Global Cooperation Newsletter

International Council on Social Welfare

ICSW

November 2016

This edition of the Global Cooperation Newsletter continues to update our readership about regional activities of the ICSW-affiliated organizations, presenting information regarding important recent events in South-East Asia and the Pacific Region. The focus of this edition is on the core messages of the most recent Government-NGO Forum on Social Welfare and Development convened in the region, particularly the recommendations of the forum.

Another key social-policy issue highlighted in this edition of the Newsletter is ongoing efforts to address mental-health challenges in the region, and the important role that families can play in that regard.

We also publish information concerning the recent initiative of the Inter-Parliamentary Union to advance gender-sensitive reforms in parliament.

Sergei Zelenev, ICSW Executive Director and the Editor of the Global Cooperation Newsletter

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ICSW SEAP participates in the 11th ASEAN GO-NGO Forum on Social Welfare and Development

Officers and members of the ICSW South-East Asia and the Pacific (SEAP) participated in the annual ASEAN Government Organization and Non-Government Organizations (GO-NGO) Forum on Social Welfare and Development, held on 26 September in Jakarta, Indonesia, under the theme *Strengthening Social Welfare Development in Pursuing ASEAN Community Vision 2025*. The forum has become an important platform for discussing the most acute issues of socio-economic development, social policy and the welfare mix in the region, providing for a comparison of policy tools as well as of welfare outcomes.

Attended by delegations from the ten ASEAN Member States together with representatives from twenty-one civil-society organizations in the region, the forum facilitated exchange of views among the participants regarding the most appropriate policy approaches to reducing insecurity and strengthening resilience. ICSW SEAP has been regularly invited by the ASEAN Secretariat to participate in the event. The participants from the government side and from the NGO side based in ASEAN countries used this opportunity to reflect together on social welfare and development (SWD) agendas in their respective countries. They shared perspectives on emerging issues and challenges at the national level in SWD agendas, lessons learnt and best practices on SWD that could be replicated and scaled-up, and discussed regional collaboration between ASEAN Member States and ASEAN's partners so as to further strengthen national initiatives on SWD. The issues of social protection coverage figured prominently in the discussions. ASEAN has committed to the endeavor through the ASEAN Declaration on

A group photo of the ICSW SEAP members during the regional and preparatory meeting held last 25 September 2016 in Jakarta, Indonesia.

Standing (from left): Mr Tran Ngoc Thach (*Vietnam*), Ms Emily Beridico (*Philippines*), Ms Chalermsee Chantaratim (*Thailand*) and Dr. Laila Said (*Indonesia*)

Seated (from left): Dr Vijiraya Buasri (Thailand), Datin Paduka Khatijiah Sulaiman (Chair), Prof. Dr. Makmur Sanusi (Indonesia), Ms Nur Judy Abdullah (Brunei) & Teoh Ai Hua (Malaysia)

Strengthening Social Protection adopted in 2013, and the call for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) participation in the process was, therefore, most appropriate and timely.

ICSW SEAP member countries in ASEAN, specifically Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam, held a regional preparatory meeting a day before the GO-NGO Forum and came up with the following recommendations:
- Continue with the annual ASEAN GO-NGO Forum with more participants from the NGOs/CSOs;
- Call for multi-sectoral and multilateral approaches and more community-based programs;
- Support inclusive and right-based approaches so that everyone can access social-protection services in pursuit of

achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) by 2030;
- Promote capacity-building aimed at establishing a social-protection floor for community and local governments;
- Establish monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for social-protection schemes in ASEAN member states;
- Allocate budget resources for social-protection programmes, setting aside funds for collaborations with the private sector;
- Support stakeholders promoting the social-protection floor initiative, strengthening partnerships between government, the private sector, non-governmental and civil-society organizations, and the community;
- Advocate for the Convention on the Rights of the Older Persons;
- Expand social services for children with severe and multiple disabilities

The above recommendations were presented by the President of ICSW SEAP, Datin Paduka Khatijah binti Sulaiman, during the GO-NGO Forum, with the call that the recommendations be incorporated into the consolidated outcome document for consideration at the 12th ASEAN Senior Official Meeting on Social Welfare Development (SOMSWD).

ICSW SEAP President Datin Paduka Khatijah Sulaiman presenting the recommendations from ICSW SEAP during the 11th ASEAN GO NGO Forum on Social Welfare and Development

Likewise, in her closing remarks she also took the opportunity to invite other ASEAN member states to join as members of the ICSW SEAP. Currently, Australia, Brunei, Fiji, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam comprise the active core group of SEAP.

After each ASEAN member state got an opportunity to present their country reports in the forum, the participants came up with the summary outlining the key challenges, and adopted the final recommendations for the 12th ASEAN SOMSWD. The outcome document from the 11th ASEAN GO-NGO Forum specifies that:

1. *The increasing modernization of society has led to the emergence of risks and challenges such as workforce mobility, urbanization, and the migration of labor, deepening inequality, and modern slavery. It has become imperative to expand the coverage of social protection and ensure greater coordination. It is also important to reach specific vulnerable groups, such as older persons and persons with disabilities, in situations of disasters, including persons with severe and multiple disabilities.*

2. *The impetus of ASEAN Community integration and the global consensus on the Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development has provided the much-needed momentum to reach the poorest of the poor, both in urban and rural societies, and the most marginalized and vulnerable. This has led to the need for broader social protection coverage, the enforcement of regulations, the facilitation and dissemination of information about safe migration; increased human and physical resources and infrastructures; and strengthened mechanisms for coordination.*

3. *ASEAN member states have been translating regional and global frameworks*

and instruments into national and sub-national laws and policies, mainly in the areas of social protection, the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities, children, and older persons. There is a marked expansion of the perspective from social welfare to protection and development. An increase in the participation of civil-society organizations is fast becoming a prominent strategy in developing and implementing social-protection policies and programs.

Key Challenges

Country presentations highlighted vulnerabilities to natural and man-made disasters, marginalized groups with special needs, and the lack of resources to support the expansion of social-protection programs. Also highlighted were limited institutional capacities, legislative limitations, the lack of effective monitoring and evaluation of social-protection programs

Summary of Recommendations

1. Ensure inclusive approaches so as to facilitate greater access and empowerment of vulnerable and marginalized groups. This can be achieved by closely monitoring the implementation of ASEAN declarations, regional frameworks and action plans, and mobilizing all relevant ASEAN bodies. At the national level, national targeting schemes can be utilized to effectively identify the poorest of the poor. The data generated can be effectively utilized by the relevant government agencies.

2. ASEAN member states should seize the opportunity to continue aligning national and sub-national laws and policies with regional and global instruments. The translation into national laws and policies must deliberately call for the mainstreaming of issues related to persons with disabilities, children, and older

persons. More importantly, policy reforms must be responsive to the changing regional landscape, such as the ageing of society, deepening inequality, heightened migration, and the need for greater resilience. Likewise, there is a need to strengthen collaboration with related ministries

3. Broaden and deepen the partnership with the stakeholders, including the full participation of civil-society organizations and the private sector, as called for in the ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection. Continue to strengthen existing regional platforms that facilitate the sharing of knowledge and best practices as well as peer-to-peer exchanges and pooling resources. These platforms include the ASEAN GO-NGO Forum.

1. Professionalize the practice of social work, paraprofessionals, community workers and NGOs practitioners, through continuous training and capacity-building. Undertake capacity-building on the social-protection floor for community and local governments, and on monitoring and evaluation mechanism for social-protection schemes in AMS

2. Allocate sufficient resources to expand the coverage of social-protection programs. Ensure the sustainability of funding support for social-protection programs through public fiscal reforms, such as allocating revenues generated from taxes on the consumption of luxury items to social-protection programs.

3. Promote social entrepreneurship as a means of incorporating business, social activity and environmental protection

7. *Uplifting the efforts to protect all ASEAN citizens including vulnerable groups who are living in the border areas of AMS;*

8. *Encourage NGOs to be more active by strengthening organizations' capacity-building in delivering social services for persons with disabilities, older persons, children and all vulnerable groups, in partnership with and/or supported by government organizations in terms of funding support and the law for the promotion*

9. *Encourage social-welfare activities to reach socially isolated communities.*

Summing up, one can say the forum has become a useful policy space for various stakeholders, including such key players as governments and civil-society organizations, for voicing their concerns and coming up with mutually acceptable solutions and policy recommendations. While the role of NGOs in the provision of social welfare at the national level varies, depending on the specifics of national history and prevalent values, the recent years have seen more active involvement on the part of NGOs in social-development activities, improving welfare outcomes for the population at large.

Addressing mental health issues in Asia Pacific region

Asia Pacific region is the home for biggest share of the world's population and consequently people with mental-health conditions live in many low and middle-income countries of the region. The enormous impact of mental-health conditions on the individuals and societies has been widely discussed by the scientific community, but people living with psychosocial disabilities have largely remained invisible in national and regional development. Families are well-placed to play a transformative role in improving the lives of

people living with psychosocial disabilities, because family support and care has been recognized as necessary for recovery and rehabilitation.

To underscore the importance of the family dimension in that regard, the 2nd Asia Pacific Conference on Mental Health was convened on 6-7 October 2016 in Singapore, with the theme "Together we can do so much more." Given that families are central to the total and holistic well-being and wellness of every member, their engagement in maintaining mental health and emotional well-being is crucial to the overall health of the society.

A rising priority for community development
Mental-health experts worldwide are of the view that one in four people will experience a mental-health condition at some point in their lives. The experts and many reports also say that people living in poverty are much more likely to experience mental-health problems, particularly if they are female, a victim of abuse or have few education opportunities.

Social situation reports say that very few people in low- and middle-income countries of the Asia Pacific region are able to access treatment or support for mental-health conditions. Community-development workers and civil-society organizations (CSOs) working in the area of mental health are of the view that the lack of financing and trained health professionals, as well as the significant stigma associated with mental illness, are important barriers to treatment.

Mental-health experts say the stigma and discrimination have wide-ranging impacts on people's ability to work, participate in their communities and live independently. Families say that, if a member has been diagnosed with schizophrenia, the suffering resulting from that psychosocial disability comes more from society than from the disorder itself and for that matter more so from the extended family system.

Over the years, mental health has largely been placed on the back burner by families and civil-society organizations, but thanks to the efforts of a few very committed mental-health experts, things are starting to change.

It is also noteworthy that mental health is included in the targets and indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and global actors and stakeholders are starting to take notice. International donor agencies are planning to do more on mental health and stigma as part of their community-development plans.

Time for families to take action
Engaging the families can be the most cost effective way of addressing mental health, particularly when it comes to reaching the region's poorest and most marginalized people. Families are well placed to reach those who would otherwise not be able to access treatment or support in order to combat the illness, because it is more at the family level that stigma starts. CSOs can play a transformative role by developing specific programs on mental health or integrating mental health and the family into existing programs. The recent spate of natural disasters in the region has proved the need to include the state of mental health in all preparedness and emergency, relief and rehabilitation work.

Throughout the Asia Pacific there are numerous good examples of CSOs working a wide range of sectors, such as by strengthening community mental-health care, enabling people to access livelihood opportunities and integrating psychological first aid into emergency response and family-resource management.

However, families can do more than what they are doing now, and foremost in that would be to bring about a total understanding of illness like any other disease.

Key interventions on mental health.
Community and social development strategies, such as reducing poverty, providing for basic requirements like shelter and food, and supporting access to health and education, are likely to have positive impacts on mental-health outcomes.

By including indicators on mental health when monitoring and evaluating programs, CSOs can generate vital evidence and data on what works – informing replication and scale up.

Ensure that interventions are accessible to people living with psychosocial disabilities.
The families should realize that the barriers and discrimination that people living with mental-health conditions face, especially with the family, mean that they are less likely to access mainstream development programs. For CSOs the engagement and empowerment of families would be the most cost-effective way, as that is where the root causes of abuse and neglect happen. Families should work with CSOs to assess the barriers that stop people with psychosocial disabilities from accessing their programs and put in practice measures to overcome them.

Families working together in advocating for change.
Many NGOs have joined forces in getting the families together to develop action plans on setting out the priority areas for development partners to tackle in order to meet the SDGs. Families can do a lot to support holistic healthy living.

What could be done under the auspices of the MINDING THE MIND programme

1. Families in general, and psychiatrists, psychologists and social-service providers in particular, must urgently begin a mental-health awareness campaign. Through online outreach via websites, articles and social networking, as well as speeches,

workshops, lectures, multilingual brochures and other means, those professionals must educate the larger community about exactly what mental health is, why it is important and how it affects us.

2. Community and religious leaders could make presentations on the topic of mental health, with a special focus on breaking down the taboo nature of this issue. Here is a guideline provided by a psychiatrist. They could also give presentations on strengthening our spiritual relationship, particularly in times of stress and difficulty. Suitable topics to discuss include patience, trust in God, and thankfulness, as well as sharing more and consuming less by practicing simple living.

3. Religious community institutions could be the first center to turn to in times of crisis. That applies not just to the spiritual realm, but to that of mental health as well. In practical terms, that can mean hiring a social worker, counselor or therapist who can work with the spiritual leaders to identify and handle mental-health crises in the community.

It can also mean breaking the mental-health taboo in the community through programs like lectures and workshops on these issues. Special emphasis should be made on seeking professional help for problems like stress and depression, for instance. There are reports that have indicated that a number of community leaders, students, artists and parents have confided that they are suffering from depression but were not seeking any professional help.

4. Schools (full time and weekend) could urgently hire professional counselors and establish mentorship programs for children, which would offer students a way to share their stress or concerns with qualified personnel who can help them. If that is not possible, then psychiatrists, psychologists and counselors in the community should step forward and volunteer their services, even if only on a part-time basis.

5. The training of para-counselors is another very urgent need. For instance, teachers, religious leaders, youth and community workers, as well as family heads, could be trained in a special seminar or workshop to recognize the signs of stress, depression and other mental-health challenges in their classrooms.

(The preceding article is based on a compilation by Mohammed Hassan Khan, presented in 'Family Scope", APFAM International, Issue #6, November 2016)

The opinions expressed in the article are those of the author and may not necessarily coincide with opinions of the ICSW Management Committee.

Gender-sensitive reforms in parliaments to eliminate violence against women

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) follows up its landmark study on sexism against women MPs with an initiative to advance gender-sensitive reforms in parliaments.

On the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, IPU has launched an innovative approach that challenges parliaments on their functioning and working methods, and how these contribute to gender equality.

The publication, *Evaluating gender sensitivity of parliaments: A self-assessment toolkit,* is the first step of this initiative, and lays the groundwork for honestly assessing women's equal representation in parliaments, the treatment of women MPs, and identify the necessary steps to transform parliaments into gender-sensitive institutions.

Most parliaments remain male-dominated, with women making up only 22 per cent of the world's parliamentarians. Once in office, the situation does not improve, as women MPs are

often underrepresented in senior positions or key committees, face a hostile work environment, and must navigate unwritten rules and practices that are preferential to men. All of that can limit their input into parliaments' policy making and undermines parliaments' efficiency, effectiveness and legitimacy.

In addition, a recently published *IPU survey* revealed widespread sexism, violence and harassment of women MPs worldwide. Of the 55 women MPs surveyed, over 80 per cent reported experiencing some form of psychological violence. Some 20 per cent of respondents said they had been slapped, pushed or struck, including by other members of parliament.

The gender-sensitive parliament assessment brings together MPs and parliamentary administrations to examine such issues openly, and identify what initiatives can be taken to address them, whether by strengthening parliament's legal and policy framework for gender equality, building the infrastructure and policies to support gender-sensitive culture in parliament, and enhancing the capacities and resources of staff to achieve gender equality. According to IPU Secretary General Martin Chungong "parliaments must do some soul-searching through a gender lens. They must acknowledge that they are not gender-neutral. The gender-sensitive parliament assessment aims to support parliaments' efforts to tackle violence against women MPs, and become champions of gender equality and models for the rest of society. Let me stress that the end result will be the reinforcement of parliaments' contribution to eliminating violence against women".

For more information:
http://www.ipu.org/english/home.htm

Feminist Mobilization, Claims Making and Policy Change: Insights from Asia

Author: Nitya Rao, Paola Cagna
UNRISD, Geneva, 2016

This paper published by UNRISD aims to understand how policy change for women's rights occurs, and what factors and conditions facilitate non-state actors' influence over policy processes. It argues that policy change is a complex and iterative

process, and explores the range of actors that mobilize for/against gender-equality policy change, with a particular focus on women's movements. The paper provides insights on how women interact with other actors and how they articulate their claims to effectively influence the policy process.

Read more

Health at a Glance: Asia/Pacific 2016
Measuring Progress towards Universal Health

This OECD publication presents key indicators for health status, the determinants of health, health-care resources and utilization, health-care expenditure and financing, and health-care quality across 27 Asia-Pacific countries and economies.

For more information:
https://www.oecd.org/health/health-at-a-glance-asia-pacific-23054964.htm

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