its social, economic, and political ramifications in the debtor’s backyard. With half of the debt owed to private creditors, any meaningful effort toward debt resolution looks improbable in the near future.

In this regard, we would like to raise these recommendations:

- Global governance reforms (making the UN representative of current global realities of smaller countries starting with structural reforms in the Security Council, Human Rights Council, ECOSOC, Peacebuilding Commission etc.

- Global economic architecture reforms including change in the basic vote and quota vote systems (long overdue in the WB and the IMF), framework convention on international tax cooperation, short term liquidity and long term stability, debt cancellation and increased concessional finance, increased lending capacity of the IFIs and its alignment with PA & SDGs, plugging of IFFs and ending devaluation of embedded resources, labour and energy in product and services from global South.

- Eliminating weapons of mass destruction such as chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear weapons and significantly reducing military spending and investment in military industrial complex.

- Reducing unbridled corporate footprint in social and economic domains and the UN by ensuring payment of dues from the MS to the UN in full.

- Ensuring environmental and climate justice based on principles of “reparation” and CBDR-RC rather than charity and solidarity.

- Addressing shrinking civic space including through setting up a regional (Asia Pacific) Human Rights Court.

- Strengthening regional/sub regional institutions to develop national oversight, planning, implementation, review and reporting capacities.
Towards the Summit of the Future

There is manifestly an urgent need to rescue the SDGs and a deep desire for change in the global governance. This makes SOTF a relevant initiative. However, until now it has been an abstract notion and defied imagination of the member states as well as CSOs. There is a varied understanding of the implications the SOTF will have on global governance and therefore, it’s unclear whether the SOTF has a political buy-in necessary to make changes. Many member states have alleged that the SOTF process takes away the focus from the Agenda 2030, diverts scarce resources and overwhelms the limited capacity of the small countries to engage in negotiations on its disparate tracks. It is also alleged that direction and guidance should be given by the member states through negotiations rather than coming from the Secretary General’s office.

The SOTF addresses a wide variety of issues ranging from future generations and youth participation, international peace and security, emergency platform, global digital compact, measuring progress beyond GDP, outer space, and reforms of global economic architecture and reforms in the UN. It looks extremely ambitious to address all of these in one shot. Many of these changes, though desirable, are outside the mandate of the UN. The UNSG also claims that the SOTF will not require changes in the UN charter. One fails to understand how these systemic changes can be brought in without making fundamental changes in the UN system.

APRCEM, though keen to support the UN as it believes that UN should be the only and legitimate institution of global governance based on the sovereignty equality of the member states, have several concerns including the following;

- **Lacks ambition and fails to address the systemic barriers:** While some policy papers of the SOTF look ambitious (end nuclear weapons, reforms in global financial and trade architecture etc. making UN more representative of the realities of today) it just falls short of addressing the systemic barriers. The financial reforms do not talk about a binding convention (framework convention on global tax cooperation) nor does it talk about debt cancellation, effectively engaging private debtors and their regulations. The new agenda for peace or emergency platform does not envision wars and conflicts as a potential threat to peace. They don’t address rising military expenditure, which is essential to ensure peace and attain sustainable development. Global digital compact does not talk about ending concentration of power in a handful of big tech companies, enhancing competition or democratising access to curb the digital divide. They do not have a clear vision on how to reduce inequalities among the countries and address unpaid care work. They unfortunately also do not address the root cause of multiple crises. UN reforms are most ambiguous and fall shy of demanding urgent reforms in power imbalances at the UN and overdue changes in the structure of the Security Council, Human Rights Council and peace building, among others.

- **Corporate Capture of the UN:** UN’s lack of financial stability is forcing it closer to big business, corporations and philanthropies, driven by the logic of profits and greed ahead of humanitarian or planetary concerns. Increasing the role of the corporations is fraught with serious consequences in the global governance and UN’s independence as a communion of our democracies.

- **Inclusive and Networked Multilateralism:** Perhaps one feature across all tracks of the SOTF is the inclusive and networked multilateralism (Stakeholderism). It is premised on the fact that the “global governance is too critical to be left alone to the states” where the UN
advocates increased role for the business and corporations, along with other stakeholders like academia, youth and the CSOs. Though apparently benign on face value, it has serious implications given the massive corporate influence over governance. While the governments are accountable to their citizens, the corporations are only accountable to its shareholders for whom the foremost priority is to increase the profits of the corporations, as evidenced by the patterns of war and even the pandemic. This is also close to the “Great Reset” or “Global Redesign” pushed by the World Economic Forum to recognise big business and corporations as important and equal stakeholders in global governance. The UN has already embraced it as manifested in the Food Systems Summit organised by corporations and agribusiness companies having a central role. Many tracks of the SOTF, especially the global digital compact witnessing corporate leadership are extremely problematic.

- Summits as a “solution”: Summits have an effect of grandstanding but have poor record in enhancing political leadership and ensuring international collective action. SDG Summits and Climate Summits have failed to create urgent changes in collective responses of the member states. Many believe that a negotiations-based approach, though time consuming, will have more concrete and long lasting impacts than Summits which create only lavish spectacle but are poor in delivery and leave critical perspectives behind.

- Implications for CSOs participation in the UN processes: The Our Common Agenda, which is the fundamental basis for the SOTF, though ostensibly vouches for increased participation of the youth and future generations and the CSOs, proposes that the UN Foundation and UN Office of Partnership take centre stage in ensuring CSO participation. Both of these organisations were created with the motive of attracting increased private investment in the UN and do not have expertise or intention of engaging the CSOs. This arrangement will result in complete oversight of asymmetries in power relations among states, corporations and CSOs. The resources as well as avenues for CSO participation have been limited and democratic spaces for safe engagement for the people are shrinking. The New York-centred focus of the SOTF also needs to be decentralised so that SOTF can benefit from a variety of thoughts and perspectives, especially from the global South.

Development Justice - Our Paradigm

The Asia Pacific Regional CSOs Engagement Mechanism (APRCEM) and the Peoples’ Forum calls for the need for Development Justice. Such a development shift is framed by five foundational shifts, across redistributive justice, economic justice, social and gender justice, environmental justice, and focus on accountability to people. The crux of this development justice paradigm lies in the protection of the planet and advancing rights of people in all their diversities. This paradigm calls out “neoliberal capitalism,” which reduces public spending on health, education, social protection and a decent standard of living, privatising public assets and services, promoting cheap and regulated labour, and unequal trade agreements to the detriment of the third world exploiting its weak jurisdictional and regulatory capacities. Neoliberal capitalism has channelled wealth to the rich, and from developing countries to developed countries, contributing to the warming of the planet and impeding the rights of people.

- Redistribute resources, wealth, power and opportunities equitably across countries and among people in the countries, dismantle existing systems that channel resources and
wealth from developing countries to the developed countries, and from people to corporations.

- Enable economic justice that ensures dignified lives for all, with social protection floors in place, and economies enabling dignified lives, and decent wages for all, and recognise unpaid care work and democratise access to resources. We call for a complete stop to the exploitation of people and the planet, and make the economies work for people, and their well being.

- Ensure meaningful engagement of people in all their diversities, and the elimination of all forms of discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion of people on the basis of gender, ethnicity, caste, sexual orientation, and gender identity. We call for structural and systemic reforms that will eliminate institutionalised patriarchy across state and societal institutions and deliver on gender and social justice.

- The historical responsibilities of countries, and elites within those countries, who have advanced extractive patterns of production and consumption leading to violations of human rights and planetary considerations. We call for those responsible to account and pay reparations for those who suffer the most including farmers, indigenous people, and marginalised groups parallel with immediate stop and accountability of repression against environmental defenders.

- Democratic and just governance is crucial to enable people to make informed decisions over their lives, communities and futures. Shifting power to the people and informed decision-making and holding governments accountable is crucial for the survival and sustainability of democracies.

We demand Development Justice as the framework of the future for people and the planet and future generations.

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