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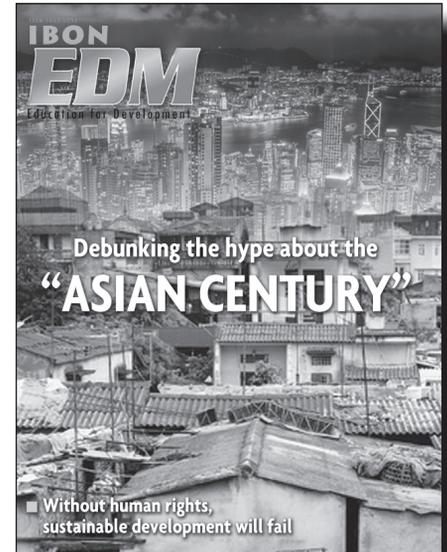
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Debunking the hype about the “Asian Century”



A young boy stands on the pipes in Dharavi in Mumbai, India—one of Asia’s largest slums. Photo: Meena Kadri/flickr.com

Asia is often depicted as a bright spot amidst the gloomy global economic landscape. The region is repeatedly described as home to the most dynamic and resilient economies in the world, with developing Asian economies growing by 4 percent even at the height of the global crisis. The region is projected to largely maintain its growth momentum in the next couple of years despite weak global demand. Expansion in the region’s GDP moderated to 7.2 percent in 2011 from 2010’s post-global crisis rebound of 9.1 percent, and is expected to ease to 6.9 percent in 2012 before picking up to 7.3 percent in 2013. These growth projections are still strong compared with other regions of the world.¹

Against the backdrop of growth, however, the long-term development challenges faced by the region remain enormous. Although Asia as a whole has achieved rapid economic growth and poverty reduction in some countries, it remains home to two-thirds of the world’s “multi-dimensionally poor”² – half in South Asia (844 million people), and 15% in East Asia and the Pacific (262 million). One of every two individuals in the region – or 1.7 billion people – are still struggling to survive on less than USD2 a day, living in urban slums or rural poverty, marginalized and excluded from the benefits of the region’s growth. In China alone, 452 million people live under this USD2-a-day poverty marker, while in India the figure is 868

million. Some 42.9 percent of the Asia-Pacific population does not have access to improved sanitation facilities.³

The promised benefits of rapid growth have also been unevenly spread. As the Asian Development Bank (ADB) itself has noted, there are widening disparities in the income and well-being of populations within and between countries. And in many of these countries, the incomes and expenditures of the wealthiest households have grown much faster than those of the poorest, as evidenced by rising Gini coefficients in many Asian countries.

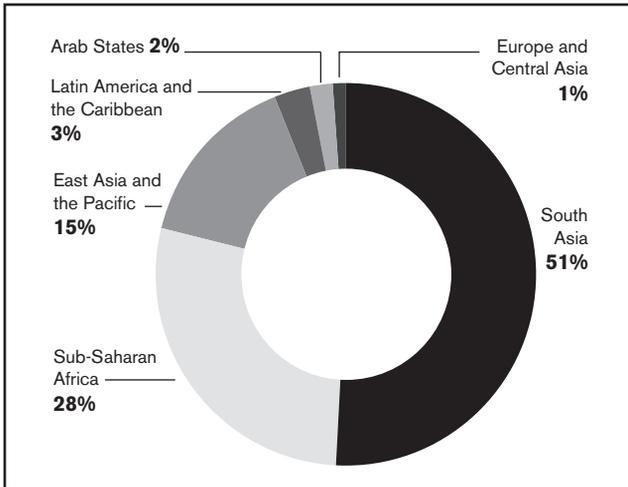


FIGURE 1: Distribution of the world's multidimensional poor living in developing countries Source: OECD

According to the ADB report, Asia's "rapid growth" is leaving millions behind, causing a widening gap between rich and poor that threatens to undermine the region's stability. Income divisions are rising markedly in the region, where the richest 1% of households accounts for 6- 8 percent of total income. In most countries, close to 20 percent of total income went to the wealthiest 5 percent. The report shows that the share of income accruing to the richest households has increased over time. The Gini coefficient – a key measure of inequality, where a higher number represents higher inequality – has leapt from 39 to 46 in the last two decades,⁴ undermining the basis of growth itself.

In order to address the continuing problem of poverty and increasing inequality while building on achieved economic growth, international and regional financial institutions (e.g. the IMF, World Bank, and ADB) as well as other regional intergovernmental formations (e.g. the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the East Asia Summit (EAS), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)) have continually put forth the implementation of export-oriented, market-driven neoliberal policies and principles (manifest in the region's trade, migration and defense policies, among others) that only end up promoting the interests of corporations and multinational firms while neglecting their impact on the region's peoples.

Lopsided FTA provisions

Free trade agreements (FTAs) continue to grow rapidly in Asia and the Pacific. From just 53 in 2000, there are 250 FTAs in different stages of development as of September

2012. Of these FTAs, 103 are being implemented while the rest are either proposed, under negotiation, or signed.⁵ Asian policymakers increasingly view FTAs as able to generate profit and create investment opportunities through further elimination of cross-border impediments and deepening production networks and supply chains formed by global multi-national corporations (MNCs) and emerging Asian firms. This has been a great cause of concern for civil society groups in the region, as believe this will only grant multinational firms further power and control over countries' resources to the detriment of local economies and industries. For instance, people in New Zealand, Japan, Australia, Malaysia, and Vietnam, among other negotiating countries, have grown wary of and protested against the outcomes of the negotiations of the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA), a multilateral free trade agreement currently being negotiated among the United States and its partner countries in the Asia-Pacific. It is an FTA that aims to open all sectors of Asia-Pacific economies to foreign investment, remove barriers and tariffs restricting trade, and grant foreign investors and corporations the right to sue governments if their investments are threatened by the latter's policies.

Thousands of activists have also joined the struggle to oppose the EU-India FTA that could potentially threaten access to medicines through the setting up of barriers against the supply of affordable generic medicines from India. Similar concerns were raised against a similar FTA between Malaysia and EU that would force generic drug-companies out of the market and penalize Malaysian government for dealing with them. This would stop the supply of cheap medicines to thousands of people who depend on these cheap drugs for survival, such as people infected with HIV. Moreover, the lack of transparency and consultations with representatives of affected sectors over the FTA negotiations has been a cause for concern, particularly given the history of lopsided provisions in favor of business and investor interests and the adverse effects similar agreements have had on the interests and welfare of people, especially vulnerable segments of society. Negotiations have often been carried out in secret.

Worsening condition of migrants

The environment in receiving countries is becoming more and more restrictive for migrants and migrant workers. Migration policies enforced by the region's governments have further undermined migrant workers' rights. In South Korea, for instance, migrant groups have expressed concern over the South Korean government's new policy that would

restrict migrants to change workplaces or companies. While supposedly a measure to improve foreign workers' job security, the new policy violates migrant workers' freedom of movement and choice of employment. Such a condition will only put migrant workers at the mercy of employers and breed more exploitation and violation of labor rights on the part of employers. In Malaysia, the new recruitment policy for Indonesian domestic workers are likely to only open up even wider the floodgates for more abuses and exploitation to be committed against domestic workers by employers and unscrupulous recruitment agencies. The policy, which took effect April 2012 following a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by Malaysia and Indonesia in May 2011, directs recruitment agencies to replace Indonesian domestic workers who ran away from employers or are deemed unfit for work by employers within the first six months of employment with another one for free. In the Philippines, the government has tried to squeeze more income from overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) subject to a multitude of fees, including the high cost of passport processing overseas, overseas employment certificates, overseas workers welfare administration (OWWA), and mandatory insurance policies.

Furthermore, state-instigated crackdowns and criminalization of undocumented migrants have not contributed to the resolution of harsh conditions faced by migrants, but only aggravated the problems. Undocumented migrants have continually become victims of the same brutal, repressive and discriminatory policies. These, among other migration policies in the region do not in any way alleviate the dire condition of migrant workers, continually characterized by inhumane treatment, widespread violation of rights as workers, gender violence, and slave-like treatment.

Increasing incidence of resource grabs

There is a growing incidence of resource grabs as a natural consequence of depleting natural resources brought about by unsustainable patterns of production and consumption in the region. Indigenous peoples, local farmers and fisherfolk in rural areas bear the brunt of the growing competition over resources. Large-scale agricultural investments have had a tremendous impact on the existence and survival of rural and indigenous peoples. They have displaced small food producers and caused widespread food insecurity and environmental destruction. In Pakistan, land formerly used to grow food crops for domestic consumption are now being planted with crops for export to other countries. Farmers have been reduced to being underpaid grass production workers,

who cannot access their lands for livestock and to produce crops that are the main source of their day-to-day subsistence. The same case holds in Indonesia, where numerous foreign palm oil companies have been granted permits to convert vast areas of forest land, for instance where the indigenous tribes of Papua rely on for hunting and food gathering, into sugarcane plantations to supposedly address energy resource needs. Construction of dams for power generation and the unceasing privatization of natural resources like water have likewise contributed to the issue of inequity and access especially for poor communities in rural and urban areas. In Manipur, India, the construction of Tipaimukh dam project is being carried out without prior and informed consent of affected villagers, despite the damage it will cause to their land and resources which they depend on for survival. In the Philippines, water privatization schemes have resulted in water price hikes, restricting access to water only to those who can afford its price.⁶

These are but some of the key issues the region's people are beset with.

The region has numerous sub-regional formations, although there is no existing pan-Asian regional formation to date. Among the sub-regional formations (e.g. ASEAN, SAARC, EAS, APEC), only a few are South-South formations and none of them have a vision of delinking from global monopoly capitalist control. Rather, the agenda is on further economic liberalization or how to better integrate with global capitalist production and trading systems.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has served as the launch pad towards further regional economic integration along the neoliberal framework of further liberalizing the flow of goods, services, and capital. As the 9th largest economy in the world if taken as a single entity,⁷ ASEAN is being sold as a single market bloc for bilateral negotiations with major economies. To bolster its competitive edge as a production base in the world market, it has agreed on the establishment of the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) that seeks to eliminate tariff and non-tariff barriers within ASEAN and attract foreign direct investment to the region. It has signed free trade agreements with India, Japan, South Korea, EU, China, Australia, New Zealand, among others. It is clear that for ASEAN, there is no sign of moving towards delinking from the dominant world capitalist system.

ASEAN was originally founded as an anti-communist bloc

with the agenda of containing the spread of communism in the region. Over the years, however, ASEAN's mission has evolved as it has expanded to include countries like Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar. It has become the official regional body seeking to advance economic, political, socio-cultural cooperation towards regional peace and prosperity. However, although ASEAN's agenda and mandate have evolved and become more complex compared to when it first started, the process continues to be dominated by foreign ministers. ASEAN remains to be more intergovernmental and interstate in nature, even though its societies have become more interconnected and open. This is seen in the yearly gathering of civil society groups to celebrate the ASEAN People's Forum. Civil society has often been excluded from official summits, which until now has been confined to heads of states and foreign ministers. This is also manifest in the drafting of the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (AHRD), where there were no proper consultations held with civil society and civil society groups could only access the draft through leaked documents.

The story of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is similar; civil society engagement continues to be minimal and underdeveloped. SAARC meetings are restricted to SAARC government officials, hence civil society has established alternative platforms like the People's SAARC to provide space to discuss the issues that matter to them that are often sidelined in the official meetings.

This is true also for regional platforms like the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the East Asia Summit (EAS). While these two formations boast of broadness and inclusivity compared to other existing regional formations in terms of the scope of its country membership, they remain to be closed-door meetings of heads-of-state with very little heed for peoples' voices, as in the case of the two sub-regional structures previously mentioned.

APEC is committed to building a dynamic and harmonious Asia-Pacific community by championing free and open trade and investment, promoting and accelerating regional economic integration, and facilitating a favorable and sustainable business environment. APEC policies and projects have only furthered the interests of corporations by facilitating a favorable environment for businesses in the region, leaving national economies and public resources open to corporate ownership and control. Civil society

groups have long engaged in wide campaigns against APEC's agenda to promote corporate interests at the expense of local economies, poor people, workers, the environment and indigenous populations. Pushing for "people's need not corporate greed", civil society organizations have criticized and exposed the impacts of APEC policies on the vulnerable sectors of the population.

Renewed US interest in the Asia-Pacific

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has signaled the shift in US geostrategic focus to Asia, where "the future of politics will be decided". In a paper titled America's Pacific Century, written in November 2011, Clinton wrote that Asia will yield the biggest returns for US investments at a time when the country is facing severe economic crisis. Clinton described Asia as central to US economic and strategic interests with its vast markets and investment areas crucial to its own economic recovery. In the previous APEC meetings and country visits, President Obama was intent on securing wide support for the US-sponsored TPP deal to enhance US free trade and investment with the region. Combined, the TPP member countries so far represent the United States' fourth-largest export market, amounting to USD80.9 billion, which is expected to grow as Obama has invited more countries to take part in the negotiations. This move also signals US determination to prevent the emergence of a "China Inc. economic bloc".⁸

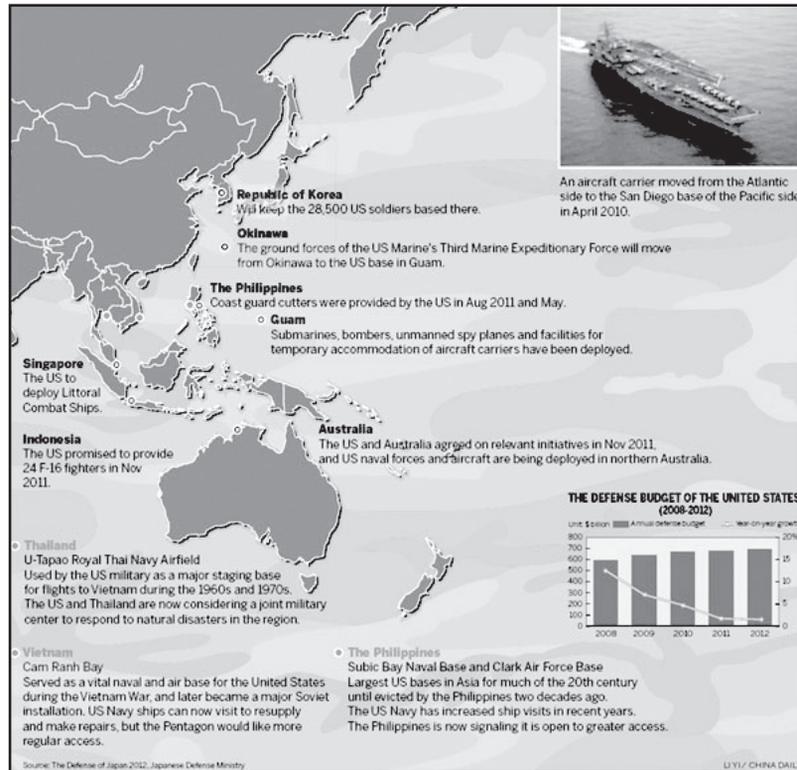
Its increasing economic interests in Asia thus necessitate the refocusing of US military projection in the region. The Philippines, along with Japan, South Korea, Australia and Thailand, have long maintained treaty alliances with the US. But the ascent of China as an economic behemoth has posed new challenges for American interests in the region. China is being depicted as having the greatest potential to compete militarily with the US and a threat to the freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, which for the first time is being considered as a matter of US national interest. Thus, as Clinton wrote, there is a need not only to sustain but to "update" the US' existing alliances which will serve as the fulcrum of its pivot to Asia. This entails the expansion of existing military cooperation and forging new ties for defense and security. Clearly, the US agenda in the sending and positioning of troops in these countries is not simply to provide military assistance to the latter in addressing external security threats, but to help revive US military power in Asia by using supposed Chinese military aggression as pretext for its continuing military expansion.

FIGURE 2: US military swings to Asia-Pacific region

Source: http://www.china.org.cn/world/2012-08/06/content_26141329.htm

US economic and military plans will have serious implications on the ground that ought to be closely monitored. Civil society groups have established anti-US bases networks across countries in order to oppose the growing presence of American troops in the region. In countries with which the US has visiting forces agreements (VFA) in place, several cases of environmental pollution and human rights violations involving American troops have been reported. An increased US presence clearly presents a continuing risk to the sovereignty of the region's countries and peoples, not to mention the possibility of an actual military conflict with China being stoked by aggressive projection of US military might in the region, putting the people and prospects for regional peace at risk. An increasing incidence of resource grabs, worsening conditions for migrants, growing militarization, increasing cases of human rights abuses, regional institutions that continue to be interstate in nature – these constitute the multiple crises the region's peoples are confronted with. Indeed, Asia is booming and is projected to achieve steady economic growth in the coming years, but this growth is not something to be proud of, as it is happening at the expense of the people. Economic growth has mainly served the interests of the region's elites, foreign investors and multinational firms, while a great majority of the population continues to live below the poverty line and are suffering the brunt of the multiple crises. As the ADB itself has noted, inequality is a leitmotif of Asia "growth". Unemployment and hunger continue to soar in countries like the Philippines, amid high levels of economic growth over the past years.

There is therefore, the need to take a step back and question the so-called success stories of development and growth



in Asia, amidst the hype of an "Asian century". While Asia is beset with a history of colonialism and neocolonialism, it also has a long history of continuing struggles for democracy and liberation. If there is going to be genuine sustainable development in the region, the impetus for this can only come from people on the ground. The need to strengthen

people's solidarity in struggling for genuine pro-people reforms and democratic alternatives has never been more crucial.

Notes

1. *Asian Development Outlook 2012: Confronting Rising Inequality in Asia* (Manila: ADB, 2012) Retrieved from: <http://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/ado2012-highlights.pdf>
2. Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) reflects the deprivations that a poor person faces all at once with respect to education, health and living standard. Unlike the Human Development Index which is based on country averages of these same dimensions of deprivation, the MPI is based on the number of people at the household level who face these deprivations simultaneously. Human Development Report 2010 – 20th Anniversary Edition. *The Real Wealth of Nations: Pathways to Human Development*. (New York: United Nations, 2010).
3. Asian Development Bank, Retrieved from : www.adb.org/themes/poverty/overview
4. *Asia's Increasing Rich-Poor Divide Undermining Growth, Stability* (ADB Report, 2012) Retrieved from: <http://www.adb.org/news/asia-increasing-rich-poor-divide-undermining-growth-stability-adb-report>
5. *FTAs now total 250 in Asia and the Pacific; 103 in effect*, Retrieved from: <http://aric.adb.org/>
6. All examples cited were drawn from reports/researches of various CSOs working on issues of migrants, FTAs, land grabs, water, among others
7. *ASEAN integration to expand market share*, Retrieved from: <http://www.bworldonline.com/content.php?section=Economy&title=ASEAN-integration-to-expand-market-share&id=59592>
8. *Obama's Plan for America's Pacific Century* (The Atlantic, 2011) Retrieved from: <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/11/obamas-plan-for-americas-pacific-century/249045/#>

IBON Criticizes ADB Support of Water Privatization and Aquino's CCTs



IBON criticized the support given by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) this month for conditional cash transfers (CCTs) and public-private partnership (PPPs) initiatives in the water sector.

The ADB praised the Aquino administration for its conditional cash transfer (CCT) scheme for poor Filipinos. However, IBON said that the program's funding from ADB will only sink poor Filipinos into a large amount of debt and that the program was not well-researched.

"The ADB has not only increased the Philippines' debt dependency, but has also made these loans a leverage to implement damaging economic policies like trade liberalization and privatization of social and public services," IBON said.

Php 34 billion has been set by the Aquino administration for this year's CCT, which aims to help 4.8 million poor families in two years. While the ADB said that the CCT

program is essential to help reduce poverty in the country IBON noted that poor Filipinos will have to repay ADB an estimated \$508.5 million over 25 years.

In terms of the water sector, contrary to the ADB's claims, IBON argued that allowing profit-oriented private corporations to take over the management and distribution of water resources will not address so-called water insecurity. Indeed, the experiences of countries around the world show that public-private partnership (PPP) have often worsened the problem.

ADB officials stressed water security as one of the issues to be addressed at their 45th Annual Meeting. The ADB warned that Asia will face a severe water crisis by 2030, with the shortfall in water supply reaching as much as 40 percent. To address the situation, the multilateral financial institution is drawing up a new framework for water operations that calls for efficiency improvement and more PPPs.

However, IBON noted that the experience of the Philippines is instructive with regard to PPP initiatives in the water sector. The Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) was privatized in 1997. Private companies Manila Water and Maynilad were allocated the task of delivering water to almost 14 million people in Metro Manila and nearby areas.

IBON research shows that since the MWSS privatization water rates have increased by 833.2% in the Manila Water concession areas and 520% in the Maynilad concession areas. Moreover, only 60% of 760,000 households in the service area of Maynilad have 24-hour water supply and more than half of its water allocation is wasted due to leaking pipes and pilferage. Manila Water, on the other hand, claims 99% coverage, but this includes those serviced by a third party private contractor often in poor communities. These private companies promised universal access to water by 2001 and a 24/7 water supply.

IBON warned that promoting more PPPs in the water sector will aggravate the deteriorating condition of the world's water supply. Contrary to the aim of "water for all" trumpeted by the ADB, dwindling water resources are likely to be increasingly monopolized by the rich at the expense of poor families who cannot afford escalating user fees common in PPP projects.

Bayan Pickets ADB Meeting, APRN Calls for Rights and Genuine Development



“ADB back off! Philippines not for sale!” was the chant from multisectoral group Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (Bayan) that greeted the opening of the 45th annual meeting of the Asian Development Bank (ADB). As the meeting opened on May 2 at the Philippine International Convention Center (PICC) in Manila, the group also burned a mock ADB logo that displayed the words “Anti-Development Bank, Promoting poverty in Asia and the Pacific.”

The Manila meeting was centered on so-called “inclusive growth”. But Bayan said the impact of ADB’s policies and loans has been excluding and marginalizing the poor while only profiting the big corporations.

Bayan criticized the Aquino administration for the red carpet

treatment it is giving to the ADB assembly, saying that the bank is behind the many anti-poor and anti-development policies that impoverish the people and bankrupt the domestic economy. It said that the ADB is the main creditor and proponent of programs that facilitate the sell-off of Philippine patrimony to profit-oriented private business, including foreign corporations.

It cited the ADB-designed and bankrolled and implemented Electric Power Industry Reform Act (Epira), which the group said is the reason why Manila now has the most expensive electricity rates in Asia. Even Mindanao, which is being plagued by “brownouts” due to a lack of energy supply, has higher electricity rates than Hong Kong, Seoul, Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok, and other major Asian cities. Electricity rates in the Philippines have doubled

since Epira was implemented, while it was funded through a debilitating foreign debt of about USD1.6 billion over the past 14 years.

Aside from power, the ADB has also funded the privatization of the country’s water services, irrigation systems, dams, and even the commercialization of the National Food Authority (NFA). These reforms have resulted in skyrocketing cost of living and further hampered poor Filipinos’ access to basic social and economic services.

The loans used to finance these neoliberal reforms have been draining the country’s resources which could and should have been used for public education, social housing, health services, social security, land reform, and other social services. The ADB is the **(continued on page 9)**

CSOs Sidelined in ASEAN Human Rights Agenda

Representatives of civil society organisations (CSOs) met the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) on June 22 in Kuala Lumpur for the first time for a consultation on the drafting of the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration.

The organisations welcomed the Consultation as a positive step in the right direction. However, CSOs stated that the Consultation was short, late, without a draft to comment on and with civil society only partially represented and some organizations rejected.

Representatives of the 48 CSOs who had participated in the Fifth Regional Consultation on ASEAN and Human Rights submitted a detailed joint statement with specific recommendations on a large variety of issues and rights. These recommendations were both provided in writing and conveyed verbally during the June 22 Consultation. During the meeting, several AICHR representatives expressed their appreciation of the submission.

Repeated failure to consult CSOs

Many CSOs believe the performance of the AICHR has been disappointing, epitomized by a lack of transparency, failure to consult with CSOs and no

demonstrable progress in protecting and promoting human rights.

A CSO report on the performance of the AICHR for the period of October 2010 to December 2011 was released at the end of April. The report said a total reform is needed if the AICHR is to become more independent from the governments, more effective in responding to human rights violations and more relevant to the needs of the peoples in the region.

The report revealed that AICHR has systematically failed to make public any of the official documents adopted since its inception in 2009. This includes its first annual report, which was submitted to the 44th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in July 2011. Other official AICHR documents that have not been made public include the Guidelines on Operations of the AICHR, the Terms of Reference of the Drafting Group of the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration, the Terms of Reference of the Baseline Study on Corporate Social Responsibility and Human Rights in ASEAN, the Rules of Procedure for the AICHR Fund, the first annual report of the AICHR, the AICHR Work Plan 2013-2015, its 2012 Priority Programme and its budget, and the Terms of Reference of the Thematic Study of the Right to Peace

The report also found that while the AICHR has repeatedly refused meetings with civil society organizations and national human rights institutions in the Southeast Asian region despite numerous requests, it did not hesitate to meet with a range of international civil society organizations, including Human Rights Watch (HRW), Amnesty International (AI), the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH) and Freedom House during its official visits to the United States and Europe.

Key CSO concerns

CSOs present at the June 22 consultation reiterated their concern over the procedural issues that have plagued the drafting process:

- CSOs in most member states, especially grassroots organisations, have been sidelined from the process, as their AICHR representatives did not hold national-level consultations. However, we commend those national AICHR representatives who have held largely informal consultations with CSOs at the national level;
- There has been no comprehensive, meaningful, institutionalised consultation at the regional level with CSOs to this point. With the present

Consultation coming so close to the scheduled submission of the draft AHRD to the ASEAN Ministers' Meeting, it will only partially mitigate this problem, unless time and space are allocated for further consultations;

- It is unfortunate that no drafts or summaries of deliberations have been issued by AICHR. At this stage of the process, where AICHR is discussing the actual wording of each provision, this seriously hampers CSOs ability to contribute to the process in a meaningful way.

CSOs procedural concerns were compounded by the lack of

transparency and organisation of the June 22 Consultation itself, with some states nominating non-independent organisations and formal invitations being issued very late, resulting in certain CSOs not having time to secure the resources for their participation.

Barred from participating

Most worryingly, several national and regional as well as international organisations were barred from participating in the Consultation, the only official explanation provided being that “there was no consensus” over allowing them to participate.

All ASEAN member states have committed, under their Charter,

to “promote a people-oriented ASEAN in which all sectors of society are encouraged to participate in, and benefit from, the process of ASEAN integration and community building”. CSOs sought to remind those censoring states that “all sectors” means that they cannot pick and choose who they want to talk to - AICHR must accept that dialogue also means exposing it to different views and criticism.

This article is an edited version of two articles, one first published by the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), the other first published by the Asian Tribune. <http://www.fidh.org/-/FIDH-s-Role-> <http://www.asiantribune.com/news/2012/04/26/total-reform-needed-make-aichr-independent-effective-and-relevant-asean-peoples>

Bayan pickets...

(continued from page 7)

single biggest foreign creditor of the Philippines, which as of 2011 owes the bank some USD5.84 billion. More than 50% of the country's multilateral debt comes from the ADB. For 2012, the Aquino administration is willing to spend PhP738.6 billion for debt servicing while the budget for social services is pegged at only PhP575.8 billion.

In its critique of the ADB, the Asia-Pacific Research Network said that no kind of growth, whether inclusive, green, or knowledge-based would represent true 'development' unless it was driven by, reflected and empowered those affected by it – that development must enable the poor to claim their political, economic, social and cultural rights.

In a statement, it said: “For the ADB, “inclusive growth” means increasing access to services and opportunities so that more households, farmers, and small business owners can participate in and benefit from growth. But a truly inclusive growth cannot be achieved without putting the poor and marginalized in the driving seat of development.

“However, history shows that ADB projects have been in the interest of business, and have resulted in spiraling poverty, marginalization, and worsening environmental degradation. Knowledge-generation will not aid development if tightly controlled by Intellectual Property Rights and thus not available to the general public. Green growth has at its heart

the commodification of nature and short-term, unsustainable technological fixes, which likewise will enrich the few at the expense of the poor.”

Thousands mark May Day across Asia

Thousands of Indonesian workers have demanded better pay and conditions at Asia's biggest May Day rally in the capital Jakarta.

Carrying banners saying "raise our salaries" and "stop outsourcing contracts", more than 9,000 workers gathered at the city's main roundabout before marching to the state palace.

Around 16,000 police and soldiers were deployed to guard the protest.

Many workers said they were worried about job security.

"Living costs have gone up but our

salaries remain unchanged. We only make enough to eat but there is no money in the bank, no money for our children's education," protest leader Muhamad Rusdi said.

Hong Kong

Raising the minimum wage was the main demand for about 5,000 workers, domestic helpers and activists who held a noisy procession through central Hong Kong.

"The problem with Hong Kong is that the wealth is concentrated on a small number of people, many people are still living in poverty," said protester Fernando Cheung.

"That's why Hong Kong has one of the world's highest income gaps between rich and poor. We urgently need a redistribution of wealth," he said.

Philippines

In Manila, about 3,000 workers and activists marched to the presidential palace, bearing a giant effigy of Philippine President Benigno Aquino. They carried banners saying "raise our pay now" and "fight for socialism".

But in a Labour Day speech, Aquino said: "If our wages go even higher, what foreign investor will put his money here? Our economy could fall even further behind."

By Agence France Presse (AFP). This article was published by Radio Australia. <http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/international/2012-05-01/thousands-mark-may-day-across-asia/936584>

On Labor Day, workers take Aquino to task for pushing working people deeper into poverty

By Marya Salamat

Some 100,000 working people and youth marched simultaneously in various cities of the Philippines on Labor Day, May 1. In the capital, an estimated 20,000 marched under the scorching sun and sudden downpour late in the afternoon. All over the Philippines they uniformly condemned, in various languages, the Aquino government's inaction on people's hunger and poverty. In fact, they blamed the government of President Benigno "Noy" Aquino III for pushing the working people deeper into poverty.

Labor leaders took turns lambasting Aquino's supposed programs for

helping the poor as bogus and palliative, not offering real solutions or at worst, even contributing to their worsening poverty.

"Pres. Aquino did nothing to lessen hunger and poverty among workers and the poor," said Elmer "Bong" Labog, chairman of labor center Kilusang Mayo Uno that led the bigger May 1 rallies all over the Philippines. Labog said Aquino has failed to heed the demands of workers and poor people who suffered for more than nine years under the past administration of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

Arroyo, who preceded Aquino as president, had given the lowest real wage hikes to workers on record, according to independent think tank Ibon Philippines. Also under Arroyo's watch, bloody dispersals of picketlines and strikes happened, giving rise to the now infamous "Hacienda Luisita massacre" and the killings of Nestle' union leaders.

Aquino had wooed Filipino voters with promises of "change" and of being different from Arroyo. But two years into his term, he has proven "that he is no different from Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo when it comes to economic policies," said Labog. He explained that Aquino has granted only "measly wage hikes, promoted contractualization even more, made demolitions of urban poor communities more brutal, and colluded with the oil cartel."

P125 and P6,000 wage hikes

Government employees, teachers and health workers, including their family members who joined the rally, scoffed at Aquino's "surprise package."

"Obviously we are dismayed," said Ferdinand Gaité, national president of government employee confederation COURAGE. The public sector leader said the Aquino government's "treatment of its own employees is reflective of its seeming prejudice against workers."

Aquino has announced ahead of Labor Day the one-month advance implementation of the last tranche of the Salary Standardization Law 3 or SSL 3. But this failed to appease nor forestall the members of Courage from attending the Labor Day protests.

"It's a measly P713 (\$17) a month increase for the minimum pay. Considering the rate of inflation, it's not even enough to make up for the lost value of our pay," Gaité said.

Courage told Aquino not to brag "about something that is not even to the credit of his administration." SSL 3 was passed in 2008 under the Arroyo administration. It mandates a four-year staggered increase for state employees. However, it is highly criticized for granting bigger pay for those occupying higher government posts while providing measly increases for rank and file workers.

Courage said that even if the public sector employees' minimum pay increases to P9,000 (\$214) next month, after deductions, "it is still way behind even the government's conservative estimate of cost of living which now stands at P29,000 (\$688)." The need



Photo: Bulatlat.com

for a P6,000 (\$142) increase remains urgent, said Gaité.

For private sector employees, the wage hike they had been pressing the government to implement remains the P125 across-the-board nationwide wage hike that is still pending in congress. Although the proposal is gaining supporters, President Aquino has shot it down recently, using what many critics said as "flawed computations." Instead, the regional wage boards and the labor department started approving "paltry" increases.

Bayan Muna Rep. Teddy Casiño asked Aquino during the May 1 rally why he is too protective of capitalist profits, as manifested by Aquino's outright rejection of a P125 (\$2.9) wage hike. He even tried to discredit it by bloating the cost of the wage hike. Casiño said the amount, when given to poor workers, would have spurred the economy as workers would likely spend it on basic goods and services. "Whereas if Aquino just let the capitalists continue pocketing those trillions of pesos, it would only go to more luxury products."

Aquino a US pit bull

This Labor Day rally, the marchers in Manila were preceded by the 10-foot effigy of Pres. Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III portrayed as a pit bull, which they say symbolizes Aquino's relentless subservience to US dictates.

Created by Ugat Lahi Artist Collective, a group of visual artists known for creating effigies of Philippine presidents shown in various protest actions, this pit bull Aquino drew chuckles. When the pit bull effigy came into their view after turning to Recto ahead of the marchers, it even elicited some smiles from policemen deployed in the area. As a US running dog sporting guns and other military paraphernalia, Aquino's effigy was burned at Mendiola at the start of the Labor Day main program there.

The KMU also unveiled a huge mural that served as backdrop of the International Workers' Day 2012 attended by tens of thousands of working people in Plaza Miranda and Mendiola.

"The mural is in theme with Labor Day 2012 commemoration," said Labog. The KMU has dubbed it a day of reckoning and struggle against the US-Aquino regime. Their mural depicts as avengers the "basic alliance of workers, peasants and other toiling masses." They were shown here with their "united resistance against the Aquino government," which KMU describes as chief representative of the few ruling elite and the US' most trusted ally in the Asia-Pacific.

This article was first published by Bulatlat.com

IFFM Highlights Devastating Impact of Land Grabs, Prompts UN Rapporteurs to Speak Out

For close to a century, peasants in the Philippines have been organizing to defend their lands from being grabbed by foreign agribusiness corporations. However, this struggle for land and livelihood in rural areas has intensified over the past five years, as a race to establish plantations of “green oases” for agrofuel development and agro-industrial crops for export has been initiated by foreign companies from Japan, South Korea, China and the Arab world.

As a consequence, communities of small farmers, fisherfolk and indigenous people are being displaced, while food insecurity and hunger are increasing, particularly amongst marginalized rural populations. The ecological balance of forests, watersheds and grasslands and the associated natural buffering system against climate change are all being undermined in this process. Yet, despite widespread public concern, these foreign land acquisitions are taking place under a veil of secrecy and with the complicity of influential international institutions, elected officials and national government mandated agencies.

In order to investigate an urgent and ongoing case of land grabbing that has been prompted by the development of

‘Gov’ts must not be seduced by developers’ promises’



James Anaya Photo: UN Photo

Responding to the findings of the IFFM - and another case of land grabbing in the Meruake region of Indonesia - two United Nations experts on food and indigenous peoples urged South-East Asian states not to sideline the human rights of communities across the region who derive their livelihoods, traditions and ways of life directly from their natural environments.

“Governments must not be seduced by the promises of developers when assessing large-scale land acquisitions for export-led crops and agrofuel production,” said the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier De Schutter, and the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, James Anaya, with specific reference to “acute” cases of competing land interests in South-East Asia, where agrofuel developments are rapidly expanding.

“Development is not always the outcome, however many jobs and export dollars a project promises to yield,” the independent experts stressed. “New economic opportunities, and new, more intensive uses of land, must not be at the expense of the human rights of local populations.”

“Governments must step up their vigilance in regard to large-scale land acquisitions to ensure that the fundamental rights of these communities are not violated, be they small-farmers, fishers, hunters,



Olivier De Schutter Photo: UN Photo

foragers or craftsmen,” they said.

“Large-scale monocrop developments mean a wholesale shift in land use and land access,” warned the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, noting that the benefits of these projects accrue principally to multinational firms who export agrofuels or food crops to international markets.

“All too often, this is to the detriment of existing land users. If the environment they depend upon is repurposed, degraded and placed off limits, their ability to produce or to procure food – and thus their right to food – will be severely threatened,” De Schutter said.

“These are mostly indigenous families whose traditional livelihoods are rooted in their local environment,” Anaya warned. “Communities are often ancestrally tied to the areas in question and may not possess official deeds to the land, making their tenure highly vulnerable in the face of land conversion deals.”

“Converting bio-diverse forest land to intensive monocropping can entail wide environmental impacts, from the loss of forest-dwelling game species in Meruake, to reduced resistance to flooding and landslides in Isabela,” the Special Rapporteurs noted. “We must also be sensitive to the impacts of sudden influxes of workers on local food access, traditions and ways of life.”

The UN experts expressed concerns about an apparent lack of adequate consultation and transparency in both land acquisition processes. In neither case are indigenous communities believed to have been sufficiently informed and consulted about the land acquisitions and their repercussions on local life.

They also noted that major question marks hang over the land lease and compensation arrangements through which land is changing hands in Isabela, while in Meruake police intimidation and the signing away of land rights under coercion have been alleged.

Both experts urged the South-East Asian Governments “to align – as a matter of urgency – their biofuels and investment policies with the need to respect land users’ rights as detailed the voluntary guidelines on land tenure, as adopted by States this

month in Rome within the Committee on World Food Security.”

Olivier De Schutter was appointed the Special Rapporteur on the right to food in May 2008 by the UN Human Rights Council. He is independent from any government or organization.

S. James Anaya was appointed as Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples in March 2008 by the UN Human Rights Council. He is a Regents Professor and the James J. Lenoir Professor of Human Rights Law and Policy at the University of Arizona (United States).

The statement of the UNSRs was first published by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (UN OHCHR)

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=12184&LangID=E>

an 11,000 hectare agrofuel project in San Mariano, an upland municipality in the Isabela province of the Philippines, an international fact finding mission was conducted from May 29 to June 6 by the People’s Coalition on Food Sovereignty and IBON International, in collaboration with the Asian Peasant Coalition and Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas, upon the request of the local organization of small-scale farmers, Danggayan Dagiti Mannalon ti Isabela, with the support of Action Solidarité Tiers Monde.

Through interviews with local peasants, indigenous people, representatives of civil society organizations, government officials and corporate spokespeople, the IFFM helped to provide a contextualized understanding of some of the devastating impacts of foreign land acquisitions on affected communities of small food producers in the Philippines.

The findings of the research demonstrate that after only acquiring 3,000 hectares of land, the Japanese-Filipino consortium of companies backing the San Mariano bio-fuel project, Green Future Innovations Inc., is already exacerbating land grabbing conflicts and socio-economic inequities as well as undermining food self-sufficiency by:

- advancing claims that lands rightfully cultivated by peasants and recognized as indigenous peoples’ ancestral territories are available for conversion into sugar cane plantations;
- engaging in non-transparent lease negotiations that result in lands being grabbed from the people who till the soil;
- promoting flagrant violations of contractual commitments under the Socialized Industrial Forestry

Management Agreements by facilitating the growing of sugar cane on these lands;

- leasing land from peasants through exploitative contracts which offer compensation at a substantially lower rate than would be earned if they continued to cultivate the land and sell their produce of rice, corn and bananas at local markets;
- threatening the food security and the livelihoods of farm workers who are now planting sugar cane under highly exploitative conditions; and
- aggravating environmental devastation and destroying the natural climate change mitigation capacities of local ecosystems.

Overall, the intensified land conflicts and food insecurity caused by foreign land acquisitions as revealed in the IFFM report are indicative of the situation of rural peoples across the Philippines who are confronting land grabbing and the corresponding threats to their rights to land, livelihood and life.

The People’s Coalition on Food Sovereignty statement on the IFFM can be found at: <http://www.archive.foodsov.org/html/mediarelease000086.htm>

The neglect of Nepal's indigenous people – facing poverty and food insecurity



A young boy walks to school in Jumla, a remote mountain district in western Nepal. Access to education in Nepal's remote mountainous regions remains a challenge. Photo: © David Swanson/IRIN

KATHMANDU, 8 May 2012 (IRIN) - The needs of millions of indigenous mountain people across Nepal are overlooked, imperilling their food security and hindering their economic progress, activists and experts say.

“People in the mountains of Nepal are worse off in terms of total poverty - food and non-food poverty,” said Jean-Yves Gerlitz, co-author of a recent study on mountain poverty, and statistical analyst at the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), an intergovernmental regional organization based in the capital, Kathmandu.

In assessing the government-administered Nepal Living Standards Survey (NLSS) of 2003/2004, the authors noted that 40 percent of the 12 million people living in the mountainous and hilly regions of Nepal were below the poverty line (US\$91 per year), compared to a national average of 31 percent of 29 million people.

Nepal is divided into three geographic zones - the northern mountains, central hills, and southern plains - each extending lengthwise through the country. The population is disproportionately distributed across these zones, with half residing in the plains, 43 percent in the hills, and only 7 percent in the mountains.

While data from the 2011 NLSS reveal a declining national poverty rate - now at 25 percent - indigenous mountain groups still fare worse.

ICIMOD says mountain and hill communities, compared to those living in the plains, have less access to “improved” sources of safe drinking water and electricity, and live hours away from road networks, markets and financial services.

Difficult terrain “aggravates the problems of access to essential services such as health, education, and livelihood support,” the report pointed out.

Households are more likely to be headed by a family member without formal education, and with more youth leaving to seek work in urban centres or abroad, the women, children and elderly are often left behind to bear the work burden, Gerlitz said.

General planning, special needs

National plans and development strategies generally apply to the country as a whole, and fail to address the particular needs of mountain dwellers, said Kiran Hunzai, ICIMOD poverty analyst and co-author of the agency’s recent report.

This has also been the case in the development of national climate change policies and programmes, said Ang Kaji Sherpa, general secretary of the Kathmandu-based NGO, Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities.

Indigenous groups were not consulted in the writing of the National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) to Climate Change, despite their increasing vulnerability to erratic weather patterns, Sherpa told an international conference that convened mountain countries in Kathmandu in April 2012.

Mountain and hill communities, compared to those living in the plains, have less access to improved sources of safe drinking water and electricity, and live hours away from road networks, markets and financial services

In recent years the Nepalese government has also cordoned off large areas of land for conservation and reforestation, displacing large numbers of the local population, who have had little say in the matter, Sherpa said.

“They have been forcibly migrated, and their livelihoods have been affected. All of this should be taken into account when Nepal is implementing its adaptation or mitigation policies.”

Batu Uprety, technical joint-secretary at the Ministry of Environment, Science and Technology, maintained that representatives of the indigenous communities had participated in an open consultation on the NAPA, and that the root of mountain poverty is not neglect, but rather the difficult terrain, he told IRIN.

ICIMOD’s Hunzai noted that not all mountain communities are isolated.

A recent UN report has called for greater focus on mountain development.

“Covering about one-quarter of the world’s land surface, mountains provide a direct life-support base for about 12 percent of the world population, as well as essential goods and services to more than half of humankind,” noted the report’s authors.

This article was first published by IRIN news. IRIN is a humanitarian news and analysis service of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report/95418/NEPAL-Mountain-dwellers-neglected>

Indignados take back square on movement's anniversary

By Jerome Roos



Hundreds of thousands flock into Puerta del Sol as part of a global day of action to commemorate the first anniversary of the 15-M movement. Photo: roarmag.org

Why would we need political parties if we can have a political *party*? That's the question that rang through my head as I roamed around Puerta del Sol last night, climbing on top of the metro station to see a crowd of hundreds of thousands amassed in the square. In one corner, people were actively debating alternatives to capitalism and representative democracy — in another, hundreds were dancing wildly to the revolutionizing beats of a professional drum circle.

At midnight, the square was still crammed with people. Earlier, tens of thousands had marched to Sol from four different corners in the city. Walking along with the

Southern march, we witnessed the incredible sight of more people joining us in every single neighborhood we passed through. In a sign that the 15-M movement has effectively decentralized itself, neighborhood assemblies amassed locally and then joined the larger marches to Sol.

The principle reason the *indignados* took back to the square last night is that this week marks the first anniversary of the movement. On May 15 last year, several dozens of activists followed in the footsteps of the Tahrir revolutionaries and pitched the first tents on Puerta del Sol, marking the birth of a non-violent

popular protest movement that would quickly spread throughout Spain, to Greece and then on to Wall Street and beyond.

As part of this anniversary, the assemblies of the 15-M movement called for another global day of action, like the one on October 15 last year. The call was answered by hundreds of thousands of people in 60 Spanish cities and at least 50 countries throughout the world. In Tel Aviv, tens of thousands took to Rabin Square to fire up their own movement again, while Occupy London protesters were met with a police crackdown on their attempt to set up a new camp.

But there was another, less festive reason the *indignados* were back in the square this weekend. A year down the line, a right-wing government has come to power and the economic situation has only further aggravated. With investors fearing a Greek-style escalation of the country's debt troubles, Spain has now become the focal point in Europe's never-ending crisis. In response, the government pushed through the most radical austerity program on the continent.

Furthermore, the government made a move this week to bail-out the country's third biggest lender, Bankia, which had long been beset with trouble as more and more homeowners began to default on their mortgages. Spain is plagued with the highest unemployment in the developed world: almost 25 percent for the average population and over 50 percent for the younger generation. Since 2007, over 350,000 families (!!!) have been evicted from their homes.

Yet despite the dark clouds of debt hanging over the country, the atmosphere in Sol last night was exhilarating and festive. When at some point a number of police vans retreated from the square, hundreds started dancing and screaming all around them, screaming "Sol belongs

to the people!". Towards 2am, thousands sat down in the middle of the square for the first general assembly since the demobilization of the camp in June last year. Noone seemed to mind the fact that the authorities had officially "forbidden" the presence of any protesters in the square after 10pm.

But then, towards 5am in the morning, as the crowds began to thin out and hundreds had already passed out on their makeshift cardboard beds, the police suddenly did move in. In a violent crackdown on the completely peaceful temporary autonomous space that had been created, policemen roughly dragged away protesters, arresting at least a dozen and a half, and pinning one girl to a wall for at least 20 minutes.

Yet, as usual, the *indignados* showed immediate resolve. Today, from 5pm on, thousands flocked back into the square and many thousands more are expected to join them tonight. Until May 15, the movement has organized dozens (if not hundreds) of thematic assemblies and workshops in squares and parks across Madrid, ranging from healthcare and economics to infrastructural questions and future actions. Similar activities are underway across Spain.

All of this is telling us something very important: our movement survived the cold winter months and is gearing up for another season of simultaneous contestation and co-creation. Last night, the people had smiles upon their faces, for the movement once more proved that it remains a force to be reckoned with. One message circulating on Twitter yesterday perfectly captured the mood here in Madrid: "This is not an anniversary — it's a tradition!"

This article was first published in RoarMag. <http://roarmag.org/2012/05/indignados-12-m-puerta-del-sol-madrid/>

Without Human Rights, Sustainable Development Will Fail

By Antonio Tujan Jr.



Civil society march at Rio de Janeiro during the Rio+20 Summit. Photo: Convergencia de Comunicación de los movimientos/flickr.com

When the speeches are made and the headlines written, I have little doubt that there will be much acclaim given to the re-affirmation at Rio+20 of a series of key human rights principles enshrined in sustainable development at the 1992 Earth Summit. But that will not tell the whole story, and nor will it guarantee the realization of those rights.

The Southern NGO IBON International coordinates the “Rights and Equity Cluster” among NGOs participating in Rio+20. Alongside a small group of states -- including none of the leading Northern nations who readily pronounce their commitment to human rights -- IBON International and other like-minded NGOs have played a key role in a battle to have these rights recognized at Rio+20. And regardless of speeches and protestations to the contrary, the incorporation of these rights is one of the key reasons why the text drafted by at the 11th hour by the Brazilian government is so unpalatable to the richest countries of the world.

But why, 20 years after the Earth Summit, has there had to be any fight to get recalcitrant Northern governments

which wage war around the world on the basis of “democracy” and “human rights” to sign up to putting rights at the heart of sustainable development? Why for example, did the richest countries on the planet line up to delete references to the Right to Development -- agreed by the UN in 1986 against the single opposing vote of the USA -- from the Rio+20 outcome document? And crucially, why has it been so easy for the corporate role in sustainable development, championed principally by the USA, to see a huge expansion without any parallel movement to ensure corporate regulation and commitment to human rights?

In a Tuesday side event in Riocentro, a panel including Rubens Ricupero, the former Secretary General of UNCTAD who played a key role in the 1992 Earth Summit, Navi Pillay, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the executive director of UNEP, Kumi Naidoo of Greenpeace, Jessica Evans of Human Rights Watch, and myself, all broadly expressed the same belief -- that without human rights at its center, sustainable development will fail. And placing human rights at the center of sustainable development means more



Antonio Tujan Jr. is director of IBON International, which coordinated the NGO cluster on rights and equity at Rio+20.

than adhering to rights in name; it means creating the accountability mechanisms to enable the people to hold governments and, indirectly, corporations to account.

It is often forgotten that sustainable development goes beyond the environmental moniker it is so often reduced to; it comprises “three pillars,” with economic and social on an equal footing alongside environmental. And this is with great reason: the systemic drive for endless economic growth is what has created social injustice and environmental destruction. Within our predominant system, with its leitmotif of perpetual growth, impoverished people become the tool for ensuring the unsustainable comfort of a minority, and the environment simultaneously both a resource base and dumping ground. It is impossible for all the people of the world to enjoy the unsustainable lifestyles of the Global North with the resources of our one planet alone. But in the 20 years since the Earth Summit, the world has increased its natural resource use by 50 percent -- North American per capita consumption stands at around 90 kg of resources per day, Europeans consume around 45kg per day, whereas in Africa consumption stands at around 10 kg per day. If the richest countries of the world care a jot for the notions of sustainable development and equity they have subscribed to, redistribution is the only way forward.

Enshrining rights amid a system of unsustainable production, consumption and distribution is a vacuous

exercise. What use is a right to food when an inequitable mode of production guarantees not only the fossil fuel-generated climate change that lay behind the failure of crops in the Horn of Africa this year, but also promotes the internecine conflicts and uneven distribution that perpetuated it? What use is a right to food when marginalized peoples dependent on agriculture do not have sovereignty over what food they eat and where they get it from? It is these people, who shoulder the terrible burden of the negative impacts of our unsustainable development, who should have their interests and rights at the heart of sustainable development.

A key failure of Rio+20 is that the richest countries have in unison failed to put up the money to match their commitments. There remains no clear cut means through which the technology needed by poorer countries to enable their transition to more sustainable economies can be transferred to them. Yet again, the richest sought to ensure that their role in this was either voluntary or altogether eradicated, with the private sector taking on sole responsibility. The likely result of this will be that the poorest will again be castigated for their “failures,” while the richest trumpet their successes in building the green technologies which they profit from selling to developing countries already struggling to meet their societies’ needs.

The Rio+20 tagline is “The Future We Want.” Who is the “we” in this? The process and its outcomes leave the conclusion that the future Rio+20 will bequeath is one wanted by corporations and their acolytes in government. With its failure to correct the unsustainable modes of production, consumption and distribution that profit a tiny elite while destroying millions of lives, devastating the environment and endangering humanity’s future, the draft outcome document for Rio+20 might as well be an empty coffin in which to bury the promises of the Earth Summit.

Antonio Tujan Jr is the director of IBON International, which coordinates the NGO Cluster on Rights and Equity at Rio+20, and is one of three NGO representatives selected to speak at the Rio+20 “High Level Roundtables” where heads of state and Nobel laureates speak to civil society and the private sector. He is chair of two major international aid coalitions, Better Aid, and the Reality of Aid Network, among other organizations. This article was first published in the Huffington Post. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/antonio-tujan-jr/without-human-rights-sust_b_1618362.html

Rio+20: A Voice from Port Harcourt, Nigeria

By Celestine Akpobari



Celestine Akpobari is head of the Social Development Integrated Centre in Nigeria, director of the Ogoni Solidarity Forum, and a member of the R4S platform. Photo: Amnesty International

Nigeria's problem is that it's one of the biggest markets in Africa; other, smaller countries have more freedom to manoeuvre in terms of development. But the global framework today means Nigeria is a slave to demands from developed economies.

As long as there is so much money coming out from oil and there's so much demand [for oil] from developed countries, the Dutch disease in Nigeria will never end. It's a new kind of colonialism that keeps us impoverished. The stone age ended not because there was no stone left, but [because] people just moved on. But the oil age cannot end until the oil is finished.

When I was growing up as a boy, we were comfortable with our farming and fishing; as a young man I could eat very nutritious, locally grown food. Now, because of what oil has done to our environment, we can't do simple things like that. People can no longer fish in polluted rivers, or make money selling this fish at the market. People can no longer farm. Oil has impoverished us in Nigeria.

Sustainable development, to me, simply means that one person cannot be suffering while another is enjoying. The current model of development in Nigeria – and probably all of Africa – is lopsided, to say the least. To have a model where one person can say “I eat”, and another person eats nothing, is criminal.

Am I optimistic about Rio+20? My answer is that we've had Kyoto and Copenhagen and how much has been implemented?

Rio+20 is about agriculture and the environment, but there's nothing about good governance. And that's the key. Governance has to be the first pillar if you want social, economic and environmental issues to advance.

But let's talk about sustainable agriculture, as Rio+20 does. First and foremost, you can't achieve it if policies are focused on industrial agriculture. National policies, global policies – all of them have to prioritise small-scale, local agriculture production.

There's also undue emphasis on a green economy which is solved by science identifying problems and

technology solving them. This is a top-down “techno-fix” approach, which I don’t agree with.

One thing that could be done is to reaffirm the precautionary principle. Things like geoengineering could be banned. New technologies such as nanotechnology and synthetic biology need to be re-evaluated for their environmental, health and socio-economic impacts.

Twenty years later, we are still using the wrong framework. 70% of the population live in poverty. It’s like sentencing someone to die by hanging or by lethal injection: one victim will be more subdued, but you’re still sentencing people to death.

Celestine Akpobari is Chairman of the Social Development Integrated Centre in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, director of the Ogoni Solidarity Forum, and a member of the Rights for Sustainability platform. This article was first published by The Guardian. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/2012/jun/15/rio20-voice-port-harcourt-nigeria>

Rio+20: A Voice from Dhaka, Bangladesh

By Ahmed Swapan

To meet the development goals, a human rights-based approach, gender equality, decent work, and environment and ecological protection should be at the heart.

Since 1992, the global economy has become more accumulative and centralised, which goes against the principles of sustainable development goals. A series of crises such as climate, food, power, energy and financial emerged due to overexploitation of natural resources, overconsumption and the capitalist nature of the economy.

Most of the world’s resources are in the hands of around 5% of the richest people. Thus, in the past two decades, marginalisation – the rich and poor divide – has increased. So, the development goals must assert social and economic equality, and environmental protection. The green economy cannot solve the problem until the current architecture is changed.



Ahmed Swapan is director of VOICE and a member of the R4S platform.
Photo: VoiceBD

Bangladesh has made economic progress with constant GDP growth of 6% in the past few years, but the rich and poor divide has increased and climate change becomes an issue that makes life more vulnerable than before.

Rio+20 must deal with how the international leadership comes to a consensus to resolve the crises and help the south, as they committed [to do] earlier, under the millennium development goals. A forward-looking vision for post-2015 should be at the core of discussions in Rio to deal with the unfinished business of commitments that global leaders made before.

Ahmed Swapan is director of VOICE, and a member of the Rights for Sustainability platform. This article was first published by The Guardian.

R4S delegates join People's March at Rio+20, bring protest inside Rio Centro

By Marjorie Pamintuan



RIO DE JANEIRO, June 20, 2012—International advocacy platform Rights for Sustainability (R4S) joined the “People’s March” on the “Global Day of Action” organized to mark the first day of formal negotiations by heads of states in Rio+20, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, now being held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

The mobilization of some 50,000 activists from both local and international groups snaked around downtown Rio to demonstrate to heads of state — as well as the

rest of the world — that people want system change for genuine sustainable development.

In a day of coordinated action, R4S delegates also protested inside the Rio Centro conference summit centre where the heads of state were gathered. They held placards bearing the R4S “five key asks”, and wore masks to show how multinational corporations from the richest countries are threatening people’s interests.

IBON International director and R4S head of delegation Antonio

Tujan Jr said: “This is the real Rio+20 summit where real solutions and approaches to genuine sustainable development are being discussed with people’s participation — in contrast to the formal Rio+20 negotiations at Rio Centro, where the corporate “green economy” is being promoted.”

Wearing orange scarves emblazoned with “I Reject Gree(d)n Economy”, the R4S delegates called for the rejection of this corporate Green Economy agenda, declaring that this would only centralize the world’s resources further in the hands of the

world's 1% — at the expense of the remaining 99%. The Green Economy will only push people deeper into poverty, and the whole world further into crisis.

“Green economy is not simply green washing. Worse, it is the ‘financialization’ of nature itself,” Tujan said.

“The proposed market reforms across the 11 economic sectors — agriculture, fisheries, water, forests, energy, manufacturing, waste, infrastructures, transportation, tourism and cities — will only provide financial investors more ways to profit.”

“We do not need this corporate Green Economy. What we need is system change that will dismantle this profit-driven economy and replace it to an economy that is founded on the rights and welfare of people.”

IBON International program manager and R4S delegate Maria Theresa Lauron also spoke on stage during the mobilization. “Green economy is not the future we want. Putting a price tag on nature violates people’s human rights. It also puts a price tag on the right to life itself — making it available only to those who can pay, Lauron said.

“We must fight for our right to live and to live well. Reject green economy!” she declared.

This article was first published on the Rights for Sustainability website. <http://rio20.iboninternational.org/archives/402>

R4S, other CSO activists hold ‘duct tape’ protest at Rio+20

By Mark Dearn

RIO DE JANEIRO, June 17, 2012—R4S member-delegates and other activists join forces in “duct-tape” action to protest the lack of civil society voices, the backtracking on Rio 1992 principles, and the prioritisation of unregulated corporate interests over human rights and equity. The protestors included representatives of IBON International, People’s

Coalition on Food Sovereignty (PCFS), European Solidarity Towards Equal Participation of People (Eurostep), the Naga People’s Movement for Human Rights (India), Roots for Equity (Pakistan), VOICE (Bangladesh), and Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN).



APRN slams Green Economy at the Rio+20 Global Day of Action in Manila



Manila, Philippines – Members of the Asia Pacific Research Network (APRN) joined a 200-strong people’s mobilization in front of the US Embassy, led by Kalikasan, a national people’s network for the environment, to denounce the “green economy” and the US’s lead role in the ever-worsening multiple global crises.

The Ecumenical Institute for Labor Education and Research (EILER), the Center for Women’s Resources (CWR), and the Center for Environmental Concerns (CEC) joined the Global Day of Action on Rio+20 in solidarity with the workers, farmers, indigenous peoples, women, urban poor, youth, and environmental groups in the Philippines, bringing with them the messages that came out of APRN’s Rio for People Conference held in Hanoi, Vietnam.

APRN General Secretary Lyn Pano was among the speakers who, after listening to the plight of the various sectors, shared the discussions in the recent APRN Rio for People conference to show that the dire situation experienced by the

Filipino people are also suffered by people around the Asia Pacific region suffer from. She emphasized the importance of the simultaneous street actions happening around the globe today, given that the ongoing Rio+20 Summit is driven and dominated by governments and corporate lobbyists who, being the culprits of the crisis, cannot be expected to bring about sustainable development.

Pano reaffirmed the calls being made in Rio and the world over for the rejection of the green economy and capitalism. “We, the people, who are not allowed to speak at the Summit, whose rights are being trampled upon, will not be silenced. Instead, we will strengthen our ranks and constantly struggle to realize system change.”

Also present in the Manila mobilization was EILER Executive Director Analea Escresa. Eiler was keen to emphasise the support of local labor groups’ demand for the government to foster national and local production and enterprises supporting small-scale business and producers for

sustainable development; to create equal employment opportunities and ensure decent work for all, gender equality, and participation particularly of marginalized groups; and to fulfill international human rights standards and principles to protect the rights of migrant workers and their families.

CWR members and staff were also present, carrying with them the messages coming from the youth and children’s sector, asserting their roles as agents of change, and not simply vulnerable victims of social injustices or mere recipients of government welfare. They joined the Global Day of Action, fully aware that they continue to be marginalized by the unsustainable dominant profit-driven economic system and that their voices must be heard and given greater importance.

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Native peoples left out in the cold at Rio+20

By Jeff Conant



Indigenous peoples' leaders prepare to meet with UN officials. Photo: Conant/climate-connections.org

When Clayton Thomas-Muller, a Cree organizer from Canada, sat on a panel at Rio+20 to announce a campaign to prevent Shell Oil from drilling in the Arctic, he was accompanied by billionaire biofuels baron Sir Richard Branson, Kumi Naidoo of Greenpeace International, and actress Lucy Lawless (perhaps better known as Xena, Warrior Princess).

“Resisting environmental destruction on indigenous lands is a movement of the Inupiak, Iliut, Gwich’in, Dene, Inuit, Tlingit, Yupik and Athabaskan tribes, who have risen up to challenge the fossil fuel industry and demand our rights to an environment that is conducive to subsistence,” he began.

Of the people on the panel, Thomas-Muller was the only one directly impacted by the issue. Yet, amidst the Hollywood glare, he was not the one to whom the media flocked.

After the media scrum followed the stars away, Thomas-Muller, in long black ponytail and t-shirt bearing the logo of his organization, the Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN), told me, “The Greenpeace campaign is good, but it’s a symbolic campaign. What’s really going to make a difference is Alaska natives, Inuit living in Canada, strong social movement organizing, civil disobedience, and the assertion of sovereignty by the people of the circumpolar regions who have taken care of the Arctic for the last 12,000 years.”

His point reflects one of the principles ceaselessly voiced by IEN and other groups that adhere to the tenets of environmental justice: “We speak for ourselves.”

Even in his opening statement, one imagines that Thomas-Muller felt compelled to list the Peoples of the Canadian Arctic to at least invoke their presence at a summit at which they were nowhere present. Unfortunately, Rio+20, like other global summits of



Clayton Thomas-Muller, Kumi Naidoo, Lucy Lawless, and Richard Branson at Rio+20. Photo: Conant/climate-connections.org

this nature, is largely inaccessible to the people, and the Peoples, who are at once most impacted by socio-environmental destruction and most central to the struggle against it.

At Rio Centro, the vast conference center where Rio+20 took place last week, the food court was adorned with artful photos of Amazonian natives with bare chests and ceremonial paint and feathers scenically situated in their natural habitats. But nowhere in the conference were such people visible in flesh and blood.

Indeed, when 400 Indigenous representatives arrived en masse from the nearby Kari-Oca encampment to deliver a declaration to UN officials, they were rebuffed by Brazilian military police and prevented entrance by UN security.

Only a handful of the Indigenous delegates were allowed to enter the summit grounds. When they did, it was far and away the most powerful statement in a week dominated by vague calls for ‘protecting our future,’ a concerted push by governments and corporations for an ill-defined ‘green economy,’ and widespread celebration of ‘public-private partnerships’ that will bring ‘sustained and sustainable economic growth.’

At that ceremonial entrance, Lakota Chief Orville Looking-Horse in full war-bonnet, Windel Bolinget of the Igorot people in the Philippines, Mexican Nahua-Otomi native Berenice Sanchez of the Global Alliance Against REDD, Tom Goldtooth of the Indigenous Environmental Network, and Marcos Terrena, an indigenous leader from Brazil, came shaking rattles

and ululating cries of war. The band of native warriors from many tribes was quickly and constantly swarmed by media and delegates alike. Everyone wanted a photograph of the procession, for their mother if not for their editor.

At a pre-arranged place in one of the outdoor areas of the summit, the Indigenous leaders presented the newly minted Declaration of Kari-Oca II to UN Director for Sustainable Development Nikhil Seth, and Gilberto Carvalho, the Chief Minister to the Presidency of Brazil. The two officials acted with grace and diplomacy. What else could they do?

After the hand-off of the document, Alberto Saldamando, Zapotec-Chicano, and the legal counsel for IEN, noted that, “The significance of this event was underscored by the flight of a condor overhead as the declaration was handed off.”

The Declaration of Kari-Oca, agreed to by over 500 grassroots Indigenous Peoples from many nations, is by far the strongest, clearest, and most purposeful statement made at Rio+20, and is worth quoting at length:

“We see the goals of UNCSO Rio+20, the ‘Green Economy’ and its premise that the world can only ‘save’ nature by commodifying its life-giving capacities as a continuation of the colonialism that Indigenous Peoples and our Mother Earth have faced and resisted for 520 years.”

“Since Rio 1992,” the Declaration states, “we as Indigenous Peoples see that colonization has become the very basis

of the globalization of trade and the dominant capitalist global economy. The exploitation and plunder of the world's ecosystems and biodiversity, as well as the violations of the inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples that depend on them, have intensified. Our rights to self-determination, to our own governance and own self-determined development, our inherent rights to our lands, territories and resources are increasingly and alarmingly under attack by the collaboration of governments and transnational corporations. Indigenous activists and leaders defending their territories continue to suffer repression, militarization, including assassination, imprisonment, harassment and vilification as 'terrorists.' The violation of our collective rights faces the same impunity. Forced relocation or assimilation assault our future generations, cultures, languages, spiritual ways and relationship to the earth, economically and politically."

While the declaration will bear no political significance within the United Nations, this is beside the point. As Alberto Saldamando told me, "What they are doing here in the UN is to create more markets, and the fact is, the only resources that remain on this planet are on

Indigenous Peoples' lands. This is not a matter of words, it's a matter of survival. What you see before you is a gathering of people who are under attack."

Of course, the exclusion of native Peoples from the UN process comes as no surprise; this is, after all, the United Nations, not the United Peoples, and it is the nation-state itself that bears responsibility for five centuries of genocide.

So, amidst NGO rubber-necking at the 'failure of Rio,' the weak and bland final text, and the so-called crisis of multilateralism, (not to mention the crisis of capitalism and the crisis of global governance), it is worth remembering the Peoples whose very existence is erased, de facto, by the United Nations process – and upon whom the stewardship of the earth's remaining resources largely depends.

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Water Warriors reject corporate control of water at Cupula dos Povos

By Marjorie Pamintuan

RIO DE JANEIRO, June 16, 2012 — "Water is life! Water is not for profit!" That was the resounding message of the Water Warriors gathered for a plenary discussion on Water as Commons in Countering Green Economy, Privatization and Commodification held to open the Cupula dos Povos in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Cupula dos Povos—or the People's Summit in Rio+20 for Social and Environmental Justice—is a parallel event to the ongoing Rio +20 conference being held by the United

Nations from June 20 to 22, 20 years after the first 1992 Rio Summit on sustainable development.

Around 100 people from various civil society and people's organizations (CSOs and POs) attended the plenary discussion at the Blue Pavilion of the Rio Conventions Pavilion where the people's summit was being held.

The first session was devoted to analyzing the structural causes of the lack of water access brought by privatization. New solutions

and paradigms to replace water privatization were then discussed in the plenary's second session.

'Commodification' of water resources

Maria Teresa Lauron of IBON International traced the global history of water privatization and recounted the privatization experience of residents in Manila (Philippines).

"The World Bank's policy shifted from the promotion of public water to privatization beginning



WATER IS LIFE. Water warriors Maria Theresa Lauron of IBON International (left) and Elizabeth Peredo of Fundación Solón (right) declare that water resources are not for profit at the Plenary on Water as Commons in Countering Green Economy, Privatization and Commodification at the *Cúpula dos Povos*.

in the 1970s, at a time that highly industrialized countries were experiencing falling rates of profit,” Lauron said. This was aimed to widen highly industrialized countries’ access to investments for their surplus capital.”

Lauron also explained that this policy shift was implemented through conditionalities attached to loans from international financing institutions (IFIs). As the policy was implemented, water no longer belonged to the commons. The commodification of water demanded that it be bought and

sold in markets, and access became available only to those who could afford to pay, she also said.

“Following the privatization of water by the Manila Water and Sewage System, Manila now has the highest water rates among Southeast Asian countries. Meanwhile, waterless communities still exist and workers in government agencies once responsible for water services have been retrenched or fired. New employees were hired on a contractual basis or were given lower wages and hardly any benefits,” Lauron added.

Participants from Bolivia, Argentina and Senegal also shared their own countries’ experiences with water privatization.

Elizabeth Peredo of *Fundación Solón y la Plataforma Boliviana frente al Cambio Climático*, a Bolivian people’s network of groups advocating climate change and sustainable development issues, narrated how Bolivia’s glaciers are melting and retreating because of climate change, and spoke of how this brings a shortage of water that threatens Bolivia’s cities and causes severe hardship for rural folk. Peredo also spoke of how water privatization worsens the impact of the glaciers’ retreat.

Diery Gaye of Senegal’s *East & Southern Africa Farmers’ Forum (ESAFF)* and *People’s Coalition on Food Sovereignty (PCFS)* recounted how foreign land deals in that east African country have snatched away already scarce water resources from small farmers.

Anibal Faccendini of *Catedra da Agua da Universidade Nacional de Rosario* pointed out that water rates increased in Argentina after water services were privatized.

Sustainable water solutions: public, community partnerships

During the plenary’s second session, Javier Marquez and Lourdes Martinez from the *Federación de Funcionarios de Obras Sanitarias del Estado (FFOSE)*, the union of workers in Uruguay’s state water company, proposed public-public

and public-community partnerships as sustainable water management solutions.

Unlike public-private partnerships that allow private control of water resources, public-public and public-community partnerships bring water back to the realm of the commons, to some extent, by returning water resources to the control of communities. These forms of water resource control place the needs of the people first, in contrast to privatization, which prioritizes private water concessionaires, who are primarily concerned only with increasing profits.

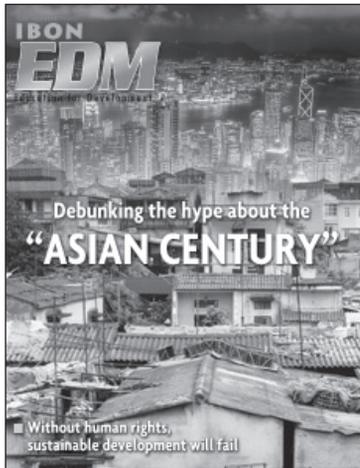
Ricardo Petrella, public intellectual and founder and former president of the Lisbon Group exposed the concept of green economy as yet another move to expand corporate investment areas into water resources. Petrella called for an end to both the privatization of commons and the ‘monetarization’ of water resources. The Lisbon Group on institutions and public policy is a forum where substantive issues of common interest to economists and other social scientists are discussed.

As the monetarization of water resources is tantamount to the

monetarization of life itself, this should be declared illegal, she also declared.

The Cupula dos Povos was also organized by global civil society to celebrate people’s struggles for sustainable development and to reject the green economy concept being promoted by the UNCSD.

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