

Asian Roundtable on Social Protection Network Newsletter

December 2018

Organizing and fighting for social protection for all in Asia



by Asia Monitor Resource Center
(September 28, 2018)

Various grassroots groups came together last September 8-9, 2018 in Quezon City, Philippines to plot strategies in promoting social protection in the country. The Asia Monitor Resource Centre (AMRC) and Asian Roundtable on Social Protection (AROSP) convened 16 groups based in the Philippines who are working on social protection. A total of 20 participants discussed the current social protection program of the Duterte government and unpacked

how social protection floors are being implemented and rolled-out.

According to the meeting, the current administration of Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte continued the social protection programs initiated by the previous administration of ex-President Benigno Aquino III, with social protection seen as anti-poverty measure. The funding of the social protection programs remains small compared to other countries in the South East Asia region, and is a mix of contributory, tax-based and loans from international financing institutions.

The meeting came out with common points of action, with attention to be given on the Extended Maternity Bill and the Universal Health Care Bill, which are both in the process of deliberations in the Philippine Congress. Along with the 2 proposed legislation, the group also wanted to come up with public information materials regarding the social protection programs in the country. The various groups proposed to meet again in 2019 to continue the momentum created in the event. The event was supported by the Belgian Development Cooperation ■

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Hanoi hosts Social Protection Training

The Oxfam in Viet Nam recently held a social protection training in the city of Hanoi last October 12-14, 2018, with 6 local organizations participating. The Asia Monitor Resource Centre and Asian Roundtable on Social Protection (AROSP) member were invited to support the activity.

AMRC attended as one of the trainers during the activity, with AROSP

member INISIATIF also joining as resource person. According to AMRC, the training used the Social Protection Training Manual published in 2017 and the Oxfam in Viet Nam took steps to increase ownership of the Manual by translating the whole document into Vietnamese, allowing grassroots groups in Viet Nam to easily access and use the document.

The participants were given activities to familiarize themselves on how to use the training manual and be able to replicate the training and adopt it to their needs. A discussion on market-themed social protection schemes was also included in the training session. The activity ended with groups stating they will focus on the concerns of women migrants and informal workers ■

Asia-Europe Peoples Forum held in Belgium attended by AROSP

by AMRC
(October 15, 2018)

The Asian Roundtable on Social Protection (AROSP) attended the recently held Asia Europe Peoples Forum (AEPF12) last September 29 – October 1, 2018 in Ghent, Belgium. The AEPF, according to its website, was “established as a platform and Forum to amplify people’s voices on the need to respect and fulfill social, economic and human rights for all across Asia and Europe, and to highlight the importance of developing just, equal and inclusive approaches to regional integrations”.

Based on the report of the AEPF, there were around 400 participants coming from more than 40 countries of Asia and Europe, with lawmakers from both Asia and Europe in attendance, including activists, academics and representatives of various social movements. The participants from AROSP shared during the plenary of the Social Justice Cluster, and organized Open Space sessions where grassroots experience in promoting non-statutory social protection was highlighted, including experiences from Indonesia and Philippines.

The AEPF12 Social Justice Clus-

ter came out with a new Global Social Protection Charter that serves as an aspirational paper where groups can come and work together in achieving universal social protection.¹ The visit to Belgium also allowed the AROSP participants to join a meeting held in the European Parliament with the progressive lawmakers in EU, wherein Asia grassroots experience and demands were presented. Consultation with the Belgian Social Protection Platform members were also conducted ■

¹ <http://globalsocialprotectioncharter.eu/charter/>



AROSP 6th Biennial Regional Meeting concluded in Siem Reap

by AMRC
(November 10, 2018)

Asian grassroots groups converged in Siem Reap, Cambodia last October 26-28, 2018 to conduct the 6th Biennial meeting of the Asian Roundtable on Social Protection (AROSP). More than 50 participants from 30 organizations travelled from 14 countries to Siem Reap, the home of Angkor Wat, to connect and plan ahead as a regional network of grassroots groups working on social protection.

The meeting came together under the theme “Understanding Social Protection Trajectories in Asia for Building Capacity of the Marginalized Workers” with the following objectives of 1) Enrich the analysis on

key social protection trends in the region; 2) Deepen the understanding of the correlation between informality and access to social protection; 3) Mainstream the gendered perspective on social protection; 4) Identify national, sub-regional and regional level initiatives for transformative social protection; and 5) Develop the AROSP into a structured network of organizations working on social protection in Asia.

Participants shared the current trends of social protection in the respective countries and what key changes happened in social protection programs in-between the 5th

and 6th biennial meetings. Trends in the labor in Asia was discussed, along with exploration on the concept of universal basic income. The gendered perspective on social protection was given prominence and a workshop on was conducted to sharpen the understanding of the members of AROSP in transformative social protection.

The meeting saw the plenary deciding to strengthen the network and capped with a visit to informal workers in Siem Reap. The meeting was hosted by Oxfam in Cambodia and supported by Belgian Development Cooperation ■

The struggle for

by Rene E. Ofreneo
(November 1, 2018)



Humanity faces a singular challenge: how to share the Planet with all peoples of the world and meet the basic needs of everyone. Is this doable?

Mahatma Gandhi has long ago given a forthright answer: “The world has enough for everyone’s need, but not enough for everyone’s greed.” In brief, what he was saying is that humanity possesses all the means to create and reproduce the necessities to sustain a decent life for everyone as long as these means and the resources of Planet Earth are equitably shared.

As we all know, this is not happening. As per study by Oxfam, eight (8) persons have wealth equal to the wealth of the 50 per cent of the world’s population. The value of the top 50 global corporations is equal to the GDP of 100 nations. And in almost every country, in the Philippines and in the Asia-Pacific in particular, the top one per cent of society controls 99 per cent of the national wealth.

This is why the social movement called – “We are the 99 per cent” – ceases to wane and keeps proliferating in new forms in various countries

across the globe. The movement started in America in the aftermath of the 2007-2010 global financial crisis (GFC), which displaced millions from their jobs and which revealed the financial and other abuses committed by the big banks and corporations in a deregulated free market environment.

However, the post-GFC period has also witnessed the rise of political demagogues and right-wing “national saviors”, who try to seize on the economic grievances of the 99 per cent by making empty promises on job creation and welfare advancement without altering unjust social and economic structures which are at the roots of social and economic inequality. In the United States, Donald Trump has even transformed his “America First” campaign into a hateful and white-race-based movement that tries to pin America’s economic problems on the migrants coming from US southern neighbors and the crisis countries in Africa and the Middle East. Somehow he has forgotten that America is a migrant nation, built by the collective labor of migrants coming from virtually all corners of the globe.

In the Asia-Pacific, a number of CSOs and trade unions have focused their efforts to promote the interests of the 99 per cent by intensifying the campaign for a stronger and comprehensive system of social protection (SP), which is woefully underdeveloped in the region despite the endless pro-SP rhetorics being spouted by Asia’s strongmen such as Duterte, Modi, Hun Sen and so on. In the developed countries, the budgetary spending on SP is equal to 20 per cent or more of the GDP; in contrast, in Asia, with the notable exception of Japan, SP spending is less than six (6) per cent.

In the Philippines, SP spending has increased, from 2-3 per cent to 4-5 per cent of the GDP, obviously due to the expansion of the CCT program and the new social protection programs such as pension for the elderly and subsidy for transport workers. Such expansion is obviously not enough given the magnitude of poverty and unemployment/underemployment in the country, not to mention the extreme level of inequality in our society. Worse, the new tax law or TRAIN, which has fueled an inflationary situation, has eroded the



purchasing power of the masses and has rendered the government promises of greater SP under TRAIN truly contradictory and illusory.

In a recent seminar organized by the Asia Monitor Resource Center (AMRC) of Hong Kong and Oxfam in Cambodia, the trade unions and CSOs across the Asia-Pacific not only lamented the weaknesses of the SP programs in place in their respective countries but also denounced the failure of most governments to secure the “commons” in the service and enjoyment of the populace. As explained by Francine Maestrum, a sociologist, the commons consists of the following: a) “natural commons” such as the planet, oceans, forests, land and seeds; b) “cultural commons” such as cultural heritage, internet and human knowledge; and “social commons” such as the human rights, public services and social security. In short, the commons such as fresh air, clean water, public spaces and scientific advancements of all kinds belong to all of humanity and should be treated as such. They should be used for the enjoyment of all for they are a common inheritance of humanity.

And yet, tragically, this is not happening. In the name of economic growth and efficiency, neo-liberal economists are trying to promote the all-out commercialization and even privatization of these commons. Example: during the opening of classes last June, the Secretary of the Department of Education was quoted as saying that the Department was prepared to help the LGUs of Metro Manila to build more schools but the problem was the lack of public lands in the metropolis to build such schools. And why are there no such lands? Well, the answer is obvious to watchers of the real estate industry: all high-value urban and agricultural lands are now in the hands of the big land developers, which are competing with one another not only in building new malls and condominiums but also in accumulating lands for “land banking” purposes. Such a process is aided by the government’s unchecked privatization program, absence of a just land-use policy and a taxation system that tends to support the land accumulation by the rich. The outcomes: no land for the schools and no land that can be transformed into public parks.

Thus, in the AMRC-Oxfam seminar on SP, representatives of the trade unions and CSOs embraced the idea that one cannot push for a stronger net of social protection for all without asserting the need for just and equitable policies on how to protect the commons for the benefit of society’s majority. As Francine Maestrum explained, social protection is not a question of charity. It is a social justice imperative. And, thus, it is inextricably linked to the struggle to build a just, inclusive and humane society.

Along this line, a proposed “Global Charter for Social Protection Rights” declares that “States should organize their social protection mechanisms in such a way that they lead to social and economic transformation, leading to just, fair and sustainable societies, preserving human and natural life ■

* First published in Business Mirror: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/the-struggle-for-the-commons-in-asia/>

VIET NAM

Grassroots group submit document for universal periodic review of Viet Nam in 2018

by AROSP

December 5, 2018

Groups in Viet Nam sent a joint submission last June 2018 for the Universal Periodic Review of Viet Nam in 2018, with 7 members of the Network of Action for Migrant Workers (MNET) Network, along with other civil society organizations (CSOs) and experts, working together to highlight 7 key concerns of labour.

The key concerns raised were 1) Economic and Labour rights; 2) Inequality in Labour and Employment, 3) Equal access to public service and social protection; 4) Sexual harassment

at workplace; 5) Ensure the minimum living wages; 6) Elimination of all forms of forced labour; and 7) Guarantee right to organize. Under each concern, there were several recommendations from the groups, including ratifications of United Nations (UN) human right conventions and International Labour Organization (ILO) fundamental conventions under the Economic and Labour Rights.

Under Equal Access to Public Service and Social Protection, one recommendation was the elimination of discrimination in access to public services, especially the limited access to health care of migrant workers. Sexual har-

assment in the workplace was also included, with emphasis on ensuring that the revised Labour Code would include specific definition on sexual harassment and sanctions against acts of sexual harassment in the workplace.

The MNET is a local NGO network, aiming at improving position and ensuring migrant workers' rights and increased voice in the decision-making process, founded in 2014. MNET focuses on i) promoting participation and equal access to social protection by migrant workers; ii) promoting equality and ensuring the rights of migrant workers exercised through efforts in policy advocacy and interventions ■

Training of trainers on SP Grassroots perspective

BANGLADESH

by Arifa As Alam, Project Coordinator, OSHE Foundation
(October 23, 2018)

The Bangladesh Occupational Safety, Health and Environment (OSHE) Foundation organized a training of trainers on social protection relating to workers' welfare on 22 September 2018 at Union Multipurpose Hall in Dhaka. A total of 25 trade union leaders, labour rights activists, government and non-government professionals, human rights activists took part in the said training.

The event was inaugurated by Department of Labour (DoL) joint labor

director S M Anamul Haque. OSHE chairperson Saki Rezwana presided over the inauguration program.

In the opening session, S M Anamul Haque mentioned OSHE emphasis on capacity building of trade union leaders and activist are anchored in a different way, and with the point of view contributing towards better understanding of social protection with clear worker's rights perspective.

Mr. Seikh Moinul Islam, Senior Assistant Chief from General Econom-

ic Division of the Ministry of Planning facilitated the session on National Social Security Strategy. Other sessions were conducted by Dr. S M Morshed, vice Chair of OSHE, Ms. China Rahman, General Secretary, FGW and Ms. Arifa As Alam, Project Coordinator, OSHE.

The intervention is part of the 2018 activities of the Bangladesh Social Protection Advocacy Network (BSPAN) and supported by the Belgian Development Cooperation ■



Peak into

by Shefali Sharan, Environics Trust
(December 4, 2018)

HEALTH SCHEMES

in Madhya Pradesh

India spends over 2% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on its core safety net programs. Although there are pockets of good performance and path-breaking program and design, the overall returns to spending in terms of poverty and improvement in livelihoods of the vulnerable have not reached their full potential.

In Madhya Pradesh (MP), one of the states in Central India, there are many health concerns faced by the communities, including malaria, viral fever, common fever, cold and cough and other common ailments. In many areas in MP, access to health and doctor is very limited, with very few villagers registered under social security schemes.

Among the many interventions conducted by Environics Trust (ET) in MP, is the free distribution of sanitary napkins in Primary Health Centres (PHC). Accredited Social Health Activist (Asha) workers are advised to keep monthly records of patients and diseases at the village level and then submit to hospital regularly.

Scrutiny of records revealed that comparatively women fall sicker than men. Female and children suffer doubly - multiple diseases and malnutrition. Generally, government hospitals are located quite far away from villages. Among the list of schemes implement-

ed in the state of Madhya Pradesh, ET focused on the 3 social protection schemes being implemented.

First is the Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel Nishulk Aushadhi Vitran Yojana (Free Drug for All scheme), which was launched in 2012. The main objective of the scheme was to guarantee the availability of minimum essential drugs free of cost to all patients across all the 10,640 public health facilities of the state.

Second is Janani Suraksha Yojana. The scheme ensures safe delivery of babies, ultimately aimed towards the reduction of maternity and mortality rate. Under Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) the government provides cash incentive for pregnant mothers to have institutional births as well as pre- and ante-natal care. Transport is made available to pregnant women under 'Parivahan Yojana'.

And third scheme is the Mukhya Mantri Shramik Sewa Prasuti Sahayata Yojna. If a registered unorganized labour woman cannot go to work during pregnancy, then she remains unpaid. Hence some women leave their job during pregnancy and in such cases government compensate/reimburse them in order to reduce their financial suffering.

For taking advantage of this scheme, each pregnant women is given

INR 16,000 into two instalments. The first instalment of INR 4000 is given for the last three months of pregnancy during the pre-delivery prenatal check by the doctor or Auxiliary Nurse Midwifery (ANAM). The second instalment of INR 12,000 will be given at the government hospital, after the institutional birth of the new-born. Subsequently, the infant is also entitled for the Zero Doz, BCG (For Tuberculosis), OPV-zero dose (Oral Polio Vaccine in 3/7 days after birth) and Hepatitis B Vaccination.

Since ET is successfully operating a sanitary making unit in Delhi, there is an effort to introduce in other districts of MP and UP as a livelihood opportunity. A training programme at different places was conducted about making of sanitary napkin and its utility in rural areas. As a part of awareness generation, sanitary napkins made in Delhi's unit were also distributed in different villages and schools. Practically everywhere groups showed their keen interest in setting up such units in their respective villages.

Environics trust plans to further make a comparative work of all the health schemes being implemented throughout the country. As we are mainly focusing on the status of women's health and social protection, we aim to make people especially women aware about their own benefits and how they can get access to it ■

LAOS

Ban Koutsambat learns about social protection

by Phetvilay Phommessay
(December 10, 2018)

Oxfam through our partner, Homenet Lao, with assistance from the Asian Monitor Research Center (AMRC), organized a training workshop last October 16, 2018 with Lao informal workers on the standards for social protection in Ban Koutsambat, Saythany district, Vientiane.

The workshop was held to help inform and facilitate discussions around this topic of social protection. The participants had a lot of interest in what was covered, with the village head, including 40 villagers and informal workers discussing the issues and problems that they face. Among the issues that came up was irregular and low income, low return on investments, inability to purchase insurance and access to

healthcare. At the end of the intervention, most importantly, was the discussion on what could be done about those problems.

At the end of the workshop, the participants gained more understanding on their right to access social protection. The workshop also allowed them to collectively analyze and define their needs, preparing them to be in a better position to articulate those needs to relevant sectors and appropriate local authorities.

The participants listed 5 main targets and goals:

1. Disadvantaged/vulnerable persons to have social protection access in their community.
2. Young people to be educated on drug abuse.
3. Young people to have better access

to higher quality education.

4. A local healthcare facility in their village or nearby.
5. Increase availability and access to legal information that's relevant to their social protection rights.

Participants were highly motivated during the discussions and mentioned additional goals including: further strategy development, continuing to engage with informal workers and local authorities, growing their community solidarity fund for when they need to borrow money, and to create a showroom to display locally made products and sell directly to buyers.

Social protection is a key component to reducing poverty and inequality. Oxfam will continue to support their development through their partners ■

The AROSP Newsletter

The AROSP Newsletter is a bulletin that provides updates about the struggles, campaigns, and other activities of the members of the AROSP network. The articles are collated by the Asia Monitor Resource Center (AMRC), a non-profit labour rights NGO based in Hong Kong.

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