"CSO Participation in the VNR Process and Follow-up Mechanisms"

Venue: MEETING ROOM C-D, 1st floor UNCC
Date: Friday, 30 March 2018
Time: 12:00-13:00
Organizers: Asia Development Alliance (ADA), Asia Civil Society Partnership for Sustainable Development (APSD), Action for Sustainable Development (A4SD)

Background

To tackle the theme of Transformation towards Sustainable and Resilient Societies at this year’s APFSD, this side event will build on the CSO-led Leave No One Behind Partnership to highlight how the Voluntary National Review (VNR) process and other SDG follow-up mechanisms can be inclusive of all people through meaningful civil society participation.

Looking back on 2016 and 2017, there have been mixed experiences regarding civil society participation in the VNR process. As a result, civil society organizations (CSO) in many countries – for instance in Bangladesh, India, Japan, Malaysia (post-VNR), Nepal and Thailand in 2017; the Republic of Korea and the Philippines in 2016 – developed their own civil society reports. While in some countries like Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, Thailand, CSOs were actively engaged with their government during VNR reporting, in other countries like Afghanistan and Maldives, CSOs were aware of the VNR process but there was limited engagement in writing/reviewing the SDG implementation in their countries. In 2018, there are 5 countries from Asia namely: Bhutan and Sri Lanka (South Asia), and Lao PDR, Vietnam and Singapore (South East and East Asia) proposing to report a VNR during the HLPF on 9-18 July in New York. So far, it seems there have been a limited number of stakeholder meetings initiated by UN ESCAP in Lao PDR, Sri Lanka and Vietnam in which civil society participated, however, there seems to be significant variation on the level of engagement between civil society and government officials in different countries.

In response to these challenges, ADA organized a series of trainings and workshops in Bhutan, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal and Singapore as well as sub-regional trainings in Cambodia and Nepal on the VNR processes. It also prepared 10 VNR country excerpts for 2017 VNR reporting, which analysed the level and frequency of CSO-government engagement in the VNR process and subsequently during the Busan Democracy Forum (Republic of Korea, 22-24 January 2018), where CSOs discussed how to improve and strengthen the government-CSO engagement process.
Scope

Against this backdrop, the Asia Civil Society Partnership for Sustainable Development (APSD), an umbrella network for regional CSO engagement on the SDGs, together with the Asia Development Alliance (ADA), an international NGO platform of national NGOs in Asia (and a member of the global coalition Action for Sustainable Development-A4SD) proposes to organize a 1.5 hr side event during the 2018 APFSD to share the experiences of government-CSO engagement and the role of United Nations to encourage multi-stakeholder partnership and ensure that the transformative promise of the SDGs to “Leave No One Behind” is delivered.

The side event will focus on challenges and opportunities related to CSO-government engagement based on previous CSO lessons learned during VNR reporting and other follow-up mechanisms in 2016 and 2017. It will be an opportunity for CSOs from countries with upcoming VNRs in 2018 to learn from their experiences, and discuss VNR guidelines prepared by UNDESA-DSD, UNDP, IFP, A4SD and ADA which will help CSOs in this region to review, monitor and meaningfully engage in their national processes to advance the 2030 Agenda.

Key Questions

- What are the challenges and opportunities for an inclusive and meaningful CSO engagement in the VNR process and other SDG follow-up mechanisms in this region?
- What can we learn from CSO alternative reports, and submissions on VNR reporting, for instance VNR guidelines prepared by CSOs such as IFP, ADA and others?
- Are the governments of 2018 VNR reporting countries prepared to fulfil the principles of the UNDESA Handbook for Preparation of VNRS regarding the role of civil society in this process?
- How can UN agencies support CSO engagement in SDG implementation at the country level? What tools and platforms can the UN create and promote to advance CSO engagement in this context?”

Tentative Programme

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Panelists/Discussants (10 min each)

- Mr. Denison Jayasooria (Malaysia – 2017 VNR), Institute of Ethnic Studies at the National University of Malaysia
Ms. Beckie Malay (Philippines 2016)
Mr. Uchita De Zoysa or Mr. Hemantha (Sri Lanka – 2018 VNR), Managing Director, Global Sustainability Solutions
Vietnam (2018 VNR) or Lao PDR (2018 VNR)
Ms. Hitomi Rankine, Environmental Affairs Officer, UN-ESCAP
Ms. Leanne Hartill, Board Member, International Association for Public Participation
Ms. Hannie Meesters, Programme Specialist, Agenda 2030 and SDGs, UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub

Moderator
Mr. Anselmo Lee, Senior Advisor, Asia Development Alliance (ADA), member of the global coalition Action for Sustainable Development (A4SD)

For more details and information contact:

Dr. Jyotsna Mohan, Regional Coordinator, Asia Development Alliance (ADA), Email: jyotsnapandey.singh@gmail.com, Skype: Jyotsna.mohan1
Mr. Pradeep Baishakh, Coordinator, Asia Civil Society Partnership on Sustainable Development (APSD), E mail: pradeep.baisakh@whiteband.org, Skype: pradeepbaisakh