



Key Activities in 2015

Building on the momentum of preceding years, the year 2015 was filled with numerous activities and publications under the aegis of Socdem Asia, which published several quarterlies with a focus on local government and participatory democracy in Asia, featuring cutting-edge analysis by leading experts from across Asia and beyond. The Socdem Asia Quarterly is a the flagship publication of progressive forces, movements, and thinkers in Asia, providing an up-to-date, relevant, and lively platform for exchange of ideas and perspectives on how to bring about genuine socio-political and economic transformation in Asia. Throughout the year, Socdem Asia also organized varying events, featuring huge conferences, which brought together leading progressive thinkers and activists from across the world, with a special focus on issues such as local governance, sustainable economy and green energy, youth leadership, and regional integration.

Major Publications



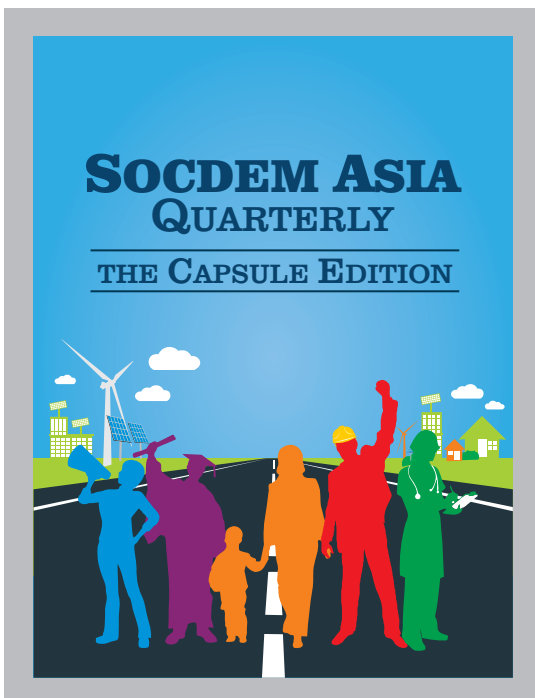
Local Government and Participatory Democracy: The Quest for Grassroots Politics in Asia (Part I)

The quarterly focused on latest developments in the domestic political landscape of Asian countries, particularly in terms of local governance and grassroots democracy. It looked at how regimes across the region are being confronted by large-scale uprisings, in varying forms, facilitated by increased political awareness as well as the usage of social media technology. This edition of the Quarterly came on the heels of the “SOCDEM Asia Conference on Lessons and Best Practices on Local Democracy and Governance in the 21st Century”, which was conducted 2-3 December 2014 in Eastern & Oriental Hotel, Penang, Malaysia, bringing together like-minded, progressive politicians to discuss among each other valuable inputs and strategies to deliver good, effective governance to their constituencies, especially in areas where social democratic forces are (or are poised to be) in position of power. The event served as a crucial platform for sharing of social democratic alternatives, with the aim of consolidating these experiences and discussions into a broader roadmap for bottom-up reforms, which will be of utmost importance to progressives in and beyond the region. The Quarterly builds up on the conference by providing a range of essays and commentaries on local governance in Asia.



Local Government and Participatory Democracy: The Quest for Grassroots Politics in Asia (Part II)

This edition built on the earlier Quarterly publication, looking at a broader range of case studies in participatory democracy and local governance reforms. It looks at areas of opportunity for reform and growing resistance against business-as-usual politics, not only by autocratic regimes, but also formally democratic regimes, which fall short in providing accountable and effective leadership. It looks at how countries like the Philippines have embarked on a high-profile anti-corruption initiative, which has, so far, led to the arrest of leading senators accused of embezzling public funds. Meanwhile, in Malaysia, a wave of political change took place in the last two general elections in 2008 and 2013, putting the opposition coalition Pakatan Rakyat (People's Coalition) in power in several key states after 57 years of rule by the current regime. In Indonesia, President Jokowi has confronted a stubborn oligarchy, which has sought to abolish local government elections in order to re-assert its grip on the Indonesia political system, weaken the bureaucratic reach of the new president, and block grass-roots efforts at reforming the country.



SOCDEM Asia Quarterly: The Capsule Edition

Throughout the last three years, the Quarterly has served as Socdem Asia's primary platform for progressive thinkers, activists, and policy-makers from across Asia and beyond to share their views on and in-depth analysis of most pertinent issues of the day. It has served as a space for cutting-edge discussion among progressives, a mechanism to take on the major debates of the day from multiple angles and people with a wide spectrum of expertise and experiences and views.

The contributors and interviewees have covered a wide range of issues, from the rise of "Jokowi", who made a meteoric rise from his humble roots in local governance to the helm of Indonesian state, to the current state of education, employment, and democratization across Asia. It had also extensively covered the issue of energy security and sustainable development, with a particular focus on Germany's legendary Energiewende (energy transformation) campaign, which has transformed the industrial powerhouse into a leading innovator in green technology, as well as post-Fukushima Japan's tortuous and uncertain journey towards a safer post-nuclear energy policy.

The capsule edition of the Quarterly provides Network readers, members, friends and the broader progressive community an opportunity to access an overview of our publications in recent years, covering major, timely themes, particularly local governance and democracy, decent work and inclusive growth, education and empowerment, and green energy and sustainable development. For the past three years, the publication has moved to a purely on-line edition. The capsule edition, however, provides, for the very first time, a hard copy, glossy version of our previous editions.

Key Conferences

Socdem Asia-organized/co-organized Activities in 2015

Building Unities around Energy Security How will the People Respond to the Growing Nuclear Lobby?

June 4th-6th, 2015 – Federal Hotel, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

When the 'nuclear age' first gathered steam, states were grappling with the idea of finding an alternative to oil and coal, and had the idea that nuclear power is cheap, clean and affordable, with no negative impact on carbon emissions. However, when the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster hit Japan and rocked the world, many states which had taken a choice of going down the 'nuclear path' for generating electricity held back. The issue of safety relating to nuclear power plants again reared its ugly head.

There are about 437 nuclear power plants in service throughout the globe today, with about 73 nuclear power plants in the pipeline, which is a substantial reduction compared to the nuclear boom in the 1970s and 1980s, where up to 233 reactors were being built. Concerns on the feasibility and safety of nuclear power plants were always present but after Fukushima, these were even more distressing. On February 27th, reports emerged that a fresh leak which flared up in April 2014 was kept hidden for nearly a year, with radioactive leaks as high as 70 times the ordinary rate. Reports have suggested that in the run up to Fukushima in March 2011, there had been 33 serious nuclear accidents, beginning with the Chalk River incident in Canada, in late December 1952. A whole load more minor nuclear incidents have gone unreported.

The aforementioned nuclear accidents served as warning signs, and resulted in 'dips' in the number of nuclear power plants in operation. Today though, there is a growing pattern in both the developed and developing world to push for nuclear plants to be built at a large scale, despite severe warnings from not only Fukushima, but Chernobyl which took place before it. Previously, it was the developed world which focused quite a bit on nuclear power plants, but the focus has now shifted to developing countries and specifically, Southeast Asian states. India and China too are some of the big players of nuclear power plants, with Russia looming large on the horizon.





One commonality these nations possess is the state-driven machinery to provide an irresistible deal to developing nations, under a 'Build-Own-Operate' (BOO) package. Vietnam has now signed a contract with Rosatom, the State-owned Enterprise of Russia, to construct at least two nuclear power plants. Rosatom and others are now looking to expand their influence in the region by offering similar deals to Malaysia and neighbouring states, more so with the oil prices now having nosedived. The United States also wants a piece of the pie, but most of the corporations there are privately owned and are unable to compete financially, due to the extreme amounts in cost, to construct, operate, manage, regulate and somehow deal with the radioactive nuclear waste, which no nation has been able to accomplish thus far.

On the other hand, Germany has kicked off a different campaign which could signal a paradigm shift towards a public-driven alternative, in the form of Renewable Energy (RE), proving that the alternatives are there. France has also put forth a legislation to reduce their reliance on nuclear power, and the United States has only 2 nuclear plants being built, with many more nearing their lifespan. States in Asia though, are opening their markets and adopting nuclear power plants, largely due to the immense power of the nuclear lobby groups. In a pursuit of reclaiming the social commons, civil society organisations, concerned groups, political parties and others are faced with a challenge of the best way forward for people-centred energy sovereignty.

1. This conference focused on first, on the state of play of nuclear power plants globally, with the focus being on Asia and Europe, and what is the rationale and basis for going towards Nuclear Power. Part of the focus will be also on the lobby groups behind the push for nuclear.
2. Discussed Malaysia's current energy mix and projected demand, as well as the Malaysian government's intent on building at least two nuclear power plants by 2021, learning from experiences from states which have begun the shift from nuclear power to renewable energy.
3. Provided an opportunity to reinvigorate existing networks comprised of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), political parties, concerned groups and others, as well as building new ties in both Asia and Europe, to combat and provide an alternative to Nuclear Power.
4. Identified approaches for Malaysia and other developing economies to reclaim the social commons for the people, under a framework of energy sovereignty.
5. The conference also provided an avenue for delegates to identify the real costs of nuclear power plants, and develop viable alternatives at both national and regional networks.
7. As a whole, this meeting enabled established networks and newly-developed groups to be able to play a vital role in developing an alternative energy policy, which can be used also as a lobbying material to the Malaysian government and ASEAN members who are looking seriously into nuclear energy.

Political Management Training for Young Progressives in South East Asia (PMT Asia)

24-28 May 2014, Amana Hotel, Genting Highlands, Pahang, Malaysia



Given the lack of adequate and strategic support, institutionalized mechanisms and venues, youth participation ranges from symbolic to under-developed. Young people participate by learning the ropes. Young people elected into office face tough challenges of realpolitik versus their idealism; actual and effective governance versus limited capacity and experience. In this situation, the youth fail in becoming agents of change and are turned into extensions of old political order. The Network of Social Democracy in Asia (SocDem Asia) has recognized the need to capacitate and prepare young people to meaningfully participate in actual governance. SocDem Asia sees the important role of young progressives in shaping the political terrain. Furthermore, it recognizes not only the role of young people in their respective countries but also shaping the future of the global community. The Political Management Training for Young Progressives in Asia seeks to address the need for programmatic capacity-building training for young progressives. It provides a venue to emerge, capacitate, and connect progressive leaders.

The Training involved 25-30 young progressives -- members of parliament; local government unit officials; young professionals in government service; and youth leaders in political parties or unions, 18-40 years old -- who sees politics as their mission and appreciates politics as a means to change society. In its pilot-run, the training, in cluster 1, included key areas of political management: deepening understanding of different political ideologies; party organizing and development; leadership; political communications and negotiations. Cluster 2 of the training builds on the knowledge and skills set covered in the first cluster. Additional topics are included based on the training-needs assessment with the participants. For Cluster 2, the knowledge set will include: SocDem Principles and Core Issues as part of ideological deepening; PartyLabour Union- Mass movement relations; ASEAN and EU Regional Integration in the light of the integration process happening in ASEAN and Gender Mainstreaming. It will also include the skills and tools set for Democratic Governance, Moderation and Facilitation Techniques, and Public Speaking.

The Training had the following specific objectives:

1. To provide capacity-building training on political management for young progressives in terms of knowledge and skills to contribute to their political work;
2. To introduce knowledge and skills of modern pedagogical tools and facilitation techniques that are able to adapt to different setting and optimizes people's participation, interaction, drive for results;
3. To provide a platform for sharing and shared-learning of young progressives in the region while maximizing venue to foster strategic connections among young progressives.

Experience Exchange On Party Building And Strengthening

September 2-3, 2015, Delhi, India



The event saw progressive parties across Asia exchanging views, enhancing their ties, strengthening their solidarity, and updating each other on major political developments in India and across Asia. Participants discussed tools for Political Communication, content formulation, profile building, and getting the progressive message across to the wider audience. They also discussed organizing principles and strategies, leadership development, maintaining and expanding bailiwicks, while looking at broader issues such as movement and party principles and dynamics, issues identification, and coalition/alliance building.

SOCDEM Asia & GPF Meeting 25-26 September 2015, Penang, Malaysia “Democracy and Development”, held back-to-back with Progressive Alliance Seminar on “Growth and Inclusion”, hosted by the Democratic Action Party (DAP) and co-organized by SOCDEM Asia



Bringing together a wide network of progressives from across Europe and Asia and beyond, the conference provided a platform to explore and discuss much-needed reforms to existing economic and political institutions in order to (a) ensure more inclusive growth, (b) secure human rights and democratic gains, and (c) undertake appropriate policy initiatives that assert the progressive development paradigm.

The activities objectives were:

1. Provide a platform for social democrats to discuss, assess, and analyse issues relevant to Asia and Europe in order to facilitate a common stance and/or strategic responses to existent and emerging challenges;
2. Share reflections, and develop comparative assessments on practices, among parties and policy makers on issues of inclusive growth, sustainable development, and democracy;
3. Come up with a consensus agenda and direction on outstanding issues of common concern for progressives from both regions.

Conference
**Shaping the Social Dimension
of Regional Integration**
5-7 November 2015 / Bangkok, Thailand



The conference provided a unique and timely platform for social democrats and progressive actors from Southeast Asia and beyond to discuss the social dimensions of regional integration, particularly its key components and underlying principles in light of the establishment of an ASEAN Common Market. The aim is to establish a social agenda for people-centered regional integration. Participants will discuss challenges with respect to upholding labor rights, tackling poverty and unemployment, and containing growing income inequality across the region, as deeper economic integration under the aegis of an ASEAN common market beckons.

Key Objectives

1. Formulate agenda toward shaping the social dimension of regional integration across Asia, identifying key concepts and principles, from a social democratic perspective;
2. Discuss the prospects for and the impact of ongoing regional integration processes across the region, to the region as a whole, and to individual member countries;
3. Compare and contrast the ASEAN experience with other regional bodies such as the SAARC and the EU;
4. Explore and propose various policies and mechanisms in order to ensure that further regional integration will benefit ordinary citizens and contribute to sustainable development among members states;
5. Explore prospects for greater partnership among advocates in ASEAN, SAARC and EU in promoting people-centered regional integration

Experience Exchange and Youth Organizing Workshop

November 13-15, 2015, Dili, Timor Leste



To strengthen solidarity and networks among progressive groups in Asia, Socdem Asia conducted a special workshop with the youth leaders of Fretilin, the ruling party in the fledgling democracy (and nation) of East Timor. The event saw youth leaders from the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia sharing their experiences with their hosts, looking at the history of the youth-wing and its character, how is the youth-wing organized and its attendant organizational structure, what are its programs for members and what are its program to attract new members. They discussed current campaigns, challenges and achievements, and relations to the party. The participants looked steps required to be able to build the youth-wing of Fretilin and the way it will be reimagined, and should it relate with the ruling party. They also looked at media strategies, campaigning, and ideological discussions among progressives and policy reforms and agenda, among other key challenges and opportunities for youth activism and empowerment.

Sustainability and Participation Socdem Asia Study Visit on Smart Cities TKP Conference Center in Shinagawa / Study visits in Yokohama, Tokyo

From 29 November to 4 December 2015, Greater Tokyo Area, Japan



The final Socdem activity for the year saw a delegation across Asia visiting Japan in order to study and closely observe the establishment of smart cities, particularly in Yokohama and Tokyo. There was also introduction to the political situation in Japan, a lecture on “Smart Cities in Japan: Concept and historical development” by Andrew deWit, Professor of Rikkyo University, lectures from representatives of the NGO Resilience Japan, lecture by Mikio Otsu, Japanese Electrical Electronic & Information Trade Union, lecture from Ms. Hiroko Uehara, member of Mayors' League, lecture on “Development of the Japanese smart cities models - megacities and their business models in view of the 2020 Olympics” By Martin Schulz of Fujitsu Research Institute, coupled with extensive visits to Yokohama City Hall, lecture on the demonstration experiment of the Yokohama Smart City from Mr. Natori of Yokohama City Government; JX Energy, Co. in Yokohama; the Bureau of Urban development Tokyo Metropolitan Government; the Metropolitan Expressway Co., Takatoshi Co., Ltd.; Eco-Gurashi Miraikan in Kawasaki, which were all complemented by lectures by resident policy-makers/experts. The activity aimed to build on Socdem's years-long effort at establishing a vision for a green economy and sustainable energy across Asia.