Bridging United Cities and Local Governments Asia Pacific (UCLG ASPAC) Role in Advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Poin 16 In Southeast Asia 2022

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Abstract

Human trafficking has been becoming a problem in the Southeast Asia region until today. Southeast Asia is the primary transit hub for human traffickers with millions of people subjected to forced labour and exploitation or commonly known as "modern slavery". The most victims in 2022 are reportedly from South and Central Asia. It emphasized that Southeast Asia is partaking as a contributor to the high number of human trafficking in the world. The concept of paradiplomacy and the concept of sustainable goals (SDGs) will be used, particularly SDGs point 16: Peace, Justice, and Institution to illustrate the issue and effort to eradicate in Southeast Asia. The purpose of this article is to analyze the efforts made by a non-governmental actor, United Cities and Local Government Asia Pacific (UCLG- ASPAC) to deal with the issue of human trafficking and correlate it with SDGs point 16. For that, this article employed qualitative methods, including a descriptive analysis of implementation between UCLG- ASPAC and local government. This article wants to show that the collaboration between UCLG ASPAC and local government is still not optimal in dealing with transnational human trafficking crimes, particularly in Southeast Asia. The result obtained are that the role of local government in UCLG ASPAC has made various effort to advancing the sustainable development goals (SDGs) point 16 and eradicate the problem of trafficking both from increase transparency in the system, become a bridge between the government and other actors, communicate information to the public and provide responses to the government.

Keywords: Human Trafficking, UCLG ASPAC, SDGs, Paradiplomacy

1. Introduction

Examining human trafficking dynamics is necessary to understand the process in which individuals are placed in the exploitative situation for economic gain. Trafficking can occur within a country or move across the borders. Southeast Asia is the primary transit hub for human traffickers with millions of people subjected to forced labour and exploitation or commonly known as "modern slavery". The most victims in 2022 are reportedly from South and Central Asia. Beginning in the 2014- 2018 period, Asia Pacific has become the region with the largest human trafficking practices and Southeast Asia is part of it [1]. Approximately 60% of 7,800 trafficked persons are exploitation and forced victims. Women and children treated by violence to be forced labour in domestic and internationally. Adding to the data, Southeast Asia contributes over 22 million women who were trafficked and forced into marriage [2]. This emphasized that human trafficking was also considered as gender based harm, in which women and children were the highest victims of experiencing this form of exploitation. According to the United Nation Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC), the trafficked persons are much higher faced by women and girls. With the overall 60% of women and 25% of girls trafficked for gander specific labour, including childcare, domestic and sex work [3]. The high prevalence of females among trafficking victims is connected to the fact that women

and girls are not only trafficked for sexual exploitation, but also for forced labour and other purposes. A clear majority of the victims of trafficking for forced labour were females. This condition claimed that the lack of rights afforded to women serves as the primary causative factor at the root of women's trafficking [4]. According to IMF 2018, the number of sexual exploitation practices in Asia certainly arose and concerning this situation. There are numerous cases, including forced marriage in the Mekong area, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Myanmar. Sexual exploitation businesses could result in high outcomes with average $3- $20 million per year with the most contributors from Cambodia and Thailand [5]. Furthermore, the value from that business has been achieving an advantage over $150 million per year in total. This indicates that the sexual exploitation practices are the largest business across the world [6].

In response, effectively addressing human trafficking is determined as a priority issue for government, international and national agencies with regional and local involvement to coordinate policies and programmes aimed at eliminating all forms of trafficking in persons. However, the challenges are still rooted in the lack of participation with local governments to partake in solutions. So, the existence of local initiative is important because local leaders know the necessities of its people. This article used the concept of Paradiplomacy thought and Sustainable Development Goals as approaches to portrayed efforts, particularly from local governments under non- governmental organizations, which is United Cities and Local Government Asia Pacific (UCLG ASPAC) in combating human trafficking issues. Nowadays, the local government has a role in delivering interaction across the borders and at certain levels they collaborate with foreign partnership policies. Thus, UCLG ASPAC emerged as a scope of collaboration between local governments in Asia Pacific to tackle major issues including human trafficking and take more preventive measures.

The United Cities and Local Government Asia Pacific (UCLG ASPAC) established as a net hub with the largest local government association. Since its founding in 2004, the UCLG APAC has advanced and achieved success in strengthening the voice of Asia Pacific's cities and local governments and interacting with international agendas. Through collaboration between local governments and the larger international community in the region, the UCLG ASPAC seeks to serve as a unified voice and regional advocate for democratic local self-government, advancing its goals, principles, and interests [7]. The goals of UCLG ASPAC include among other things, advancing gender and racial equality and combating all types of discrimination that are prohibited by international law. According to Article 4 of the constitution, UCLG ASPAC carries out these activities to fulfil its missions, which include, among other things, actively lobbying and advocating for local government's status and role in the global arena and influencing international policy-making; creating and promoting policies and positions that are important to local government and the international community; and creating initiatives and action programs based on the principles of international cooperation and self-government, especially through decentralization cooperation or development projects between local governments and associations of local governments [9].

Moreover, the article provides further efforts of local leaders in UCLG ASPAC to encourage Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). On 25 September 2015, members of the United Nations committed to the sustainable development agenda 2030 which include 17 targets. Sustainable Development Goals was organized based on Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) that began in 2000 with aims to develop social, economic, security, and environment all across the globe. The emergence of SDGs is pivotal to guide the regional government to reaching sustainable development. In the context of an issue of human trafficking, it has triggered SDGs point 16 to advancing solutions. Target points 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong institution supports and fights for inclusivity, freedom, and equality. It aimed to provide

fair access for every person and foster effective, accountable, and inclusiveness in all levels of institutions [10]. Besides, the elaboration of SDGs point 16 seek to end sexual harassment, exploitation of human resources, human trafficking and other various forms of violence against children. These points align with the mission of UCLG ASPAC which is to promote race and gender equality and to combat all forms of discrimination. UCLG ASPAC committed proactively to collaborate and intensively persuade local governments supporting SDGs points 16 to fulfil its role in achieving ambitious, universal, and integrated action to reduce and remove human trafficking practices in Southeast Asia.

2. Method

This article employed qualitative methods with descriptive analysis and seeks to explore the paradiplomacy concept approached in examining the instrument of local government to tackle global issues, primarily on human trafficking in Southeast Asia. The author collects information and data from the secondary sources and examines the data was not from the first informant. The secondary data obtained through relevant sources, such as scientific, journals, books, and internet sites. Through this research, the author will focus to discuss the role of local government based on UCLG ASPAC programme that support Sustainable Development Goals: target 16 in eliminating specific issues of trafficking. Furthermore, this article used to analyze how local leaders were involved in achieving a solution towards the issue.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Human Trafficking in Southeast Asia

The term "modern slavery" has recently been used in the context of different practices such as trafficking in person, forced labour, slavery, forced marriage, and others. Southeast Asia well known as "modern slavery" has affected approximately 40 million individuals globally trapped in forced labour, sexual exploitation, and coerced marriage [11]. The report indicates that over 85% of trafficking victims in Southeast Asia are trafficked from within the region with countries like Malaysia and Thailand serving as primary destinations. Thailand is notably the leading destination for victims from neighbouring countries such as Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Indonesia, and Myanmar. Additionally, the demography aspect has become one factor whereas Southeast Asia is a strategic region that aligns with international trade ways thereby enabling human trafficking to spread rapidly in this region. This is proven by the number of slavery victim comparisons between 2016- 2018 acknowledging the enhancement, primarily Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Tabel 1. Number of Slavery Victims In ASEAN 2016

Country	Number of Slavery Victims
Indonesia	736,100
Malaysia	128,800
Brunei Darussalam	3,400
Vietnam	139,300
Laos	20,000
Cambodia	256,800
Myanmar	515,100
Singapore	9,200
Philippines	401,000
Thailand	425,500

Sources: (Global Slavery Index, 2016)

From Tabel 1 above, it shows the number of labour slavery in Indonesia by 2016 is the highest, which is estimated at over 736.000 victims. Followed by the Philippines with approximately 401.000 and Thailand with 425.500 on slavery victims [12]. This examines Asia and the Pacific ranks as the third most vulnerable region globally to modern slavery, primarily influenced by discriminatory social norms, political instability, and economic insecurity. Discriminatory social norms significantly contribute to the vulnerability of marginalized groups based on race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. For instance, in Myanmar, the Rohingya minority continue to face mass slavery has led to increased rates of child labour and marriage. As a result, Myanmar was ranked second with the highest number of victims around 515.100 people [13]. Then, economic instability and rising poverty levels further increase vulnerability to modern slavery. Because there is limited access to essential needs for survival, such as shelter, food, and water. Despite this, the emergence of conflict in the region caused political inequality and instability. In the end, the crisis impacted civilian and vulnerable communities, including women and children thereby repressing their rights.

Tabel 2. Number of Slavery Victims In ASEAN 2018

Country	Number of Slavery Victims
Indonesia	1,220,000
Malaysia	212,000
Brunei Darussalam	5,000
Vietnam	421,000
Laos	62,000
Cambodia	261,000
Myanmar	575,000
Singapore	19,000
Philippines	784,000
Thailand	610,000

Sources: (Global Slavery Index, 2018)

As indicated in Table 2 this phenomenon escalated in 2018, which portrayed Indonesia as the highest with 1.220.000, Philippines with 784.000, and Thailand with an average 610.000 on human slavery victims [14]. Overall, the human slavery practices are crucial whereas the gap increasement reached over 483.900 in Indonesia. This indicates the number of human slavery in ASEAN has not been shown a decline, which means ASEAN must provide more attention to it. It emphasized that Southeast Asia is partaking as a contributor to the high number of human trafficking in the world. Due to the wider urgency, the further joint forum is necessary through the regional government collaboration within UCLG ASPAC.

3.2. The UCLG ASPAC as Paradiplomacy

In terms, paradiplomacy refers to the behaviour and capacity to perform with foreign party by the role of sub- state. Paradiplomacy posits the sub-state actor is the local government which acts as the domestic actor [15]. The United Cities Local Government in Asia Pacific (UCLG ASPAC) is an extension of the regional government. With strategic partnership, a growing membership of regional governments and commitment to local voices, UCLG ASPAC stands as an inspiration for effective decentralisation, reflecting its belief that policy advocacy is the collective work of an entire community. According to statistics, UCLG ASPAC stands as the nexus connecting over 7.000 cities and local governments across the Asia and Pacific [16]. The worldwide has recognized the importance of local government as the main pillar in fostering international cooperation and representing the national interest on international scope.

Embarking on a journey through the decade, UCLG ASPAC has marked significant growth and impactful initiatives, positioning itself as a leading advocate for local governance, sustainable development, and inclusive practices. The organization has played a crucial role in localizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) thereby enhancing the capacity of local governments to address pressing challenges. UCLG ASPAC is important in the sustainable development performance because it has been included in the report of the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons for the Post 2015 Development Agenda which is "cities are where the battle for sustainable development will be won or lost" [17]. This indicates that the important role of regional and city governments in encouraging sustainable development is one of the reasons intergovernmental partnerships are necessary to develop mutually beneficial. In the end, it will improve the welfare of the local community. Throughout its journey, UCLG ASPAC has successfully fostered partnerships and expanded its influence both regionally and globally. There are numerous landscape collaborations, including 72 out of 79 partners that have joined [18]. This has been achieved through the establishment of platforms for dialogue and collaboration among diverse local governments. UCLG ASPAC committed to effective decentralization and local empowerment has been cornerstones of its efforts. It has also been undertaking in advocating for policies that prioritize community well bein9g and social inclusivity. Its advocacy has influenced regional policies leading to positive changes at the local level and contributing to the advancement of the SDGs. Thus, the active engagement of UCLG ASPAC has enriched the concept of paradiplomacy.

As mentioned above, the regional government has been valued to perform sustainable development. Every region has numerous matters, such as poverty, sanitation, inequality of distribution, until exploitation of labour. This condition caused regional governments to focus on resolving those problems effectively and efficiently, primarily on inequality and exploitation as part of trafficking practices. Accelerating the urban SDGs is the answer in order to maximize broader aspects not only on economic development but also ensuring robust equality of welfare. Local governments have an obligation as encouragement and facilitator, such as private sectors involved in development participation to accelerate goals in 2030. So, "political will" is also necessary in order to support the implementation and commitment by regional parties. Although the "political will" has been applied by local leaders, the implementation of SDGs also necessitates the efficient bureaucracy to elaborate further regional action. The reformation of bureaucracy establishes the improvement of quality in order to undertake sustainable development maximization.

3.3. The UCLG ASPAC Advancing SDGs: Point 16.

Since confirmed in 2015, local government has been viewing as a central in order to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) because of local leaders has its capabilities, particularly providing sufficient budget, well closed with its citizens, a broader authority, the initiator for regional innovation and public services, and regulating public policy which serve local interest. The main pillar of sustainable development goals are interconnectedness whereas, among development goals there is no "success" in one particular target without contributing to the achievement of other targets, because the implementation of development is also mutually related between one programme and another programme. For instance, the issue of human trafficking has been violated in target 5 which posits women as the major victims who experience form of the exploitative, forced, and harassment. This triggered another target to advancing its principle to eradicate the issue, which is SDGs point 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions.

SDGs point 16 calls for the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions. In the context of SDGs 16, the international community seeks to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and all forms of violence. Incorporating SDGs 16 into the 2030 agenda emphasized the interconnectedness of peace, justice, inclusion, and development including at school, work, domestic, and public specs, is at the core of local public action. By prioritizing accountability, participation, and transparency can significantly enhance social protection, equal opportunities, and poverty alleviation. However, challenges persist, particularly regarding women's participation in public, where increased violence, forced, and harassment hinder their engagement. Despite commitments from several countries in the Asia-Pacific region to enhance peaceful communities, progress involvement in peace processes remains slow. Then, promising innovation and practices are needed regarding this issue.

UCLG ASPAC committed proactively to contribute and intensively persuade local and regional governments (LRGs) enhancing access to quality public services for all through increased transparency in the system, become a bridge between the government and other actors, communicate information to the public, and provide responses to the government. The leading LRGs are currently working to reconnect with the citizenry in some ways, enhancing transparency and accountability, preventing crime, and innovating in decision-making processes. Local governments also ensure the decision-making process is representative, participative, and responsive in all sectors. The key objective is to enhance public trust, satisfaction with the local public sector, and fostering capacity for public services. To this end, LRGs promoted a new exploration to cocreate and coproduce joint local product solutions to meet consensus priorities.

In order to give its citizens, civil society, private sector, and local stakeholders the chance to participate in decision-making processes that take into consideration local goals and development objectives, LRGs have created participatory mechanisms in a number of events. As a well-known and effective method of involving local communities and boosting trust in LRGs, UCLG ASPAC first worked with the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN Habitat) on Gender Responsive and Participatory Budgeting (GRPB) [19]. The GRPB is a crucial instrument for increasing the efficacy and efficiency of public spending management and ensuring that public funds are distributed more fairly among men and women. This process's ability to change local democracy and increase the accountability and responsiveness of local government institutions to their people is primarily responsible for its success. GRPB's ability to be implemented at all levels, from the local level to the regional level, is one of its distinctive features that distinctly matches SDG 16 indication 7. LRGs worldwide have pledged to promote open government changes in response to local information access [20]. In order to facilitate access to local information and include the public, civic associations, and commercial sector as strategic partners in the pursuit of more efficient and responsible local institutions, they are creating new tools and solutions. The way forward, there are six essential elements that can enhance the implementation of SDGs 16 at the local level, namely:

1. *Strong partnerships*

It emphasizes the importance of fostering strong partnerships between LRGs and various stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector. Such collaborations are crucial for establishing open, transparent, and inclusive institutions, which require the commitment of political actors and citizens alike.

2. *Strengthening capacities*

It highlights the need to strengthen the capacities of LRGs to create accountable and inclusive local institutions. This involves empowering LRGs to meet citizens' demands for basic services and safety, while

also developing participatory mechanisms that encourage citizen involvement in local governance. Adequate resources and supportive legal frameworks are necessary to facilitate effective decentralization and accountability.

3. *Advocates integration of human rights*

Advocating for the integration of a human rights approach in local policies to ensure equal rights and access to justice for all individuals, particularly vulnerable groups. LRGs are encouraged to form partnerships that prevent discrimination and promote respect for diversity, thereby addressing violence and conflict within communities.

4. *Fostering multilevel cooperation*

The significance of multilevel and multi-stakeholder governance, which fosters cooperation among different levels of government and local stakeholders. A cohesive approach that aligns national, regional, and local policies is essential for promoting peace, justice, and effective institutions. It asserts that local initiatives can complement national strategies, ensuring that no territory is left behind.

5. *Promoting peace and participatory democracy*

It calls for support of LRG initiatives aimed at building peace and promoting participatory democracy. The tradition of city-to-city cooperation is highlighted as a means to facilitate cultural exchange and learning, contributing to the broader goals of SDG16 and other Sustainable Development Goals.

6. *Localized strategies*

It highlights participatory efforts between LRGs and society contributing to achieve SDGs 16. This localization includes a series of training guides that support workshops on the localization of global. Then, a series of initiatives that support local and regional authorities in their efforts to localize the Sustainable Development Goals. Furthermore, initiatives that aims to promote strong and effective democratic local self-governance.

4. Conclusion

Human trafficking in Southeast Asia highlights as a significant transit hub. Millions are subjected to forced labour, often categorized as "modern slavery." In 2022, a substantial number of trafficking victims originated from South and Central Asia. Approximately 60% of the 7,800 trafficked individuals experienced exploitation and forced labour, with women and children being disproportionately affected. Although addressing human trafficking has become a priority for governments and international agencies, challenges remain due to inadequate local government involvement. The United Cities and Local Government Asia Pacific (UCLG ASPAC) has emerged as a collaborative platform for local governments to combat human trafficking, highlighting the necessity of local initiatives in tackling this issue.

UCLG ASPAC advocates for local governance and sustainable development in the Asia Pacific region. Its mission includes promoting race and gender equality and combating discrimination. The organization plays a crucial role in fostering decentralized cooperation and international collaboration among local governments, aligning its efforts with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Specifically, SDG 16, which focuses on promoting peace, justice, and strong institutions. Paradiplomacy concept involves local governments engaging with foreign entities aligned by UCLG ASPAC's initiatives. The organization connects over 7,000 cities and local governments, advocating for sustainable development and inclusive practices. UCLG ASPAC's commitment to local empowerment and effective decentralization has led to positive changes in regional policies, contributing to the advancement of the SDGs. The organization's active engagement enriches the concept of paradiplomacy, underscoring the essential role of local governments in fostering international cooperation and addressing pressing global challenges such as human trafficking.

UCLG ASPAC is working to improve access to quality public services by enhancing transparency and communication between local governments and citizens. This initiative aims to build public trust and satisfaction while promoting participatory decision-making. Collaborative efforts, such as Gender Responsive and Participatory Budgeting (GRPB), have successfully engaged communities and ensured equitable distribution of public finances, aligning with the principles of SDG 16. LRGs further advance the implementation of SDG 16 at the local level includes fostering strong partnerships among local governments, civil society, and the private sector. Secondly, enhancing local government capacities to create accountable institutions. Integrating a human rights approach into local policies, promoting multi-level cooperation, supporting peace-building initiatives and participatory democracy. Then, developing localized strategies that engage communities in achieving the SDGs 16.

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