

FORUM-ASIA

# Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development

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Asian membership-based regional organisation

## Strategic Plan 2023-2027



# VISION

FORUM-ASIA's vision is to build democratic, just, equitable and sustainable societies in Asia and beyond, where human rights of all individuals, groups, and peoples are fully realised, in accordance with international human rights standards and norms.

# MISSION

To fulfil our goals, we have made our mission to strengthen movements for human rights and sustainable development through advocacy, capacity-development and solidarity actions with human rights defenders and civil society organisations.



**85 members  
in 23 countries**

## Introduction

The strategic plan inception started between June and October 2021. FORUM-ASIA commissioned external consultants to facilitate the process, using a participatory process that involved both the Secretariat and members. Further contributions were made by external experts working in human rights and other relevant fields. The methodologies used identified FORUM-ASIA's strengths—ensuring these were retained—and innovations and adaptations in the way the organisation works, demanded by a fast-changing world. The strategy underwent internal and external validations and reiterations in 2022 and the final version was shared with members and stakeholders before the 10th General Assembly in September 2022.

This strategy is built upon a set of foundational pillars that form the basis of FORUM-ASIA's work that human rights are not Western or Asian but universal, including the organisation's Vision, Mission, Core Values, and Working Principles. In this new strategy, FORUM-ASIA adopts an organisational Mantra - Realising Human Rights for all, Reclaiming Civic Space and Strengthening Democracies in Asia – providing a simple summary of the organisation's *raison d'être*. This will allow FORUM-ASIA to explain itself more easily to a wider audience not well versed in human rights language, as well as function as a touchstone for the Secretariat and members to retain focus on the organisation's core purpose.

### Who we work with:

**Asian Civil society:** By Asian civil society we mean first responders including our members, other local level civil society organisations, Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) including Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) and Environmental Defenders (E-HRDs), social and democratic movements particularly those of youth, regional and national networks (formal and informal) and other formations who are facing challenges such as structural challenges/risks due to shrinking civic space, democratic backsliding, human rights violations and abuses online and offline.

**Marginalised communities:** All vulnerable groups facing discrimination based on gender identities and sexual orientation including women and LGBTIQ+ communities, as well as religious, ethnic and racial minorities, Indigenous Peoples, migrant communities and those who have faced or are facing human rights abuses including physical, psychological and digital, whose fundamental rights are affected by business operations especially large infrastructural projects, environmental degradation and climate change. It also includes victims, survivors and their families.

**Strategic partners:** Including but not limited to, international and regional non-governmental organisations, international and regional networks & alliances, funders and non-traditional allies such as artists and art institutions, academia, research institutions, media and advocacy platforms to build solidarity and amplify our strategic interventions on human rights, civic space and democracy issues in Asia.

**State institutions and policy makers:** Institutions and/or mechanisms for influencing pro human rights policies and laws and enhancing accountability at the national level such as

National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), likeminded parliamentarians, executives including ministries and officials, courts and ombudsmen.

**Mechanisms:** We facilitate the participation of Asian civil society representatives and conduct advocacy with international and regional mechanisms such as the United Nations human rights mechanisms including United Nations Human Rights Council, Special Procedure Mandate Holders, UN General Assembly, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its human rights bodies. Others such as the European Parliament, International Criminal Court and International Court of Justice, World Economic Forum, international financial institutions will be assessed and reached for widening international and regional outreach to advocacy platforms.

**Diplomatic community:** Including embassies, missions and state missions' representatives at international and regional human rights mechanisms from across the world to influence the agenda, discussions and outputs in favour of Asian civil society and marginalised communities.

### **The context we work**

FORUM-ASIA is situated in a context anew that is characterised by uncertainties and changes, including democratic backsliding, erosion of the rule of law resulting in widespread violations of human rights, disruptive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and emerging diseases, global financial crises, the worsening climate emergency and environmental degradation, and overall shrinking civic space. Whether direct or indirect, all these impact the progress that civil society has painstakingly established over the years in the promotion and protection of human rights, civic space and democracy.

In FORUM-ASIA's view, the causal factors rousing Asian governments to adopt authoritarian models of governance are fueled by three main causes: regional clustering of authoritarian regimes (authoritarian States tend to have authoritarian neighbors), economic inequality (research shows that where economic inequality is greater, authoritarianism is more pervasive) and inadequate, or lack of implementation of, legal frameworks to protect against human rights abuses by business enterprises and weak mandate and accountability policies of regional mechanisms such as ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights and the dysfunctional nature of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation.

The current state of human rights in Asia reflected the gravity of democratic backsliding the region has been observing in recent years. Autocratic regimes overpowered democratically elected public representatives such as in Myanmar and Afghanistan resulting in the total collapse of human rights institutions and structures in addition to brutal and inhumane attacks against civil society and democratic groups. The loopholes in the fragile democratic institutions are taken advantage of such as in the Philippines where disinformation and vote buying played a crucial role to the ostensive democratic process. This is also evident in India where populist parties propagating ultra-nationalist and ethno-religious centered agenda rose to power through democratic elections. Meanwhile, economic crises in Sri Lanka and Pakistan have led to the resignation and removal from the office of the Prime Ministers and the President. In Central Asia, a sub-region which FORUM-ASIA has recently included in its geographic coverage, is not immune to authoritarianism as well. In early 2022, the Kazakhstan

government used excessive force and killed several and jailed scores of young protesters and other civilians who had started a peaceful protest against a sudden fuel hike.

Repeatedly, the fragile democracy and hostile governments have created challenges for civil society and human rights defenders. In India, hundreds of NGO licenses were canceled, suspended or refused renewal to receive foreign funding under the Foreign Contributions Regulations Act (FCRA) and in Bangladesh through the Foreign Donation (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act 2016.<sup>1</sup> These restrictions made it extremely difficult for local civil society to raise funds and remain operational. The COVID-19 pandemic and Russia-Ukraine war are other contributing factors hindering Asian civil society to source and mobilise financial resources for sustainable operations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated a trend exposing the fragile state of human rights as ironclad rule prevailed in consolidating control over civic space. As the COVID-19 virus continued evolving to different variants along with other emerging diseases, control over physical and online spaces through repressive and restrictive laws and extreme attacks against human rights defenders are expected to continue to intensify. Surveillance (including the tracking of populations) and violations of individuals' right to privacy have increased to unprecedented levels and there remains the threat of using the personal data to silence dissent in many ways. For example, the human rights crisis in Kashmir where restrictions on fundamental freedoms continue after the revocation of constitutional autonomy; in Cambodia, doubts were raised on the passing of the Sub-Decree on the Establishment of the National Internet Gateway due to its lack of technical infrastructure and information on its operations as further detrimental civil society functioning in the country. The shutting down of the internet by governments is an emerging tool used to prevent information flows of human rights violations, and for civil society and defenders to effectively organise to protect themselves and resist attempts by the state to suppress their fundamental rights. The use of social media to spread disinformation continues with the increased use of deep fakes. Media, particularly social media tech companies, are corroborating with authoritarian regimes to silence dissent and harm movements which find online spaces as an amplifying tool to their campaigns.

Based on FORUM-ASIA's recorded [cases of violations](#) committed against human rights defenders, the violations included, but were not limited to, judicial harassment, (arbitrary) arrest and detention, physical violence, intimidation and threats, and enactment of repressive legislation and policies, both in online and offline spaces.<sup>2</sup> FORUM-ASIA has observed that such attacks surge in locations which are witnessing armed conflicts where civil society and defenders find themselves in an environment in which they lack the capacities and resources to navigate the complex security scenarios brought on by political turmoil and humanitarian crisis. Human rights defenders from marginalised groups such as women, Indigenous Peoples and LGBTIQ+ are particularly impacted as they face endemic levels of violence and persecution amidst rampant impunity. Women are subject to gender-based risks and patriarchal attitudes

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=36732>

<sup>2</sup> In the publication *Defending in Numbers (DiN)*, FORUM-ASIA recorded 1,073 cases of violations against 3,046 HRDs and their family members, NGOs, and communities across 21 countries in Asia. *Defending in Numbers (DiN)* is a compendium of data analysed to identify regional patterns of violations against HRDs and provide analysis of these trends to illustrate the landscape HRDs in Asia operate <https://asianhrds.forum-asia.org/>

that seek to undermine their work, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic which saw a rise in domestic and sexual violence against women and girls.

Non-state actors, particularly companies involved in the extractive and manufacturing industries across the region, have taken advantage of these conditions and amplified threats, intimidation, and harassment against civil society actors voicing concern against their operations.<sup>3</sup> More often, the precarious conditions of the vulnerable and marginalised groups easily expose them by their susceptibility to severe impact of this scenario especially when the states' priority is to fast-track business operations without meaningful assessment of the impact on the communities and the environment. However, national accountability mechanisms such as NHRIs offer little respite as their independence and effectiveness are impacted by the deteriorating democratic environment coupled with an acute lack of the human and financial resources needed to fulfill their mandates.<sup>4</sup>

Despite these challenges and the context FORUM-ASIA is situated in, we are encouraged by our members and partners' formidable work to mobilise around issues such as environmental justice, ethnic and racial justice, gender equality, civic space, democratic governance, access to information and state and corporate accountability for intersecting human rights violations and economic and environmental abuses. Similarly, youth-led democratic movements across Asia are becoming a ray of new hope that next generation leaders are on the right path to realising their fundamental rights. A growing number of civil society and defenders beyond the FORUM-ASIA membership are equipped to engage with regional and international human rights mechanisms, especially the United Nations Human Rights Council, in attempts to amplify voices by providing firsthand accounts of their issues. FORUM-ASIA will continue its role to encourage formation of and support movements to ensure a ripple effect in other Asian countries with weaker democratic governance and at the same time, take active steps that ensure youth leaders are nurtured and looked after well.

## **Strategic Goals**

Responding to the above context and integrating the learning from the implementation of the Strategic Plan (2016-2022), including the recommendations of the external evaluation commissioned by Sida, to ensure that FORUM-ASIA does not stretch its limited capacity to the extent that its effectiveness is impaired, it has limited itself to two goals for its work over the next five years. These goals focus on human rights, democracy, and civic space issues that FORUM-ASIA will prioritise. The goals and objectives will be realised primarily through applying the organisational values and strategic working principles in the implementation of interventions. FORUM-ASIA will focus on the issues identified in the context by creating meaningful and structural linkages between the programmes and the organisational goals and objectives through clear change pathways by achieving the long-term outcomes which serve as pre-conditions to the objectives.

### **Strategic Goal 1: Empowered civil society and marginalised communities promoting and protecting human rights, civic space and democracy in Asia**

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=27678>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=36231&nhri=1>

An open civic space in a democratic society forms the basis for the realisation, promotion, and protection of all human rights. As many countries in Asia are witnessing democratic backsliding with curbs and restrictions on civic space and fundamental freedoms (freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly and association, freedom of religion and belief among others) and human rights abuses in online and offline spaces, FORUM-ASIA will keep building the capacity of Asian civil society and marginalised communities in a more structured and coordinated manner. Data and information on civic and democratic space and human rights will be curated in compelling ways, impending restrictions anticipated, and our focus on actionable recommendations more enhanced. As an Asian regional organisation, FORUM-ASIA is strategically positioned in providing platforms of engagements for civil society and contributing to an improved policy and regulatory environment for human rights and civic and democratic space in Asia. FORUM-ASIA will build solidarity and facilitate members and partners to conduct more rigorous and coordinated advocacy at national levels, especially those for progressive and pro-human rights policy making, blocking attempts to pass laws that pose risk to civic and democratic space, and continue to advocate against existing laws, policies and regulations as such. FORUM-ASIA will continue to empower civil society for the strengthening of existing national accountability mechanisms/institutions including NHRIs and also push for the establishment of new mechanisms/NHRIs in countries where they do not exist through the platform of the Asian NGO Network on National Human Rights Institutions (ANNI). We will sustain and build on existing advocacy with international and regional human rights mechanisms and explore other avenues such as international financial institutions, World Economic Forum and the European Parliament to amplify civil society voices and hold state and non-state actors accountable.

FORUM-ASIA will invest not only in challenging negative narratives but also to achieve capabilities that set the agenda on human rights in public discourse, with the aim of reducing the risks that Asian civil society face which are detrimental to the impact of their work. FORUM-ASIA will achieve this through the use of strategic communication methods and tools, innovative dissemination strategies, and messaging that use positive and inspiring narratives (e.g., hope-based communications and stories of resistance) that is both engaging and accessible in order to influence attitudes and behaviours of targeted stakeholders for a vibrant civil society in both online and offline spaces.

**Strategic Goal 2: Resilient Asian civil society and marginalised communities continuing their work for human rights, civic space and democracy in a safe and sustainable manner.**

FORUM-ASIA will put in place technical and financial resources for Asian civil society and marginalised communities enabling them to hold the line amid mounting challenges. FORUM-ASIA will strive to improve the operational resilience and holistic security of civil society organisations, human rights defenders, and communities including those living in crisis/conflict situations to assess and respond to security threats and attacks in online and offline spaces. FORUM-ASIA will deploy a two-pronged approach to enable civil society organisations, human rights defenders, and communities to continue their work for human rights and social and democratic movements building: a) provision of timely emergency assistance, and b) capacity to assess and mitigate security risks and remain safe in online and

offline spaces i.e., provisions of skills, tools and resources on digital and physical security, and psycho-social wellbeing. FORUM-ASIA will sustain and strive to expand its partnership with relevant organisations, networks and forums, and funding partners at national, regional and international levels to bring cooperation in civil society protection work and avoid duplication of resources. FORUM-ASIA will create and support effective civil society resourcing infrastructure across locations in Asia and beyond by improving institutional and operational capacities of members and partners. Leveraging its position as a regional organisation, FORUM-ASIA will lead on convening civil society working on human rights protection in Asia to bring an overall cooperation in the work that they are doing and create avenues for data sharing and knowledge transfer from best practices and lessons learned.

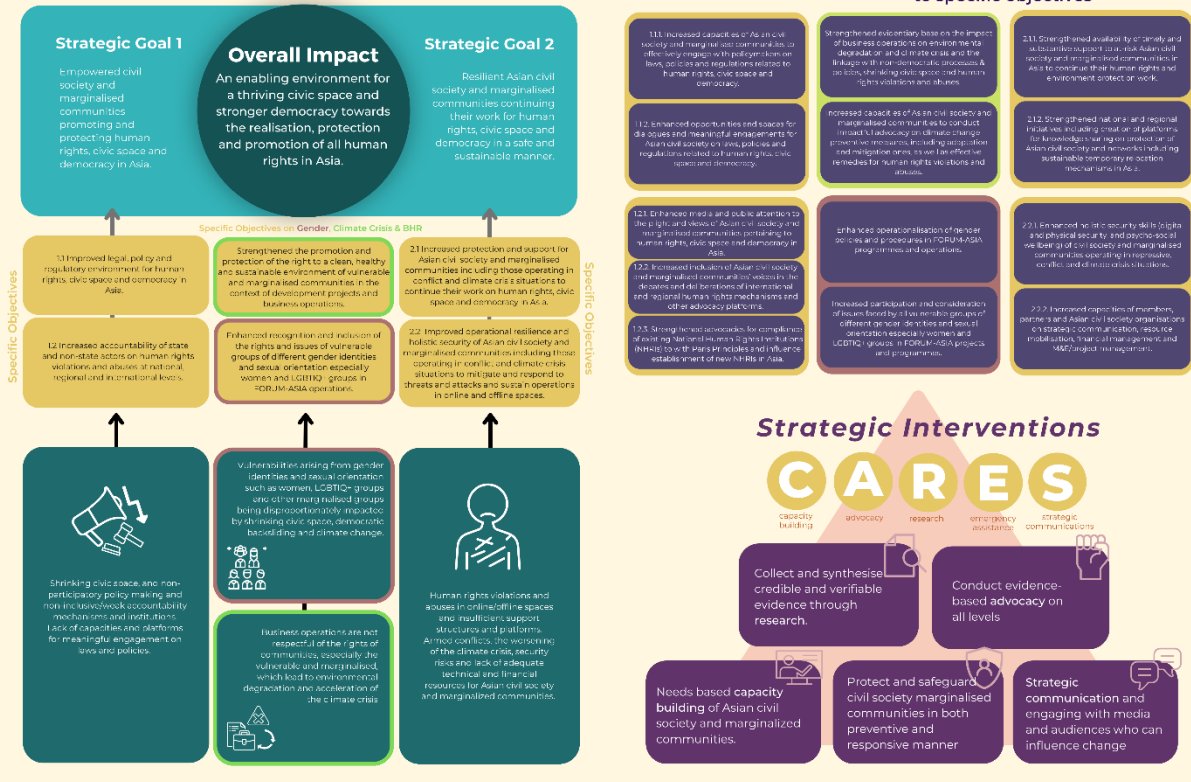
While FORUM-ASIA will work for the protection and promotion of civic space, democracy and human rights of Asian civil society and all marginalised communities, a special emphasis will be put on engaging with and working for the rights of women and LGBTIQ+ groups and all those who are facing discrimination because of their gender identities and sexual orientation. FORUM-ASIA will strengthen gender mainstreaming in its operations and programmes and consider intersectionality of gender identifies and sexual orientation and social demographics in planning, implementation, and reporting of missions and activities. Relatedly, as the United Nations recognised access to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment as a human right, FORUM-ASIA will strive to expand its work on issues of Business and Human Rights (BHR) and climate change in a way to collect evidence and advocate on the actual impact of business operations/expansions on environment & climate change and the interlinkages with human rights violations, shrinking civic space, and non-democratic/non-participatory policy making in Asia.

As such, specific objectives on gender mainstreaming, climate crisis and business and human rights are designed to give priorities to these issues in FORUM-ASIA programming.



**Our theory of change**

**FORUM-ASIA Theory of Change 2023-2027**



Please click [this link](#) to download the visualised version of FORUM-ASIA theory of change

FORUM-ASIA's theory of change builds on the lessons learned from the achievements of the previous strategic plan and challenges posed by the modern civil, political and democratic contexts in Asia as well as the innovations the organisation has put in place in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The theory of change is centered on the core foundation of the organisation to provide opportunities and resources to civil society and marginalised communities to work together and empower them to make change happen within their local contexts. It strengthens the premises that human rights are not Western nor Asian but rather, universal.

In today's fast-changing world, the dynamics of which form an existential threat to the international human rights standards built over the past 75 years, FORUM-ASIA's theory of change needs to adapt to face these challenges. This includes freeing itself from prescriptive ways of working and organising itself, being open to agile innovation and being adaptable in the face of threats and opportunities. Most importantly, FORUM-ASIA will explore its creative potential by building on but also thinking beyond the traditional set of tools human rights organisations have historically worked with, especially through the use of innovative technologies in its intervention strategies and becoming the regional go-to organisation for human rights, civic and democratic space promotion and protection.

As opposed to one goal and four specific objectives in the previous strategic plan, FORUM-ASIA now envisions two goals whereby one goal aspires to promote and protect human rights, civic and democratic space in Asia and the other goal focuses on delivering the change with regards to civil society's resilience to continue operating in challenging contexts in a safe and secure manner. While FORUM-ASIA recognises the complexity of the change it is pursuing, the overlapping nature of strategic interventions, the non-linear preconditions (outcomes) as well as the objectives leading to both strategic goals, it will aspire to deliver on the below listed pathways of change under each goal to achieve the overall impact:

We believe that by working together with civil society, marginalised communities, and all other stakeholders:

If FORUM-ASIA contributes to the improvement of legal, policy and regulatory environment for civil society and marginalised communities in Asia, through achieving:

- Increased capacities of Asian civil society and marginalised communities to effectively engage with policymakers on laws, policies and regulations related to human rights, civic space and democracy.
- Enhanced opportunities and spaces for dialogues and meaningful engagements for Asian civil society on laws, policies and regulations related to human rights, civic space and democracy.

And if FORUM-ASIA increases the accountability of state and non-state actors on human rights violations at national, regional and international levels through:

- Enhanced media and public attention to the plight and views of Asian civil society and marginalised communities pertaining to human rights, civic space and democracy in Asia.
- Increased inclusion of Asian civil society and marginalised communities' voices in the debates and deliberations of international and regional human rights mechanisms and other advocacy platforms.
- Strengthened advocacies for compliance of existing National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) to with Paris Principles and influence establishment of new NHRIs in Asia.

Then, FORUM-ASIA will have meaningfully contributed to empowering civil society and marginalised communities to promote and protect human rights, civic space and democracy in Asia

Additionally, if FORUM-ASIA contributes to provision of protection and support for Asian civil society and marginalised communities including those operating in conflict and climate crisis situations to continue their work on human rights, civic space and democracy in Asia through:

- Strengthened availability of timely and substantive support to at-risk Asian civil society and marginalised communities in Asia to continue their human rights and environment protection work.

- Strengthened national and regional initiatives including creation of platforms for knowledge sharing on protection of Asian civil society and networks including sustainable temporary relocation mechanisms in Asia.

And, if FORUM-ASIA enhances the operational resilience and holistic security of Asian civil society and marginalised communities including those operating in conflict and climate crisis situations to mitigate and respond to threats and attacks and sustain operations in online and offline spaces through:

- Enhanced holistic security skills (digital and physical security, and psycho-social wellbeing) of civil society and marginalised communities operating in repressive, conflict and climate crisis situations.
- Increased capacities of members, partners and Asian civil society organisations on strategic communication, resource mobilisation, financial management and M&E/project management.

Then, FORUM-ASIA will contribute towards resilient Asian civil society and marginalised communities being able to continue their work for human rights, civic space and democracy in a safe and sustainable manner.

Together with this and as cross-sectional and emerging priorities of mainstreaming gender and climate crisis and business and human rights:

If FORUM-ASIA enhances the recognition and inclusion of the rights and issues of vulnerable groups of different gender identities and sexual orientation especially women and LGBTIQ+ groups in FORUM-ASIA operations through:

- Enhanced operationalisation of gender policies and procedures in FORUM-ASIA programmes and operations.
- Increased participation and consideration of issues faced by all vulnerable groups of different gender identities and sexual orientation especially women and LGBTIQ+ groups in FORUM-ASIA projects and programmes.

And if FORUM-ASIA strengthens the promotion and protection of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment of vulnerable and marginalised communities in the context of development projects and business operations through:

- Strengthened evidentiary base on the impact of business operations on environmental degradation and climate crisis and the linkage with non-democratic processes & policies, shrinking civic space and human rights violations and abuses.
- Increased capacities of Asian civil society and marginalised communities to conduct impactful advocacy on climate change preventive measures, including adaptation and mitigation ones, as well as effective remedies for human rights violations and abuses.

Then eventually, FORUM-ASIA will have contributed significantly to an enabling environment for a thriving civic space and stronger democracy towards the realisation, protection and promotion of all human rights, in Asia as its overarching impact by 2027.

## **How we will implement the strategy**

### **Strategic Working Principles**

FORUM-ASIA strives to maximise and sustain its impact through strategic thinking and planning. Its credible work, rooted in its values and with conviction, speaks truth to power, and challenges norms, actions and practices, and laws that contrast with international human rights standards. It remains accountable in its approach and in managing its resources responsibly. FORUM-ASIA uses the following working principles in its strategic interventions:

Working as a Collective: FORUM-ASIA commits itself to work as a collective and enact this principle in everything it does, from planning to implementation, and from fundraising to expanding the membership base in order to provide voices to those unheard. It will ensure participatory and bottom-up approaches in its projects and programmes so as to be contextually relevant to local and national civil society and regionally/internationally unique in its advocacy efforts.

Strategic Engagements: FORUM-ASIA commits itself to forging strategic partnerships for change where there is a common cause to further leverage its position as an umbrella organisation with mechanisms such as ASEAN and the UN Human Rights mechanisms, among others to facilitate the participation and engagement of Asian civil society stakeholders, and nationally with NHRIs to influence agendas and achieve increased accountability of state and non-state actors on human rights violations and shrinking civic and democratic space.

Strengthening Asian Solidarity and Movement Building: Improving regional and international solidarity is imperative, especially on issues surrounding human rights, civic space, climate crisis, and democracies. By focusing on those affected current and emerging issues, FORUM-ASIA will strengthen collective response to prevent the escalation of the crises. Together with strategic partners, members and other civic actors, FORUM-ASIA will continue to take a unified position and provide support to civil society and marginalised communities across Asia for their just cause.

Do No Harm: FORUM-ASIA does not support projects/programmes that unnecessarily harm the environment and has zero-tolerance when it comes to potential adverse impacts on civil society and marginalised communities. FORUM-ASIA will institute robust risk management in all its operations and will demonstrate taking a step back from an intervention to look at the broader context and mitigate potential negative effects on the civil society and marginalised communities.

Gender-sensitivity and Gender Mainstreaming Approach: FORUM-ASIA contributes to gender equality and inclusiveness by ensuring that the methods and tools to promote gender equality and reduce gender disparities in programmes and projects are thoroughly planned and implemented. FORUM-ASIA will strive that gender analysis is integrated into the planning, execution and monitoring and evaluation of projects and programmes. Emphasis will be given to protection of women human rights defenders and those from LGBTIQ+ groups.

Evidence-based and Impact Oriented: FORUM-ASIA commits to collect evidence in systemic manner and achieve, measure and demonstrate the results (outcomes and impact) of its work on human rights, civic space and democracy in Asia.

### **Strategic Interventions**

Applying these principles, FORUM-ASIA will implement the following cross-cutting and overarching strategic interventions to achieve the desired outcomes serving as pre-conditions in the theory of change.

Collect and synthesize credible and verifiable evidence to document the plight of civil society and marginalised communities and inform capacity building, advocacy and solidarity missions. FORUM-ASIA's goal is to conduct evidence-based advocacy, where the data and testimonies collected from the ground are instrumental for effective advocacy outputs and actions at national, regional and international levels. FORUM-ASIA conducts **research** by documenting abuses, gathering testimonies and analysing legal structures and policy processes. The focus on the interconnection and interdependence of rights and issues guides FORUM-ASIA's research approach, where civil and political rights, and economic, cultural and social rights and environmental issues faced by civil society and marginalised communities are addressed in a holistic way.

To further strengthen its research, FORUM-ASIA will take the following steps over the next five years:

- Establish systems to ensure the standardisation and quality control of research outputs, including organisational methodologies on how research is conducted, analysed, and drafted.
- Document the cases of violations against human rights defenders and use the data and analysis as a tool for evidence-based advocacy at national, regional, and international level as mentioned above.
- Establish a standardised process for the editing, formatting and publication of research in order to amplify its reach and impact, including through the strategic use of communication.
- Continuous documentation and consolidation of evidence provided by members, partners and other civil society organisations complementing FORUM-ASIA's strategic interventions and objectives.
- Focus on issues on which information is not readily available at local/national level, and which have a strong cross-border and cross-sub/regional element enabling FORUM-ASIA, civil society and marginalised communities to inform their interventions.

Conduct evidence-based **advocacy** on human rights, civic space and democracy together with Asian civil society, marginalised communities and strategic partners at national, regional and international levels.

FORUM-ASIA will consolidate decades of experience, expertise, strategic partnerships, concrete outcomes and unique presence in national, regional and international human rights

fora. FORUM-ASIA will continue to leverage and build on its strategic advantages as an Asian organisation with a constituency of broad-based and grassroots civil society organisation and human rights defenders with robust and credible research and documentation and unique perspectives with a view to ensure national, regional and/or international actions to promote and protect human rights and accountability in the region. To further strengthen its advocacy, FORUM-ASIA will take the following steps over the next five years:

- Ensure genuine, meaningful and strategic participation of Asian civil society, marginalised communities and partners in human rights advocacy with ownership and enhance the visibility and impact of their advocacy at national, regional and international forums, in particular UN human rights mechanisms, through enhanced capacity and strategic advice and guidance.
- Develop and implement coherent, long term advocacy strategies and campaigns on issues and laws, policies and regulations in countries of concern with a view to ensure robust response and changes at national, regional and international levels.
- Mainstream and consolidate advocacy strategies and campaigns across all intervention strategies of the organisation, in particular research and capacity building, to ensure advocacy initiatives are internally coherent and consistent, strategic and backed by robust evidence and follow ups.
- Broaden its allies and partners through networking, coalition building and solidarity action in order to strengthen political and strategic leverages, efficiency in resource utilisation and impact
- Continue to advocate for meaningful participation of Asian civil society and marginalised communities in national, regional and international human rights deliberations and decision-making processes.
- Create meaningful and strategic linkages between national and international/regional advocacy through coordinated efforts within the Secretariat, among members and wider civil society.

Needs based **capacity building** to equip civil society and marginalised communities with tools and skills to organise and engage with advocacy and policymaking platforms, institutions, mechanisms, policy makers and other stakeholders at national, regional and international levels.

FORUM-ASIA will develop a coherent strategy for capacity development based on the principle of equipping Asian civil society and marginalised communities to be self-reliant, and that focuses on strengthening their knowledge, skills and practices on human rights, civic space and democracy. FORUM-ASIA programmes will derive inputs and evidence from strategic intervention along with continuous surveys and assessments to map the needs of Asian civil society representatives and marginalised groups. FORUM-ASIA will:

- Enhance the capacity of members and partners on research, Fact Finding Missions and online/offline documentation tools to prepare and contribute robust and credible information and feedback to capacity building and advocacy on human rights and civic

space issues and countries of concern at national, regional and international levels including UN and ASEAN mechanisms.

- Develop the capacity to visualise research data in a more standardised and impactful manner in order to enhance engagement and trigger change
- Strengthen FORUM-ASIA's presence in and capacity to engage with national, regional and international human rights forums and platforms through enhancement of internal technical capacity and resources.
- Coaching and mentoring of the new generation (youth) of civic and democratic movements across Asia through innovative means and tools meeting the demands of modern day online and offline research and advocacy.
- Maximise the benefits of eLearning opportunities that have opened up during the COVID-19 pandemic and achieve a balance between virtual, offline/on-site capacity building programmes.

Protection and institutional/operational strengthening of civil society and marginalised communities in both preventive and responsive manner by increasing their capacity on safety, security, and operations, together with provision of **emergency assistance** to those under threat, especially when operating in conflict and climate crisis situations. Currently, FORUM-ASIA is the only Asia-based organisation providing emergency assistance to all groups of defenders. FORUM-ASIA is also hosting the biggest biennial strengthening event for defenders in Asia called the Asian Regional Human Rights Defenders Forum (AHRDF). Specialized documentation and research related to cases of harassment against defenders have also been undertaken in the past decade, whereby the data is contributing to the evidence-based advocacy and research of FORUM-ASIA.

To further enhance its work in supporting and safeguarding the work of Asian civil society and marginalised communities, FORUM-ASIA will focus on the following approaches for the next five years:

- Continue providing emergency assistance to Asian civil society and at risk/marginalised communities through its Protection Plan, while continuing to explore and initiate ways to decentralise the support to the local level.
- Support and develop national and regional initiatives on human rights defenders' support mechanisms, including temporary relocation mechanisms and human rights defenders' networks as well as convene civil society regionally to share knowledge and best practices and create synergies in their work.
- Enhance the understanding and practices on holistic security (physical and digital security, and psycho-social wellbeing) of civil society and marginalised communities to enable them to continue their work in repressive environments.
- Provide skills, knowledge and resources to civil society in areas of operations and programme management such as M&E, resource mobilisation and financial management.

**Strategic communication** and engaging with media and audiences who can influence change: FORUM-ASIA as a regional umbrella organisation is well-positioned to conduct a range of communication initiatives for Asian civil society and marginalised communities and strategically counter negative narratives on the work of Asian civil society and the rights of marginalised communities. FORUM-ASIA will take the following steps over the next five years to strengthen the role of communication and media engagement, enhance production value and increase scale and reach:

- Develop a communication strategy that supports the five-year organisational strategy and programme and projects, including a refresh of the organisation's branding; systems, tools, means and platforms for public communications, via efficient networking and partnership with print and electronic media including social media.
- Allocate additional tools and resources to the production and dissemination of quality communications outputs, including high-quality and compelling audio-visual content that allow FORUM-ASIA to engage in 'hope-based' storytelling while developing the internal capacity to support the visualisation of data for public and media consumption.
- Position FORUM-ASIA to source, design and publish materials from members and partners to develop quality communication products and develop capacity building courses on strategic communication.
- Continuously measure and evaluate its communications, including through the production of regular media analyses, to inform communications strategies at both organisational and project levels, and adapt to changing media landscapes.

### **How we will monitor and evaluate the strategy**

FORUM-ASIA will measure the organisational change through systemic and periodic assessment of key performance indicators set for the strategic goals and specific objectives in the theory of change (Please click [this link](#) for indicators). Further strengthening the existing processes and tools under the Results Based Management philosophy, the overall monitoring and evaluation infrastructure of the strategic plan will include:

- An organisational logframe complementing the key performance indicators and detailing outcome and output level indicators will guide the overall monitoring and evaluation framework of the strategic plan. The indicators will be defined to indicate achievement against the targets to be set by FORUM-ASIA at the start of 2023. These targets will track the organisational achievements and provide both the core funding donors and FORUM-ASIA a tool to monitor organisational performance throughout the strategic plan implementation. FORUM-ASIA is committed to continuously review and adapt the organisational logframe to changing contexts and lessons learned through the annual organisational reporting and engaging discussions during mid-year and annual planning and review workshops and mainstreaming a robust and ongoing change management system within the organisation.
- Data review will be assessed through FORUM-ASIA data quality standards for validity (to ensure that data clearly and adequately represents the intended result); reliability



(to ensure that data reflects stable and consistent data collection processes and analysis methods over time); timeliness (to ensure that data is available at useful frequencies, current, and timely enough to influence management decision making); inclusivity (the perspectives of the most excluded and marginalised communities are included in the evidence), transparency and integrity (data collected should have safeguards to minimise the risk of transcription error or data manipulation). FORUM-ASIA will strive to institute user friendly data analysis and storage databases to streamline knowledge management in the organisation.

- FORUM-ASIA will institutionalise internal evaluations of projects and programmes to evaluate the overall impact, relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of the organisation and its programmes/projects. FORUM-ASIA will apply a participatory approach by engaging internal programmes, members and partners in the design of methodology, tools development and validation of findings. FORUM-ASIA will consult with the relevant donors and procure services of experts in the development of the evaluation methodology and its implementation.

### **Our structures and associations to complement the strategy**

- FORUM-ASIA has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council. We are one of the few Asian NGOs with a permanent presence in Geneva, ensuring that the voices of Asian civil society activists are heard at the UN human rights mechanisms. FORUM-ASIA is also one of the most connected civil society stakeholder in human rights advocacy at ASEAN with a consultative relationship at the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. We use our position to keep discussions pertaining to the crisis of human rights in our priority countries.
- FORUM-ASIA is regionally registered in Thailand and has an international registration in Geneva, Switzerland. The Regional Secretariat of FORUM-ASIA has been based in Bangkok since 1992. However, the Secretariat as a whole is composed of all its other offices in Jakarta, Kathmandu and Geneva and it operates as one entity.
- The Executive Committee is elected by the General Assembly which in turn is composed of all full members and convenes once every three years. The Secretariat is headed by the Executive Director who is responsible for assuring that the Secretariat implements the decisions of the Executive Committee. The Secretariat is composed of a diverse team of professionals from all over the world with the majority from Asia united by a commitment to the vision and mission of the organisation. The Executive Directors and the Director(s) form the senior management team of the organisation who in turn lead all core functional and technical implementation programmes of the organisation.

### **Membership, partnership and incubation**

FORUM-ASIA members are non-governmental organisations and think tanks active at the national or grassroots level and committed to the vision, mission, and values of FORUM-ASIA. As a network of Asian NGOs, FORUM-ASIA follows the needs and strategic priorities of its

members and serves its members, particularly at the regional and international levels. FORUM-ASIA in delivering on this strategy, will play a larger role in promoting human rights at the national level, collaborating with members in-country as well as with other relevant national stakeholders.

FORUM-ASIA's Secretariat and its members working with other civil society organisations, human rights institutions and mechanisms, groups and movements, networks, alliances, coalitions, professional bodies, individuals such as human rights defenders, journalists, academics and academia, lawyers, is one of FORUM-ASIA primary means of bringing about change in the external world.

Therefore FORUM-ASIA will:

- Systematically and routinely assess the needs of the members and develop plans and mobilise resources within this strategy to respond to those needs, including by establishing service level agreements and consortia formations.
- Forge mutually beneficial and strategic partnerships based on principles of solidarity, common cause, clear agendas, active participation, equity, transparency, accountability, mutual respect and mutual exchange of knowledge and expertise.
- Connect members to the relevant networks/alliances they are not a part of and also access and connect to relevant networks/alliances at the national, regional and international levels. Special emphasis will be given to Central Asia and positioning of FORUM-ASIA as an impactful regional stakeholder.
- Innovate ideas to mobilise people in online and offline spaces by tapping into the opportunities created for digital engagement during the COVID-19 lockdowns and offline working with members and partners.
- Continue to serve as an incubation for other networks and forums such as the Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) established in 1997, The Solidarity for Asian People's Advocacy (SAPA), established in 2006 and The Asian NGO Network on National Human Rights Institutions (ANNI), also established in 2006 and currently serving as the Secretariat. Beyond this, FORUM-ASIA will also continue to strengthen and support loose networks and groups especially those led by the youth for a just, peaceful and democratic Asia.

## **How we will resource the strategy**

The current Fundraising Strategy identifies the high-level funding needs for the organisation, fundraising vehicles and new fundraising developments. This will be updated and aligned with the five-year organisational Strategic Plan to enhance its success of being properly resourced.

To meet the resourcing needs of the strategic plan, FORUM-ASIA over the course of the next five years will:

- Strengthen internal systems and policies to further diversify and deepen its funding base, retain existing donors and approach new donors with a view to raising the funds necessary to implement this strategy effectively and sustainably.
- Strive to achieve and maintain an optimum level of institutional savings, at least 15% of the total expenditure in the annual Operational Budget Plan, by having sound grant management and accountancy policies and standards to sustain the operation of the organisation in risky cash flow scenarios.
- Innovate fundraising channels that include exploring consortium and partnership models of fundraising at national, regional and international levels including those with development sector partners and grant contractors and approaching foundations and charities.
- Strive to achieve core funding up to at least 50% of total income to be able to respond to emerging priorities and meet the needs of match funding requirements of restricted grants.

## About FORUM-ASIA

The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is a network of 85 member organisations across 23 countries, mainly in Asia. Founded in 1991, FORUM-ASIA works to strengthen movements for human rights and sustainable development through research, advocacy, capacity development and solidarity actions in Asia and beyond. It has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and consultative relationship with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. The FORUM-ASIA Secretariat is based in Bangkok, with offices in Jakarta, Geneva and Kathmandu.

## Website and social media

 [www.forum-asia.org](http://www.forum-asia.org)


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## Bangkok office

S.P.D Building 3rd Floor, 79/2 Krungthongburi Road,  
Khlong Ton Sai, Khlong San  
Bangkok, 10600 Thailand  
Tel: +66 (0)2 1082643-45  
Fax: +66 (0)2 1082646

## Geneva Office

Rue de Varembe 1, 2nd floor,  
1202 Geneva, Switzerland  
Tel: +41 (0)22 740 2947

## Jakarta Office

c/o KontraS  
Jalan Kramat 2 No. 7, Senen  
Jakarta Pusat 10420, Indonesia  
Tel/Fax: +62 (0)21 391 9006

## Kathmandu Office

c/o INSEC  
Syuchatar, Kalanki,  
Kathmandu, Nepal  
Tel: +977 (0)1 521 8770

## Email:

[info@forum-asia.org](mailto:info@forum-asia.org)

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