

# A Summary of Key Messages

## Regional Workshop

### BUILDING RESILIENCE THROUGH PARTICIPATION

United Nations Conference Center, Bangkok, Thailand, 26-27 March 2018

---

The Embassy of Sweden's Annual Regional Workshop was hosted in collaboration with United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), around the theme of "Building Resilience through Participation". To highlight the importance of inclusiveness in achieving resilience and the Sustainable Development Goals, the workshop addressed the role of participation to strengthen resilience. Together, organizations, experts and stakeholders from the Asia-Pacific region and beyond explored successful participatory models and crafted new, innovative participatory approaches for building resilience.

The following is a summary of key messages emerging from the workshop:

#### Context analysis:

- ❖ Resilience is key to sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific – a region exposed to a multitude of environmental, climate, social and economic risks. Currently, resilience is not keeping pace with the shocks, and the space for participation is shrinking. Meeting these challenges will require transformations of our societies, built on deep social engagement and broad-based support of all stakeholders. True resilience for everyone can only be achieved through participatory, inclusive processes.
- ❖ The risks to people in the region are not distributed or shared equally across groups in the societies. Women, people in poverty and those who are marginalized and vulnerable disproportionately affected by risks and the lack of resilience in communities, societies or regions. Other traditionally disadvantaged groups such as indigenous populations, minorities, the elderly and children, persons with disabilities and migrants are especially exposed.
- ❖ The same risk-exposed people also tend to lack voice and representation in the decision-making processes that affect their situation. Development decisions are often made without involvement of the people most affected.
- ❖ Communities are the "first responders" to risks and shocks. However, to reap the full benefits of participatory approaches and resilience-building, participation must be allowed in development processes on all levels; local, national, regional and global level. Inclusive international cooperation is crucial, since the Asia-Pacific's challenges are often transboundary or regional in nature.
- ❖ In many places, a democratic deficit, shrinking civil society space, discrimination and lack of gender equality and respect for human rights, limit people's ability to demand accountability and to participate in decision-making for resilience-building and sustainable development.

- ❖ While the Asia-Pacific region is, by many accounts, the most risk-prone part of the world, the region is at the same time in the position to be a world-leader in resilience-building and to spear-head participatory approaches for sustainable development and the fulfilment of the Agenda 2030.

Points for action:

- ❖ Governments, as the duty bearers, need to find ways to facilitate broad participation by the rights-holders of their societies to build resilience. And there are many good reasons and benefits to do so. Participation does not only help to fulfil human rights, such as freedom of expression and the right to information, there is also broad evidence that engagement of stakeholders in policy processes and discourses leads to better policies and outcomes.
- ❖ Policies, plans or budgets designed based on all stakeholders' risk analysis, perspectives and knowledge will lead to more relevant solutions and sustainable results. If decisions are made *with* people instead of *for* people, there will be better ownership, which strengthens sustainability.
- ❖ There is a need for more research and evidence building around the benefits of participation for sustainable development, especially quantifiable information. Evidence-based decision-making processes are vital.
- ❖ It is important to define what participation is, and what the dimensions of effective engagement are and how to conduct engagement processes for resilience-building, in as inclusive and transparent ways as possible. There will be no one way to do it – context and level specific solutions are necessary. Nonetheless, participation shall never be forced; it should be free and meaningful.
- ❖ Building resilience is a multi-stakeholder and multi-level endeavour. Diversity of stakeholders and perspectives is a power to be harnessed. Understanding each other's roles, responsibilities and capacities, addressing the structural imbalances (such as gender, power and knowledge) and jointly formulating the common goal of all stakeholders lays a foundation for partnerships for resilience. More space is generally needed for participation by civil society and vulnerable groups.
- ❖ Governments can identify and strengthen champions and change-makers as a starting point to facilitate participation processes for resilience-building. Developing networks of such champions, especially with participation of women and youth, would be critical to resilience building.
- ❖ Capacity building of all stakeholders, including governments, in conducting and participating in effective stakeholder engagement processes should be central to all resilience building initiatives.
- ❖ Rooting out corruption and building good, democratic governance is essential in facilitating meaningful participation.
- ❖ Performance incentives for collaboration and engagement should be built into policy and business processes. At the same time imposing punitive measures in cases where proper engagement has not happened could be considered.
- ❖ Developing innovative communication methods and tools to reach communities and stakeholders, who are normally 'left behind' is critical for ensuring meaningful participation. Free media is also vital for facilitating informed participatory development processes and promote collective learning on emerging risks.