

## GRASSROOTS MOVEMENTS & SOLIDARITY ECONOMY IN ASIA

ASEC hosted a side event at the Asia Pacific People Forum on Sustainable Development on the theme *“Grassroots movements in Asia, creating alternative development models for economic justice and inclusion”*. The event was held on March 20, 2021 from 4.00pm to 6pm (Bangkok time) and was an online conversation. A total of 44 people participated. There was a panel of four speakers and participation of those present.

We started by hearing two cases studies on how rural women in South India and urban informal sector women in Manila organised themselves into self-help groups, social and community enterprises, thereby enhancing their potential as social movements in addressing poverty, economic exclusion and exploitation.

These concerns were well articulated by Mr Kumar Loganatha (India), who spoke on the collective empowerment of women through self-help groups and cooperatives from the ASSEFA Model, Madurai, South India working in over 10,000 villages impacting 1.7 million families. Ms Josephine ‘Olive’ C. Parilla (Philippines) President of PATAMABA WISE representing women workers in the informal sector enterprise illustrated the dynamics, resilience of women in charting through challenges and enhancing their potential by reaching out to over 70,000 women .

National, regional and global concerns on rise of neo liberal policies, the cut down on state funding for services, the rising inequalities and the shrinking democratic space were discussed by Dr Eri Trinurini Adhi (Indonesia) and Professor Emeritus Dr. Rene E. Ofreneo (Philippines).

Dr Eri highlighted the decentralised development agenda adopted in Indonesia with a policy favouring village based economic activities. Social movements adopted the social economy and enterprise model like Bina Swadaya creating alternative economic development models which are friendly to the poor. Dr Rene articulated that the COVID pandemic illustrates the clash of the neo-liberal framework and solidarity framework. The COVID pandemic best illustrates the need to strengthen the collective and developing holistic community resilience.

### **Emerging Key themes from alternative economies in the Asia pacific region.**

Based on the conversation we had the following five themes were discussed:-

First, all recognise the potential of SSE and the social movement’s not just as economic projects but in adopting a whole society approach in line with the seventeen SDG goals in building peaceful and inclusive communities especially in the context of the COVID pandemic and to counteract the neo liberal market policies dominating the region

Second, the SSE movement is focused on building people and not just the economic project. It is a focus on social capital and building trust which is the ingredient for sustainability as people are the centre of development. The key is community building of urban, rural and coastal communities.

Third, there was the question of financing for SSE and it was felt that if people are at the heart of the development, then the funds could emerge from collective savings as well as when the communities are united and prepared, the funders will emerge to fund and finance

the initiatives. So what was emphasised was the need to build people and the resources will emerge in due time.

Fourth, it was emphasised that networking and cooperation with local government is essential. Active participation in local governance and advocacy is necessary for conducive local economy policy environment.

Fifth, it was felt that a more critical approach could be adopted with the national and central governments over conducive policies and resource allocation (national budgets) for community based economic development. Building effective and conducive policies supporting decentralisation and promoting greater democratic space was essential.

### **Concluding Reflections**

Dr Ben Quinones, (the Founder chair of ASEC) noted that social solidarity economy organisations (SSEOs), which are community based people’s organisations and those which are engaging in socio-economic undertakings contribute to SDGs. That means that organised people themselves as exemplified by ASSEFA and PATAMABA WISE, apart from the State and the for-profit corporate sector are capable of achieving the SDGs. He further reiterated that SSEOs are effective vehicle for transitioning micro, small & medium enterprises and small farmers & fisher folk from the informal economy to the formal economy. He called for greater partnership between SSEOs and Local Government Units (LGUS) are essential in revitalising and diversifying local economies. On moving forward Dr Ben made two suggestions. The first is that SSEOs need to integrate and consolidate the microeconomic activities of micro, small & medium enterprises and small farmers & fisher folk to achieve economies of scale and to provide viable & sustainable alternative to the neoliberal market economy. The second is a need for SSEOs to make use of the digital technology for supply/value chain integration and scaling up.

### **Recommendations**

ASEC calls on UNESCAP and APRCEM- Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism, to recognise the potential of social solidarity economy as a vehicle to reach vulnerable communities in fostering inclusive economies for all. That the SSE movement could accelerate the implementation of SDGs especially in reaching out to target groups currently isolated and ensuring that no one or community is left behind

In this context too, ASEC proposes that the UN agencies in UNESCAP at Bangkok set up a Asia Pacific Level Taskforce on SSE similar to the one set up by eighteen UN agencies and their partners in Geneva known as the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy (UNTFSSSE- <https://unsse.org/>). The Taskforce which is chaired by ILO aims to raise the visibility of Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) within the UN system and beyond. A similar effort could be undertaken at the Asia Pacific level.

Summary by Prof Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria (ASEC Chair)

March 21, 2021

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Summary of discussions at the side event of the Asia Pacific People Forum on Sustainable Development held online on March 20, 2021 hosted by ASEC- Asian Solidarity Economy Council.