

Conference Report 2023

CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS IN ASIA

4-5 October 2023
Bangkok, Thailand



CORPORATE
SUSTAINABILITY AND
ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS
IN ASIA CONFERENCE



CONFERENCE BACKGROUND

On 4-5 October 2023, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) co-hosted the **Corporate Sustainability and Environmental Rights in Asia (CSERA)** conference in Bangkok, Thailand, in partnership with the European Union and the Government of Sweden, and together with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The conference promoted dialogue between business, civil society, academia, youth, and government on the role of business to respect, support and strengthen the newly recognized right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment (“right to a healthy environment”). Importantly, the conference also facilitated learning around decarbonization strategies, biodiversity impacts and disclosure, and emerging regulatory norms in Asia and Europe.

About the Co-Organizers:

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

UNDP is the United Nations global development network, present in over 170 countries and territories. UNDP’s mandate is to eradicate poverty, reduce inequality and exclusion, and achieve sustainable development. Since 2016, UNDP’s Business and Human Rights in Asia (B+HR Asia) programme has been partnering with government, business, and civil society leaders to promote the implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs). As the world’s most authoritative, normative framework guiding responsible business practice, the UNGPs provide an agreed pathway for governments and business to address business-related environmental and human rights risks and impacts.

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is the leading global environmental authority that sets the global environmental agenda; promotes the coherent implementation of environmental dimensions of sustainable development within the UN system; and serves as an authoritative advocate for the global environment. UNEP’s mandate in the field of environmental law is to lead the United Nations System in the development and implementation of environmental rule of law with attention at all levels, including access to information, public participation, and access to justice in environmental matters. UNEP supports the upholding of the right to a healthy environment through The Environmental Rights Initiative which is a coalition of state and non-state actors united to promote, protect, and respect environmental rights.

International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

IUCN is a membership Union composed of both government and civil society organisations. It harnesses the experience, resources and reach of its more than 1,400 Member organisations and the input of more than 15,000 experts. IUCN is the global authority on the status of the natural world and the measures needed to safeguard it.

Acknowledgements

UNDP: Sean Lees, Belinda Hlatshwayo, Jiahuan Yuan, Warunpon Wongtanyakon, Harpreet Kaur, Kevin Lehmann and Suparek Wesarat.

UNEP: Georgina Lloyd, Elin Gidloef, Kamala Ernst, Kamal Najmus Salehin, Natalie Harms, Hyunjeong Jin, Opi Outhwaite and David Cole.

IUCN: Fatma Ben Fadhl, Liza Murphy, Raj Kumar, and Kosuke Terai

Compiled by Belinda Hlatshwayo

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report do not necessarily represent those of the International Union on the Conservation of Nature, the European Union, the Government of Sweden, the United Nations, including the organizing agencies, or United Nations Member States.

ACRONYMS

AI	Artificial Intelligence
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
B+HR Asia	Business and Human Rights in Asia: Enabling Sustainable Economic Growth through the Protect, Respect and Remedy Framework
BHR	Business and Human Rights
BRSR	Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting
CBAM	Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
COP	Conference of Parties
CSDDD	Corporate Sustainability and Due Diligence Directive
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
EHRD	Environmental Human Rights Defender
EPR	Extended Producer Responsibility
ESG	Environmental, Social and Governance
EU	European Union
EUDR	European Union Deforestation Regulation
FI	Financial Institution
GBF	Global Biodiversity Framework (also known as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework)
GIACC	National Governance, Integrity and Anti-Corruption Centre, Prime Minister's Department
GCN	Global Compact Network
HRDD	Human Rights Due Diligence
HREDD	Human Rights and Environmental Due Diligence
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
LEAP	Locate, Evaluate, Assess, Prepare
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
mHRDD	Mandatory Human Rights Due Diligence
MNEs	Multinational Enterprises
MSMEs	Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEC	Securities and Exchange Commission
TCFD	Task Force on Climate-Related Financial Disclosures
TNFD	Task Force on Nature-Related Financial Disclosures
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNGPs	The United Nations Guiding Principles
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACRONYMS.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
INTRODUCTION.....	5
A CLOSER-LOOK: OUR PARTICIPANTS IN AUDIENCE.....	6
I. OPENING REMARKS.....	8
II. THE ROLE OF BUSINESS AND THE RIGHT TO A CLEAN, HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT	9
III. CLEAN AIR IN ASIA - SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS PRACTICES IN FOCUS	12
IV. A JUST TRANSITION TOWARDS CLEAN ENERGY IN ASIA	15
V. A NEW GLOBAL FRAMEWORK ON BIODIVERSITY - IMPLICATIONS FOR ASIA	18
VI. BIODIVERSITY AND ECOSYSTEMS - APPROACHES TO DISCLOSURES AND DUE DILIGENCE.....	21
VII. CAN ESG UPHOLD THE RIGHT TO A CLEAN, HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT IN ASIA?.....	25
VIII. CLIMATE ACTION - TRENDS AND CHALLENGES POST-COP27	28
IX. CLIMATE ACTION 101 - EMISSION REDUCTION STRATEGIES	32
X. CLEAN SEAS & RIVERS IN ASIA – PROMISING APPROACHES TO TACKLING WATER POLLUTION	37
XI. YOUTH, BUSINESS AND CLIMATE ACTION - BRIDGING THE GAP.....	40
XII. PLASTIC POLLUTION IN ASIA - BUSINESS MODELS THAT INTEGRATE A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH ALONG THE PLASTIC VALUE CHAIN.....	43
XIII. LOOKING FORWARD - ACCELERATING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT	46
POST-CONFERENCE REFLECTIONS	48
ENDNOTES.....	50

INTRODUCTION

On 28 July 2022, the UN General Assembly (GA) recognized the human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment (hereinafter, “the right to a healthy environment”).¹ According to many, the passage of the new resolution would give a powerful boost to work promoting environmental sustainability. Others, however, found the resolution short on details. What does the right to a healthy environment require government and business to do? And what does the resolution mean for Asia, a region where policy priorities have remained firmly centered on economic growth for a generation or more.

On 4-5 October 2023, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) together with the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), and International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), co-organized the **Corporate Sustainability and Environmental Rights in Asia conference (CSERA)** with support from the European Union and the Government of Sweden. This conference explored what the new right to a healthy environment means in the Asia context, while detailing challenges and breakthroughs in addressing the region’s environmental priorities.

The CSERA conference described pathways for reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and addressing adverse climate impacts. Conference sessions also detailed approaches to protecting nature and eliminating and reversing biodiversity loss, as well as defined new solutions to tackle air, water and plastic pollution, including from a human rights-based approach. As such, the CSERA conference provided an opportunity for participants **to sharpen their understanding of what industry must do next.**

CSERA speakers also called for more sophisticated approaches to tackling controversial subjects including, “just transitions” in the renewable energy space, loss and damage from climate change impacts, and the [“30 by 30 plan”](#) for nature conservation. It also looked at how vulnerable groups such as youth, women in rural areas or Indigenous Peoples should be included as agents of change. **Importantly, CSERA participants made recommendations tailored to both policy makers and business leaders, which are outlined in the report below.**

We hope you will enjoy the following CSERA 2023 Conference Report and think of it as both an attempt to give fuller expression to the right to a healthy environment, and as a baseline by which to measure our progress in Asia towards the realization of this important new human right going forward.

¹ United Nations General Assembly resolution 76/300, *The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment*, A/RES/76/300 (26 July 2022)

A CLOSER-LOOK: OUR PARTICIPANTS IN AUDIENCE

The UNDP Business and Human Rights in Asia programme takes a data driven approach to understanding the impact of all its initiatives. Co-hosting the CSERA event was no different. Our key findings, including the demographics of the audience, are detailed below.

GENDER

In the context of climate change and environmental sustainability, the [UNFCCC](#) has expressed concern that there is a lack of women's participation in climate decision-making spaces. For this reason, the CSERA conference took a proactive approach to gender parity, resulting in a speakership profile of **34 female to 26 male speakers**. This approach also resulted in a gender balanced attendance profile. Of the 275 participants who attended the conference, **55% were women and 44% men** (1% non-binary).

SECTOR PROFILE

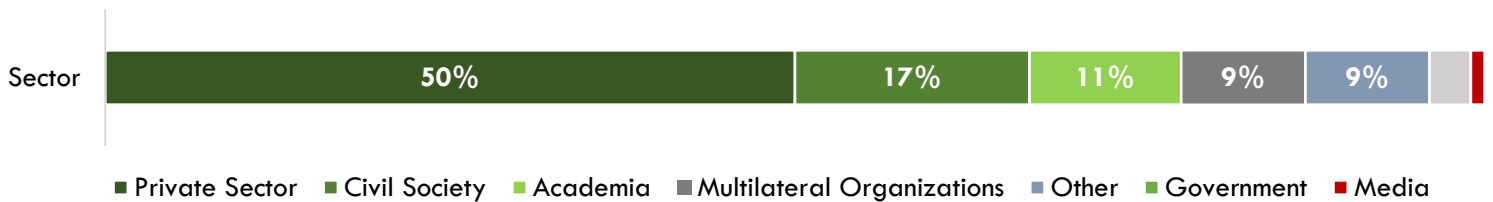


Figure: Bar chart illustrating sector of attendees of the CSERA Conference 2023

The private sector plays a central role in promoting respect for human rights and the environment. Aimed at engaging more business voices in the environmental rights discussion, the CSERA conference drew half of its participants from the private sector. Of these, the highest proportion of representatives came from consultancy services and the energy, agriculture and manufacturing sectors.



Figure: Pie chart illustrating attendance by industry

AUDIENCE INSIGHTS

Through various surveys, CSERA conference organizers asked participants why they decided to attend the conference. **Forty-nine percent indicated that they wanted to learn more about corporate sustainability and environmental rights**, 23 % indicated a desire to exchange ideas and collaborate with like-minded professionals, and 11 % had the precise aim of using discussions to help respective companies align their practices with existing standards.

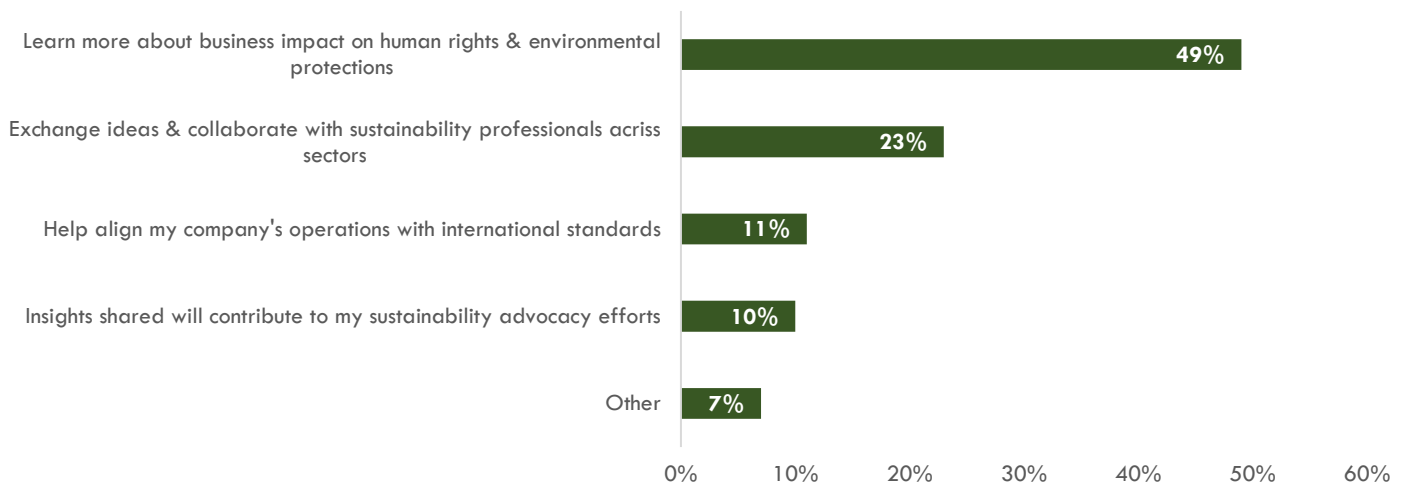
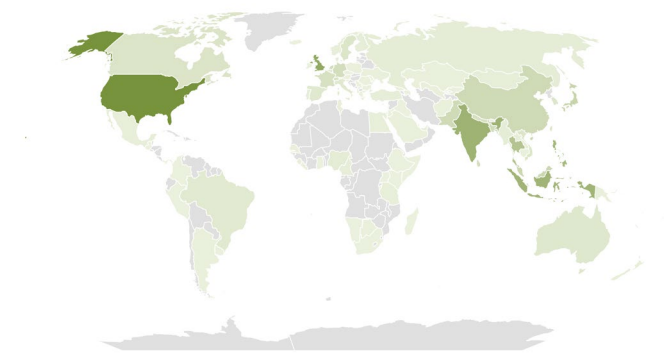


Figure: Bar chart of audience responses to the survey question 'Why do you want to attend the CSERA Conference?'

Lessons-Learned

Based on the results from the post-conference survey, attendees indicated that they most appreciated the diversity of the speakers and participants, and the seemingly even representation across all sub-regions of Asia. The survey further identified the following areas of improvement for future conferences:

- More time to ensure audience participation;
- A longer conference to allow for more time to discuss critical topics such as corporate engagement with affected communities;
- Sessions dedicated to gender-specific topic areas; and
- Greater participation of youth and Indigenous People's groups.



Powered by Bing
© Australian Bureau of Statistics, GeoNames, Microsoft, Navinfo, OpenStreetMap, TomTom

Figure: Map of reach of CSERA 2023 communications campaign

I. OPENING REMARKS

Livestream recording available [here](#)



“The environment is no longer a technical issue – it is a development issue, and increasingly, it is also a legal issue.”

Christophe Bahuet, Deputy Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub



“The right to clean, healthy and sustainable environment is a concern to all of us, it is no longer a question of whether businesses should work on this, it is how we should work together.”

Patricia Kameri-Mbote, Director – Law Division, UNEP



“We need to better understand how the business of nature can drive the nature of business.”

Dr. Dindo M. Campilan, Regional Director for Asia and Hub Director for Oceania, IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature)

At the opening of the CERA conference, UNDP, UNEP and IUCN leadership outlined the current state of corporate sustainability and environmental rights in Asia, as well as the important role that business and government play in upholding and respecting the right to a healthy environment. Speakers included:

- Christophe Bahuet, Deputy Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub
- Patricia Kameri-Mbote, Director – Law Division, UNEP
- Dr. Dr. Dindo M. Campilan, Regional Director for Asia and Hub Director for Oceania, IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature)

Christophe Bahuet noted that Asia is increasingly at the center of global debate on sustainability. Patricia Kameri-Mbote highlighted the unique space the conference provided for business to explore measures to uphold environmental rights.

Dr. Dindo M. Campilan outlined the need to raise the level of ambition of business action in tackling environmental challenges.

All three speakers agreed that adopting a rights-based approach is essential for addressing the triple planetary crisis. The speakers also noted that there is an urgent need to address shrinking civic space.



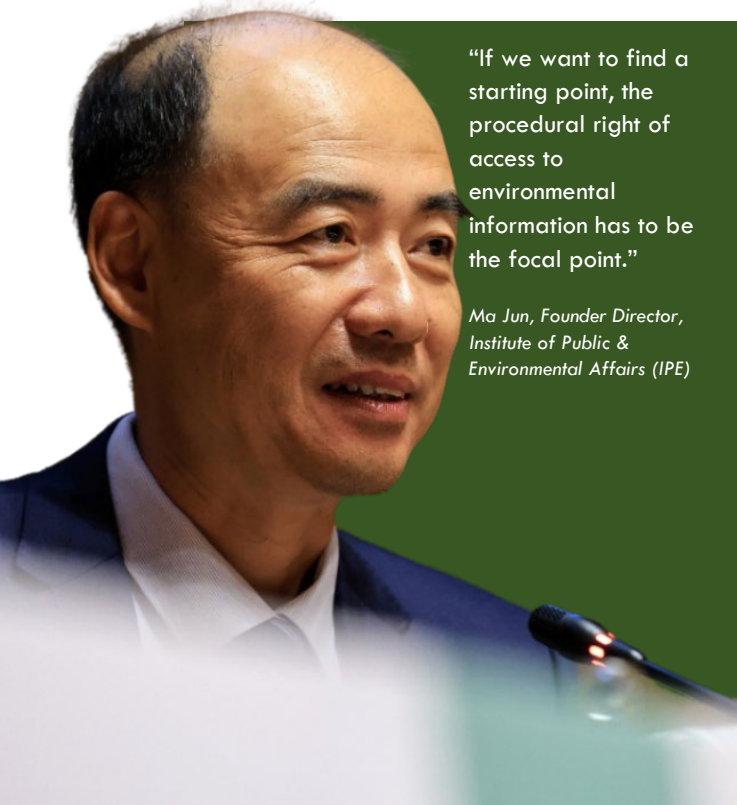
II. THE ROLE OF BUSINESS AND THE RIGHT TO A CLEAN, HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT

PANEL

- Moderator: Livio Sarandrea, Global Advisor – Business and Human Rights, UNDP
- Ma Jun, Founder Director, Institute of Public & Environmental Affairs (IPE)
- Eelco van der Enden, CEO, Global Reporting Initiative (GRI)
- Louise Mabulo, Founder, the Cacao Project
- Adam Brennan, Chief Sustainability Officer, Thai Union Group PLC
- Vaishnavi Prabhakakaran, Head - Sustainability, Tata Power

Livestream recording available [here](#).

SUMMARY



“If we want to find a starting point, the procedural right of access to environmental information has to be the focal point.”

*Ma Jun, Founder Director,
Institute of Public &
Environmental Affairs (IPE)*

The Opening Plenary on the Role of Business and the Right to a Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment (the right to a healthy environment), explored the state of corporate sustainability and environmental rights in Asia today. Panelists agreed that it was increasingly important for business to address sustainability proactively, given the accelerating impacts of climate change and other environmental crises on human and environmental rights.

Among the most pressing actions, panelists largely agreed that the right to a healthy environment required access to sound data to inform evidence-based solutions. Several panelists noted more efforts at corporate transparency was needed. One or more panelists argued for “agile systems” that enable rapid mobilization of resources for environmental damage. Lastly, panelists largely agreed that policy makers and business leaders need to communicate in a common language on sustainability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for government:

- Governments need to create a level playing field and enforce regulations evenly, to ensure all business act responsibly towards the environment.
- Governments should develop and enforce legislative frameworks in line with international standards on environmental and human rights.
- The procedural right to access information is critical to ensure that corporate sustainability efforts have their intended impacts. More must be done by governments to strengthen this right.
- Governments must provide access to remedy for victims of environmental rights-related abuses to ensure, among other things, that these abuses end.
- Young people have the ability to build capacities, upscale innovation, and reimagine practices so that Asia goes beyond reacting to the triple planetary crisis and addressing risks. Governments should leverage these capacities, to further mainstream sustainability.

Recommendations for business:

- To increase commitments from company boards and leadership, sustainability professionals need to shift the environmental sustainability conversations from liability to opportunities. Emerging business models looking at what businesses can gain from sustainability can capture leadership attention.
- Transparency and accountability can drive change. Reporting on sustainability issues is increasingly seen on equal footing as financial information and reporting. Investors need better data in Asia to enable them to make better evidence-based decisions.
- Sustainability must be made an essential part of the project planning cycle – from the bottom-up and the top-down. To this end, there is a need for a common language on sustainability inside the company.



QUESTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE

What does sustainability mean in a world in which production and profit remains king?

“We need to focus on communicating around traditional systems and incorporate stewardship. This means localizing food systems and how we produce for consumption; in the food security space, there is an exploration of regenerative agriculture.”

What efforts is the Chinese government making on environment-based investments?

“As a result of a multistakeholder approach, hundreds of voices are being heard. China is gradually developing policies and using accounting platforms to do environmental reporting. [Taking] on legislation first, the country is embedding elements of transparency and public participation as a strategy for attracting investment.”



III. CLEAN AIR IN ASIA - SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS PRACTICES IN FOCUS

PANEL

- Moderator: Sean Lees, Business and Human Rights Specialist, UNDP
- Ma Jun, Founder Director, Institute of Public & Environmental Affairs (IPE)
- Archana Walia, India Director, Clean Air Asia
- Weenarin Lulitanonda, Co-Founder, Thailand Clean Air Network
- Gerald Tan, CEO Agridence Singapore

Livestream recording available [here](#).

SUMMARY

“As we breathe the same air, co-management is key including to bring in citizens to take action to ensure measures in addressing air pollution are integrated into legislation, and implementation is monitored.”

Weenarin Lulitanonda, Co-Founder, Thailand Clean Air Network



Air pollution has deep implications for economies across Asia, including the loss of economic output, reduced productivity among workers, and increased health care costs. According to some sources, around 1.2 billion workdays are lost globally each year due to air pollution.¹ Indeed, studies show that approximately 92 percent of Asia-Pacific’s population experiences air pollution at levels that violate human rights.² Furthermore, air pollution does not impact everyone equally. Polluted air disproportionately impacts low-skilled workers, workers in the informal sector, indigenous peoples, women, and children - groups that are often the least able to access health services.

This panel discussion titled, Clean Air in Asia: Sustainable Business Practices in Focus, unpacked cost-effective solutions to address air pollution, and the importance of standardized indicators to track air quality. To this end, the right to information is vital, and panelists outlined how online monitoring data should be made public. Speakers noted that environmental risk data helps green financing throughout the supply chain, and agreed that more should be done to enforce sustainability disclosure for traceability.

Environmental databases that are accessible to both governments and civil society can be used to draft policy and hold “bad-actors” accountable.

It was agreed that public and private actors must both be engaged in policy discussions on air pollution. This should be coupled with meaningful consultations with community stakeholders. Co-management and meaningful engagement with communities is key; citizens should be empowered to take action to ensure measures in addressing air pollution. Speakers concluded that more citizen engagement measures should be integrated into legislation, and communities should be galvanized to support in monitoring air quality levels. Further to this, economic incentives (such as tax incentives) could be used to support company efforts to eliminate air pollution caused by their operations.

RECOMMENDATIONS



“Economic growth and industrialization require more energies. Economic growth should not compromise air quality. Government need transition to clean and renewable energy.”

Archana Walia, India Director, Clean Air Asia

Recommendations for government:

- Data transparency is key to motivating government, business, societies to close the gap between air quality targets and pollution rates. Harmonized data is also essential for business to take measures, and track performance. Governments must enhance public reporting and transparency regulations, as part of strengthening implementation of access to information efforts.
- Governments should align science-based air quality indicators with national priorities and address sectoral issues to help to streamline air pollution mitigation and response measures.
- Open dialogue, informed by the needs of affected populations strengthens the quality of legislation. Governments should take a multistakeholder approach to developing policy and legislation.

Recommendations for business:

- Consultations with local stakeholders is central to understanding practices and customs that contribute to air pollution, for example, agricultural burning. Businesses should seek out ways to directly engage with communities on these issues.
- More businesses should be made aware of the positive incentives of operating with air quality standards. For example, few businesses realize that the traceability of environmental risks can help attract green financing.

QUESTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE

What shall we as activists do when environmental abuses are committed by companies or governments? What can civil society do to address these abuses?

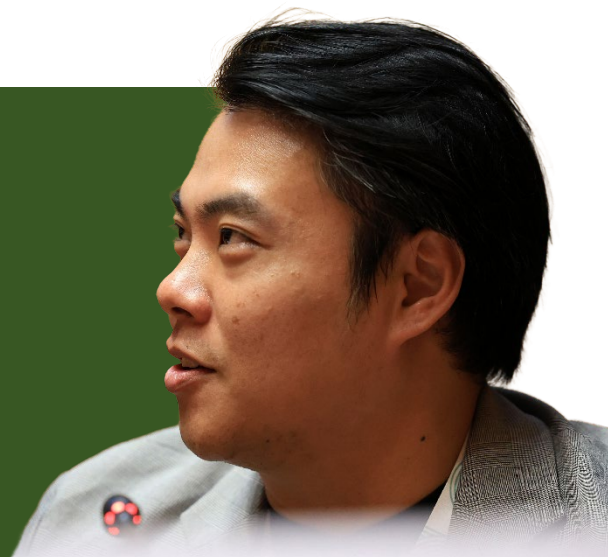
“It’s important to start with an understanding of which regulations you have in hand. For example, India has strict regulations on environmental clearance, and companies need permission from government to cut down trees. Secondly, data and evidence are a vital part of any impact assessment taken by government. Having a view of these would help in holding different actors accountable.”

Many workers experience the direct effects of high air pollution rates. Unlike other rights violations like child labour, air pollution is difficult to document in some countries; air comes and goes. We have found it difficult to hold employers and international buyers accountable for occupational health violations. How can we help our workers assert their rights under environmental justice?

“That’s why source verification, as well as advocacy for greater corporate responsibility and accountability are important. As an NGO, engaging with workers is crucial. But at the same time, we should engage other stakeholders – the shareholders, the investors, the consumers – they need to understand these issues too... I hope we can engage consumers to address not just local pollution and occupational safety and climate issues too.”

“Environmental risk data helps green financing throughout the supply chain and enforce sustainability disclosure of traceability.”

Gerald Tan, CEO Agridence Singapore





IV. A JUST TRANSITION TOWARDS CLEAN ENERGY IN ASIA

PANEL

- Moderator: Harpreet Kaur, Business and Human Rights Specialist, UNDP Asia-Pacific
- Matthew Kasdin, Director, Senior Counsel, Maxeon Solar Technologies
- Maya Quirino, Advocacy Coordinator, The Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center
- Mehak Masood, Head of Sustainability & ESG, Artistic Milliners
- Sumi Dhanarajan, Managing Director – Southeast Asia, Forum for the Future

Livestream recording available [here](#).

SUMMARY

“A just transition necessitates a fast transition. It needs to be fast in order to be fair.”

Sumi Dhanarajan, Managing Director – Southeast Asia, Forum for the Future



The UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific recently reported significant progress toward Sustainable Development Goal 7 – Affordable and Clean Energy.³ However, while access to electricity is expanding and international financial support to developing countries is increasing, the proportion of renewable energy in the Asia-Pacific region's total energy consumption is decreasing. This trend is especially worrisome given that Asia is projected to use half the world's electricity by 2025.

The session, A Just Transition Towards Clean Energy in Asia, unpacked what would be required to ensure a just energy transition. Though countries and governments in the region are making commitments to transition away from fossil fuel use, accelerating this transition towards the threshold required is increasingly difficult. According to a study by the

Stockholm Environmental Institute, dependence on coal and overall electricity demand is high and will remain high.⁴

The discussion centered around the concept of a just transition, which addresses the challenges of moving away from fossil fuels. This approach aims not only to switch to renewable energy sources but also to create a responsible, equitable, and sustainable energy system. This system should ensure fair access to energy for all, include gender inclusivity, and take into account the needs of future generations. During the session, several speakers highlighted the critical role that consumers and buyers play in this transition.

They advocated for these groups to exert pressure on governments and corporations, urging them to hasten the shift to clean energy sources by ensuring a just transition.

The session highlighted the importance of integrating considerations such as gender equity, workers' rights, and cultural heritage into the planning and execution of this energy shift and must prioritize ecological safety and human rights, avoiding compromises that could lead to environmental degradation or social injustice. The aim is to create a sustainable, responsible energy system that balances the immediate need to lower carbon emissions with long-term sustainability and justice for all involved, including future generations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for government:

- The achievement of climate targets should not come at the expense of human rights. It is important that governments develop transition policies that protect human rights.
- Government and regulators should be encouraged to develop enabling policies and licensing frameworks to standardize energy transition practices across industries. In addition, government should provide capacity building for business as required.
- To bring both opportunities and risks to light, different ministries and departments should work more closely with civil society and business, moving away from a siloed approach. This collaborative strategy should address the interrelated issues of climate change, energy transition, and social justice.
- Governments could do more to advocate for wide-scale technology transfer and capacity building efforts, in order to address the growing inequities in energy use and production between the Global South and Global North.
- Greater investment is required for climate-smart/environmentally sustainable businesses. Further to this, governments should encourage policies that enable access to climate-insurance for business. Climate-insurance mechanisms can help absorb the climate-risks faced by producers, particularly those engaging in downscale activities such as farming, and fishing.
- Ensure that the transition to renewable energy includes strategies for equitable access to energy, particularly in underserved areas. Additionally, incorporate gender inclusivity in energy policies and practices, recognizing the traditionally male-dominated nature of the energy sector.

Recommendations for business:

- The renewable energy industry must aim to standardize practices such as human rights and environmental due diligence to account for the full breadth of the rights implications of their operations.
- Board members and top-levels of management should do more to engage with impacted communities so that stakeholders can share insights directly with decision-makers. This engagement should be meaningful, allowing for an exchange of insights and concerns, ensuring that business practices are aligned with the needs and rights of these communities.
- Businesses need to be proactive in finding new technologies to help power their respective company energy transition needs. This includes not only adopting existing technologies but also investing in research and development to innovate sustainable energy solutions.



“The extraction of energy transition minerals mirrors the experiences of communities with the extractives sector. We have seen scores of human rights violations and environmental impacts.”

Maya Quirino, Advocacy Coordinator, The Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center

QUESTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE

As a social enterprise and a civil society actor, we work with frugal innovations to train farmers in environmentally sustainable practices. However, when we approach environment ministries and departments, they refer us to the social development ministries and vice-versa. What approach do you suggest we take to engaging with governments on the science-based and social elements of our work?

“From my experience, I think it’s important to start by bringing all relevant ministries to one table. It may be difficult, but it really starts there.”

Investors in some country-contexts are averse to the use of human rights language. What collective language can be used to drive a fair energy transition forward?

“I would use the language of regulatory risk, because I do believe that a lot of countries are coming around to the fact that we do not want to sacrifice human development at the expense of the environment. That’s the common language that governments and investors use.”

What is expected from the financial sector, particularly banks and insurers?

“As an immediate step, investors can begin to work closely with those they are investing in to identify where environmental and social impacts are turning up, and where they are anticipating risks.⁵”



V. A NEW GLOBAL FRAMEWORK ON BIODIVERSITY - IMPLICATIONS FOR ASIA

PANEL

- Moderator: Sean Lees, Business and Human Rights Specialist, UNDP
- Joseph D'Cruz, CEO, Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil
- Pallavi Kalita, Advocacy and Asia Lead, Business for Nature
- Dr. M. Saleh Nugrahadi, Coordinating Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Investments, Indonesia
- Mrinalini Rai, Director, Women4Biodiversity; Coordinator, UN Convention on Biodiversity Women's Caucus; and Member- Indigenous Peoples' Advisory Group, Global Environment Facility
- Chin Sing Yun, Conservation Programme Leader, Wilmar International

Livestream recording available [here](#).

SUMMARY

“Mandate 30x30 is a good framework, however, the devil is in the details. Sustainability is multi-dimensional. One of the challenges we face when we define sustainability means to balance production with rural farmers/smallholders. 40% palm oil production is by smallholders. We need to understand the local context on what is most important.”

Joseph D'Cruz, CEO, Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO)



In December 2022, the international community convened in Montreal, Canada, under the auspices of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and agreed to a new [Global Biodiversity Framework \(GBF\)](#). Among other objectives, the framework includes the ambitious ‘30x30’ target which seeks to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by conserving and restoring at least 30 percent of the planet's land and oceans by 2030. However, the implementation of 30X30 and other parts of this new framework require careful consideration of the human rights implications. Recognizing this, the GBF calls for a human rights-based approach and recognition of the right to a healthy environment to underpin its implementation. Crucially, the GBF also identifies the role of business and finance to address biodiversity loss under Target 15.

For the Asia market, there is a need to support government and companies alike to meet the demands of the changing regulatory environment. Reporting on biodiversity risks in the region is complex, but the need to do so is urgent. According to recent projections, as much as 42 percent of all species in Southeast Asia could be lost by the turn of

the century. Since around 1970, 40 percent of coral reefs and 60 percent of mangroves in the Asia Pacific region have disappeared.⁶ The adverse human rights impacts stemming from biodiversity loss are also considerable, including infringements on the right to life and livelihoods. One speaker noted that women are often at the frontlines of natural resource-management at the community level, and can be powerful change agents in ecosystem restoration.⁷ Speakers agreed with this sentiment, further adding that any biodiversity loss mitigation efforts need to holistically consider the environmental and human rights impacts on communities. Panelists noted that business have until this point remained hesitant to engage with biodiversity impacts, as it has been historically unclear where they are to start.

Speakers noted that awareness of the impact of biodiversity risks on businesses is limited in many companies. Further, some companies were hesitant to engage in biodiversity due diligence because data collection and assessment is extensive. Furthermore, traceability is more complicated in the commodities sector due to frequent land-use changes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for government:

- Biodiversity risk assessments are complex. Governments should review what business has achieved already against the targets set out in the GBF. This would allow for the crafting of robust national frameworks to monitor, assess, and respond to biodiversity loss risks.
- Strong regulatory, monitoring and enforcement mechanisms are needed to support implementation of the GBF.
- Governments must work with businesses to enhance their traceability capacities. This would in turn, enhance government efforts in monitoring and enforcement of nationally set biodiversity loss mitigation targets. Strengthening traceability capacities would further improve the competitiveness of Asian businesses at a global level as they will be more equipped to keep up with emerging regulations such as the EUDR.
- Governments should work to build the capacities of smallholders on an industrial scale so that they too are able to align with emerging global and regional standards on traceability.
- Local communities are key in responding to unchecked exploitation to nature. Governments must seek to align national priorities with the GBF, as well as engage more proactively with local communities on these priorities.

Recommendations for business:

- Businesses should invest in development of biodiversity impact plans in line with the GBF, specifically the 30X30 targets. Impact plans should include provisions for businesses to assess their risks and impacts their operations have on nature, commit to transparent, time-bound, and science-based targets, address the risks identified, and publicly report material nature-related information.⁸
- Data collection on company impacts on biodiversity loss needs to be more transparent. Businesses should be encouraged to share data and lessons-learned at an industry-level.
- Businesses should work with local communities to identify biodiversity conservation areas, and in the reporting of biodiversity loss mitigation risks.



“It is important to align national priorities with GBF and engaging local communities in stakeholders’ consultations including taking into account local wisdom in not exploiting nature.”

Mrinalini Rai, Director, Women4Biodiversity; Coordinator, UN Convention on Biodiversity Women’s Caucus; and Member- Indigenous Peoples’ Advisory Group, Global Environment Facility (GEF)

QUESTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE

What does the Indonesian government (GOI) do to document Nature's Contributions to People (NCP)? What of the recognition of high conservation value – does the GOI recognize this standard?

“The Government of Indonesia develops regulation and monitoring systems in recognition of NCP, but it must be noted that law enforcement of these measures is equally as important.”

What are some of the challenges of data collection?

“As there are more emerging mandatory reporting and compliance requirements for businesses, data needs to be shared publicly; we need more transparency on data. Mandatory reporting would help accelerate transparency efforts at industry-levels. Biodiversity conversation also requires a ‘top-down approach’ - with laws and regulation on reporting nature-related risks applied across all sectors. This be helpful to reduce compliance complexity for companies.”

How do traceability requirements affect smallholders?

“Traceability is applicable to all business who export to the EU now that the EU Deforestation Regulation has passed. Every time a company ships a product to the EU, they need to provide information on traceability. Unfortunately, smallholders often do not have the capacity to comply with the traceability requirements.”



VI. BIODIVERSITY AND ECOSYSTEMS - APPROACHES TO DISCLOSURES AND DUE DILIGENCE

PANEL

- Trainer: Dr. Richard Young, Director of International Biodiversity, Nature Positive
- Dialogue Facilitator: Liza Murphy, Head – Conservation Management Assurance, International Union for the Conservation of Nature
- Dr. Allinnettes Adigue, Regional Head – ASEAN Regional Hub, Global Reporting Initiative
- Opi Outhwaite, Environmental Specialist, UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre
- Wan Kasim Kadir, Head of Sustainability Engagement, FGV Holdings Berhad
- Stefano Savi, Director, Global Platform for Sustainable Natural Rubber

Livestream recording available [here](#).

SUMMARY



“Understanding UNGPs means we should also recognize the right to healthy environment. Many businesses already have human rights policy in place. Now it’s to integrate it in a holistic way to the whole operations.”

*Opi Outhwaite,
Environmental Specialist,
UNEP World Conservation
Monitoring Centre (WCMC)*

In Asia, biodiversity loss is happening at a staggering rate, with negative impacts on ecosystems, economies, and societies.⁹ At the same time, businesses are facing a ‘new reality,’ where reporting requirements on sustainability topics like biodiversity risk disclosures are becoming the norm.

To help the private sector better understand established and emerging international standards, the session, Biodiversity And Ecosystems - Approaches To Disclosures And Due Diligence, introduced business professionals and others to the GBF reporting framework and “LEAP” assessment process designed by the Task Force on Nature-based Disclosures (TNFD). The [LEAP approach](#) is a process intended to support internal, nature-related risk and opportunity assessments within corporates and financial institutions. LEAP involves a four-step process that asks business to:

- 1) Locate its interface with nature
- 2) Evaluate its dependencies and impacts on nature
- 3) Assess risks it poses to nature and opportunities to halt or reverse any negative impacts
- 4) Prepare to respond to nature-related risks and opportunities and report.

The training was delivered by Dr. Richard Young, who went through each step of the LEAP process with examples of how companies can identify and address nature-related risks. Dr. Liza Murphy then

facilitated a panel discussion with experts and sustainability professionals to reflect on the opportunities and challenges of implementing this framework.

Dr. Young began by noting that while biodiversity risk reduction may be intimidating at first, “the key is to make a start and learn about your business relationship and interface with nature.” A critical first step includes an initial scoping stage, which involves a quick scan of business operations, and their material impacts to shape the design parameters of the LEAP assessment. This will help the business align internally about what the assessment is intended to deliver and how it will be resourced.

Data will be one of the most important limiting factors throughout the assessment, especially with regards to understanding the impact and risks posed by supply chain partners. But many tools are available to help business make rational assumptions on the requisite data, including the [WWF Risk Filter](#) of the [ENCORE tool](#).

Reflecting on Richard’s training, one panelist noted that guidance from the UN and other organizations are taken as benchmarks, but business still consider industry practice and norms first, given scrutiny by national regulators. It was further noted that though national and international standards may differ, business should be encouraged take on the highest standards to inspire the rest of the market to do the same.

A sound governance structure within the business is important to ensure biodiversity risks are taken seriously and over the long term. Some companies have “board sustainability committees” to take decisions on nature-related issues. Sustainability reporting requirements on biodiversity from securities regulators can encourage companies to build these kinds of governance mechanisms. Assurance is also important to verify disclosures based on agreed numerical targets. Industry wide approaches to reporting and disclosures can be helpful but agreeing those standards is often difficult.

Speakers also noted that there is more recognition of the connection of human rights and environmental work because a healthy environment is now widely recognized as a prerequisite to enjoy the right to food, water, life and livelihoods. The TNFD guidance includes in its recommendations a series of human rights activities and policies recognizing these as relevant for business to understand its impacts and dependencies. Human rights also have a procedural component, also recognized by the TNFD, especially as stakeholder engagement is necessary to understand human rights impacts deriving from nature impacts. One speaker noted that it is no longer helpful to think of human rights and environmental due diligence efforts as separate systems.



LEAP Framework basics:

1. **Locate the interface of business with nature.** Locating the interface of the business with nature is done through a review of the company's value chain and an examination of the impact drivers associated with the specific sector.
2. **Evaluate dependencies and impacts.** After locating the interface with nature, a business should then assess the scale and scope of its dependency on environmental assets and ecosystem services. This is followed by an examination of the severity of the negative (and positive) impacts of the business.
3. **Assess risks and opportunities.** The next step involves understanding risks and opportunities presented by business operations. A business should examine the risk mitigation measures already in place, including associated elements (such as the curation of a risk inventory, and the adaptation of risk taxonomy and risk tolerance criteria). Risks to nature are then measured and prioritized based on the adjusted risk mitigation strategy. The business should then carry out a risk and opportunity materiality assessment in line with TNFD recommended disclosures.
4. **Prepare to respond and report.** Once the nature-related risks have been located, dependencies and impacts located, and after a thorough assessment of risks and opportunities have been carried out, the organization needs to prepare strategy and allocation plans to support action-oriented decision-making at the board-level. This should be followed by target setting and performance management on which the organization may measure progress. In line with TNFD recommended disclosures, organizations are encouraged to report progress to see the effectiveness of solutions employed, and further make presentations on nature-related disclosures.



"It is important to identify and state how biodiversity and human rights link by providing example on how these linkages to be materialized."

Wan Kasim Kadir, Head of Sustainability Engagement, FGV Holdings Berhad

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for government:

- Legal structures drive disclosure practice, so it's important to understand trends and register best practices towards disclosures of impacts on nature.
- More and more governments require mandatory disclosures against biodiversity risks. Where mandatory disclosures are not being pursued as a legislative matter, adopt other incentives to encourage companies to take up biodiversity risk mitigation work.

- Smallholders should be equipped with accessible methodology and tools so that they too can effectively assess their risks to endangered species.

Recommendations for business:

- As a first step, be ready to make the business case for nature and get buy-in from the board and management. Financing, human resources and the data you have at your disposal are necessary considerations. Start with the sustainability data that you have (e.g. carbon or water) and leverage other work to drive momentum.
- Companies should set up governance structures such as “board sustainability committees” to ensure sustained commitments to biodiversity.
- Business should adopt voluntary standards now, to prepare for the hard regulatory requirements to come.
- Business should take action and document best practice for sharing. Practices need not be perfect, but companies in Asia need to start exchanging good practices so they can clearly identify areas of improvement.
- The process can be iterative and flexible, and engagement internal and external stakeholders can make things easier.
- Businesses that are serious about sustainability issues should sensitize all employees, especially senior management across all verticals, on the concrete links between biodiversity loss and reputational risk and litigation risks.



VII. CAN ESG UPHOLD THE RIGHT TO A CLEAN, HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT IN ASIA?

PANEL

- Moderator: Kevin Lehmann, Business and Human Rights Analyst, UNDP
- Bernadette Victorio, Program Lead, Fair Finance Asia
- Eugene Wong, CEO, Sustainable Finance Institute Asia
- Hanh Le, Founder and CEO, Empacte
- Bennett Freeman, Principal, Bennett Freeman Associates LLC

Livestream recording available [here](#).

SUMMARY



“We don’t need to reimagine ESG. We need to reform, renovate, implement ESG and fix its squeaky wheels. We need greater clarity, consistency and constancy.”

*Bennett Freeman, Principal,
Bennett Freeman Associates LLC;
Associate Fellow, Chatham House*

In recent years, environmental, social and governance (ESG) risk has risen in prominence among both retail and institutional investors. However, the availability, integrity, and sophistication of ESG funding vehicles has not progressed rapidly in Asia relative to other regions, in part because Asian frameworks covering ESG taxonomy and disclosure requirements remain fragmented.¹⁰ Still, critics point out that the term ESG has always suffered from lack of conceptual clarity.¹¹

This session outlined the challenges and potential of ESG to drive meaningful impact. The session also explored actions different actors working on ESG in Asia - including companies, regulators, stock exchanges and others - can take to drive sustainability results, including on the SDGs. Further to this, speakers recognized that Asian financial

institutions are lagging as compared to peers from other regions especially on thematic areas such as climate change, human rights, and gender equality. Panelists explored how Asian Financial Institutions (FIs) can draw on global best practices to build capacity, and also enhance assessments and disclosure of the ‘Social’ pillar of ESG through greater collaborations with civil society.

RECOMMENDATIONS



“Policy goes hand in hand with practice. It does not matter how well FIs perform in terms of ESG policies, if they don’t put it into practice. We need to be more aware of the civil and political underpinnings of a right to healthy environment; the need for civic space...should be the underpinning for sustainable and profitable business and investment.”

Bernadette Victorio, Program Lead, Fair Finance Asia

Recommendations for government:

- Asian Financial Institutions (FIs) tend to perform better on legislated areas of work such as on tax, anti-corruption, financial inclusion. With this in mind, governments should consider regulatory and legislative initiatives on ESG.
- To ensure ESG contributes to the right to a healthy environment, governments need to harmonize ESG standards, consolidate taxonomies, promote an orderly and just transition, and mandate disclosures by companies and FIs to enable stakeholder accountability as well as efficient and effective resource allocation towards the SDGs.
- The right to a healthy environment is a new standard and needs time to mature so that policy makers are able to fully appreciate how it can be implemented. There are blind spots on the nexus between the right to a healthy environment and ESG, which governments will need to address.
- Governments should ensure that CSOs are involved in clarifying the social parameters of ESG.

Recommendations for financial institutions:

- To achieve greater impact, FIs should accelerate the flow of money towards the SDGs while at the same time addressing human rights risks, which in turn will help to realize just transitions.
- Asian FIs are encouraged to learn from their global peers on how to drive impact on the right to a healthy environment through ESG.
- FIs should encourage corporate transparency, which in turn will help to generate higher quality ESG data and create an enabling environment for more impactful ESG practice.
- Civil society play a key role in identifying discrepancies between ESG rhetoric and practice. There are clear benefits for FIs in including CSOs in their ESG efforts. For example, CSOs can help FIs by supplementing existing quantitative data and analysis with qualitative, lived experiences from the ground.

Recommendations for business:

- Asian businesses need to assess how emerging expectations are affecting their position in supply chains. FIs are starting to closely scrutinize business practices, which will affect business’ asset value and their cost of capital.

- Businesses need to devise ecosystem solutions that go beyond contemporary ESG siloes. For example, civic space will prove to be an essential in safeguarding the right to a healthy environment and addressing the climate crisis. Losing the battle on one front will mean losing the battle on all fronts.
- Companies themselves have a key role to play in improving contemporary ESG practice, for example, by proactively building capacity to collate and share data.

Recommendations for civil society:

- CSOs have been instrumental in creating awareness about the challenges tied to ESG practice, and the field needs them to help formulate solutions. CSOs can push ESG discourse forward as challengers, dialogue and project partners.



“If you are protecting the value of your business and you don’t shift to sustainability, you will be kicked out of the supply chain. This will affect the value of your assets and your ability to access financing from banks and investors.”

Eugene Wong, CEO, Sustainable Finance Institute Asia

QUESTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Does the way in which companies and FIs interpret risk impact the effectiveness of ESG strategies?

“This ties back to single and double materiality. Single materiality entails looking at the impact of the world on a business’ value proposition, and double materiality entails looking at the impact of a business on the world. If businesses don’t assess their impact on the world, they fail to capture information on issues that will translate into future risks to business; at the end of the day, it will come back to haunt you. If this information is captured, it can be used to address double material risks.”

Does litigation hamper coordination efforts to move the needle on ESG uptake through investors?

“Litigation is not a likely first step for civil society organizations to take on ESG, as litigation is so resource intensive. CSOs resort to litigation only after trying to advocate for engagement between investors and companies, and if calls for divestment have not been as successful.”



VIII. CLIMATE ACTION - TRENDS AND CHALLENGES POST-COP27

PANEL

- Moderator: Jessica Cheam, Founder and Managing Director, Ecobusiness
- Eu-Lin Fang, Partner, Sustainability & Climate Change, PWC
- Professor Surya Deva, Special Rapporteur on the Right to Development
- Andrea Shemberg, Chair & Senior Advisor, Global Business Initiative on Human Rights
- Christine Amour-Levar, Founder, Investors for Climate Singapore
- Anthony Watanabe, Chief Sustainability Officer, Indorama Ventures

Livestream recording available [here](#).

SUMMARY

“Development and climate action have been pitted against each other. But the perceived conflict between development and climate action is based on a misunderstanding. The right to development isn’t a license to destroy the planet. All countries and all people have the right to develop, but it must be understood in a more holistic sense.”

Professor Surya Deva, Special Rapporteur on the Right to Development



Asia is increasingly at the center of the global climate change debate given the size of its contribution to greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) and the severity of risks that climate impacts will have on the region.¹² Indeed, decisions made by Asian business leaders and policy makers today will likely impact on the lives of millions, if not billions, of people for generations to come.

Recognizing this, discussions during the session titled, Climate Action - Trends and Challenges Post-COP 27, unpacked the major controversies and policy prescriptions for tackling climate change, particularly around net-zero commitments, climate justice, and just transitions. Moderator, Jessica Cheam opened the discussion by noting that despite the urgency of the climate crisis, public awareness, as well as political and corporate action on climate change remains volatile. She noted, “there is a marked decline in the perception of the climate threat”.

Panelists explored the role of business in climate mitigation efforts, including the uptake of decarbonization strategies and innovative industry practices. Speakers noted that more governments are setting climate targets, but only about 40 percent of companies in the region are committing to net-zero. Operationalizing decarbonization plans also remains a challenge for most.¹³

In recent years, positive steps have been taken by governments in Asia to respond to the threat posed by climate change, with an increase in emerging policy and regulation on decarbonization and climate transition plans. This is mirrored by the rise of sustainable investment practices, as well as more foreign direct investment opportunities opening up for businesses that align with environmental and human rights standards. Nevertheless, the panel agreed that progress remains too slow to meet the multi-layered challenge of climate change.

- At the political level, there is an encouraging and growing focus in developing countries on just transitions, but these discussions must keep in mind the historical contributions of advanced economies to climate change. Just transitions cannot happen in the Global South unless the Global North provides the necessary capital and technology. The panel observed that all stakeholders must seek to address systemic and historical root causes of climate change through intra-regional dialogue.
- Systems change is necessary to streamline development finance and climate finance streams respectively, in recognition of the nexus between environmental and human rights impacts. The panel agreed on the need to explore blended finance options and deploy them in a systematic manner at scale.
- A planet-centered participatory approach would help all stakeholders explore intragenerational and intersectional solutions to the complex rights issues posed by climate change; ensuring that the needs of future generations and the planet are taken into consideration.

The panel concluded that stakeholders in Asia are mostly reactive to the climate challenge, but that there needs to be proactive action to move from a place of principle on climate action, to a position of practice – with companies and governments alike acting on climate mitigation, adaptation, and transition measures.

RECOMMENDATIONS



“As corporations race to net zero, they are looking at innovation and sustainable solutions, which is admirable. But this raises other questions: Are these solutions considering biodiversity? How do they affect local communities and ensure they aren’t exploited by the drive for resources? Practical examples show the risks as we race towards these targets.”

Christine Amour-Levar, Founder, Investors for Climate; Vice-Chair of the Board, ZeroWaste Singapore; and Board Advisor, Impact Investment Exchange (IIX)

Recommendations for government:

- There is a need for greater policy coherence in the discourse around current challenges, rather than governments tackling issues through siloed efforts by individual ministries. Governments should seek to establish multi-ministerial platforms to address cross-cutting climate and human rights issues.
- Companies are failing to act on climate adaptation and mitigation, even when it affects their bottom line. When facing the expansive challenge of climate change and other crises, this approach must change. Governments can do better in providing clear incentives and disincentives for companies to act and for the market to regulate itself (for example through public procurement, and tax incentives).
- Climate change – and the green transition it necessitates – can no longer be an afterthought in international trade and investment agreements. States have the duty to put a transition strategy in place.
- Governments play a key role in setting a policy baseline for climate action, they should work with business and other actors to continuously improve on this baseline as the availability of data and technology improves.

Recommendations for business:

- Companies have remained reactive in the climate space, and more action is needed internally within company structures to proactively act on the impact that operations have on environmental and human rights.
- Business should invest in building the capacities of board members on sustainability topics which would address expertise gaps which are often missing at the company governance level. In this regard, companies may consider setting up Board Sustainability Committees which would take company climate-targets as seriously as audit and risk committees.
- When companies set net zero targets, it's an indicator they want to move the needle on their impact on the climate. However, only 8 percent of the largest companies in Asia have set targets.¹⁴ Greater attention must be paid by business to operationalize targets. Businesses are also encouraged to consider working together at the regional level to achieve this aim.
- There is an increase in the collection of sustainability data. Given the diversity and evolving nature of reporting frameworks, data will be an important tool for businesses to demonstrate their commitment to climate targets to stakeholders.
- Business should collect and standardize data on the impact of their operations on climate-related targets. Transparency of data at an industrial scale would help empower SMEs to take up climate mitigation and adaptation at a faster rate. For example, mechanisms such as advance market commitments where buyers signal what their commitments are with reference to data, sends a clear indication to their supply chain on the measures to be taken.
- There are vast commercial (and profitable) opportunities in Asia-Pacific in solving problems, particularly in the renewable energy sector. When solutions make commercial sense – and are possible to scale – it will lead to change. Businesses should leverage the commercial potential of bringing solutions to address climate change challenges to scale.
- Trade associations also have a role to play to support market-driven approaches, calling for greater climate action on policy-targets.

QUESTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Asia has 5 countries in the global top 10 CO₂ emitters. Do you think this is due to Asia's large population?

"We need to look at per capita emissions. And we also need to examine historical contributions of carbon to our atmosphere and utilize the Principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities to address climate change."


How do we normalize the concept of green audits across different governments Asia?

"Audits serve as the guard-rails ensuring a more credible pathway towards a low-carbon environment. However, green audits are fraught with issues at this point in time. Firstly, the frameworks on what is green and not green are still developing. Secondly, data availability is still an issue. Sometimes there is enough data to be auditable, and sometimes data is scarce or completely not available. One of the elements I've observed is that emissions are more auditable and the GHG protocols are very clear. But if you wanted to audit items like waste, that would be trickier."

What is your opinion on governments that are taking the lead on policy detailing environmentally sustainability practices (for example the EU's CBAM)?

"Different governments are utilizing ideologically different approaches to address climate risks. For example the EU's [Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism \(CBAM\)](#), is triggering a reflection in Asia for countries here to also have some sort of carbon tax. This is a corollary effect that will be slow, but ultimately it will be a good thing.

The [Inflation Reduction Act \(IRA\)](#) in the US is an approach involving incentives and inspiring innovative approaches. This is different from the EU's approach which is more skewed towards barriers and the "cost-of-doing-business". Both approaches have their charms and challenges, but I do see benefit on both sides for triggering other policy initiatives."



"The transition risk is real for investors. If we don't accept that companies are also going to suffer in these transitions, we can't clearly see the problem that people need to come together around."

Andrea Shemberg, Chair & Senior Advisor, Global Business Initiative on Human Rights



IX. CLIMATE ACTION 101- EMISSION REDUCTION STRATEGIES

PANEL

- Trainer: Danielle King, Head of Climate Strategy, RSK Centre for Sustainability
- Dialogue Facilitator: Sean Lees, Business and Human Rights Specialist, UNDP
- Tim McCaffery, Global Investment Director, Siam Cement Group (SCG)
- Poom Siraprapasiri, Consulting Partner, Corporate Sustainability and Climate Change, ERM Thailand
- Bob Fox, Board Director, and Chair, European Chamber of Commerce to Thailand (EABC)
- Elizabeth Wu, Legal Consultant – Energy Systems, Asia, ClientEarth

Livestream recording available [here](#).

SUMMARY

Climate impacts on business operations and human rights can be mitigated by a commitment by business to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), while simultaneously strengthening shareholder and investor appetite to invest in green solutions. The training session titled, Climate Action 101- Emission Reduction Strategies, familiarized the audience on the steps necessary to reduce emissions from their operations and value chains leveraging international standards, based on the [Taskforce for Climate-related Financial Disclosures](#) (TCFD) reporting framework.

Panelists spoke to the real-life challenges business face but also promising strategies they are adopting as they reduce green-house gas emissions. Danielle King from RSK provided an introduction to global standards used to account for global carbon emissions. She noted that in the early days, the focus then was on nation states and that “companies were being left behind.” Thus, some companies started their own decarbonization accounting efforts, and as a consequence, a GHG protocol was developed that was later adopted by the ISSB and other standards setting organizations. Later the Science Based Target Initiative (SBTI) provided still further depth. Since then, “there has been a flourishing of sustainability frameworks.” Danielle explained that today, a preferred framework includes the Task Force for Climate related Financial Disclosures (TCFD) launched at COP21.

A panel of speakers provided reflections on the training. One speaker noted that there are “decarbonization challenges that are easy and others that are hard.” The speaker noted that there are a “series of ways to step down” carbon emissions, including reducing electricity use, carbon capture and storage, and increasing renewable energy use. Every company and/or factory plant will develop and use different pathways and technologies. Standards are key, but different approaches to the standards will be required because of the variability of industry operations.

On scope 1 and 2, companies have a good understanding of what data is required, and how to convert activity data into CO2 equivalent. But in the real world, business is dynamic, and there are new pieces of machinery to bring on board, new process to adopt and even new companies to acquire. The

dynamism of companies makes carbon accounting and decarbonization strategy implementation difficult. “Scope 3 is the bane of our existence” according to one panelist, because you must work with people outside of your company just to get access to data. Retail and agriculture industries leads, for example, may have hundreds of suppliers. Digital platforms can be used, but there are also many different platforms to chose from. Sometimes companies are using standard values in this context, but these are imperfect, and may not fairly reflect the big improvements a company is making in reductions. More granular data is needed, and the pre-competitive space should be better leveraged for this purpose.

Under scope 1 and 2, industry needs to reduce CO2 by 4.2 percent, per year, and under scope 3, emissions should be reduced by 2.5 percent. Some companies are advised to approach decarbonization in 3 buckets: 1) things to do now, like utilizing inexpensive readily available technologies; 2) planning for things to do tomorrow, like the uptake of new and capital-intensive changes to processes and; 3) everything else. Governance structures inside the company are required to make those decisions deliberately and according to a timetable. Safeguards with regards to the use of new technologies, such as AI, may also be needed.

It was further explained that decarbonization efforts are being pushed by international investors through shareholder resolutions. A common ask includes requests for companies to be net-zero and to ensure transparency and disclosure around net-zero efforts. Shareholders want commitments to Paris-aligned business strategies with short-, medium- and long-term goals. They also want disclosures on climate and energy policy lobbying. According to a speaker, Japan is the country with the most progressive shareholder resolution action on climate.



Decarbonization requires a business to:

1. **Engage Stakeholders.** Companies should engage with internal and external stakeholders as a first step, including with local communities. Among other things, this will help avoid double-counting of emissions.
2. **Calculate Emissions.** This multi-step process requires the establishment of a methodology to calculate emissions, strengthen data collection systems to monitor the quality of data collected, and delivery of a robust assessment that assures reliable monitoring of progress. It includes the following steps:
 - Build required systems based on **accounting principles**, ensuring that relevance, completeness, consistency, accuracy and transparency are at the core of corporate systems to calculate emissions.
 - **Ensure relevance:** At the organizational level, **establish a boundary**. Here, companies can take either the Equity Share approach, where the company accounts for GHG emissions from operations according to its share of equity; or the Control approach with accounts for 100% of the GHG from operations under company control. Once the approach has been selected, the company can define the scope of emissions, i.e. **Scope 1** (emissions from sources that the company owns or controls *directly*), **Scope 2** (emissions that the company causes indirectly *produced* from the energy it has either purchased or used), and **Scope 3** (emissions not produced by the company and not a result of company activities, but that the company is *responsible for* up and down its value chain).
 - **Establish a baseline** by selecting a base year which will serve as a reference point for emission comparison. For data accuracy, the base year should not be more than the preceding 2 years. Note that the following structural changes could lead to a recalculation of baseline: changes in methodology or improvements in a data accuracy, and discovery of material errors. In this instance, emissions should be retroactively calculated in line with the company's recalculation strategy.
 - **Identify sources:** Collect and assess data by first identifying sources of data for scope 1, 2 and progress to 3) and collect primary data. Be ready, collecting data is a difficult process. If data is not available look to industry benchmarks to formulate logical assumptions. Keep good records of your efforts!
 - Calculating emissions requires that the business take the activity data gathered and multiply this by the emission factor and then multiply this by the Global warming potential (GWP) of the gas measured (Activity data x emission factor x GWP value).
3. **Formulate a plan.** This step includes a range of corporate actions including, but not limited to obtaining senior management commitment, deciding the target type and boundary, defining the target completion date, and deciding on the use of offsets or credits. Importantly, a company can have more than one decarbonization plan. Offsets should only be used for residual emissions. Offsets cannot be used as a “means of reduction.”
4. **Identify solutions.** Specific solutions should be identified for Scope 1, Scope 2, and/or Scope 3 emissions. Some solutions include under scope 1 include electric vehicle use. Under scope 2, onsite renewable energy, and under scope 3, circular economy product design.
5. **Implementing solutions.** Solutions should be prioritized and implemented accordingly. Think quick wins! During this process, ongoing engagement with stakeholders is crucial for continued capacity building and alignment. Key stakeholders include employees, customers, procurement team and communities. Enjoy and reap the reputational gains of the stakeholder engagement process.
6. **Reviewing progress.** This step is helps companies assess the effectiveness of solutions in reducing emissions. This should be regular, such as on a yearly basis. Results should be communicated to stakeholders in a transparent manner.

RECOMMENDATIONS



“By looking at how we produce products, we could see a way to switch plans and technologies that can help reduce CO2.”

Tim McCaffery, Global Investment Director, Siam Cement Group (SCG)

Recommendations for all stakeholders:

- Stakeholder engagement can support government and business efforts to collect data and facilitate the smooth implementation of business’s plans to reduce emissions. Stakeholders include internal and external stakeholders. Communities should be engaged by all stakeholders, as they are best placed to report on the direct impact of state or business actions.

Recommendations for business:

- "Don't be intimidated by the decarbonization process, just start." There is a lot of support out there from the business community.
- Emissions data collection is onerous and complicated. Begin the process with internal stakeholders and industry standard-setting bodies.
- For each business activity, a company may develop different strategies for reducing emissions.
- A company may consider investing in other companies that could help decarbonize or reduce emissions of the main company’s business activities or products.
- Investing in net zero pathways with integrity is critical. Carbon markets and accounting tricks will not de-risk our business or economies.
- Customer preferences are increasingly moving towards environmentally sustainable products. Businesses should take this as a signal to embrace decarbonization as part of company policy and operations.
- Even small companies starting the decarbonization journey today, should not think they are starting from scratch. Data is available, technology is available. The key is prioritization.
- Business can decarbonize but it will mean working together, including with competitors in pre-competitive spaces.
- Corporate lawyers need to be more engaged in the mechanics around decarbonization.

QUESTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE

It is going to cost us 500 billion annually to audit and report on measures taken to transition to net zero. But SMEs in Asia do not have the bandwidth for this, so how do we cut the expense and where should we make the cuts?

“You can use AI to cut a lot of costs and if focus on scope 1 and large emitters than you get far in the journey. Scope 3 makes everything complicated.”

“Every dollar spent on reporting and auditing is a dollar not spent on improving performance. But a lot of the costs involved in this “500 billion” may relate to “set-up” costs. Once you have a system in place the costs should come down because you learn and you can replicate systems or processes. Prioritization is also needed.”

Using absolute emission reductions versus carbon intensity reductions, which one is better? And on baselines, you said three years back is a good marker, but what about a company that just started on their journey, where do they get the data?

“The Science-Based Target Initiative (SBTI) strongly encourages the use of absolute targets. An absolute target is the amount of emissions you are not going to emit per year. Its very transparent and very clear. So that’s the advantage of absolute targets. But the disadvantage is that businesses are dynamic and so the baseline will need to be updated each year. Intensity targets on the other hand do not require that a business constructs a new baseline every year. But the disadvantage is that you are not providing a guarantee that your business is not reducing emissions. For large conglomerates, intensity targets are also imperfect for measuring emissions.”



X. CLEAN SEAS & RIVERS IN ASIA – PROMISING APPROACHES TO TACKLING WATER POLLUTION

PANEL

- Moderator: Richard Brubaker, CEO, CoResponsibility
- Dr. Mohamad Mova Al'Afghani, Director, Centre for Regulation, Policy and Governance
- Mayuree Aroonwaranon, Co-Founder and CEO, GEPP Sa-Ard
- Atty. Gloria Estenzo Ramos, Vice President, Oceana Philippines, and Member of the Executive Committee, Oceana International
- Salisa Traipipitsiriwat, Southeast Asia, Environmental Justice Foundation

Livestream recording available [here](#).

SUMMARY



“Environment is a shared responsibility. We cannot forever blame the government. You have to ask yourself what I can do to achieve the much-needed reforms.”

Atty. Gloria Estenzo Ramos, Vice President, Oceana Philippines, and Member of the Executive Committee, Oceana International

Rapid urbanization and economic growth in Asia have resulted in significant water pollution from both land-based and sea-based sources. Among land-based sources of pollution, the [2012 Manila Declaration](#) has identified nutrients, wastewater, and marine litter as priority categories. While various industries including agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries, tourism, and transportation contribute the most to marine pollution, improvements in these sectors also present the biggest opportunities for addressing pollutants.

The private sector plays a crucial role in addressing water pollution. This session titled, Clean Seas and Rivers: Promising Approaches to Tackling Water Pollution, explored the possibility of an integrated approach to addressing water pollution including assessment, participation, transparency, and accountability. Speakers unpacked the role of the private sector, highlighting inclusive approaches that support the realization of the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment. Speakers agreed on the need for meaningful engagement with affected communities, and industries in addressing water pollution concerns. Most of the panel advocated for implementation of the extended producer responsibility in a systemic manner, requiring governments to strengthen enforcement mechanisms, and disincentivizing businesses from abuses to community rights to clean and safe water and sanitation.

RECOMMENDATIONS



“Government needs to move fast especially with respect to extended producer responsibility”

*Dr. Mohamad Mova Al' Afghani, Director,
Centre for Regulation, Policy and
Governance (CPRG)*

Recommendations for government:

- Government mandated legislative frameworks are needed to support clean water strategies rolled out by industry at scale.
- Water pollution is a complex issue, with multiple sources (industrial, plantation, domestic/sewage waste, solid waste), but there is an overall lack of resources and infrastructure to handle the problem. Governments must invest more in waste treatment systems, monitoring and enforcement.
- Governments should design policies that focus on sustainable economic growth – prioritizing economic, social, and environmental policy impacts equally.
- A coordinated system for dealing with consumer waste needs to be created by the government and supported by industry. Plastic packaging is hard to recycle, and the cost of collection is so high that it is economically impossible to scale up. Government and private sector need to work together to invest in technologies that help drive the cost of collection and recycling of these materials down.

Recommendations for business:

- Larger companies must continue to incentivize smaller businesses within their supply chains to implement EPR.
- Businesses can conduct human rights and environmental due diligence to assess their impact on water sources across their supply chains. This should include an assessment of the chemical (often unseen) impacts their having on water sources; which have an impact on human health and the right to clean and safe water.
- Businesses can use simple tools, for example self-assessment checklists that might assess their impact on water pollution across their operations and supply chains.

QUESTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE

What are some of the recommendations for making the cost of recycled plastic cheaper, also acknowledging the vested economic interests of petrochemicals/ONG companies providing raw materials?

“We can use legislation to provide subsidies for recycled products and set targets on recycling accordingly, so it becomes regular practice.

The recycling industry works in the same way as any other business; it is based on supply and demand. The issue in previous years has been how do you sustain demand. The good news is that countries in our region will be implementing the extended producer responsibility (EPR), which will incentivize actors to increase demand.”

What are the prospects and challenges of using technology to solve these issues and which aspect of technology can be best put to use to solve the marine pollution?

“I would recommend that all technologies introduced to address pollution, are complemented by governance elements which will help manage any additional risks introduced by the technology.”

How do we ensure that government adopt a science backed approach in solving this crisis?

“In my experience, the laws exist but the issue is the implementation. In this context, we are seeing an increase in the number of cases being brought to court by affected communities against governments for not living up to the legal mandate of banning single use plastic.”



XI. YOUTH, BUSINESS AND CLIMATE ACTION - BRIDGING THE GAP

PANEL

- Moderator: Belinda Hlatshwayo, M&E Officer – Business and Human Rights in Asia, UNDP
- Shubhabrata Roy, Chair and Founder, Behavioral Insights, Architecture and Strategy Pvt. Ltd
- Tran Minh Quang, Member of CYMG to UNEP, Environmental Activist, Youth Advisor of UNYAP
- Shamima Akhter, Director – Corporate Affairs, Partnerships and Communications, Unilever Bangladesh
- Louise Mabulo, Founder, the Cacao Project

Livestream recording available [here](#).

SUMMARY

“Youth want to be seen and to be heard, and when we talk about sustainability, it’s still in a room full of people like this: in conferences, boardrooms or annual reports. It’s still not yet in the voice of youth.”

Shamima Akhter, Director – Corporate Affairs, Partnerships and Communications, Unilever Bangladesh



Youth in Asia make up 60 percent of the global population and represent a growing consumer class.¹⁵ Youth today, are also more conscious of environmental sustainability, and human rights than previous generations. Young influencers also have a distinct advantage when it comes to changing behavior as they are both the consumers and producers of the future (they also have the ability to influence the older generation but the generation after them).

But young activists working in sustainability often face unique challenges, such as reasserting their credibility when engaging with policymakers and corporates alike. Speakers reflected on the stigmas often associated with youth in the region. Additional barriers discussed included, absence of dedicated roles for youth in corporate decision making, contributions of young people towards environmental sustainability being overlooked, and a lack of

models for intergenerational communication and exchange.

Anchored in the framing of the question, “With, For and By Youth”, the panelists provided their reflections on business responsible to sustainably produce, and the role that young people play in promoting responsible consumption within their communities.¹⁶ The discussion highlighted that current systems are not

equipped for new methods, particularly in decision-making and the use of adaptive technologies like social media. These tools are essential for transforming dialogues into action. Moreover, it emphasized the role of behavioral science insights and strategic nudges in encouraging young people to make sustainable choices.

The conversation also focused on the importance of policy and educational reforms, especially in consumer education and clear labeling, to engage the youth effectively. It was also noted that involving youth in corporate and policy realms is crucial for bringing in innovative ideas and perspectives. Recognizing and valuing the dynamic contributions of young people is essential for driving significant and meaningful change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for government:

- Governments should facilitate improved dissemination of information on the environmental impacts that reflect the true costs of consumption so that young people can engage more fully and meaningfully in the environmental agenda.
- Governments should also prioritize financial and human resources for protecting children's and young people's environmental rights. This can be achieved by promoting reforms on consumer education and transparent labelling.
- Create a safe space and encourage open dialogue to integrate youth voices and perspectives and incentivize young people in building solutions and innovations centered on human rights and environmental sustainability. This should include incorporating youth perspectives in policy-making, and engaging youth in socializing sustainability practices within their communities.

Recommendations for business:

- Existing corporate decision-making systems are not fit for purpose and are often unable to accommodate youth involvement. Multistakeholder collaborations are needed to encourage meaningful participation of young voices. Businesses should also reconsider their corporate governance structure, and how they can include young people as decision-makers.
- Business needs to think through how they package solutions, in order for young people to embrace and accelerate the transition – this would represent a co-benefit for companies as sustainable appeal to the youth demographic.
- Larger companies and multinationals have the capacities to review consumer intelligence on a large scale. They are therefore able to pick up on soft signals and better understand current and future market demands. Future trends have already identified the perspectives of young people, and youth views on business environmental sustainability as key factors in the growth of the consumer market in Asia. These companies should seek to share sustainable practice trends with small to medium sized enterprises within their supply chain, and even further at the industrial level.

QUESTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE

How can businesses equip young people to be ready for green jobs? How young is too young to start engaging with children on climate issues?

“We need to start by prioritizing sustainability education at an early stage, so that young people can begin to contribute towards green jobs. Also, it’s important to shift the narrative of “young people are inexperienced” to better reflect the reality that young people are more conscious than ever before on environmental concerns and have expertise.”

Placing the burden on consumers negates the role of businesses in sustainable action. What is the role of business?

“There are some trade-offs when we look at business responsibility to the environment. For example, businesses also absorb the hidden costs of production, and this is not reflected in the final price . . . The good news is that it is steadily becoming a business imperative to become environmentally sustainable in order to secure future profits from the market.”

Student question: What is the first step for youth to be included in the corporate world?

“Simply through innovation. There are examples of young students who have invented simple solutions that seek to nudge consumers towards more sustainable daily practices, such as a shower meter to calculate how many gallons of water are used in one shower. These simple innovations helped raise the level of imagination in different industries.”

Student question: How can we be accommodating to human diversity (on health and culture) and still be mindful of overproduction?

“Personalization is a balance that businesses always take because it is the most expensive thing to do for a business line. It reduces economies of scale. Personalization needs a cost-benefit analysis. Personalization increases carbon emissions, so the good news is that it is too costly for businesses, so they simply don’t do it.”



XII. PLASTIC POLLUTION IN ASIA - BUSINESS MODELS THAT INTEGRATE A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH ALONG THE PLASTIC VALUE CHAIN

I PANEL

- Opening Remarks: Sanna Leino, Program Specialist, Swedish Embassy in Bangkok
- Pre-Recorded Welcome Remarks: Dr. Sara Seck, Associate Professor, Dalhousie University
- Moderator: Elin Gidloef, Associate Program Officer – Human Rights and Environment, UNEP
- Vivekenand Sistla, Head of R&D, Unilever Thailand
- Kabir Arora, National Coordinator, the Alliance of Indian Waste-pickers
- Madhushree Narayan, Responsible Sourcing Program Manager, The Circular Initiative
- Patricia Kameri-Mbote, Director – Law Division, UNEP

Livestream recording available [here](#).

I SUMMARY



“Our approach to plastic is reducing plastic by design – “less plastic, no plastic and better plastic”. When we have to create a product that require plastic packaging, we ask - can we do it less plastic or no plastic at all?”

Vivekenand Sistla, Head of R&D, Unilever Thailand

In June 2023, 175 countries agreed to develop a Global Plastics Treaty by 2024 to tackle the issue of plastic pollution.¹⁷ In Asia and the Pacific, plastic pollution is reaching critical levels, with 12 million metric tons of plastic waste making their way to oceans and rivers every year.¹⁸ The human rights impacts of this crisis are evident across the plastic life cycle – including the right to a healthy environment.¹⁹ The private sector can drive meaningful change in addressing plastic pollution concern, as exemplified by the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) principles (which incentivize producers to account for environmental concerns in designing their products).

The session explored Asia’s journey towards a circular economy that embraces human rights-based approaches as part its foundation. This included the sharing of the rights implicated in the rise of plastic pollution, review of best practices, and outlining of a set of recommendations for governments, business and civil society ahead meaningful implementation of EPR principles.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for government:


- Gaps still exist that do not address issues of recycling collection, handling of plastic waste and eco-design principles. There is a need for government to provide comprehensive regulatory framework to accompany advancements that are already taking place in investment and technology spaces.
- Strengthen traceability and transparency of plastic use, so that businesses and populations are informed about the kinds of plastic they are using, where and how.
- Incentives for businesses can be provided that limit the production of single-use plastics.

Recommendations for business:

- Businesses must carefully examine how they use plastic and recycle it within their operations. This includes designing and using circular plastic products which are designed to minimize the adverse environmental and human rights impacts of products.
- Businesses should have a clear vision and supplier code of conduct for procuring recycled plastic. Traceability and transparency of products is crucial in this regard.
- Businesses must align their operations with EPR principles, and take steps to review the impact of plastic products across the plastic-lifecycle before introducing it to the market.
- Businesses are encouraged to conduct Life Cycle Assessments before introducing plastic alternatives to the market, as alternatives may prove to have harsher environmental and human rights impacts.

Recommendations to civil society:

- There needs to be a narrative shift on those who work in collection of plastic waste. It is important that civil society advocate for public policy bodies to recognize the role that the informal economy (including waste pickers and waste collection industry) plays.
- Identify avenues to work with businesses and governments on crucial issues such as plastic waste management, conducting health inspections of waste-collection industries, and increasing access to effective remedy for affected workers and communities.
- Providing access to remedy is the producers' responsibility, however, CSOs should be empowered to take a larger role in holding producers' accountable. Litigation for example is an emerging approach being taken by many across the region.



“Businesses should first recognize the landscape and existing environmental rights [framework] where they are operating.”

Madhushree Narayan, Responsible Sourcing Program Manager, The Circular Initiative

QUESTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE

There are many mandates in the region to “beat plastic pollution”, however the problem is implementation. The cost of making paper bags is much higher than production of plastics. What would be the alternatives?

“On alternatives, we need to be careful of passing off one value to the other. For example, if paper comes from cutting down trees, then we must consider if it is a viable alternative. We need to look at a holistic use of plastic and its alternatives, to ensure that it is not disruptive to the environment.”

We’ve heard solutions about tackling plastic pollution at the end of their lifecycle, but a lot of environmental damage happens at the beginning of the plastic lifecycle (for example carbon emissions from production, and the ecological damage it causes). Shall we not instead consider phasing out plastic completely?

“Plastics are the most versatile materials known to humankind. There is, however, emerging research on the full life cycle of the different kinds of plastics on a per weight and usage bases. A full lifecycle assessment is more useful than comparing plastics to alternative materials that are there, as the impacts of alternatives is not yet fully understood. To replace all plastic today would not be possible as we simply do not have the technological solutions, and no material is available at the scale that plastic exists in the market. The emerging approach is to pilot “less plastic by design” approaches, and this includes looking at recyclability.”

What is the opportunity cost for the production of one plastic bag in your opinion?

“We need to start talking about the true cost of production, from the health cost of workers and all the other hidden costs in the supply chain.”



XIII. LOOKING FORWARD - ACCELERATING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

PANEL

- Moderator: Sean Lees, Business and Human Rights Specialist, UNDP
- Liza Murphy, Global Head of Conservation Management Assurance Team, IUCN
- Renaud Meyer, Resident Representative, UNDP Thailand
- Mrinalini Rai, Director, Women4Biodiversity
- Jessica Cheam, Founder and Managing Director, Ecobusiness

Link to livestream [here](#).

SUMMARY

“Sharing results is very powerful. Verified results, which could be scientific facts or through certification program, could be used as a trust-building tool.”

Liza Murphy, Global Head of Conservation Management Assurance Team, IUCN



The closing plenary included reflections from speakers and outlined a way forward for future CSERA conferences. It provided a platform for reflection on the outcomes of the conference and featured a mix of exchanges on environmental rule of law topics.

The panel agreed that more face-to-face engagements between businesses, government and civil society are needed for there to be actionable implementation of the right to a healthy environment. As a recommendation for future CSERA conferences, speakers agreed that deeper dives in regulatory practice would motivate a constructive dialogue among different stakeholders on opportunities for business to deliver on environmental commitments. Panelists generally agreed that sustainability challenges include human rights concerns such as the lack of inclusive decision-making practices, and the disproportionate impact environmental threats

have on the rights of key populations such as youth, indigenous communities, and women. Overall,

speakers concluded that around environmental sustainability should seek to take a human-rights based approach that prioritizes inclusion of the most affected populations. The panel also provided the following overarching recommendations -

I RECOMMENDATIONS

- Actions should be put in place to make sure that substantive and procedural rights are enforced to create an enabling environment for implementation of the right to a healthy environment. Business and governments are encouraged to create and sustain mechanisms that seek to protect, respect and remedy human rights in order to achieve this goal.
- Policy coherence is important and has been cited as a recommendation in many of the CSERA 2023 sessions. Governments should discuss shared priorities at the regional level and encourage national and regional mechanisms on pressing environmental issues. This will be key in demonstrating how Asia is at the forefront of sustainability discourse at the international stage.
- There is increasing interest in the nexus of environmental issues and human rights topics. However, business, government and civil society need to agree on common language to help articulate progress, challenges and opportunities for fuller implementation of the right to a healthy environment.
- Environmental and human rights defenders, and communities impacted by business operations, must be meaningfully consulted on the impact operations will have on populations and their rights. EHRDs are also encouraged to hold corporates and government accountable for adverse environmental and human rights impacts faced by affected communities.

“Engagement with businesses is done in Bangkok, but 90% of Thai economy are small and medium-sized enterprises in the provinces. Most of them are entrepreneurs in informal sectors, and they are miles away from the conversation. The efforts that we are making reflect only those of 10% of the economy. We really need to make an effort, tailoring the tools, approaches and investment towards awareness raising, and explanation to lower level of engagement at provincial level – sub-national level, where companies do not have the same budget or knowledge as those investing in the issue.”

Renaud Meyer, Resident Representative, UNDP Thailand



POST-CONFERENCE REFLECTIONS

Media Features


Below are samples of media features of the conference in Asia and beyond:



UNDER30CEO

CSERA Empowering Green Revolution in Asia's Industries

by **KIMBERLY ZHANG** / FEATURED - NEWS / NOVEMBER 2, 2023

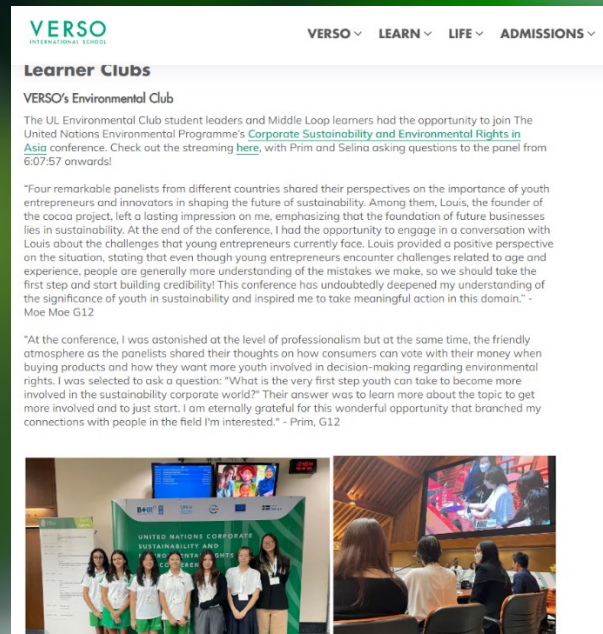


The inaugural Corporate Sustainability and Environmental Rights in Asia Conference (CSERA) was held in Bangkok, bringing together prominent business professionals, scholars, and members of civil society.

Conference: A Gathering of Industry Representatives and Environmental Advocates

New York, USA – CSERA Empowering Green Revolution in Asia's Industries, Under30CEO

[\(link\)](#)



VERSO INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

VERSO ▾ LEARN ▾ LIFE ▾ ADMISSIONS ▾



Learner Clubs

VERSO's Environmental Club

The UL Environmental Club student leaders and Middle Loop learners had the opportunity to join The United Nations Environmental Programme's **Corporate Sustainability and Environmental Rights in Asia** conference. Check out the streaming [here](#), with Prim and Selina asking questions to the panel from 6:07:57 onwards!

"Four remarkable panelists from different countries shared their perspectives on the importance of youth entrepreneurs and innovators in shaping the future of sustainability. Among them, Louis, the founder of the cocoa project, left a lasting impression on me, emphasizing that the foundation of future businesses lies in sustainability. At the end of the conference, I had the opportunity to engage in a conversation with Louis about the challenges that young entrepreneurs currently face. Louis provided a positive perspective on the situation, stating that even though young entrepreneurs encounter challenges related to age and experience, people are generally more understanding of the mistakes we make, so we should take the first step and start building credibility! This conference has undoubtedly deepened my understanding of the significance of youth in sustainability and inspired me to take meaningful action in this domain." - Moe Moe G12

"At the conference, I was astonished at the level of professionalism but at the same time, the friendly atmosphere as the panelists shared their thoughts on how consumers can vote with their money when buying products and how they want more youth involved in decision-making regarding environmental rights. I was selected to ask a question: "What is the very first step youth can take to become more involved in the sustainability corporate world?" Their answer was to learn more about the topic to get more involved and to just start. I am eternally grateful for this wonderful opportunity that branched my connections with people in the field I'm interested." - Prim, G12



Bangkok, Thailand – Verso International School's Environmental Club attends CSERA Conference

[\(link\)](#)



知乎 商业 生物多样性保护 切换模式



亚洲商界领袖共话企业可持续发展和环境权利

中国生物多样性保护与绿色发展基金会 已认证账号

【中国绿发会讯】2023年10月上旬，亚洲企业界、学术界和民间社会领袖与青年行动者代表等近300名嘉宾在曼谷参加了首届亚洲企业可持续发展与环境权利会议（Corporate Sustainability and Environmental Rights in Asia Conference, CSERA）。会议由世界自然保护联盟（IUCN）、联合国开发计划署（UNDP）和联合国环境规划署（UNEP）共同举办，突出了亚洲快速发展的企业可持续发展议程，包括生物多样性影响和披露、环境和人权尽职调查、脱碳战略和碳市场，以及ESG报告等主题。

通过一系列小组讨论和联席会议，众多行业先驱、政府官员和环境倡导者就企业在促进和尊重清洁、健康和可持续环境权利方面的作用分享了见解。发言者呼吁在遵循环境正义原则的同时，追求气候复原力、生物多样性保护和可持续增长路径。

China – Asian Business Leaders Discuss Corporate Sustainability and Environmental Rights, China Biodiversity Conservation and Green Development Foundation) [\(link\)](#)



BERANDA ORGANISASI PROGRAM BERITA AIS 2023 INFORMASI PUBLISASI LAYANAN PUBLIK EVENT

Bahas Keanekaragaman Hayati, Kemenko Marves Hadiri Corporate Sustainability and Environmental Rights in Asia Conference

Administrator 65 views 15 Oct 2023



Marves - Bangkok, Kementerian Koordinator Bidang Kemaritiman dan Investasi (Kemenko Marves) melalui Asisten Deputi (Asdep) Pengelolaan Daerah Aliran Sungai (DAS) dan Konservasi Sumber Daya Alam (SDA) Sahih Nugrahadi menghadiri Konferensi Regional tentang Corporate Sustainability and Environmental Rights in Asia, Bangkok pada 4-5 Oktober 2023. Acara ini membahas isu-isu tak hanya manusia terkait lingkungan dan melina kerangka kerja baru.

Jakarta, Indonesia – Discussing Biodiversity: Coordinating Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Investments attend CSERA Conference

[\(link\)](#)

“As [a member] of VERSO’s Environmental Club, I attended the UN Corporate Sustainability and Environmental Rights in Asia Conference on the 5th of October 2023.

At the conference, I was astonished at the level of professionalism but at the same time, the friendly atmosphere as the panelists shared their thoughts on how consumers can vote with their money when buying products and how they want more youth involved in decision-making regarding environmental rights. I was selected to ask a question: “What is the very first step youth can take to become more involved in the sustainability corporate world?” Their answer was to learn more about the topic and to get more involved and to just start. I am eternally grateful for this wonderful opportunity that branched my connections with people in the field I’m interested in pursuing.”

High school student

“We will need to ensure commitments to implement the Paris Agreement align with existing international human rights obligations and standards and promote just and equitable solutions to climate change. We will need more policy coherence in this region to achieve this and for businesses not to wait to be mandated to take leadership...”

Notwithstanding the usefulness of Teams/Zoom calls, nothing quite replaces the face-to-face personal interactions and building of relationships and trust.

Huge thank you for the invitation and well done to the team for putting it all together!”

*Jessica Cheam, Founder & Managing Director,
Ecobusiness*

“This opportunity allows me to present the current status and issues of youth empowerment and youth community participation in social decisions related to sustainable development and climate action, and make recommendations.

Also, comment on solutions that businesses can consider to minimize environmental impacts, as well as create conditions for young people to contribute more to the process of sustainability and climate change.

Currently, there are still many barriers for young people to participate in the decision-making process of businesses and policymakers, hoping for a desirable future with more positive things for them.”

*Tran Minh Quang, Member of CYMG to UNEP,
Environmental Activist, Youth Advisor of
UNYAP*

“Just attended the #UNConference on Corporate Sustainability & Environmental Rights in Asia! Such a great opportunity to learn, grow, and connect with professionals in the sector!”

*Chandana J Hewawasam, Program Manager,
Delegation of the European Union to Sri Lanka
and the Maldives*

“I was honoured to speak on the Just Transition at the UN’s ‘Corporate Sustainability and Environmental Rights in Asia’ conference... Topics I was able to touch on included: (i) best practices for supply chain human rights due diligence; (ii) the challenge of conducting audits in the Asian context; (iii) our case study on the treatment of migrant workers in Malaysia; (iv) trends in enforcement of human rights issues in supply chains in the US, EU and Asia; and (v) our lobbying efforts to tighten legal standards, especially in Australia and the EU.”

*Matthew Kasdin, Director – Senior Counsel, Maxeon
Solar Technologies*

ENDNOTES

-
- ¹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2016), 'Policy Highlights: The Economic Consequences of Outdoor Air Pollution'. Available from: < <https://www.oecd.org/environment/indicators-modelling-outlooks/Policy-Highlights-Economic-consequences-of-outdoor-air-pollution-web.pdf> >
- ² United Nations Development Programme (2021), 'Asia in Focus: Clean Air and the Business and Human Rights Agenda'. Available from: < <https://bhr.cleanairinasia.org/> >
- ³ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (2023), 'Affordable and Clean Energy'. Available from: < <https://www.unescap.org/kp/2023/sdg-7-affordable-and-clean-energy> >
- ⁴ Fair Finance Asia and Stockholm Environment Institute (2022), 'Financing the Just Transition: Powering Asia's Sustainable Energy Future'. Available from: < <https://www.sei.org/publications/just-energy-transition-asia/#:~:text=Major%20economic%20powerhouses%20like%20India,of%20their%20primary%20energy%20needs> >
- ⁵ Forum for the Future (2022). 'Finance: An Agent of System Change?'. Available from < <https://www.forumforthefuture.org/finance-an-agent-of-system-change> >
- ⁶ Convention on Biological Diversity (2016), 'The State of Biodiversity in Asia: A Review of Progress Towards the Aichi Biodiversity Targets'. Available from: < <https://www.cbd.int/gbo/gbo4/outlook-asiapacific-en.pdf> >
- ⁷ New York Times (2023), 'Female Rangers 'Don't Go All Alpha Like the Men' to Protect a Forest. Available from: < <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/27/world/asia/female-forest-rangers-aceh-indonesia.html> >
- ⁸ Business for Nature (2023), 'High-Level Business Actions on Nature'. Available from: < <https://www.businessfornature.org/high-level-business-actions-on-nature> >
- ⁹ The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2023), 'Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report'. Available from: < <https://www.ipcc.ch/assessment-report/ar6/> >
- ¹⁰ CDP (2023), 'Data for Public Good: Steering the Role of ESG Rating and Data Products Providers'. Available from: < <https://www.cdp.net/en/policy-briefings/downloads/7242> >
- ¹¹ ESG Clarity (2021), 'Lack of Standardised ESG Reporting 'Biggest Threat' to Effective Disclosure'. Available from: < <https://esgclarity.com/lack-of-standardised-esg-reporting-biggest-threat-to-effective-disclosure/> >
- ¹² United Nations Development Programme (2023), 'Asia in Focus: Corporate Accountability and Climate Change'. Available from: < <https://www.undp.org/publications/asia-focus-corporate-accountability-and-climate-change> >
- ¹³ PWC (2023), 'Sustainability Counts II'. Available from: < <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/esg/esg-asia-pacific/sustainability-counts-2023.html> >
- ¹⁴ CDP (2022), 'Despite Growing Awareness of Climate Risks, just 8% of Companies in Asia Pacific Region have Committed to Net-Zero Targets'. Available from: < <https://www.cdp.net/en/articles/media/despite-growing-awareness-of-climate-risks-just-8-of-companies-in-asia-pacific-region-have-committed-to-net-zero-targets> >
- ¹⁵ World Economic Forum (2022), 'Future of Consumption in Fast Growth Consumer Market: ASEAN'. Available from: < https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Consumption_in_Fast_Growth_Consumer_Markets_ASEAN_2020.pdf >
- ¹⁶ United Nations Development Programme (2023), 'Achieving SDG 12: Bridging the Intent-Action Gap among Young Consumers'. Available from: < https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-10/undp_rbp_youth-and-responsible-consumption_issue-brief_2023_0.pdf >
- ¹⁷ United Nations Environment Programme (2023), 'The Second Session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) on Plastic Pollution.' Available from: < <https://www.unep.org/inc-plastic-pollution/session-2> >
- ¹⁸ United Nations Environment Programme (2023), 'Charting a Sustainable Course: Tackling Plastic Pollution in Asia with a Human Rights Based Approach'. Available from: < <https://www.sea-circular.org/news/charting-a-sustainable-course-tackling-plastic-pollution-in-asia-with-a-human-rights-based-approach/#:~:text=Understanding%20the%20Crisis%3A%20The%20Asia,into%20Oceans%20and%20Rivers%20yearly.> >
- ¹⁹ United Nations Environment Programme (2023), 'Turning off the Tap: How the World can End Plastic Pollution and Create a Circular Economy.' Available from: < <https://www.unep.org/resources/turning-off-tap-end-plastic-pollution-create-circular-economy> >