



INDO-PACIFIC CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM

Launch Event - Report

Role of Civil Society Organisations in Shaping the Indo-Pacific Region: Prospects and Challenges

Friday, September 30, 2022 | 1730-1900 IST

Summary

At the launch event of the Indo-Pacific Civil Society Forum (IPCSF), the panellists discussed the *Role of Civil Society Organisations in Shaping the Indo-Pacific Region: Prospects and Challenges*. The discussion was followed by an official curtain raiser to commence the activities of the Forum. The session focused on the need and ways of collaboration of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in the region. In addition, the panel discussed the importance of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) centrality, the relevance of maritime security, and the need for innovation-based economic growth in the region, among many others.

Panellists

- **Bipul Chatterjee**, *Executive Director, CUTS International, Jaipur, India* [Moderator]
- **Ichiro Fujisaki**, *President, Nakasone Peace Institute, Tokyo, Japan*
- **Lurong Chen**, *Senior Economist, Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia, Jakarta, Indonesia*
- **Stephen Ezell**, *Vice-President, Global Innovation Policy, Information and Technology and Innovation Foundation, Washington DC, USA*

Background and Context

The Indo-Pacific region has become a central feature of any discussion on international relations. Countries within and beyond the Indo-Pacific region have realised its strategic importance in global geopolitics. As the governments of these countries navigate closer cooperation on security, strategic, and economic issues, non-governmental stakeholders' engagement is quintessential in shaping the discourse. The [Indo-Pacific Civil Society Forum \(IPCSF\)](#), an initiative of CUTS International, envisions to act as an enduring platform for advocacy on important issues common to the Indo-Pacific region. This is in recognition that there is immense scope for positive collaboration among CSOs to complement the efforts at the inter-governmental level towards greater synergy in the Indo-Pacific.

Key Takeaways

- 1. Bipul Chatterjee** pointed out that all developments in the Indo-Pacific region seem to validate the predictions made post-2008 financial crisis that this century will have two hotspots: inner Asia and the Indo-pacific.

- 1.1.** He remarked that many initiatives among different stakeholders are emerging to address the region's traditional and non-traditional security challenges, like the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF). However, the vacuum seems to be in the collaborative efforts of CSOs. Hence, IPCSF aims to understand the impacts of security challenges on the ground and bridge the gap from the grassroots to the policy level. This is in addition to challenging the perception of 'Asia is for Asians'. However, the latter needs to be in tandem with the idea of ASEAN centrality.

- 1.2.** Towards these objectives, he noted that IPCSF is publishing Quarterly Newsletter, aims to undertake thematic research, and envisions an annual conference to facilitate engagement with the members. He observed gradually, institutionalising the sharing of lessons and experiences gained by CSOs working in the region.

- 1.3.** Regarding the ways CSOs can collaborate in the region, Chatterjee noted that the CSOs often and primarily lack accurate information on new developments. Therefore, he added that it is essential for CSOs to network to facilitate sharing information and knowledge with timely capacity-building initiatives. He said a successful case in point is the formation of the South-Asia Watch on Trade Economics & Environment (SAWTEE).

- 1.4.** Moreover, he commented that the engagement of CSOs is not just to generate common consensus among themselves but to develop interests and equip them to engage based on CSOs' own positions and priorities.

- 2. Ichiro Fujisaki** remarked that India-Japanese relations had undergone rapid changes in the last decade. Apart from a five-million-yen investment in India by the Japanese government and Japanese private players, there is consensus among leaders on cooperation in disaster relief & risk reduction management and cyber security. However, he noted that differences of opinion on Russia, China and relation with the US need to be navigated.

2.1. Further, he observed that there are two models for India-Japan relations. The first model comprises Money; relation to China; and Leaders' relation to each other, i.e., the MCL model. The second model is the ties between Democracy, Technology, and People-to-people connections, i.e., the DTP model. He iterated that the second model needs to be prioritised over the first for a lasting relationship.

2.2. Fujisaki also pointed out that the peculiarity of maritime security in the Indo-Pacific construct is linking the Pacific and the Indian Ocean. He suggested increasing exercises with Quad and like-minded countries to address maritime security challenges.

3. Lurong Chen observed that IPCSF is a timely initiative as the Indo-Pacific region is one of the centres of global political crises. Emphasising ASEAN centrality, he noted that it had two preconditions of existence. First, the ASEAN centrality gained centre stage in the post-globalisation world. Second, the emphasis emanates from countries in the region wanting to jump out of the middle-income trap.

3.1. Chen was also of the opinion that these preconditions are to be in tandem with the development of the surrounding region and hand in hand with the friendly countries. While maintaining regional security, peace and democracy, not by forming blocks and deploying an 'iron curtain'.

3.2. On maritime security, Chen pointed out that the economic dimension of maritime security is often framed in terms of connectivity. Connectivity facilitates engagement between countries and their participation in the global value chain. He noted that the key to connectivity is peace and a stable regional and global environment based on rules.

4. Steven Ezell emphasised that the Indo-Pacific region currently possesses 40% of the global GDP, is home to 60% of the global population and is expected to contribute a majority of global growth over the next thirty years. Recognising the region's relevance, he said initiatives like the IPEF, compatible with the tenants of the WTO, are very important.

4.1. However, he said the IPEF's non-provision of market access is a limitation of the framework. Still, he reaffirmed that pillars like connectivity, digital economy, and supply chain resilience are crucial.

4.2. According to many researchers, Ezell observed that in the next decade, half of the value in the global economy would be created digitally. Therefore, he said the policymakers need to focus not on data protectionism but data facilitation and data empowerment. Ezell noted that around 68% of employment in developing countries comes from small businesses and needs to be empowered to use e-commerce. CSOs can play an essential role in the facilitation of the same.

5. A lively Q&A session followed the panel discussion. Participants posed questions on diverse topics such as the accountability of CSOs, challenges of expansion of Information and communication technologies (ICT) on CSOs', prospects of CSOs' collaboration on climate change and mitigation, and the linkages of maritime security to the Indo-Pacific construct.