

Understanding

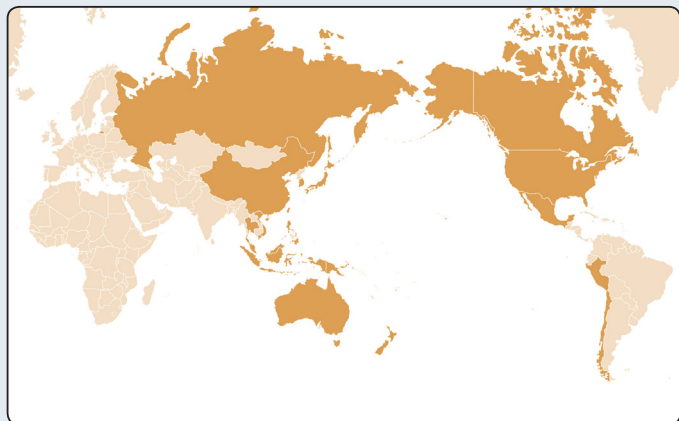
APEC

Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum



What is APEC?

The Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum comprises 21 Pacific Rim member countries collaborating to advance 'free' trade and investment regimes. It was established as an avenue to coerce states into bilateral and regional neo-liberal agreements at a time when the World Trade Organisation had stalled as the main body to determine global economic rules.



APEC was established in 1989 in Canberra, Australia at an informal ministerial-level dialogue from an initial 12 members. Current members are from the Americas, Asia and the Pacific regions, including: Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, People's Republic of China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Peru, The Philippines, Russia, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, The United States and Vietnam.

How is APEC structured?

The APEC Secretariat is based in Singapore. Its work and activities fall under four high level committees:

- Committee on Trade and Investment
- Senior Officials' Meeting Committee on Economic and Technical Cooperation
- Economic Committee
- Budget and Management Committee

Every Committee is run by a leader from an APEC member country.

Each year a member country hosts the annual APEC Summit. This year the Philippines is hosting under the theme 'Building Inclusive Economies,

Building a Better World.' There are four agenda items at this year's Summit:

1. Investing in human capital
2. Fostering small and medium enterprises' participation in Regional and Global Markets
3. Building Sustainable and Resilient Communities
4. Enhancing the Regional Economic Integration Agenda

What does APEC do?

APEC is primarily concerned with trade and investment issues. Under the Osaka Action Agenda its three pillars are:

1. Trade and Investment Liberalisation
2. Business Facilitation
3. Economic and Technical Cooperation

Under these three pillars regional economic integration and structural reform are key goals.

The Bogor Goals, established in 1994, call on the regional community to address the economic and social dimensions of development in the region through market-driven and growth-focused development policies. By 2020 APEC aims to have 'free and open' trade among all member economies. This trade liberalisation broadly refers to the abolition of barriers to trade, including tariff and 'non-tariff barriers', the reduction of domestic subsidies, and the promotion of exports. While these policies may not appear on their face to be necessarily harmful to women, women have a heightened risk of losing their livelihoods and being subjected to exploitative labour practices in regional and global value chains.

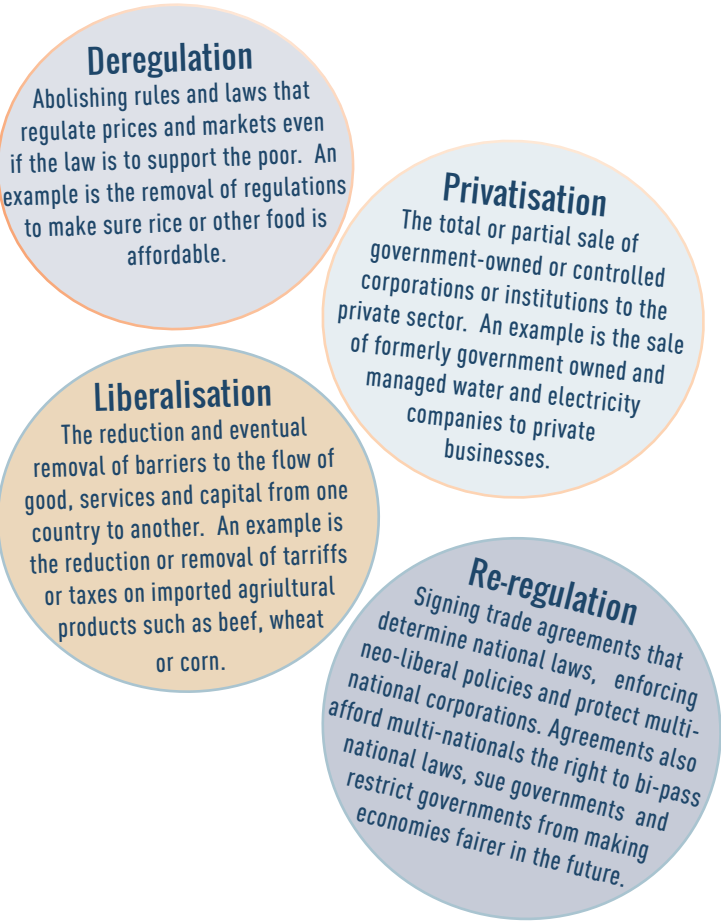
This assumption that "development" is synonymous with open markets is a myth. APEC-facilitated trade liberalization is responsible for the decline of national industries and agriculture. Failing economies due to competition, privatisation and liberalisation have the most negative impact on the poor. In the case of the Philippines, where the APEC Summit is held this year, tariffs, or taxes imposed on imports, are now at their lowest levels, worsening the country's trade deficit. "Tariff levels have fallen from approximately 26% in 1996 to 5% in 2012 for manufacturing goods and from 36% to 10% in the same period for agricultural products. As of 2012, the Philippines has among the lowest agricultural tariffs and the lowest non-agricultural tariffs in Asia." Lowering tariffs means removing protections for the local economy and drastically reduced government income. This has devastating impacts on farmers, farm workers and fisher folk, who experience dwindling wages and are unable to compete in the market against imported, often subsidized, agricultural products from multinational producers.

Women make up the majority of agricultural workers in Asia and are widely employed in small-scale or subsistence production. As a result, their welfare and livelihood is directly affected by imports

of cheap agricultural products and the reduction of domestic subsidies. The cheap labour of Asian women is also considered a competitive advantage in the context of regional and global value chains, which has led to the transnational suppliers moving from country to country in the region in search of the cheapest, most easily exploited workforce.

Why should APEC matter to us?

Despite rates of economic growth that have focused international attention on the Asia Pacific, inequality, insecurity, and systemic disadvantages continue to define the experience of the majority of women in the region. Approximately 60%-70% of the world's poor are women¹, and women's social and economic realities are shaped by the neoliberal economic ideology that APEC promotes and has been embraced by the majority of governments. Such neoliberal economic ideology is premised on four pillars: (i) deregulation; (ii) privatisation of public services (iii) trade and investment liberalisation and (iv) re-regulation. Each of these undermines the capacity of governments to respect, protect, and fulfill human rights and has demonstrably contributed to the erosion of the enjoyment of economic and social rights of women in the Asia Pacific.



As the 'premier' Asia Pacific economic forum APEC activities and policy decisions have implications for the people in its member economies. APEC facilitates economic policies that do not serve the majority of the region's population. It promotes a model of development that has been channeled from working people to the rich, and from developing countries to rich countries. This model

of development has contributed to global warming, displaced millions of people, lowered real wages, increased labour migration and caused finance, environment, food and energy crises that have devastated the lives of women in the global south.

Why is it important for us to engage in the people's movement and mobilisation against APEC?

APEC is one of the institutions set up to ensure global rules are set in favour of corporations rather than people. The recently concluded Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP) was born out of an APEC meeting in 2011 in Honolulu, Hawaii. This space breeds pernicious agreements that focus on domestic structural reforms or "behind-the-border" measures to achieve economic integration. With trade agreements like the TPP, the United States and global powers are able to set the rules for countries in the region, guaranteeing access to resources, markets and profits for its multi-national corporations.

APWLD activities in Manila around the APEC Summit will consolidate and strengthen our feminist movements against neoliberal economic policies that empower corporate interests. We need to collectively challenge unjust and unequal power relations. We are demonstrating that we resist APEC and the continued attack on women in the global south. We are demonstrating that we should have a say in the Asia Pacific economic trajectory and that we demand a new global architecture that prioritises people over profit.

The Development Justice Alternative:

Since 2013, civil society in Asia and Pacific has called for a new development model called Development Justice. Development Justice is a transformative framework that aims to reduce inequalities of wealth, power, and resources between countries, between rich and poor, and between men and women. It places people – that is the majority poor and the marginalised – at the heart of development. It is a paradigm that recognises the importance of sustaining the Earth's planetary boundaries over sustaining profits. Development Justice requires past injustices to be remedied and new, just, sustainable and democratic systems to be developed.

During the APEC Summit we want to advance the collective call for Development Justice - an agenda that calls for five transformative shifts of **redistributive justice, economic justice, social and gender justice, environmental justice and accountability to peoples.**

1 Report of the Independent Expert on the effects of foreign debt and other related international financial obligations of States on the full enjoyment of all human rights, particularly economic, social, and cultural rights (2012) UN Doc. A/67/304 [77].