



Asia-Pacific SSG Forums 2024

Summary Report

Melaka, Malaysia

7-11 October 2024

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List of acronyms

Acronym	Full Form
AI	Artificial Intelligence
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DCAF	DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration
ESIWA	Enhancing Security Cooperation in and with Asia
EU	European Union
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JVP	Janatha Vimukti Peramuna
NPP	National People's Power
NWG	National Working Group
PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SDG 16	Sustainable Development Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
SSG/R	Security Sector Governance and Reform
SSR	Security Sector Reform
UN	United Nations
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
YPS	Youth, Peace and Security



Executive summary

The draft report summarizes the activities and outcomes of the 2024 Asia-Pacific Security Sector Governance (SSG) Forum, bringing together the Asia-Pacific SSG Network that is led by DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance. The report focuses on the network's activities in three sub-regions: South Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia.

The report highlights key opportunities and challenges for SSG/R across the Asia-Pacific region, and lists some of the network's key achievements and missed opportunities during the past six years.

Some of these achievements include the sense of community and open dialogue that the network has realized, both between different participating partners and in their national working groups. This has had concrete networking and trust-building results. Other achievements include the thematic expertise that members have gained in topics such as cybersecurity; youth, peace and security; environmental security; maritime security, and the dissemination of this knowledge in the form of webinars, workshops, and publications.

The report also identifies challenges and missed opportunities. The most significant challenge is securing funding for SSG/R projects. There is also still space for increased collaboration and interaction between and within sub-regions, as well as room to further enhance the visibility of the network and its purpose. National working groups, a key output of the network, could also have been more frequently held in some cases, as they served as valuable platforms for those who organized them periodically.

The network will transition into a wider association in 2025. It will have an expanded membership, and members will join on a voluntary and non-funded basis. The report outlines several key considerations for the association's structure, activities, and thematic priorities.

Above all, this report underscores the importance of continuing the work of the SSG Network in promoting SSG across the Asia-Pacific region. The future association format offers new opportunities to do so while building on the existing networks and knowledge.

Introduction

DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance coordinates a network of partner institutions and associates from over 20 countries and territories across the Asia-Pacific region. The annual forum brings together partners and associates from across the entire network. The network is part of the wider Initiative to Promote Good Security Sector Governance (SSG) in the Asia-Pacific Region.

The network creates space for exchange, comparison, and debate on key SSG challenges, opportunities, and security sector reform (SSR) requirements as they apply to the Asia-Pacific region. Along with offering opportunities for the exchange of good practices, experiences, and lessons across the network, the dialogue is meant to build mutual trust and foster the exchange of practical policy recommendations and initiatives.

The 2024 SSG Forum took place in Malacca, Malaysia from 7 to 11 October 2024. As the fifth and final forum, it offered an opportunity to look back at both achievements and missed opportunities of the network. At the same time, the forum continued the practice of taking stock of changes in the security environment across the region, and jointly assess what this might mean for SSG/R from national and regional perspectives. Unlike previous years, the focus of this year's forum was on the region at large. While there were sub-regional sessions and thematic break-out group discussions, the forum was held predominantly in plenary, in the spirit of a joint assessment and evaluation of the network's activities since its inception.



Sub-regional overview

This session provided an overview of activities, opportunities and challenges of the three sub-regional groups of the Asia-Pacific SSG Network.

South Asia

Among the members of the South Asia group, National Working Group (NWG) meetings are regularly held to discuss Security Sector Governance and Reform (SSG/R) challenges and entry points. These meetings also help in supporting periodically revised SSG Updates. While concepts for several projects were developed, for example in Nepal, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and Sri Lanka, securing funding for national-level projects remains a significant challenge.

The South Asian Network members actively engage in bilateral exchanges, sharing expertise and best practice. They also collaborate on webinars about critical issues such as climate security, cybersecurity, and other cross-cutting themes. The members also emphasized the ongoing volatility in the region, noting how a number of countries are currently navigating political transitions, while facing various sources of instability. The tension between India and Pakistan significantly impacts space for regional cooperation, such as within the framework of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Still, there are opportunities for working with state and non-state actors on issues related to SSG, such as in Afghanistan and Bangladesh. The changing political landscapes in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh also present potential entry points for engagement.



Southeast Asia

The Southeast Asia network is very active, with members regularly sharing information, articles, and working bilaterally. The network is also addressing emerging security challenges, such as youth, peace and security, or cybersecurity and AI governance. This allows for engagement on less contentious topics and can facilitate dialogue with numerous stakeholders. The network has conducted webinars and workshops with audiences including representatives from civil society, government, security forces, and academia. These events facilitate knowledge sharing, awareness-raising, and capacity building on critical SSG/R issues.

Despite having developed numerous project concepts on key thematic areas, securing funding remains a major challenge. The difficult political situation in some Southeast Asian countries further exacerbate these funding constraints.

The network is trying to bring on board partners from countries such as Vietnam, where engagement on SSG/R issues has been challenging. The establishment of an "association" format could facilitate collaboration by minimizing the necessity of formal commitments such as MoUs.

East Asia

NWG meetings are held regularly in East Asia. In China, DCAF's recent efforts have focused on exploring opportunities for engagement and possible avenues for collaboration with its partner institute on a range of SSG/R issues. During DCAF's visit to China, meetings with Chinese experts, think tanks, and potential donors, including the Swiss and European embassies in Beijing, were organized in an effort to identify collaborative avenues on SSG/R issues, building on collaborative work that is already underway with DCAF and ICRC on business and security.

Despite ongoing efforts to secure funding from governmental and non-governmental sources in Japan and South Korea, fundraising also remains a significant hurdle in East Asia. Attempts to capitalize on the growing interest by European donors in the Indo-Pacific region have not yielded corresponding funding commitments.

Meanwhile, bilateral academic exchanges and conferences do contribute to sensitizing stakeholders and promoting dialogue on SSG/R concepts in East Asia. These activities, often facilitated by network members, serve as valuable platforms for knowledge sharing and relationship building.



Contemporary security challenges and the SSG/R agenda

The participants split into separate break-out sessions to discuss contemporary security challenges in each sub-region, and how these align with national-level entry points for SSG/R activities.

Southeast Asia

In **Indonesia**, challenges include the limited access to education in remote areas, which reduces the capacity of citizens to use their voting rights due to either lack of access to information or reluctance to vote. Another concern is police corruption, which is fuelling debates on a draft law on cyber police powers. In extension, data management issues and hacking incidents expose weaknesses in government data protection practices and cybersecurity.

In **Cambodia**, there is widespread concern among the population about the new leadership's focus on topics that appear disconnected from more pressing issues. Demonstrations and dissatisfaction with an initiative for a Cambodia-Laos-Vietnam development treaty caused the government to withdraw from the treaty. In addition, cybercrime is a growing concern in Cambodia, along with concerns regarding China's influence on trade and development, as well as labour rights violations. Furthermore, dam construction projects contribute to climate change concerns.

In **Malaysia**, the country's multicultural society faces challenges in adapting to conservative policies, while political parties play on social tensions for political gain. The country is navigating a complex geopolitical landscape, seeking a balance between the US and China. As elsewhere, despite some progress, cybersecurity remains a weakness, with no concrete plan in sight to address misinformation and fake news. Political instability continues to stall the validation of the Defence White Paper, a crucial document for national security.

*(As **Myanmar** was a specific topic for the next session, it was not discussed during this session.)*

In the **Philippines**, cybersecurity challenges are an issue of concern, the country is highly vulnerable to climate change impacts, and there are worries about China's aggressive actions in the South China Sea. The Philippine government works towards preventing further escalation of tensions over the South China/West Philippine Sea.

The transition within the armed forces from internal security operations to territorial defence empowers autonomous regions, posing challenges for the central government. The armed forces are being modernized to help deter perceived Chinese aggression. In addition, there are misinformation campaigns targeting the military.

In **Thailand**, people could vote in a parliamentary election. Even though the winning party did not get to form the government, the elections demonstrate a readiness for change among the population. Amendments to the constitution affect the balance of influence between the King and the Prime Minister, as the latter continues to increase her and the military's power and influence.

In **Timor-Leste**, government subsidies for military security during the Pope's visit in September 2024 exacerbated concerns about corruption. The Defence Minister's attempts to get involved in the police recruitment process are viewed with suspicion. At the same time, the government has involved NGOs in drafting questions for police candidate interviews, showcasing a positive example of civil society participation. There also continue to be challenges in finalizing the national security policy.

South Asia

In South Asia, several trends and themes are commonly shared. Authoritarian tendencies and constant political changes, for instance, contribute to instability across South Asia. Several countries experience economic challenges, and International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan conditions and tax increases burden the population, particularly the lower classes, causing economic stress and unemployment. In several countries of the region, the public is expressing their grievances through non-violent as well as violent means, thereby threatening – and weakening – the proper functioning of democratic governance.



Most countries require police reforms to enhance security and stability. In South Asia, governments have increasingly used law enforcement as a tool to suppress dissent, leading to arbitrary arrests and excessive use of force against the public. This is compounded by a lack of accountability mechanisms, resulting in human rights abuses and eroding public trust in state institutions. Judicial proceedings are slow and hampered by strict evidentiary requirements, compounded by inadequate police training and resources.

Radicalization that emanates from Afghanistan poses security challenges for neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh, the Maldives and Pakistan, particularly by targeting the vulnerable youth for recruitment. This spillover effect raises concerns about the spread of extremist ideologies, which can further destabilize the region. Additionally, some Islamic countries in the region have introduced stricter than usual societal rules, especially targeting human rights of women. Connected to this, the widespread use of social media challenges already fragile political systems, often creating more problems than solutions. Climate change affects the entire region, underscoring the need for collective action. Other regional concerns are drug trafficking, human trafficking, maritime security challenges, and geopolitical dynamics.



East Asia

In **China**, the Global Security Initiative (GSI) is promoted as an approach to balance international development and security. The competition with the US is viewed as a major challenge, impacting various bilateral and multilateral relationships. There are concerns that the US can create a security trap by escalating tensions and diverting resources from development to security in the region.

In **Japan**, there are challenges in tracking and ensuring accountability for expanded defence cooperation initiatives in the Indo-Pacific region. There is also limited knowledge of defence issues among parliamentarians, which poses challenges for effective parliamentary oversight.

In **South Korea**, the declining birth rate leads to questions about maintenance of its military force, and South Korea is exploring options like reserve forces and unmanned weapons. Fierce political rivalry between major parties is an obstacle to effective security sector governance. In addition, South Korea faces several geopolitical challenges. The Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between Russia and North Korea raises concerns about potential Russian involvement in a conflict on the Korean peninsula. The escalating tensions in Taiwan and the broader US-China competition also risk that South Korea might be drawn into a conflict over the South China Sea, a crucial trade route for South Korea, where potential disruptions could hurt South Korea's economy.

In **Mongolia**, the neutral position towards its neighbours is seen as an advantage in potentially mediating conflicts and contributing to regional stability. Despite these positive relations, Mongolia still faces internal security issues that require attention to strengthen its democratic institutions and ensure political stability

In **Taiwan**, strained relations with mainland China are the main factor affecting Taiwan's security. Increasing Chinese military activity near the Taiwan Strait, poses a significant threat. The breakdown of the tacit median line in the Taiwan Strait and frequent Chinese military manoeuvres escalate security concerns for Taiwan. Taiwan is increasing its defence budget, invests in asymmetrical warfare capabilities, strengthens reserve forces, and focuses on societal resilience. The absence of meaningful dialogue between Taiwan and mainland China hinders the resolution of tensions and poses significant risks.



Regional security challenges and hotspots

This session addressed several prominent security issues across the Asia-Pacific region, especially from the perspective of potential entry points for SSG/R support.

Myanmar

The civil war in Myanmar continues with high intensity. Guns are primarily smuggled into Myanmar from southern Thailand and across the Myanmar-India border, with some weapons even originating from conflict zones like Afghanistan and Syria. Drug money plays a significant role in financing these arms purchases, particularly for groups involved in the production and trafficking of methamphetamine and other synthetic drugs.

The widespread involvement of individuals in ethnic armed groups has resulted in a profound radicalization of Myanmar society. Every family has at least one member involved in armed conflict. This militarization of society is an obstacle to pursuing alternative pathways to peace.

While there is widespread support for federalism in Myanmar, there is no clarity and consensus on its definition and implementation. The concept of local administration is a more practical starting point for addressing the country's political and ethnic divisions. Strengthening local administrative structures could provide a pathway toward greater autonomy and power-sharing.

The emergence of scamming centres in Myanmar, particularly in areas controlled by ethnic armed groups, is a security problem. These centres engage in various illegal activities, including online gambling, cryptocurrency scams, and human trafficking, attracting international workers who are often exploited and subjected to forced labour. The profits contribute to financing the war.

External actors, particularly China, are influencing the Myanmar military. China's economic and political leverage allows it to extract concessions and shape policy decisions. Others, including India, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, also exert influence, albeit to a lesser extent.

The discussion concluded with a consideration of potential pathways for change in Myanmar. There is hope for a democratic transition, but historically speaking, wars rarely end and seamlessly lead to democratic transitions. The willingness of the military to embrace reforms hinges on its institutional and political survival, while the resistance movements demand the end of the military's political role.

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is grappling with a severe economic crisis, exacerbated by corruption and mismanagement under the previous Rajapaksa regime. This crisis fuelled widespread protests, forcing the then President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to resign and flee the country. Ranil Wickremesinghe was appointed as President to lead a caretaker government until the election of a new president. While his appointment was intended to provide stability, Wickremesinghe's leadership faced challenges due to widespread public dissatisfaction with the political elite. It paved the way for a surprise victory by Anura Kumara Dissanayake, the leader of the National People's Power (NPP), a relatively small political party. Dissanayake went on to win Sri Lanka's eighth presidential election, marking a significant shift in the country's political landscape, which has historically been dominated by traditional political parties and a few family dynasties.

The protests that toppled the Rajapaksa government were largely organized and driven by a "virtual class" of citizens using social media. This can have implications on democratic processes as online activism can undermine established mechanisms for political change. Dissanayake, along with his NPP coalition, gained traction by presenting themselves as a credible alternative focused on fighting corruption and addressing economic challenges.

The incoming NPP-led coalition faces the task of addressing the economic crisis, tackling corruption, and implementing necessary reforms. Given Dissanayake's background as a politician trained in Marxist ideology, many are cautious about how he will address Sri Lanka's economic crisis and manage the country's negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Furthermore, the lack of experience within the new government raises questions about its ability to manage the political transition. In addition, the new government will need to navigate carefully the complex geopolitical landscape, particularly in managing relationships with India and China. Balancing domestic interests with external pressures will be crucial for ensuring stability and securing international support.

There are several key areas requiring security sector reform, including military rightsizing, addressing human rights violations, improving transparency and accountability, and promoting community policing. The lack of progress on reconciliation and transitional justice following the end of the civil war in 2009 remains a pressing concern. Past human rights abuses need to be addressed, and measures should be put in place to foster lasting peace and social cohesion.

Afghanistan

Since the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan in August 2021, the country has encountered social, political, and economic challenges. The withdrawal of US and NATO forces, coupled with the collapse of the Afghan government, triggered an economic crisis and deepened humanitarian suffering. Although some neighbouring countries have chosen to engage with the Taliban regime, Afghanistan remains largely isolated due to severe human rights abuses, particularly against women and girls. The most significant deterioration has been that of women's rights, with strict bans on education, work with NGOs, and access to public spaces. Political freedoms have also been curtailed, as the Taliban have outlawed political parties, suppressed dissent, and intensified censorship, leading to a controlled media environment.

Economically, the Taliban's return resulted in the significant reduction of international aid, a key financial lifeline, leading to widespread poverty and unemployment. The absence of foreign support, alongside frozen central bank assets of Afghanistan, has severely hampered any prospects for recovery. The crisis has worsened access to essential services like healthcare and access to clean water, affecting millions of Afghans. While the Taliban have managed to improve certain security and infrastructure projects, such as reducing narcotics cultivation and rebuilding transport networks, these gains are overshadowed by their exclusionary and repressive policies.

Afghan public opinion remains divided, with some segments—particularly in rural areas—supporting the Taliban's rule as a victory for self-determination, while many, especially women and minorities, resist their form of governance. Given the regime's rigid stance, especially on gender rights, international efforts to pressure the Taliban into reforms have had limited success. A more pragmatic approach would be to focus on humanitarian assistance and engaging with Afghan civil society groups in exile and resistance groups to promote long-term security sector reform and governance capacity, without necessarily recognizing the Taliban government. This strategy would aim to improve the lives of Afghan citizens while supporting an inclusive, democratic future.

South China Sea

The discussion on the South China Sea offered perspectives from the Philippines, Taiwan, and China.

The Philippines is concerned over China's assertive actions in the South China Sea, citing incidents of harassment, collisions with resupply ships, and China's disregard for the 2016 arbitration ruling in favour of the Philippines. The Philippines is actively strengthening its military



partnerships with allies, conducting exercises, and acquiring equipment to bolster its defence capabilities in the region. Despite these actions, the Philippines sees the importance of maintaining peace and stability, and is bilaterally working with China to manage tensions and find common ground.

Taiwan emphasizes its historical claim to Taiping Island in the South China Sea. Taiwan expresses concern about China's island-building efforts, particularly the construction of military installations on artificial islands, which have altered the regional balance of power. It believes that any conflict in the South China Sea would have severe economic and security implications for the entire region, including potential blockades that could "suffocate Taiwan". It therefore hopes for a peaceful resolution through multilateral mechanisms, adherence to international law, and joint development initiatives.

On the other hand, China rejects the narrative of aggression, framing its actions as reactive and defensive responses to provocations by other countries. It disputes claims about its territorial ambitions within the nine-dash line, asserting that Western media has misrepresented China's position. China contends that actions such as crossing the median line in the Taiwan Strait are justified responses to provocative actions by others. In addition, it criticizes the Philippines for grounding a ship in Ayungin Shoal and for engaging in what China perceives as proactive and aggressive actions that violate a previously reached consensus.

The discussion in general underlines the fact that there is considerable potential for conflict and further escalation in a maritime region that is crucial for global trade. There appears to be a shared understanding of the need for strategic communication and dialogue, multilateral work, and track 2 engagement, in order to resolve disputes and promote stability.



Achievements and future network

This session discussed the achievements of the network since its creation in 2018/19, and discusses how future efforts can build on these achievements.

South Asia

Discussions in the South Asia group focussed on police reform; preventing violent extremism (PVE); youth, peace and security (YPS), especially in Nepal, Bhutan, India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh; climate change; cybersecurity; gender and inclusivity; humanitarian assistance and disaster response; nature conservation, with Nepal and Bhutan contributing to decarbonization efforts.

A significant joint achievement of the network was the publication of "Security Sector Responses to Covid-19 in the Asia-Pacific Region: Reflections on an Ongoing Health Crisis", a book that was published in December 2021.

The national working groups (NWGs) in South Asia played a crucial role in bringing diverse stakeholders around the table, including lawmakers, policymakers, civil society, and academia. They discussed threats to the region's security context, DDR, and broader topics such as accountability, transparency and the rule of law.

While the challenges (see session 6) of securing funding persisted, there are several opportunities, such as joint research projects at the sub-regional level, joint initiatives on topics such as climate governance and, when there is a specific interest, financial support from the international community. This group of partners desires to continue to support and participate in the network, building on the community of practise and expertise that has grown during the past six years.

Southeast Asia

In Southeast Asia, the network gained momentum before the COVID-19 pandemic, but faced challenges in adapting to the changing political context and dynamics in countries like Myanmar, Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia.

DCAF's efforts to focus on thematic areas such as maritime security worked well. Publications in some thematic areas helped influence policy discussions and featured in the regional network, including with regard to cybersecurity and border security. They generated interest from ASEAN as well. The network enabled discussions on different views on conflicts in the region, fostering trust because of DCAF's neutral status and Geneva-based broader perspective. Besides the thematic briefs, the national working groups also attempted to contribute to policy-making processes.

While no new donors were found to fund joint activities, some network partners successfully built on network activities to secure funding from regional donors.

East Asia

With the help of DCAF's facilitation, network members from East Asia pursued track-2 activities, involving participants from various backgrounds, including government, security services, NGOs, and parliament. Suggestions were made to continue the network on a self-paying basis within East Asia, potentially with a national partner institution and continued virtual or in-person meetings.

DCAF's publications are considered to be positive contributions, providing free and accessible dissemination of information. The sub-regional focus made it easier to find common ground among countries facing similar challenges, such as a low birth rate. While the interaction with other sub-regions was seen as beneficial for identifying common challenges and sharing solutions, the focus on East Asia helps reflect on peculiarities and dynamics that are unique to the region.

The NWGs were useful, although the frequency of meetings varied. Virtual meetings may help to increase participation and reach a wider audience, including for educational purposes. Some NWGs focused directly on SSG/R, while others started with general security issues before introducing SSG concepts.

Association with DCAF and the SSG Network identity enhanced outreach efforts, making it easier to approach donors and institutions such as EU delegations or national offices of the International Committee of the Red Cross. In this vein, the network contact with the project team of the EU's Enhancing Security Cooperation in and with Asia (ESIWA) project was useful as it triggered some collaborative work with network partners.¹ While no follow-up funding could be secured, the various individual activities and connections were very helpful and might generate future collaborative activities.



¹ ESIWA focused on thematic areas such as maritime security, cybersecurity, crisis management, confidence-building measures, and PVE.

Missed opportunities and the way forward

This session primarily focused on identifying missed opportunities of the network's activities since 2018 and potential areas for improvement.

Missed opportunities

A recurring theme across all three sub-regions is the difficulty in securing funding for projects. Among other difficulties, donors tend to prioritize humanitarian and development needs over security sector governance.

There are several examples where greater collaboration could have yielded more impactful outcomes, if the resources would have been available (and would in future be available) to pursue them. Examples include increased interaction between sub-regions to share best practices and solutions; joint projects between national working groups from different countries; more frequent sub-regional forums like those held in 2019; and using DCAF's expertise and network for peer review and backstopping.

The session pointed out the need for greater visibility for the SSG Network and its work, for instance by creating shorter, more accessible publications and using social media, by engaging international and global media agencies, and by highlighting the achievements and impact more clearly to potential donors. Associates, members and the DCAF secretariat would however depend on continued – and possibly additional – resources to pursue these suggestions.

While generally viewed as valuable, opportunities exist to enhance NWGs by better involving young people, facilitating more in-depth bilateral discussions between DCAF and partners, exploring virtual meetings to expand participation, and pre-selecting topics for focused discussions.

Specific sub-regional opportunities

In South Asia, there is space to better leverage the opportunities for climate governance in Nepal. This can be rolled out further. In addition, the contributions of NWG members should be acknowledged. One suggestion was for DCAF to present them with certificates to recognize their contributions.

In Southeast Asia, there is insufficient understanding of individual countries' entry points for government engagement on SSG. That can be improved with continued work on SSG Updates. There is also space for more translations of DCAF publications into local languages, and more training for members of NWGs to pitch projects to donors (if respective resources can be secured).

In East Asia, there is an opportunity to focus more on larger strategic and regional security issues, and to explore confidence-building measures, especially involving track one actors. Demographic challenges of low birth rates and aging populations should also be considered more carefully as our joint work continues.



Narrower network, wider association

This session focused on practical strategies and activities for advancing Security Sector Governance and Reform (SSG/R) in the Asia-Pacific region within the framework of a network association as funding for the current network initiative will formally come to an end in 2025. The discussions in plenary followed group work guided by the following questions:

- What can we do – as a network and on specific activities?
- Lobbying for investment in SSG/R and carrying out operational SSG/R work
- Promoting Good SSG in the Asia-Pacific as an investment in national and regional peace, development and stability?
- Promoting Good Security Sector Governance as a national and regional peace and confidence building measure?

Expanding the association's reach

By turning the network into an association, the reach can be extended considerably. This can be achieved by building on the existing network, targeted capacity building, communicating effectively, and developing alumni networks.

Participants emphasized the potential of capitalizing on established networks and events to promote SSG/R without incurring significant costs. This could involve opportunities to present at conferences and workshops organized by other members of the association and drawing on the expertise of other association members to support initiatives in the form of online presentations or other types of engagements.

In addition, there is space to provide training on SSG/R to wider audiences, such as to newly-elected legislators and their staff, especially in countries with new democracies or those experiencing regime changes; modular training programs that provide ongoing learning opportunities rather than one-time events; and training-of-trainers activities to build local capacity for delivering SSG/R training.

There is still a need to communicate more effectively the value of SSG/R. Proposals include creating short, engaging videos on SSG/R topics for platforms like TikTok to reach younger audiences; developing publications in regional languages to overcome language barriers and expand the reach; and producing content that showcases diverse perspectives on SSG/R issues, fostering dialogue among target audiences.

Lastly, participants underscored the value of networks and nurturing relationships with individuals who participated in previous events. It would be helpful to maintain an active alumni network to facilitate collaboration, knowledge sharing, and support for future initiatives. This would however require a secretariat with staff that would facilitate such services.

Extending the range of SSG/R stakeholders

There is considerable room to expand the scope of SSG/R stakeholders, notably by reaching out to the private sector and youth. The private sector could be engaged primarily through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives. Companies operating in sectors with significant security implications, such as extractive industries, could be targeted. The association could also attract private sector investment by highlighting the links between SSG/R and business interests.

Moreover, the network association could build further on its work done on youth, peace and security and better engage youth in its activities. It could include training programs that meet the needs and interests of young people, potentially incorporating innovative approaches such as gamification; promoting DCAF's online SSG/R courses to youth; emphasizing potential career

benefits and offering certificates; and developing SSG/R-related content tailored for social media platforms that are popular among youth.

Network members stressed the need to engage more actively with actors at multiple levels, such as members of parliament to ensure political support for SSG/R reforms; civil society organizations to foster grassroots engagement and promote inclusive SSG; and diplomats and military or police academies to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Securing funding

A recurring topic is the pressing need for funding. The participants offer several recommendations on how to be more successful in securing funding, emphasizing the need to communicate more effectively the impact of SSG/R and demonstrate return on investment.

First, the network association needs to explore diverse funding avenues beyond traditional donors to ensure the long-term sustainability of SSG/R initiatives. Potential sources would be private foundations, particularly those with a regional focus or interest in thematic areas related to SSG/R, and – possibly – religious organizations.

Second, the network association should better align SSG/R projects with thematic areas that are currently attracting significant funding. Examples include climate security and the clean energy transition in the security sector, or the women, peace, and security (WPS) agenda, possibly by leveraging AI technologies to advance WPS goals within SSG/R initiatives.

Third, the Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund supports ASEAN member countries' integration by funding projects in areas like maritime cooperation, disaster management, counterterrorism, and regional connectivity. This aligns with ASEAN's strategic goals, enhancing Japan-ASEAN relations and regional stability. In addition, the Japan Foundation provides scholarships to ASEAN scholars to promote academic exchanges, fostering cross-cultural understanding. Japan also funds collaborative research projects with ASEAN nations, focusing on shared global challenges and innovation, further strengthening ties and mutual development.



The network's future

During this session, participants laid out the structure of the future network association that will replace the current SSG Network from 2025 onwards. The feedback received by participants, including on a draft version of articles of association, will help DCAF in finalizing those articles and in drafting terms of reference. The participants met in sub-regional groups before reporting back in plenary, followed by discussion among the whole group. They addressed the following issues:

- Association membership on voluntary, non-funded basis
- The provision of a DCAF secretariat
- Commitment of current partners to continue as members
- The future of national working groups
- Membership criteria for new members
- Continuation of virtual meetings at sub-regional and regional levels
- Thematic virtual workshops
- Efforts to raise funds from donors and develop joint or national activities
- Sub-regional dimension and activities

Several points surfaced during discussions in all groups:

First, there is a perceived need to reframe the network and expand the SSG/R concept. For instance, the East Asian participants propose to link SSG/R more directly to the security-development nexus and focus more on governance. The discussion also focussed on its geographic label: Asia-Pacific or Indo-Pacific? As well, should the initiative be called “initiative”, “network”, “association”, or “network association”?

Second, discussions focussed on network and membership criteria. While all sub-regional groups see great potential for expanding the network, the current values and ethos should be retained, while maintaining easy and straightforward selection criteria. Considerations could be to require organizations to be legally registered and identified by the current national working groups, or to include individuals who work for research institutions, parliaments, and human rights commissions by using a recommendation-based invitation system. There was consensus on a case-by-case approach, and the need to offer the possibility of different levels of participation.

Third, as for the continuation of activities and collaboration, all would like to see tangible activities and knowledge products (and related fundraising) to continue. Both the Southeast Asia and East Asia groups would also like to see a continuation of the national working groups in alignment with national priorities, and, where possible, even annual and regional meetings (carried out virtually or, if financially feasible, in person), webinars, and workshops. These could be held in the margins of conferences and events with participation of association members.

Fourth, participants would like to see a continuation of fundraising activities. Promotion materials or successful fundraising examples from elsewhere could assist, although the participants placed more emphasis on networking and connecting members with cross-regional opportunities.

Fifth, on continued collaboration and information sharing, the different sub-regional groups see ways in which DCAF can continue to help shape sub-regional collaboration and support national working groups. For instance, in South Asia this can range from events on preventing violent extremism and SDG 16, to environmental conservation and protection. In East Asia, this could focus on the context of the South China Sea and the possible addition of new national members to the regional groups. More broadly, such information-sharing could also include the SSG Updates (should they be continued), which could be exchanged more broadly within the network and be accompanied by short introductory briefings.

The evolving structure of the network and its operational details are work in progress. However, this also comes with new challenges and opportunities, such as engaging with less accessible state security actors such as the military or police – where individual connections and private capacity participation might open new doors.

Closing remarks

During this session, the network associate from Japan offered a presentation about Japanese funding opportunities, then DCAF's Head of the Asia-Pacific Unit offered a summary of the main achievements of the forums and presented upcoming follow-up steps. The week was concluded by a tour de table during which each participants shared some concluding words.

This forum was important in that it marks the transition in 2025 from an initiative into an association with an expanded membership, without periodic in-person events. The structure will be wider and looser, which may also open the door to a wider range of stakeholders and topics. This also aligns with DCAF's new strategy that emphasizes the need to link SSG/R with development. The need for resources to fund future expansion remains.



The day ended with a round of appreciation and recognition, including personal reflections and takeaways from the forum. These reflections highlighted the significance of networking, knowledge sharing, and personal connections formed during the week. Many emphasized the comfortable and respectful atmosphere, which allowed for open dialogue and the exchange of diverse perspectives. Several participants noted the value of learning from

the experiences of “SSG/R peers” from various regions and backgrounds.

The forum concluded with a strong sense of commitment to continue the work of the initiative. The potential for future collaboration was cited as additional motivation. There is a clear desire to maintain these connections and explore new ways to collaborate, whether through future forums, workshops, or other joint endeavours.

Conclusion

The 2024 Asia-Pacific SSG Forum was an opportunity for experts and practitioners in SSG/R to come together and exchange their views and experiences. Over a week-long period from 7 to 11 October, participants discussed a wide range of SSG/R issues with great significance for the wider Asia-Pacific region, such as the evolving political situations in Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, the South China Sea, and Myanmar, entry points for security sector reform across the region.

This year's forum also marks the transition of a smaller but tighter network to a broader but looser association structure. The forum laid the groundwork for this transition, discussing amongst others future membership criteria and admission structure.

This moment of change also provided an opportunity for reflection. A considerable part of this year's sessions was dedicated to evaluating lessons and achievements from the past six years, as well as missed opportunities and ways in which the future network association can improve over the current network.

The most important outcome of this forum is the trust and constructive spirit shared among the network's members. Few platforms exist where participants from so many different backgrounds, sometimes with significant underlying international or domestic tensions, can speak openly about security issues and the role that governance can play in improving the functioning of national security sectors across this large region. Their commitment to maintaining these connections is an important pillar of continued cooperation and collaboration.



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