

Research title: *Civil society participation in the implementation of SDGs in Asia: A comparison of policy networks in Japan, Malaysia, and Timor Leste*

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development can be seen as an opportunity for civil society to engage with their governments and related stakeholders in a multi-sectoral and holistic manner, with a long term timeframe. The shared language and vision of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide civil society organisations (CSOs) with the communication tool to frame their ongoing work and to participate in the developmental process at a policy level. Since the launch of the Agenda in September 2015, civil society across Asia have started to mobilise themselves to engage in the public policy processes.

- In Malaysia, a coalition named the Malaysia CSO-SDG Alliance was formed in November 2015. Since then it has participated actively in the national SDG processes such as mapping civil society work on sustainable development, and being part of the state-led National Steering Committee for SDGs and its working groups.
- In Japan, the Japan Civil Society Network on SDGs (or SDGs Shimin Shakai Network) was launched in April 2016 to collaborate with policymakers on achieving the SDGs. Their website was launched in September 2016, providing an overview and detailing the list of committee members and organisations .
- In Timor Leste, a major Civil Society Round Table was organised in June 2016 to raise awareness about SDGs among the CSOs, and to make recommendations to their government and civil society on the matter. The formation of a civil society network is being discussed.

These three Asian countries at different levels of development are proposed as case studies for comparison in civil society participation in the SDG process. Commonalities and differences found in the policy networks will reveal intricacies of the relations between state and society, as well as interactions with other stakeholders such as the private sector and academia.

#### **a) Present Research Related to Research Proposal**

My current research and advocacy work lies in the area of social and solidarity economy (SSE) as a pathway towards sustainable development. Sustainability is seen through the lens of upholding the triple bottom line when running economic activities, with production and consumption patterns that are socially responsible and environmentally friendly. Besides the research area being the same as the proposed study, my involvement from the policy angle in Malaysia provides me with the domain knowledge of the processes that brought about the 2030 Agenda, and the challenges of implementing it.

#### **b) Objective of Proposed Research**

The main objective of the proposed research is to compare the governance of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Japan, Malaysia and Timor Leste,

with a focus on policy networks from a civil society point of view. These countries were chosen to represent nations at different levels of development in Asia: developed, developing, and least developed (according to the UN classifications).

Comparisons can be made from (but are not limited to) the following aspects:

- The objectives and guiding principles of the civil society networks
- Coalition and trust building processes
- Institutional frameworks at the national level
- Discourse analyses of stakeholder perception of SDGs
- Real and perceived challenges
- Socio-cultural and political background of the different nations, and how it affects the engagement processes

### **c) Proposed Research Plan**

A research framework will be devised to narrow down the elements for comparison with consultation from the research group. Literature review will be conducted based on the preliminary research framework, which will be refined according to findings from the review.

The proposed research methodology is qualitative, relying on data collection techniques of in-depth interviews and participant observation. Fieldwork is expected to be conducted in Japan, Malaysia and Timor Leste, specifically on conducting interviews with key individuals and organisational representatives, as well as participating in key events and meetings.

### **d) Expected Results and Impacts**

The expected results of this study are:

- An analytical framework for comparing policy networks in relation to civil society and SDG engagement, which can be used with other countries (within and outside of Asia) for enlarging the comparative study
- Detailed and nuanced insights on the processes of civil society coalition building and networking within the area of governance in sustainable development
- Policy recommendations to governments on how to better facilitate civil society participation and public-private partnerships to achieve the SDGs
- Recommendations for civil society networks on best practices and lessons learnt about different engagement models