

SYNTHESIS & LESSONS LEARNED AT THE ASEC OPEN SPACE ON SOCIAL INCLUSION AND SOCIAL PROTECTION AT THE ASIA EUROPE PEOPLE FORUM (AEPF) HELD ON MAY 19, 2021

By Prof Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria (ASEC Chair)

Introduction

Let me take this opportunity to congratulate Dr Ben Quinones and the ASEC team for hosting this online conversation among SSE partners from around the world with a specific focus on Asian experiences. There are 90 people who have participated in this global conversation, with nine key speakers and three moderators. I take this opportunity to thank all especially our international partners from Synergia Institute, International Cooperative Alliance Asia Pacific and RIPESS

This is indeed a significant event and conversation among SSE practitioners in Asia and our counterparts in Europe and elsewhere at the 2021 Asia Europe People Forum. Solidarity and cooperation is essential in building the global SSE community. The diverse individuals and their communities they represent is illustrative of this global movement for transformational development.

I thanks the organisers for asking me to share my reflections by providing a synthesis and lessons learnt. I have listened to various sharing of practitioners and academics. I can divide my reflections into five major themes. I hope this is helpful for our ongoing conversation especially for our follow up discussion on May 21, 2021 on “Building a real alternative to the status quo”.

1 Ideological conversation

Prof Rene Ofreneo provided an excellent ideological discussion on the neo liberal development framework verses the solidarity framework. Very often practitioners shy away from intellectual discussions but this is at the heart of the contestation. The economic development model will result in the creation of equality or inequality, social inclusion or exclusion and impact positively or negatively on the vulnerable populations. The call is for the alternative economic model which builds the resilience of the people and puts people first over profits. There is a need to recognise that there is a growing social movement for change at the grassroots though the social solidarity movement.

In this context we also heard of the investor model of development verses sustainable economic model. There is a necessity for us to as practitioners, also confront the economic theories and provide alternative development discourse which is so urgently needed. Academics and academic institutions who are partners in the SSE movement can play a bigger role in re writing the economic development agenda which is empowering and inclusive.

The five case studies and the three reflections clearly illustrates what Prof Rene coined as the People’s Stimulus namely for social solidarity and social movements.

2 The faces of social exclusion

From the case study sharing we can recognise six communities experiencing exclusion which our ASEC partners are working among in building an alternative solidarity model of development. These are:-

Firstly, communities isolated and negatively impacted by the caste system and gender inequality especially impacting both women and communities categorised as backward

Second, farmers and rural poor communities

Three, forest communities, forest user groups and indigenous people

Four, the urban poor and the informal sector majority of whom are women

Five, migrant workers and the experiences of exclusion and exploitation

Six, there is a gender dimension in all the above target groups and this is a key SSE agenda

3 Social inclusive initiatives

We heard from the speakers not just the struggles and analysis of social exclusion but also dynamic, alternative initiatives which are solutions focused. Here the people are organising themselves and fighting back with their solutions which are providing alternatives to the neo liberal approach. These alternatives are inclusive and empowering reinforcing dignity and mutual respect of all people including addressing gender discrimination.

Six community initiatives from the SSE movement was shared which has a strong thrust of social protection are namely:-

First, community based economic initiatives which is different from the investor model of economic activities.

Second, cooperatives as community based enterprise models. This has the largest potential for SSE at the ground level in Asia in organising grassroots communities.

Third, urban farming and community cooperation.

Fourth, community based forestry. There is great potential for this especially rural and interior communities

Five, financial inclusive programs as alternative micro credit to conventional banks

Six, micro insurance programs which specially targets the poor, informal sector and the Bottom 40 % communities,

4 Relevant emerging thematic aspects

The conversation together highlighted some major relevant themes to the alternative development model which is holistic in orientation. These need further working and I am sure we will be able to develop and strengthen them.

First, the theme of food security through various community farms as well as organic initiatives.

Second, the theme of conservation and bio diversity especially in the role of community forest users groups. Forest users groups as a dynamic development of a social movement for conservation and wealth creation via natural capital.

Third, inclusive governance models where the whole community is involved as co-partners.

Four, local enterprise development as well as building local economy in a decentralised development planning model rather than top down.

Five, mutual benefit societies and self-help groups which is more inclusive and empowering. Often these are women led at the grassroots and from among the grassroots communities.

5 Policy coherence

Emerging from the conversations are pointers towards policies and legislation. Here it can be divided into two namely pertaining to the nation and another to SSE movements

National policies

There is need for national level legislative protection for vulnerable groups which we heard in the Nepal case was constitutional for forest users. In the Malaysia case it is through five year development planning which assesses concerns for social inclusion, promotion of cooperative movements and social enterprise development

SSE movements

At the SSE Movement level there is a need to strengthen partnerships and networks which can enhance the SSE global movement in a dynamic and impactful way rather than just micro projects.

There is a need for stronger advocacy for public policies which can serve as an enabling framework at the national and local levels. The Philippines example of policies and legislation facilitating micro insurance and social protection is a significant national example for replication.

The need for rigorous methodology to measure impact of SSE projects and programs are needed so as to gather data, quantify it for national, regional and global advocacy for the alternative solidarity model. We need to develop the tools and measurements.

Capability building and educational/training programs are most essential and universities in the regional can undertake both short term courses and degree level of SSE

Conclusion

Once again, I thank all the presenters and participation for your valuable inputs. Our ongoing conversation together to further unpack these aspects is key. We have had a rich conversation

together and I wish you all the best in the follow up discussions especially the next discussion on “Building a real alternative”. Thanks and all the best.