



Statelessness Network Asia Pacific (SNAP)

Summary Report: Consultations with Stakeholders by SNAP's Organising Committee

1. Introduction

From 6 August 2015 until 10 November 2015, SNAP's Organising Committee (formerly the "Core Group on Statelessness in the Asia-Pacific region") held consultations with 31 stakeholders (Key Contacts) that work on statelessness globally and/or have experience in establishing civil society networks.

The aim of this report is to record the results of the consultations and to provide a platform for further discussions between SNAP's Organising Committee and interested stakeholders with regard to the development of SNAP and SNAP's potential future activities.

The consultations focused on:

- the challenges for civil society in responding to statelessness in the Asia-Pacific region,
- how a regional network on statelessness could address these challenges,
- what cooperation between network members might entail,
- the network's potential activities,
- the role and composition of the network's membership,
- the role and composition of the network's advisory group,
- potential funders and funding opportunities for the network,
- suggestions for the name of the network,
- suggestions for engaging stakeholders throughout the process of developing the network,
- challenges the network might face, and
- general advice on developing the network.

To further discuss the outcomes of the consultations, and to finalise the draft terms of reference and action plan for developing SNAP, a 2-day meeting of SNAP's Organising Committee was held on 21 and 22 November 2015 in Bangkok.

2. Background

It is estimated that statelessness affects at least 10 million people worldwide,¹ and that the Asia-Pacific region holds the largest proportion of stateless persons.²

¹ UNHCR, Stateless People: An introduction to Statelessness <<http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c155.html>>. Note this estimate does not include stateless refugees and asylum seekers.

² UNHCR Statistical Yearbook 2014, 14th edition, 8 December 2015, Annex, Table 1 <<http://www.unhcr.org/566584fc9.html>>.

There was strong recognition of the need for a regional civil society network on statelessness during the Civil Society Retreat on Resolving Statelessness in Asia and the Pacific (“Statelessness Retreat”). The Statelessness Retreat was co-hosted in June 2015 by the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies of Mahidol University.³

The Statelessness Retreat’s participants agreed that the aims of the network should be primarily to:

- ‘promote and pursue advocacy at national and regional levels,
- facilitate capacity strengthening of civil society in the region,
- provide a resource and knowledge hub, and
- function as a platform for civil society and other stakeholders to access and share information, tools and good practices’.⁴

SNAP’s Organising Committee was formed to establish and progress the development of the network in line with the above listed aims. A key initial function of the Organising Committee was to undertake consultations with stakeholders on the development of SNAP, particularly those who attended the Statelessness Retreat.

A list of 69 Key Contacts was developed following input from SNAP’s Organising Committee of an exhaustive list of stakeholders working on statelessness globally and/or with experience in establishing civil society networks. The final list of Key Contacts included all of the participants from the Statelessness Retreat.

Due to competing commitments and changes to the composition of SNAP’s Organising Committee, during the consultations 62 of the 69 Key Contacts were ultimately approached by members of SNAP’s Organising Committee. As of 10 November 2015, 31 consultations had been completed. These included consultations with each member of SNAP’s Organising Committee, 10 additional Statelessness Retreat participants and 11 stakeholders who were not present at the Statelessness Retreat but who have expertise in working on statelessness globally and/or developing civil society networks.

3. Outcomes of the consultations

The outcomes of the consultations are detailed below under the topics discussed with Key Contacts.

3.1. What are the challenges for civil society in addressing statelessness in the region?

Majority views

- limited opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and sharing of ‘good-practices’
- limited publicly-available data and research on statelessness in the region (including gaps in cross-disciplinary research on statelessness)

³ The need for a regional network on statelessness was also confirmed at the ICVA-UNHCR-IFRC Structured Dialogues held in September 2015.

⁴ Outcome Document, Civil Society Retreat on Resolving Statelessness in Asia and the Pacific, June 2015 <http://aprrn.info/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/final_outcome-document_civil-society-retreat-on-resolving-statelessness-in-asia-and-the-pacific_june20151.pdf>.

- stakeholders are time and resource stretched and this can provide barriers for collaboration
- limited information sharing and collaboration amongst stakeholders of the links between statelessness and broader human rights issues, and statelessness beyond national and contextual situations
- limited successful and collaborative advocacy by stakeholders.⁵

Minority views

- limited political will by States in the region to resolve statelessness
- stateless persons and persons at risk of statelessness have limited access to legal assistance
- statelessness and related human rights issues can be misrepresented by the media in the region and it was suggested that this can jeopardise the success of activities which aim to address statelessness

3.2. How could a regional network on statelessness address these challenges?

Majority views

- by providing a platform that shares information and ‘good practices’ between members, organises capacity-building trainings and raises awareness on statelessness at the regional level
- by connecting stakeholders working with similar populations or on similar issues (it was suggested that this would encourage peer-to-peer learning, and build stronger advocacy strategies and activities)
- by conducting evidence-based research and gathering data on stateless populations in the region
- by building solidarity and facilitating a cohesive response to statelessness among stakeholders in the region

Minority views

- by conducting trainings for media organisations on statelessness, and related human rights issues
- by assisting members to engage with regional and international human rights instruments and organisations

3.3. What might cooperation between network members entail?

Key Contacts detailed that cooperation between network members would depend on the network’s activities and members’ capacities and needs.

A number of Key Contacts also suggested that commitment by network members would be key to successful cooperation.

⁵ What Key Contacts mean by “advocacy” is to be explored in future consultations.

Initial cooperation:

- developing a collaborative agenda for addressing statelessness in the region
- linking with UNHCR's *#IBelong* campaign
- organising trainings that are accessible and relevant for all network members (it was suggested that the trainings could coincide with meetings focused on developing the network)
- sharing information on statelessness with members and initiating joint statements and petitions

Longer-term cooperation:

- establishing working groups focused on sub-regions or on specific issues that are relevant across the region
- developing activities which respond to UNHCR's Global Action Plan to End Statelessness by 2024

3.4. What are some specific activities that the network on statelessness could implement?

Key Contacts outlined that when identifying potential activities, it would be important to take into consideration the different sub-regions and cultures in the Asia-Pacific region, and the potential opportunity to focus the network's activities into thematic-areas, within sub-regions.

It was also suggested that the network could play a role in supporting the development of a stronger "Asia-Pacific identity" amongst civil society stakeholders.

Majority views

- mapping of stateless populations in the Asia-Pacific region, using different research methods as necessary
- mapping of stakeholders and their work on statelessness
- developing summaries and guides explaining the nationality laws in the region in a manner comprehensible for stakeholders that do not have a legal background
- developing short briefing notes on statelessness issues in each member's country of focus
- developing advocacy activities on a particular issue, in a particular country (it was suggested, for example, that such activities could focus on stateless Rohingya populations throughout the region or childhood statelessness in sub-regions)
- mapping the gaps and barriers that exist relating to the acquisition and confirmation of nationality in the region (i.e. gender discrimination in nationality laws and policies or restrictive civil registration laws and policies, such as barriers to late birth registration)
- holding annual trainings on statelessness for members of the network, combined with planning around network-related issues for members to become more closely involved in SNAP's activities (suggestions for the topics of such trainings included legal aid models for assisting populations to acquire and confirm nationality and fundraising methodologies)

Minority views

- developing submissions on statelessness to relevant human rights treaty bodies and the Universal Periodic Review
- developing an advocacy tool kit for statelessness stakeholders
- facilitating round tables with government representatives on statelessness

3.5. What could be the role and composition of the network's membership?

Throughout the consultations, it was suggested that the potential members of the network would be a mix of people representing non-government organisations, community-based organisations, faith-based organisations, law firms, academic institutions and individual experts (such as formerly stateless persons, stateless persons and persons at risk of stateless).

The majority of Key Contacts opined that membership should be open to everyone interested in the issue of statelessness and that, with time, it would be possible to distinguish active members that are committed to contributing to developing the network from passive members more interested in receiving information and updates on regional developments and events.

It was suggested by the majority of Key Contacts that the membership criteria would depend on the role of the network. Key Contacts outlined that it would be important to actively encourage people who are stateless, formerly stateless or at risk of statelessness to become members. It was also suggested that membership should be open to organisations and individuals based outside of the Asia-Pacific region.

The majority of Key Contacts suggested we consider the membership structures adopted by existing networks, such as secretariat-driven networks and membership-driven networks, and brainstorm the pros and cons of these structures.

3.6. What might be some recommendations for the role and composition of the network's advisory group?

Majority views

- stakeholders that have sound knowledge in human rights and who are aware of the cultural aspects of different sub-regions in the Asia-Pacific region
- strategic members, who can give weight and legitimacy (and also bring in key non-financial resources)
- stakeholders who can provide advice and contacts regarding fundraising
- stakeholders working both within and outside of the Asia-Pacific region

Minority views

- people with seniority (it was suggested that this can sometimes diffuse sensitivities around statelessness)

3.7. Who might be potential funders of SNAP?

Key Contacts suggested the following potential funders (in alphabetical order):

- American Jewish World Service
- AMES Australia
- Asia Foundation
- Crowd-funding
- Embassies of US and European Governments
- Foundation for Just Society
- Fund for Global Human Rights
- Heinrich Boell Foundation
- McArthur Foundation
- Oak Foundation
- Open Society Foundations
- Sigrid Rausing Trust
- Universities (in the region and globally)
- UNHCR
- World Council of Churches

3.8. What are some suggestions for the name of the network?

There were diverging views presented by Key Contacts as to the potential name of the network.

Majority views:

- the name should be broad enough so that members can easily identify themselves with the network, and so that it is inclusive of all stakeholders

Minority views:

- the name of the network should have a corresponding acronym that spells a word in English
- the name should be similar to the name of other regional networks
- the phrase “eradication of statelessness” should be included in the name to demonstrate the broader aim of the network
- the name should include the word “nationality” instead of the word “statelessness”

SNAP’s Organising Committee developed the following list of potential names for the network:

- Asia Pacific Network on Inclusion and Nationality (APNIN)
- Network on Inclusion and Nationality (NIN)
- Statelessness Network Asia Pacific (SNAP)
- Statelessness Organisation Asia Pacific (SOAP)
- Asia Pacific Association of Statelessness (ASAP)
- Asia Pacific Statelessness Network (APSN)
- Asia Pacific Association on Statelessness (APAS)
- Asia Pacific Network on Statelessness (APNS)

A poll conducted of SNAP’s Organising Committee found that 9 out of 10 members voted for the following name: Statelessness Network Asia Pacific (SNAP) and five out of 10 members voted for - Asia Pacific Network on Statelessness (APNS).

3.9. How could we keep potential members engaged in the network's development?

Majority views

- by sending email updates on the progress in developing the network and information on upcoming events, training opportunities and other resources

Minority views

- by ensuring that the purpose of the network is clear
- by publicising the development of the network via social media

3.10. What are some of the challenges that the network might face?

Majority views

- initial enthusiasm could fade quickly

Minority views

- the network may initially have limited access to government representatives
- it may be difficult to develop autonomy from funders

3.11. General advice for SNAP's Organising Committee with regard to developing the network?

Majority views

- a network requires:
 - a common agenda,
 - shared measurement as to how we are getting there,
 - mutually enforcing relationship,
 - constant communication, and
 - backbone support from a secretariat.
- strong networks:
 - are inclusive,
 - disseminate information well, and
 - bring organisations and people together.
- the proportionately high levels of statelessness in Asia-Pacific region could be emphasised when developing advocacy strategies
- the network could collaborate with the European Network on Statelessness, the Americas Network on Nationality and Statelessness and the Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights (it was suggested that these organisations have helpful information to share on developing networks on statelessness and together the networks could also collaborate to resolving statelessness globally)
- the network could launch a website as soon as practicable (this was the approach taken by European Network on Statelessness, the Americas Network Nationality and Statelessness, and the Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights and it was suggested that launching a

website early encourages potential funders to be interested in the development of the network and builds momentum)

- the network could employ a coordinator to promote the network (it was suggested that during the initial phases of the development of the network it would be important to have one person who is working full-time on developing the network's activities and fundraising; it was also suggested that it would be important to ensure that the coordinator receives sufficient training in order to successfully fulfil their role)
- the coordinator of the network could concentrate on their "communications role" and limit their focus to just a couple of activities, such as facilitating trainings and developing research reports
- the network could start with modest projects with clear goals and accumulate successes as the network builds momentum and interest (it was suggested that the network could focus on developing activities that have a high 'success-rate' as this may support the network to receive additional funding to further develop the network)
- the network could prioritise engaging with stateless populations and involve organisations working directly with stateless populations

Minority views

- the network could create a core advisory group and an additional group such as the "friends of the network" which includes larger international agencies or international non-government organisations that are not actively involved in the network but support its work (it was suggested that this is good for exposure and generating interest from funders)
- the network could use UNHCR's ten-point plan as a basis for developing the network's terms of reference and the work plan
- the network could be initially couched as a pilot and could facilitate meetings which allow for information sharing on issues (it was suggested that this would be more effective than focusing on trying to establish the network)
- while establishing the network, the network could partner with an organisation that could host events and trainings (it was suggested that this would avoid issues with SNAP's Organising Committee being unable to receive funds)
- SNAP's Organising Committee could involve institutional members rather than individuals (it was suggested that if an institution is a member of the Organising Committee, it would be easier to replace a person working for an institution than someone working in their individual capacity)

4. Conclusion

Throughout the consultations, SNAP's Organising Committee observed that there is significant commitment and goodwill towards the development of SNAP and the information gathered during the consultations further confirmed the need for a civil society network on statelessness in the Asia-Pacific region.

SNAP's Organising Committee
snap@statelessnessnetworkasiapacific.org/
<http://www.statelessnessnetworkasiapacific.org/>