Intervention made by: Jeffry Acaba, Youth LEAD (Asia Pacific Network of Young Key Populations)
On behalf of the Civil Society Organizations

We from the civil society organizations present today at the 4th session of the Committee Social Development, representing a diversity of constituencies and groups in the region, recognize UNESCAP for making sure that we are heard in this meeting.

Partnership between governments and civil society is not only considered innovative but also crucial for the achievement of the SDGs. In fact the region has led the world in institutionalizing civil society engagement through the formation of the Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism (RCEM) – a platform representing more than 500 organisations that builds on the 9 major groups but goes beyond to recognize key constituencies relevant to the region including migrants, people with disabilities, displaced peoples, LGBT, people living with HIV and older people. RCEM was endorsed by member states in the 2014 ESCAP meeting on Gender Equality where ESCAP was urged to strengthen collaboration with the body. It is now recognized globally as an innovative and effective mechanism to ensure regional and diverse representation.

However, we see from the current government funding that strengthening of civil society organizations are not prioritized. We can replicate similar mechanisms such as RCEM at the national level and encourage governments to establish inclusive implementation bodies. We need to stop working in silos and promote a more collaborative approach and this can only be achieved if Member States and civil society can work together.

Innovative financing for sustainable development is critical but these innovations need to be redistributive and address systemic sources of inequality. Innovative sources include taxes on financial flows, arms trade, carbon and harmful industries. We encourage states to commit to a global tax body to truly address the problems of illicit financial flows, tax evasion and avoidance. We are heartened by interest in a regional tax committee as first step.

We also call for a more disaggregated data particularly on gender, including transgender populations, and a more inclusive disaggregation to include other intersecting issues such as health status and migration status.

We need open, transparent information and communications systems and political cultures that establish and realize legal rights to freedom of speech and access to information, and do not punish voices of dissent. We also need free and functioning media, Internet freedom, and a supportive regulatory environment whilst recognizing that four billion people in the developing world remain offline.

Innovations are critical but they must not increase inequalities or jeopardize accountability and the demand for Development Justice.