**Asia Pacific Faith Coalition for Sustainable Development (APFC)**

Launch Report

***Brief Summary***

Seven months after its formalization, the regional platform called Asia Pacific Faith Coalition for Sustainable Development (APFC) has been publicly launched through a side event at the recent Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development held at the UN complex in Bangkok, Thailand on 28th of March 2018. The APFC is an open, inclusive coalition representing different faiths towards achieving sustainable development and peace and adheres to international humanitarian standards, adherence to international human rights principles and instruments. The founding members of the APFC are ACT Alliance, Arigatou International, Islamic Relief, Soka Gakkai International, and World Vision International.

The launch was attended by more than 30 individuals from other international non-government agencies and universities. (The participants organizations: Asian Solidarity Economy Council, Christian Aid, Devex, ADN, Child Fund in Vietnam, Child Fund Korea, ADA, SRD, ADRF, APWLD, GCAP/PRRM, GCAP/APSD, ADA, FW, HrFP, Development of Civil Society, Moscow University, CED, COASR, Films 4 Peace Foundation, UNESCAP)

The one and half hour-long program featured a five-member panel of FBO, Civil Society and UN representatives who highlighted the role of faith and FBOs in sustainable development.  Members of the panel include: John Patrick Murray, Director, National Catholic Commission on Migration, Thailand; Hiro Sakurai, Director, Soka Gakkai International, Office for UN Affairs; Masud Siddique, Head of Asia Region, Islamic Relief Worldwide; Anselmo Lee, Senior Advisor, Asia Development Alliance and Asia Pacific CSO Partnership for Sustainable Development; and Shinji Kubo, Officer-in-Charge, UNHCR Representative in Bangkok, Thailand. The discussion was facilitated/moderated by Mr. Norbert Hsu, WVI's Regional Leader for Asia.

The founding members, through this year’s current chair (Sudarshan Reddy, WVI Regional Faith & Development Director for East Asia) formally introduced the coalition and its history. Anoop Sukumaran, Regional Representative (Asia and the Pacific) of ACT Alliance presented the coalition’s focus of work decided based on a mapping conducted by the coalition. The panelists also responded to audience’s questions about initiatives to link FBOs to the localization agenda for humanitarian summit, usefulness of the ‘edifying ethical values’ as a framework for FBOs, and mechanisms to link with civil society organizations and the UN for sustainable development.

APFC commits itself to the principles of “do no harm”, non-discrimination and equality, transparency and accountability. APFC aims to: 1) provide greater impetus to the voices of faith communities; 2) Effectively engage in Asia Pacific regional development discourse feeding to global processes, such as the SDGs. The five founding member organizations worki in almost 45 countries in the Asia region. Based on the mapping, the five member organizations all work on almost all the 17 SDGs but the most prevalent ones or the SDGs which almost everybody works on are SDGs 1, 2, 5 including 3, 4, 16, 17.

With the support of World Vision Regional Office Communications, a few tweets and a post-event press release were posted through WV Asia Pacific account - <https://twitter.com/WVAsia/status/979588366650912769> . A Copy of the press release may also be found in this site - <https://www.wvi.org/pressrelease/faith-based-group-launches-asia-pacific-faith-based-coalition-sustainable-development>

Photos and presentations used during the launch may be accessed in this link: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/c5667evjvzamdij/AADm2cH0LYiSG_oz0bI6mJNea?dl=0>

***Main Discussion***

The panel discussion focused on the current and potential contribution of faith leaders and FBOs in making communities resilient and socially cohesive to achieve sustainable development. The discussion also explored the various ways FBOs can work together and address issues at the regional levels, andhow to engage with UN and civil society organizations.

**Role of faith in achieving sustainable development**

* Faith has been central to the lives of millions, has been a great source and anchor for bringing people together and fostering social and behavioral change
* Faith is an important factor in building individual and community resilience.
* Faith (spirituality) gives a perspective, a context through relationship, offers insight into our persons and into humanity that gives us a sense of vision to appreciate the beyond of our humanity, and to appreciate their own person; It speaks of the person as a holistic person in humanity
* Faith is a motivator for people of faith to help people in need with an unwavering resolve and constant effort. Faith enables hope to endure and to be constantly present thus it is no surprise that throughout history, faith-based groups have become and is the first service providers in times of crisis.

With faith as a resource, FBOs have the following complementary roles to achieving sustainable development:

* FBOs have a distinct role and responsibility to make the 2030 Agenda slogan "leave no one behind" real and not just a nice-sounding phrase. While it is not a new concept for FBOs, faith communities need to join together to ensure that this call is spread, shared, and rooted in societies to the point where it will not be necessary to urge people to “leave no one behind” because everyone will understand that this is a moral imperative – and that a life of dignity for all is essential to our common progress as one human family.
* FBOs can/shouldemphasize the human factor of SDGs by reminding people what or who the SDGs are for, and to demonstrate this principle by constantly choosing to work for the people who are present but don’t have the voice or whose voices are a bit invisible.
* FBOs can maximize the potential of SDGs for peace within the different communities especially among different religious groups by promoting a paradigm shift, moving from being competitors to being more advocates or defenders of common values.
* FBOs can also play a vital role in changing practices and promote sustainable consumption patterns which is also critical to achieve the SDGs. While the secular framework has limited impact on the community, it is the faith perspective that can bring lasting changes to developing a discourse which is closer to peoples’ hearts and has greater acceptability.

***Recommendations and Proposals for APFC POA***

Below are concrete proposals for APFC to enhance/strengthen the implementation of SDGs in the region:

1. Develop a system to search/identify people who have very much marginalized (those who seem to be invisible, who don’t have voices) conditions to be recognized and have access to development efforts or initiatives
2. Promote spiritual dimension of the SDGs and [explore] how to add a spiritual dimension to measurement of progress on SDGs
3. Coordinate efforts and work with UN and civil society organizations in addressing common issues
4. Find a way to mobilize communities to work together. Develop local ownership, promote local autonomy and act together in solidarity.
5. Explore flexible approaches and arrangements based on the needs.
6. Consider involving a third party i.e., academic researchers to provide the common space to effectively bring FBOs together.
7. Identify a common initiative that is easy to implement and make a step-by-step progress report or time-framed action plan and that will probably help organize this coalition’s efforts in a more effective way. Below are suggestions from the panel members for specific activities:
   * Joint programming or collaborative programming e.g., jointly supporting not only survival kits but also their longer-term livelihood options
   * Joint advocacy initiatives at regional platforms
   * Joint capacity building initiatives at regional levels engaging faith leaders
   * Data collection, mapping or collaborative regional research of how FBOs can work together
   * Joint position papers around critical issues e.g., climate change, child protection, resilience and gender
   * Developing joint faith leaders platform
   * Organizing some big events like a faith leaders panel discussion on role of faith in development; Continue this kind of side event at every APFSD and do the same at the national level (in different countries)
   * Developing faith inspired literatures addressing specific issues i.e., bring the faith angle in the SDG goals
   * Developing faith-sensitive IEC materials
   * Develop an explanation of why SDGs matter for people of different faiths
   * Develop a narrative or a collection of stories illustrating how different religions can work together to achieve the SDG or bring stories of FBOs related to SDGs/sustainable development with examples drawn together from diverse faith communities and FBOs.