

A CHARTER OF VALUES



FOR A FREE, PEACEFUL,
INCLUSIVE AND PROSPEROUS
INDO-PACIFIC

2024

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This Charter of Values captures the inputs of numerous regional experts from 10 Indo-Pacific countries. The Council for Strategic and Defense Research (CSDR) would like to thank them for sharing their time and expertise through in-depth interviews conducted by the CSDR research team. Over 60 regional experts gave in-depth interviews, and more joined the development of various drafts of this charter over Focus Group Discussions and stakeholder consultation meetings in New Delhi and Bangkok. On the request of anonymity by some, the names of these experts rest with the CSDR research team.

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ABOUT COUNCIL FOR STRATEGIC AND DEFENSE RESEARCH

CSDR is a research-focused think tank founded in January 2020 by Dr. Happymon Jacob (Associate Professor, School of International Studies, JNU), Lt. Gen. DS Hooda (Former. Northern Army Commander, Indian Army). CSDR combines academic research with policy advocacy and strategic consulting to help governments, businesses, and institutions navigate complex challenges and seize new opportunities in an increasingly complicated world. Our areas of expertise include foreign policy, geopolitical risk, connectivity and geoeconomics, defense and aerospace, military strategy, strategic technologies, conflict resolution, peacebuilding, climate change, energy security, and tech policy. We specialize in the Indian subcontinent, Eurasia, and the Indo-Pacific.

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BACKGROUND

The Indo-Pacific is in a state of churn due to intensifying interstate tensions and great power rivalries that have brought increased interest to the region, complicating conditions for cooperation with both regional and extra-regional partners. This state of flux has made apparent the need for a regional conversation on how Indo-Pacific countries- particularly small and middle power countries, and the various stakeholder groups within them would like to see international engagement unfold in the region.

Even though there is much debate about the geographic limits of the Indo-Pacific region and a diversity of interests drive foreign policy action and international engagement, values like peaceful resolution and management of disputes, respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states, and freedom of navigation are held sacrosanct by every country in the region. Further, comparable historical, economic and socio-political experiences create ripe conditions for a region-wide dialogue on values like social equity, sustainable pathways to economic growth and development, environmental protection and democratic good governance that can be advanced to address a litany of shared challenges.

THE CHARTER

This Charter of Values is an attempt to present a regional voice on values that should guide regional and international engagement in the Indo-Pacific. They present perspectives collected from members of epistemic communities and Track 1.5 actors from 10 Indo-Pacific countries. These 10 Indo-Pacific countries are:

Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Nepal, India, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Fiji, Bangladesh

Based on an exhaustive study of existing strategies, frameworks, outlooks, joint and country-level statements, and mandates of existing regional organisations, the research team at CSDR identified 9 sectors (listed below), where international engagement amongst various Indo-Pacific countries and extra-regional partners exists and can be guided by values. The 9 sectors of international engagement for which this charter provides guiding values are:

- Regional Engagement and Dispute Management
- Maritime Security and Cooperation
- Democratic Values in the Indo-Pacific
- Human Rights and Freedoms
- Gender in Foreign Policy and Action
- Role of Civil Society in the Indo-Pacific
- Sustainable Trade and Economic Cooperation
- Sustainable Development Cooperation
- Regional Climate Action

Based on this initial research, interviews were carried out with over 50 experts from epistemic and foreign policy communities belonging to the selected 10 Indo-Pacific countries, to identify which values, principles and norms hold regional relevance and realistic potential to achieve a free, peaceful, inclusive and prosperous Indo-Pacific. Several drafts of this charter were developed and discussed through closed-door Focus Group Discussions and stakeholder consultation meetings.

Through these engagements, the research team aimed to identify and refine regionally relevant values that align with existing global norms whilst also being sensitive to the socio-political, geopolitical, economic and foreign policy contexts of small, middle and emerging power countries in the Indo-Pacific. The values, principles and norms outlined in this charter are grounded in existing international and regional agreements and declarations, UN Charter, key General Assembly resolutions, and relevant UN and regional conventions to advance a vision for a peaceful, inclusive and equitable regional order based on the cooperation of all stakeholders.

We aim to present a regionally owned value-based (re)imagination of international engagement in the Indo-Pacific. Therefore, the charter captures regional agency and position on desired terms of engagement in the Indo Pacific. The Charter is simultaneously domestic and international facing, to the extent that it speaks to both domestic stakeholders, including Governments in the Indo-Pacific region as well as regional and extra-regional partners.

The charter seeks to help countries frame better policies by encouraging that international engagement across the identified sectors be conceptualized, planned and implemented in conjunction with the values outlined in this charter. By outlining the common principles and inviting stakeholders to use the charter to inform their actions, we seek to ensure that future action by countries does not aggravate fragmentation and policy incoherence, but is for the benefit of all.

Keeping in mind that principles, by themselves, are not self-executing, the charter should be read as a call to enhance regional thinking and dialogue on collective action in the Indo-Pacific. The charter is not oriented towards evaluating the performance of countries' compliance with principles but seeks to contribute towards a positive, enabling environment by reiterating these shared principles for dialogue and cooperation between different stakeholders. We aim for this charter to serve as an advocacy tool for governments and civil society groups alike, which are committed to a truly free, open, inclusive and prosperous Indo-Pacific.

DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of this Charter,

“**Values**” refers to shared expectations of desirable characteristics underlining appropriate behavioural choices of state and non-state actors.

“**Norms**” refers to Widely shared expectations about what constitutes appropriate behaviour among governments and certain non-state actors at the international level.

“**Principles**” refers to acceptable rules of conduct to govern the behaviour of all relevant actors in the global system, which are necessary to reinforce international order and regional stability derived from shared values. [1]

“**Developed countries**” refers to countries which have a high per capita gross national income (GNI), low poverty and high human development levels and a developed industrial base with widespread physical and technological infrastructure.

“**Developing countries**” refers to low to moderate levels of per capita GNI, lower human development levels, underdeveloped infrastructure and industrial base along with limited advanced technology.

“**Stakeholders**” refers to states as well as individuals, communities, civil society actors and public and private organisations which have interests in and/or are impacted by the processes and outcomes of the growing engagement in the Indo-Pacific region.

“**Civil society actors or organisations (CSOs)**” refers to any non-government actors who work at a local, national or international level and hold considerable subject-specific knowledge.

“**Global North and Global South**” are referred to in this charter to highlight the political and economic distinctions between developed and developing countries, usually, but not always, located in the northern and southern hemispheres respectively.

“**Gender mainstreaming**” refers to processes that ensure gender perspectives are included at all levels of planned action, which include legislation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes across the social, political, economic and cultural spheres to achieve the goal of gender equality.

“**Climate justice**” refers to a human rights-based, people-centric approach to climate action which includes ensuring “representation, inclusion, and protection of the rights of those most vulnerable to the effects of climate change.”

“**Indigenous communities**” refers to the heterogeneous category of people who inhabited a geographical location prior to the arrival of people of different cultures or ethnic origins and often have their “distinct culture, language, customs and institutions” and “retain some or all of their social, economic, cultural and political institutions.”

“**Monitoring and evaluation**” refers to the process of assessing the purpose, performance and impact of a particular plan, programme or project and critically evaluate “progress in achieving expected results, to spot bottlenecks in implementation and to highlight whether there are any unintended effects (positive or negative)” from the same.

“**South-South Cooperation**” refers to cooperation among developing countries in the Global South, involving state, non-state and international actors to co-create and share knowledge, skills, technologies and policy initiatives.

“**Non-traditional security threats**” refer to those threats, often transnational, originating from non-military sources like climate change, pandemics, piracy, drugs and human trafficking and affecting the survival and well-being of people and states.

“**Traditional security threats**” refer to those threats originating from the use of military force that threaten a state’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.

“**Confidence-building measures**” refer to “planned procedures to prevent hostilities, to avert escalation, to reduce military tension, and to build mutual trust between countries.”

“**Capacity building**” refers to the process of developing and augmenting resources, knowledge, skills and processes that are necessary for the development of individuals, communities and countries.

“**Sustainable development**” refers to “development pathways that prioritize reducing exposure and vulnerability to climate hazards, cutting back greenhouse gas emissions and conserving biodiversity”

SECTION 1: REGIONAL SECURITY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

1. REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT AND DISPUTE MANAGEMENT

The Indo-Pacific region is home to multiple socio-political, economic and security realities. Indo-Pacific countries with varying geographic, economic, political and socio-cultural realities are now increasingly engaging with each other on cooperative as well as contentious issues. These differences contribute to competing threat assessments, security and foreign policy imperatives for each country. Perhaps owing to the regional experience of long-standing territorial and maritime disputes, countries in the region tend to prioritize traditional security challenges over non-traditional ones.

To address various security concerns, we have identified the following common principles and values that hold regional relevance and potential to guide growing engagement in the Indo-Pacific, regulate conflict and encourage dispute resolution.

1.1 In the face of fast-increasing interest and engagement in the Indo-Pacific, it is the responsibility of all stakeholder countries to protect and **promote peace, stability, security, and prosperity** for all Indo-Pacific countries.

1.2 Given the intensifying great power competition in the Indo-Pacific, major powers must **respect the right of Indo-Pacific countries to maintain flexibility in their regional and extra-regional partnerships**, including their non-aligned foreign policies.

1.3 While there are several unresolved disputes and disagreements in the Indo-Pacific, there are also examples of common challenges which have been resolved following principles of International Law[2]. **All resolution efforts, whether bilateral, sub-regional, regional or international should be in accordance with International Law.**

1.4 In the interest of long-term peace and stability in the region, it is of paramount importance that states **uphold the principle of sovereignty and equity in dispute resolution, refrain from unilateral actions and resort to diplomacy and persuasion instead. Where appropriate, regional partners and multilateral mechanisms** like the International Court of Justice, Permanent Court of Arbitration, and United Nations Dispute Tribunal should be involved.

1.5 The Indo-Pacific region is witnessing increasing instances of maritime disputes, naval build-up and militarization of oceans, spurred by excessive maritime claims. In this context, **all countries are encouraged to sign and ratify UNCLOS** and those who are parties should ensure **consistent application of UNCLOS provisions** based on common interpretations.

1.6 **Ongoing (and future) initiatives on regional security cooperation should be more holistic and address Non-Traditional Security (NTS) challenges.** Collaborative initiatives that address common NTS challenges can act as confidence-building measures in the region.

1.7 Evolving groupings in the region should support the **ASEAN centrality principle** in letter and spirit. This should involve investing more resources to enhance ties with ASEAN. Such an approach would create better synergy across various sub-regions in the Indo-Pacific.

2. MARITIME SECURITY AND COOPERATION

Maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region is being undermined by transnational challenges such as piracy, armed robbery, drug trafficking, human trafficking, and illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. In addition, continued unsustainable use of sea resources through overfishing and pollution, poses a severe threat to the long-term health and productivity of marine ecosystems, exacerbating livelihood issues in coastal communities. Furthermore, problems with disputed maritime borders and navigation routes that do not conform to international law pose a significant risk to regional stability.

W.r.t. international law, the lack of a universal consensus around the meaning of maritime security presents a barrier to a secure maritime order capable of ensuring unimpeded lawful maritime commerce in the region. It is important therefore for regional and other stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific to make concerted efforts to facilitate the development of broad consensus on the definition of maritime security and interpretations of different legal phrases such as “marine scientific research”, “military activities”, “hydrographic surveys” etc in the EEZ regime.

Sustainability and inclusivity are primary concerns with increasing interest in Blue Economy initiatives. Further, continuing sea level rise will have significant impacts, particularly for small island developing states (SIDS) and coastal Least Developed Countries (LDCs) with respect to baselines, maritime zones, maritime boundaries, and human impact of sea-level rise. Considering these issues, regional experts suggest that initiatives on maritime security and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region will better serve the region if they incorporate the following guiding values. Where already incorporated, efforts should be made to enhance their effective and consistent implementation:

2.1 Domestic laws should **acknowledge and integrate principles enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)** and the 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC).

2.2 All interpretations integrated in **domestic legislatures must be shared transparently** by coastal countries.

2.3 Any consensus on **regional interpretations should be reached through an inclusive and equitable process which builds on complementarities in existing country-specific definitions.** Further **coastal countries should clearly define and transparently share their interpretations of legal terms**, especially with regards to the EEZ regime.

2.4 Acknowledging the increasing frequency of incidents at sea, there is an urgent need for a regional agreement to regulate tensions arising from such incidents at sea which upholds the values of inclusive and collaborative dialogue.

2.5 Recognizing that landlocked countries are equal stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific region, their right of access to and from the sea must be held sacrosanct and granted unconditionally by all coastal countries, and not be impeded unilaterally in adherence to Part X of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

2.6 Underscoring the interdependent nature of global trade and commerce, Indo-Pacific countries should engage each other and their extra-regional partners to ensure a free, open and rules-based order that delivers freedom of navigation and territorial sovereignty for all in the regional waters.

2.7 Recognizing the influence of geopolitics on maritime cooperation, Indo-Pacific countries should ensure all maritime cooperation upholds the values of peace and stability while delivering economic growth and prosperity.

2.8 Given the increasing interest in enhancing maritime ties, Indo-Pacific countries should explore complementarities and convergences in values and objectives of existing regional frameworks, through the use of regional multilateral fora like the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and ASEAN.

2.9 Indo-Pacific countries should mainstream sustainability as a core value in Blue Economy initiatives to deliver inclusive growth and development with positive environmental impacts.

2.10 To guide sustainable and inclusive blue growth in the Indo-Pacific, countries in the region should focus on building an effective and enabling policy and regulatory environment which is in adherence with the Sustainable Blue Economy Finance Principles as outlined by the UNEP in 2018[3] to encourage private sector investments in building sustainable Blue Economies.

2.11 Indo-Pacific countries should lean on civil society expertise to further regional sustainable ocean management at existing ocean governance platforms to jointly devise guidelines, standards and protocols for the prevention, minimisation, and management of pollution and exploitative practices in marine ecosystems.

2.12 Acknowledging that threats from sea-level rise are not addressed by present legal regimes such as the UNCLOS, all Indo-Pacific countries should address these concerns at existing regional platforms and include the perspectives of SIDS and LDCs that are particularly vulnerable to threats from rise in sea level.



SECTION 2: HUMAN RIGHTS, DEMOCRACY, CIVIL SOCIETY, AND GENDER IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

3. DEMOCRATIC VALUES IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

Many countries in the Indo-Pacific region have adopted non-linear approaches to democratic transition resulting in different political systems with varying democratic aspects. Because of this, 'Democracy' across the Indo-Pacific has developed its unique characteristics. Many Indo-Pacific countries remain sceptical of a supranational push for democracy, often called democracy promotion, especially by North American and European countries and prefer a dialogue over democratic values born out of the Global South experience.

Today the region at large is witnessing the backsliding of many democratic aspects like the rollback of participatory politics and the rise of military dominance in governance which have led to a host of issues such as the curtailment of political and civil rights, weakening of democratic institutions, increase in elite corruption, lack of transparency, and accountability.

Meanwhile, increasing economic and strategic partnerships with autocratic states are also exposing developing Indo-Pacific countries to illiberal influences, threatening existing democratic institutions within these countries. For pro-democracy actors, the challenge is to identify ways of strengthening democratic principles in the region without raising sovereignty and interference concerns. In this context, the following recommendations emerge from our discussions with members of epistemological communities in small and middle-power Indo-Pacific countries.

3.1 In accordance with the UN Charter, countries in the Indo-Pacific have the **sovereign right to choose their socio-economic and governance systems in accordance with the will of the people.** To ensure this, governments in the region must encourage free political competition in the spirit of **inclusive, non-discriminatory participation by all people through free and fair elections.**

3.2 Indo-Pacific countries should **strive towards governance that ensures the protection of collective as well as individual rights, promotes effective citizen representation and participation, and respects human dignity** to deliver comprehensive development.

3.3 To deliver good democratic governance, governments should adopt a **governance approach that nurtures transparency, accountability, social equity, plurality and inclusivity.**

3.4 Democracy assistance and dialogues on democracy should be consultative and transparent in nature. **Pro-democracy actors including multilateral institutions, governments and non-government entities must adopt non-punitive and safe democracy assistance measures.**

3.5 Countries in the region must go beyond rhetoric and **governments should expand their engagement with existing regional intergovernmental mechanisms and frameworks** such as the Bali Democracy Forum which promote democratic values across the region.

3.6 Acknowledging that economic and development partnerships with autocratic and non-democratic actors in the region are encouraging undemocratic practices such as lack of

transparency and accountability, mature democracies should facilitate the creation of inclusive regional platforms that promote **transparency and accountability in vulnerable sectors like procurement in infrastructure projects, environmental impact assessments etc.** Such platforms should engage various actors including government, non-government, and private entities.

4. HUMAN RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

Owing to the unique historical, civilizational and migration experiences, the Indo-Pacific region is home to some of the most ethnically, religiously, and socio-culturally diverse countries. The presence of a diverse set of identities has also created a tinderbox with many entrenched socio-cultural fault lines existing at a subnational and regional level.

In several countries in the region, political exploitation of identity conflicts has resulted in rising violence against religious and ethnic minorities. In deeply disturbing instances, religious and ethnic minorities have been forced to flee into neighbouring countries creating massive refugee and humanitarian crises. Further, serious restrictions on freedom of expression to silence dissent and criticism of governments is emerging as an unfortunate trend in the Indo-Pacific. Restrictions on media freedoms are also on the rise with physical and legal attacks against journalists to silence critical reporting.

However, the Indo-Pacific is a dynamic region of growth and home to half of the world's population which is ethnically, religiously, and racially diverse. Therefore, the Indo-Pacific region has an important stake in ensuring the meaningful application of universal human rights standards. Based on our conversations with experts from the region, the following principles need to be supported to protect various human rights and freedoms in the Indo-Pacific:

4.1 Every country has a responsibility to **support and safeguard the human rights of all, especially the most vulnerable people and communities.** This includes, but is not limited to, **compliance with existing international human rights agreements that countries are party to** such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Convention on the Rights of the Child and accompanying international review processes.

4.2 **Countries should respect the global consensus that already exists** as contained in various international and regional conventions, and instruments that they are party to. In this respect, governments should **refrain from using 'culturally specific' and 'traditional' interpretations of these instruments to avoid diluting the efficacy and scope of freedoms** provided by them.

4.3 Many countries in the Indo-Pacific region have been former colonies. It is important that in

their ongoing process of decolonization, countries make legislative changes to ensure that domestic legal frameworks do not retain outdated colonial laws that criminalize important freedoms and transgress on human rights. New legislative changes should also protect social equity and align with current international human rights standards.

4.4 Countries must also ensure greater transparency in the way they interpret and apply international human rights standards both domestically and as part of their external efforts to allow international human rights review processes to reach accurate conclusions.

4.5 Freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly are the cornerstones of free and open societies. These rights are accompanied by important duties such as respect for other groups, national security, and public order. Countries in the region should ensure, through constant dialogue and persuasion, that governments do not exploit these duties as grounds for suppressing freedoms in both online and offline spaces.

4.6 Recognizing that the Indo-Pacific is home to many religious, racial, caste and ethnic minorities, countries should use existing regional platforms to develop regional frameworks to advance the status of various protections and freedoms in the Indo-Pacific region such as hate speech, violence, undue restrictions on religious and cultural identity and expression, limitations of rights to privacy and movement as well as arbitrary segregation, detention, arrests and legal harassment.

4.7 Governments of countries in the region should ensure effective representation and participation of ethnic, religious, indigenous, or linguistic minorities and caste-affected groups at all levels of decision-making.

4.8 Governments should guarantee access to effective justice to members of minority communities by involving their representatives in the development, implementation and review of special measures that seek to address discrimination against them.

4.9 Recognising that relatively few countries are signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention and the subsequent 1961 protocol, there is a need to recommit to deliberate diplomatic engagement in the Indo-Pacific region to address cross-border challenges relating to displacement of people using existing platforms such as the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime.

4.10 Countries in the Indo-Pacific should reaffirm their commitments to various international and regional frameworks on women's rights like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, ASEAN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Elimination of Violence Against Children, Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration, SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution, Bali Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls, Asia-Pacific Ministerial

Declaration on Women's Economic Empowerment, Asia-Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Education, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and other human rights instruments. Relevant stakeholders, including governments, non-government, and private entities must make concerted efforts to ensure basic universal freedoms for women and young girls like freedom from intimidation, harassment, threats, and gender-based violence.

4.11 Regional efforts should be intensified and coordinated to **support countries to build better capacities to safeguard the rights of women and young girls** by ensuring these aspects are included in all bilateral and regional engagements including, but not limited to, development cooperation. Countries in the Indo-Pacific region with advanced guarantees of women's rights must work with partner countries in the region to advocate for the adoption of similar domestic and regional standards.

4.12 All regional engagements between Indo-Pacific and external actors, including non-governmental and private entities, should **include effective measures to ensure that ecosystems and biological diversity are conserved, and resources are sustainably used; this is crucial for the full realization of human rights**. It is therefore necessary that Environmental Impact Assessments of projects are carried out transparently, in consultation with indigenous communities and grassroots organizations that work on environmental protection and the resulting reports should be made available to the public.

4.13 **Human rights promotion and protection in the region requires an affirmative approach**. Punitive measures like harsh economic sanctions, denying market access etc. should be avoided in cases of disagreements involving human rights. In the spirit of such affirmative action, countries should also refrain from joining or forming anti-human rights blocks at multilateral and international fora, and participate meaningfully in ongoing processes and new initiatives that work towards improving human rights standards in the region.

5. GENDER IN FOREIGN POLICY AND ACTION

Gender is a cross-cutting issue across many areas of regional and international cooperation. However, across most countries, including those in the Indo-Pacific, how gender relates to various vectors of foreign and development policies remains under-studied and unacknowledged.

There are crucial issues pertaining to gender-sensitive foreign and development policymaking that include safeguarding the rights of women and other minorities, ensuring their perspectives are included in policymaking, that decisions regarding the allocation of state resources are responsive to their needs, and that they participate in these decision-making processes. Regional experts recommend that Indo-Pacific countries mainstream the following values and approaches in their regional engagements to be able to develop and implement gender-sensitive policies across all thematic areas of regional cooperation to ensure a truly free, open, and prosperous Indo-Pacific.

5.1 Countries in the Indo-Pacific should work to **mainstream gender in internal as well as external dimensions of their foreign policy** (including in their bilateral and multilateral efforts). They should work to sensitise the staff of their foreign ministries to develop a better understanding of how gender operates in foreign policy, and they should support more research and capacity building in this respect.

5.2 These **gender mainstreaming approaches should adopt an intersectional approach** to meaningfully mainstream gender by designing policies that acknowledge the intersection of gender with other sources of marginalization like ethnicity, caste, religion, and sexual orientation, among others.

5.3 All initiatives undertaken as part of **development cooperation should be monitored and evaluated using gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) indicators with the help of GESI experts.**

5.4 Countries should **convert the policy intention of gender equality and women's empowerment into action by including gender-sensitive financial commitments** in their development cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. These steps are essential

5.5 Countries should **adopt an inclusive, consultative process to engage women and minority groups** in agenda setting, programming, budgeting, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of development and economic cooperation projects.

5.6 Acknowledging that conflicts have a disproportionate impact on women and girls, countries in the Indo-Pacific should **reaffirm their commitments to the UN Security Council's resolutions on Women, Peace, and Security** and their four pillars: participation and representation, prevention, protection, and relief and recovery.

5.7 **Political dialogues including backchannel talks at Track II and III levels should adopt an inclusive and gender-sensitive approach** and urgently work with gender experts to fill participation, representation, and knowledge gaps.

5.8 Acknowledging the need to address gender-specific issues perpetuated by trade and trade policies such as unequal opportunity and access to participate in trade at the regional level for women, wage creation, patterns of consumption, welfare creation, etc., **countries in the Indo-Pacific should work with GESI experts to meaningfully mainstream gender in their Foreign Trade policies.**

6. ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

Being primary actors, states have so far shaped the evolving Indo-Pacific agenda. However, state outlooks provide a partial and constrained perspective, particularly of social development priorities. For the Indo-Pacific to be truly inclusive and have a holistic cooperation agenda, the voices of civil society actors must be incorporated while identifying critical challenges, opportunities and norms that should shape cooperation across several thematic issues like sustainable development, climate change action, trade and development cooperation, human rights, and ensuring policies are gender sensitive.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) are important partners w.r.t. many social development issues including achieving SDGs. Their participation is crucial to ensure policies are informed by ground realities. CSOs are crucial links between many marginalized communities and policy makers and help bridge information gaps as well as support the efficient delivery of public goods and services. They also play the role of overseeing government and private actions and help provide credible information with regards to the same.

Members of epistemic communities in the Indo-Pacific believe that in the context of rapid developments taking place in the Indo-Pacific, there is a need to ensure civil society actors are engaged and their expertise is mainstreamed across important areas of cooperation. They recommend engagement with civil society actors should be supported by the following value-based pathways:

6.1 To improve various aspects of regional cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, especially **in issue areas that impact human security and development, governments must collaborate with civil society organizations and individual actors** to ensure policies are informed by their expertise.

6.2 It is important that **CSOs are provided with a supportive ecosystem to operate in and their freedoms are safeguarded** so that they are allowed to participate meaningfully (and safely) in all efforts to address various vulnerabilities to ensure holistic development at sub-national, national, and regional levels.

6.3 As Trade and Economic cooperation increases in the region, **the democratization of trade policymaking through increased and meaningful engagement with civil society actors** is important to ensure that such cooperation contributes positively to important socio-economic goals like poverty eradication and sustainable development.

6.4 Civil society consultation can help ensure new policies do not violate human rights and/or marginalize disadvantaged groups. Therefore, it is crucial that countries in the Indo-Pacific, as well as external actors, establish democratic consultation mechanisms in the policy planning phase as well as civil society monitoring mechanisms to provide **civil oversight of ensuing regional agreements**.

6.5 Since civil society actors are an important bridge between communities, governments and international human rights platforms, **governments should work with civil society actors through consultative mechanisms** with regards to improving domestic and regional human rights situations.

SECTION 3: ECONOMY, SOCIETY AND ENVIRONMENT

7. SUSTAINABLE TRADE AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION

The Indo-Pacific accounts for two-thirds of the world population, global GDP, and nearly half of world merchandise trade. Encompassing mostly developing countries, the region has the potential to be a growth engine for the global economy. According to the World Bank, inter-regional trade between South and Southeast Asia could increase by up to nearly USD 186 billion, by reducing tariffs and expanding trade facilitation measures[4] which can eventually add economic gains of up to USD 1.12 trillion.[5] Unlocking the Indo-Pacific's full economic potential requires addressing key challenges and enacting measures to deepen trade and economic connectivity.

Developing economies face several trade challenges due to systemic vulnerabilities—underdeveloped manufacturing ecosystems, export dependence, insufficient transportation infrastructure, etc. These vulnerabilities lead to surmounting trade deficits, slow economic growth, and lower human development indices. Yet the global economic regime leaves much to be desired in its ability to address these challenges.

Following discussions with experts, we recommend that trade and economic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region should be based on and promote the following norms to provide sustainable development through economic growth in the region.

7.1 Efforts to improve economic connectivity and trade in the region need to be guided by the principle of equity and align macroeconomic policies with sustainable development goals that have a positive environmental impact.

7.2 Advanced economies should reduce trade barriers and allow greater market access to developing countries, further supporting them by providing technological and knowledge support to provide equitable distribution of global production.

7.3 Acknowledging the complex nature of the vulnerability profiles of most Indo-Pacific countries, trade and economic cooperation, particularly the infrastructural aspects should mainstream sustainability as a core value.

7.4 Acknowledging the importance of supply chain diversification, Indo-Pacific countries and their extra-regional partners must build capacities in developing countries that contribute to regional resilience. This involves adopting a holistic approach to improving manufacturing ecosystems through sharing the latest manufacturing technologies, skill development cooperation, improving logistical efficiency, supporting research and development, technology transfers, etc.

7.5 WTO negotiations and reforms should be fair, open, and inclusive. Such reforms are crucial to creating a fair, resilient, non-discriminatory, and rules-based global trading system. Existing and evolving multilateral trade frameworks in the region must be modelled on norms that support a reformed international economic regime.

7.6 In the process of mitigating future disruptions in global supply chains, developed economies should **accelerate supply chain diversification strategies and build reliable and trusted trade partnerships** in the Indo-Pacific region.

7.7 **Trade and economic partnerships in the Indo-Pacific must be made more climate-resilient and sustainable.** Developed countries should adopt context-dependent just-transition pathways that deliver regional economic growth whilst promoting renewable energy, green hydrogen, energy efficiency, and sustainable infrastructure projects.

8. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

The Indo-Pacific is home to many developing countries with a range of development challenges. This puts development cooperation at the forefront of building deeper ties in the Indo-Pacific. However, several issues emerge in this sector including the legitimacy of stakeholders and their agendas, representation of community needs, perspectives and knowledge, urgently ensuring sustainable development, and managing increasing geopolitical influence in the region and development aid assistance.

Considering these issues and informed by regional expertise, we recommend that development cooperation in the Indo-Pacific must be based on the following norms and values:

8.1 Development partners of Indo-Pacific countries must acknowledge the challenge of unequal growth in many Indo-Pacific countries and **ensure that the outcomes of development partnerships do not erode the rights of marginalised communities** and provide benefits to them.

8.2 Development partnerships in the Indo-Pacific should **uphold the regional responsibility for sustainable growth, promote social development, and balance progress on physical and critical infrastructure with social equity and sustainability.** To ensure this multi-stakeholder engagement and consultation with those who will be impacted by development efforts should be consistently ensured.

8.3 In the context of increasing geopolitical competition and illiberal foreign influence on democratic processes and structures in small and middle-power countries in the Indo-Pacific, **development partnerships should be needs-based and integrate transparency, accountability, civil oversight, and social equity.**

8.4 **Development aid, especially in the form of loans, should consider existing economic asymmetry** and therefore be structured around low interest rates, longer repayment periods, restructuring possibilities, and avoiding debt traps.

8.5 Development partnerships should **promote the value of equity by incorporating knowledge transfer aspects** like capacity building on policymaking, project implementation, institutional capacities, transparency, and accountability.

8.6 To promote responsibility, accountability, social equity and sustainable development through development cooperation, partners must uphold transparency in Environmental Impact Assessments and information sharing with civil society actors.

8.7 South-South and Triangular cooperation provide important models of development cooperation which build on the context familiarity of Global South actors. These partnerships should be guided by the same values and ethics regarding equitable and fair terms and conditions, transparency, and accountability as are expected of traditional North-South partnerships.

8.8 Development partnerships should promote and protect a human-rights-based approach. However, this approach must be constructive, focus on positive reinforcement, sustained engagement with government and non-government actors in the region and avoid punitive measures such as refusal to continue partnerships or pull-back development aid which is detrimental to safeguarding and promoting democratic values and human rights in the long-term.

8.9 Development partnerships in the Indo-Pacific continue to have inadequate women's participation and further marginalize already marginalized communities. It is therefore important that gender mainstreaming, intersectional approaches and multi-stakeholder partnerships informed by civil society expertise are institutionalised in all aspects of development cooperation including planning, financing, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

9. CLIMATE ACTION

Home to countries with extensive coastlines, low-lying territories, and many small island states, the Indo-Pacific region is particularly vulnerable to climate hazards.[6] Given the region's unique topography, climate change related challenges such as rising sea levels, melting of glacial mountains, severe droughts, and extreme weather events pose an existential threat to many countries in the region.

Despite their extreme vulnerability to climate change and their lack of adaptive capacity, the international community has not been able to support least developed and developing countries (many of which are in the Indo-Pacific region) with adequate support for their climate mitigation, adaptation, and energy transition efforts. Current trends indicate that bilateral and multilateral climate financing often under-delivers[7] Despite Article 4.3 of the UNFCCC highlighting the importance of "adequacy and predictability in the flow of funds and the importance of appropriate burden sharing among the developed country Parties". Such insensitivities have aggravated pre-existing asymmetries.[8]

Indo-Pacific countries, particularly small island developing states, face steep resource and capability challenges to deal with climate emergencies. According to IMF reports, the annual climate change adaptation costs are expected to exceed 1% of the GDP of some developing

countries, and above 10% for some island states.[9]

These countries are also home to many sensitive communities including indigenous groups particularly vulnerable to climate change. According to the 2014 IPCC report, individuals and communities that face social, economic, cultural, political, institutional, or other forms of marginalization are particularly susceptible to not only the impacts of climate change but also to certain climate adaptation and mitigation measures.[10]

In the context of these challenges and based on regional expertise, we recommend that regional cooperation in the Indo-Pacific align better and uphold the following values and principles:

9.1 Countries must **commit to full and effective implementation of the UNFCCC and of the Paris Agreement**, which this Charter recognises as the primary multilateral fora in the global effort to respond to climate change.

9.2 Considering Indo-Pacific countries' different national circumstances and economic capabilities, **countries must adhere to the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, as outlined in the UNFCCC**. Advanced economies must meet their pledges for financial contributions to assist developing countries while developing countries must continue to enhance their mitigation efforts.

9.3 In the Indo-Pacific, **cooperation models such as South-South and Triangular cooperation on climate change mitigation and adaptation that can capitalize on knowledge sharing and collective action to address shared challenges**, particularly when it comes to achieving sustainable development pathways, should be encouraged.

9.4 Countries in the region must **clearly define measurable goals and indicators that align with international climate commitments and enact domestic legislation** to reflect them.

9.5 **Climate frameworks and laws must include accountability mechanisms** that ensure government and private entities are held accountable for taking necessary steps to achieve climate objectives.[11]

9.6 **Finance for climate action for developing countries must acknowledge pre-existing economic asymmetries and be provided in concessional rates**, ideally as grants, not as market-rate loans and other non-concessional instruments.[12]

9.7 **The operationalization of the loss and damage fund as established at the United Nations Climate Change Conference COP27[13] must be accomplished through an inclusive and negotiated process**, urgently prioritizing the perspectives of 'developing countries that are particularly vulnerable'

9.8 Given the long-entrenched nature of interests around equitable reduction in carbon emissions, climate cooperation should prioritize the transfer of low-carbon technology so that all countries can benefit equitably.

9.9 The costs of negotiating access to low-carbon technologies is too high for developing countries. Acknowledging pre-existing economic asymmetries as a significant hurdle in lowering carbon emissions for developing countries and based on the principle of equity, developed countries in the Indo-Pacific and extra-regional partners of Indo-Pacific countries should place green technologies under humanitarian or preferential licensing.

9.10 Acknowledging the transboundary nature and increased complexity of natural disasters in the region, regional partners should give due consideration to multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral partnerships to institutionalize a whole-of-system approach and increase the efficiency of disaster risk management efforts.[14]

9.11 Multilateral arrangements in the Indo-Pacific include climate change in their agendas but continue to operate in silos. Countries should establish regional platforms and networks to strengthen collaborations between fragmented regional arrangements and create a common narrative that promotes a shared green growth pathway at the Indo-Pacific level.[15]

9.12 Recognizing the pre-existing socio-economic inequities in many Indo-Pacific countries, addressing climate change on a regional level requires a climate justice perspective that prioritizes fair and equitable transition for workers and communities in the region.

9.13 Indo-Pacific governments must involve indigenous communities and grassroots civil society organisations beyond domestic consultations, as important stakeholders in regional climate mitigation and adaptation discussions.

Countries in the Indo-Pacific region should cooperate to facilitate a favourable ecosystem for private actors/industries so that appropriate incentive structures are established at a regional scale, to encourage private actors to divert funding from high-emission ventures to greener sources of energy.[16]

ENDNOTES

[1] In this charter, the research team uses the terms values, principles and norms interchangeably or together.

[2] See Nurhidayah, Alam and Lipman 2015 for an example of regional dispute resolution following international law.

[3] <https://www.unepfi.org/blue-finance/the-principles/#:~:text=The%20Sustainable%20Blue%20Economy%20Finance,finance%20a%20sustainable%20blue%20economy>

[4] [Deepening Linkages between South Asia and Southeast Asia, Trade, OneSouthAsia, Economic \(worldbank.org\)](https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/south-asia-and-southeast-asia/Trade/OneSouthAsia/Economic).

[5] Ibid

[6] <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/dislocation-and-disruption-climate-change-in-the-indo-pacific-in-2035/>

[7] https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Baruah_Labh_-_Indo-Pacific_Islands_final.pdf

[8] <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2023/03/03/developing-countries-are-key-to-climate-action/>

[9] <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/staff-climate-notes/Issues/2022/03/16/Macro-Fiscal-Implications-of-Adaptation-to-Climate-Change-512769>

[10] https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/02/ar5_wgll_spm_en.pdf

[11] <https://www.protectioninternational.org/news/public-statemente-public-development-banks-pdb-must-deliver-on-the-world-we-want/>

[12] <https://www.lse.ac.uk/granthaminstitute/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Accountability-mechanisms-in-climate-change-framework-laws.pdf>

[13] <https://unfccc.int/news/cop27-reaches-breakthrough-agreement-on-new-loss-and-damage-fund-for-vulnerable-countries>

[14] https://www.unisdr.org/preventionweb/files/41655_finalinputpost2015frameworkfordrr1.pdf

[15] <https://www.ceew.in/sites/default/files/ceew-research-on-accelarating-indo-pacific-energy-transition.pdf>

[16] <https://www.oecd.org/environment/cc/climate-futures/policy-highlights-financing-climate-futures.pdf>