International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW)
UN Asia Pacific United Nations Representatives

Contribution to the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development 2024
https://www.unescap.org/events/apfsd11

International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW)

Date submitted:

Submitted by: Dr. Sebastian Cordoba - IFSW Asia Pacific United Nations Regional Commissioner

Agenda item(s): Agenda item 2: Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: The effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions in Asia and the Pacific.

Organization profile

The IFSW is a non-governmental organization that has been granted Special Consultative Status by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). As the global professional body for social work the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) acts as an inclusive and democratic facilitator of global standards, policies and along with the International Association of Schools of Social Work the profession’s ethical principles. Each of the Federation’s 150 country members both contribute to the formulation of these standards and are also bound by them, resulting in globally shared values, and standards that bind the profession together. Consequently, today there are over 3 million social work practitioners that share the values of human rights, self-determination and social justice.

The IFSW’s United Nations Commission supports IFSW representatives and IFSW members to act as facilitators and bridging the gaps between community’s aspirations and UN agendas. In 2019, the IFSW established a regional commissioner and representatives for the Asia Pacific to work with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in relation to regional and global issues in order to strengthen the partnership between IFSW and ESCAP.

Please find more detailed information on the IFSW website.

https://www.ifsw.org/

I. Introduction

We welcome the opportunity to make a submission to the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development 2024. We commend ESCAP for recognizing the need for urgent action and
strategies to achieve and realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

As social workers, we are committed to working with the United Nations to ensure that every individual, group and community is provided human rights protections, a sustainable world and the support to meet their full potential.

II. Call for considerations

SDGs and climate action

We are beyond the halfway point of the SDGs and as the Summary of the Asia and the Pacific Sustainable Development Goals progress report 2024 highlights, we are not on track to meet the targets. Several global crises have further derailed the region’s efforts but they laid bare deep flaws within existing systems and policies that entrench inequality and injustice. We need urgent, accountable and collaborative action from Member States if we want to achieve the SDGs as they continue to be the biggest barrier towards meaningful action.

Despite its potential, the SDGs have proved difficult to implement despite support from all members of the UN. In too many cases the Member States have lacked the political will or struggled in their responsibilities to take action. As we continue to see across the region, the COVID-19 crisis has further exacerbated the situation with Member States focusing on their national interests over global solidarity. Without meaningful combined action from Member States, we will fail to achieve the Goals and this will have devastating consequences for current and future generations. The negative impact on people and communities with whom we work will be deeply damaging, further entrenching poverty and inequality. Additionally, it will perpetuate the unfair paradox that those who often suffer the most from global social, climate and economic policy failures, are the ones who usually contribute the least, as we see with climate change and carbon emissions.

Social workers understand that to achieve the SDGs we need a combination of a bottom-up approach, where people are part of the process and must have a much greater say, along with the UN SDGs more top-down agenda.

The IFSW knows that the social work profession can and shall be a strong and recognised partner, however, a comprehensive approach must begin with structural changes that recognises and protects the democratic right of individuals, groups and communities in the
region to be active partners in the process.

There is an urgent need to advance progress on environment and development challenges in the region. Central to this is focusing on the role of civil society, including social workers, in enhancing cooperation, supporting strengthened public collective action and providing a platform for listening to people’s voices. Meaningful contributions of civil society movements are pivotal if we are to address these existential challenges.

The People’s Charter for an Eco-Social World is a clear example of this.

The People’s Charter comes from the People’s Global Summit, ‘Co-Building a New Eco-Social World: Leaving No One Behind’, held online on 29 June – 2 July 2022. The People's Global Summit was initiated by 26 diverse global organisations representing hundreds of millions of people. Representing different faiths, philosophies, rights movements, workforces, generations, traditions and cultures. The Summit gathered with people from across the world, bridging movements for justice, to create new ways to work together for sustainability and quality of life for all.

The People’s Charter for an Eco-Social World was a result of this event proposes a new way forward with solutions to our joint challenges, so all people can live with confidence, security, and peace in a sustainable world and this can only be achieved through co-developing reciprocity and joint ownership of positive change, co-building peace, co-living with nature, co-creating social justice and co-realising equality.

We encourage member countries to read the Charter and work with civil society to achieve these aims. [https://newecosocialworld.com/the-peoples-charter-for-an-eco-social-world/](https://newecosocialworld.com/the-peoples-charter-for-an-eco-social-world/)

**Disability**

The 2023 Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report highlighted the strides made towards the 17 Goals despite challenges in championing sustainability. However, progress needs to catch up to expectations at the midpoint, primarily due to data gaps.

In the realm of Goal 1 concerning social protection, significant strides have been taken to enhance the provision of disability cash benefits to individuals grappling with severe disabilities. This initiative aims to alleviate financial burdens and provide a safety net for those facing significant challenges due to their disabilities.

Commendable progress has been achieved regarding Goal 16, which emphasizes the representation of marginalized groups such as women, youth, and persons with disabilities in key parliamentary and institutional roles. The increased presence of these groups in
decision-making positions fosters inclusivity and ensures diverse perspectives are considered in policy formulation and implementation.

Despite these advancements, individuals with disabilities continue to confront marginalization within the broader development context. Their unique needs and concerns are often overlooked, hindering their full social integration. While disability intersects with various social and economic factors, the sustainable development goals have not sufficiently prioritized addressing the complex challenges faced by this demographic.

It is imperative to recognize the multifaceted nature of disability issues and strive to amplify the voices of those affected. By incorporating a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to disability rights within the sustainable development framework, we can work towards building a more equitable and supportive society for all individuals, irrespective of their abilities.

Therefore, the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) advocates for affirmative action to integrate disability considerations into all development agendas. This entails ensuring inclusive education by creating accessible learning environments and necessary support for individuals with disabilities, fostering inclusive economic growth, and facilitating their full and productive participation in the workforce. Furthermore, it involves promoting the economic and political inclusion of persons with disabilities, constructing accessible urban spaces, ensuring accessible and sustainable transportation systems, and underscoring the significance of collecting data, particularly on disaggregated disability-related data.

**Refugees and Conflict**

Looking at the Asia-Pacific region with more than 10 million refugees, stateless and forcibly displaced people, we see unresolved conflicts rooted in extremism and injustice. During the past few years, the number of forcibly displaced people increased, demanding more humanitarian aid.

Social workers, who are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and values to work with communities, families, and individuals, have been an essential part of every humanitarian response. This is important to acknowledge that humanitarian responses, empowerment and development programs are incomplete without the necessary political actions to keep peace, prevent and resolve conflicts.
Rural development and social work

The 2023 Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR), finds that at this critical juncture, midway to 2030, incremental and fragmented change is insufficient to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the remaining seven years. Implementation of the 2030 Agenda requires the active engagement and participation of rural communities. As the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr Ban Ki – Moon noted in the Millennium Development Goals Report 2015, “disparities between rural and urban areas remain pronounced” and gaps persist in different sectors. In rural areas, a lack of access to modern energy services negatively affects productivity, educational attainment, and even health and ultimately exacerbates the poverty trap. The rural population does not have access to improved drinking water sources, sanitation facilities, and basic infrastructure.

The profession of social work has a historical engagement in rural community development. Social workers can play an important role in promoting sustainable agriculture and rural development (SARD). Rural Community development with a human rights approach, social workers can focus on strengthening communities from the bottom up, empowering communities to build on their own coping strategies and advocate for sustainable rural development policies.

Through engagement in community-based resource management, social workers can strengthen the resilience of communities and contribute to preserving and enhancing local ecosystems. For rural communities, building resilience assumes building social capital, responding to the mental health needs of farming and rural communities, adapting sustainable agricultural practices and promoting social sustainability that encompasses ecological and economic dimensions.

Social work's understanding of social capital and its demonstrated awareness of social implications makes it best suited to help environmental change adaptations. Social workers in rural development can potentially engage themselves in increasing food production in a sustainable way and enhancing food security by involving education initiatives, utilization of economic incentives, and the development of appropriate technologies.

III. Conclusion and Recommendations

IFSW’s Asia Pacific Representatives to the United Nations welcome the opportunity to make this submission and look forward to working collaboratively with the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) towards improving the wellbeing of all peoples.
In summary, the International Federation of Social Workers Asia Pacific UN Representatives recommend:

1. Take urgent action to achieve the SDGs by adopting multilateral approaches that work with Civil Society Organizations, including social workers.
2. Affirmative action to integrate disability considerations into all development agendas.
3. Work with social workers to address the refugee and major conflict issues in the area.
4. Focus on strengthening rural communities from the bottom up, empowering them to build on their own coping strategies and advocate for sustainable rural development policies.

For any queries relating to this statement please contact:

Dr. Sebastian Cordoba
**IFSW Asia Pacific United Nations Regional Commissioner**
pushkar.cordoba@rmit.edu.au