

The Statement of North-East Asian Civil Society 2020

Final

20th, October 2020 Virtual

We, participants from civil society organizations (CSOs) in China, Japan, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea¹, welcome the 4th North-East Asian Multi-stakeholder Forum on Sustainable Development Goals (‘NEA SDGs MSH Forum’) organized by United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP) on 3rd and 4th November 2020, and appreciate UNESCAP East, North-East Asia (ENEA) Office for hosting this forum.

Responding to the NEA SDGs Forum, the CSO session was organized on 20th October, which was to provide a space for NEA CSOs to share their stories and voices about the agenda of the 2021 HLPF before the NEA SDGs Forum, and to prepare its collective voice as this statement which will be submitted to the UN at sub-regional and regional levels².

Our world is clearly reaching its final limits and is facing relatively new international threats such as climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic. These issues have been exaggerating the old vulnerability of our world such as inequality, poverty, insecurity, hunger, and armed conflict. Meanwhile, such emergent issues have also reminded us of the accelerated solidarity and immediate actions at all levels for implementing SDGs as a road map for our survival.

Toward sustainable and resilient recovery from the pandemic, we hereby call on all the stakeholders to have much stronger ties and accelerate much more actions that promote synergy among the dimensions of the society, economy, environment, and science and technology. Also, we emphasize that planning, implementing, and reviewing all measures must be in democratic mechanism and governance among multi-stakeholders at local, national, sub-regional levels.

In the light of these common values among the CSOs in North-East Asia, we urge all the stakeholders to be responsible for the SDGs' achievement and recovering from the pandemic to take these proposals below into serious consideration to ensure the future we want, and the North East Asia region we need.

¹ CSO Representatives from Russian Federations and Democratic People’s Republic of Korea were absent from the CSO Session due to circumstances including technical problems.

² Total 108 CSOs from China, Japan, Korea, and Mongolia participated in the CSO session. 38 volunteers, largely youths from 4 countries, including country focal points, contributed to the work of communication, documenting and translation to local languages, and drafting the NEA CSO position paper.

Promoting sustainable and inclusive economic recovery

Current Status

1. Although economic growth is strengthening North-East Asian countries, there are still challenges remained due to the outbreak of COVID-19 and other factors;
2. Economic growth led to destruction of the environment. States are making efforts for environmental protection but the implementation needs to be assessed. For example, the government of China put environmental strategies and legislative frameworks on national and local levels to develop market-oriented and diversified compensation mechanisms for ecological conservation. In case of Mongolia, important policies for sustainable development such as green development strategies or state policy on governance and decentralization are on paper and far from bringing real results;
3. Vulnerable populations are hit hardest by the outbreak of COVID-19, and existing inequalities are widened;
 - a. The outbreak of COVID-19 brought a huge damage to the economy. An increase of unemployment rate and a decrease of income are observed in each state; Non-regular employees are more likely to face unemployment than regular employees. More low-income households tend to experience a decrease in monthly income. According to UNDP Mongolia, vulnerable populations such as young households, migrants, disabled, single mothers have experienced a decrease in income. In addition, Self-employed, female oriented households and agriculture households have been significantly impacted;
 - b. Widened inequality makes it hard to access social services. Digital divide of education for children and youths is seen due to the ownership of digital devices. Health care accessibility such as lack of hospital equipment, protective items, quarantine housing, and communications infrastructure is also conspicuous;
 - c. Economic/social insecurity, lock-down, social distancing, shrinkage of care services increased violence and abuse against vulnerable groups in society such as women, children, youths, elderly and people with disabilities.

Solutions and Recommendations

4. Considering these related challenging situations, we call on all stakeholders for actions below;
 - a. Place the SDGs at the centre of the COVID-19 response/recovery to introduce measures for economic and social inclusion that leave no one behind, including the future generations;
 - b. Initiate economic stimulus actions to widening social protection to ensure the livelihoods and wellbeing of most marginalized population including women, children, youths, and people with disabilities;
 - c. Mobilize whole-of-government action to advance policy and institutional coherence as well as mobilize whole-of-society-action including private sector and CSOs for

- implementation of SDGs and maximize synergies and minimize trade-offs, balance domestic and international priorities, and address long-term effects of policies;
- d. Strengthen governance systems such as financial prudence, devise strategies for smart schooling, delivery of health care services, and support for firms especially SMEs.

Protecting people and reducing inequality

Current Status

5. Vulnerable persons and/or groups cannot take care of themselves enough because of their vulnerability, which resulted from structural obstacles and more fundamentally, unfair governance and policies without any systematic roundtable among multi-stakeholders;
 - a. Domestic Violence (DV) increased remarkably during the COVID-19 pandemic, and victim's situation has been getting worse because of difficulties of accessing service; In the case of China, 24.7% of married women have suffered from domestic violence by husband. To be specific, verbal insults, financial control, and sexual harassments have increasingly happened. It is one of the noticeable tendencies that most violence has occurred in digital space and home;
 - b. Youths have also been in critical situations, such as job insecurity, discontinuing education, mental health concerns, discriminations, prejudices, and gender violence. In cases of Japan, 1 in 13 students that lost or have less opportunities for part time jobs, considered leaving school³, because they often depend on their income from part time jobs as their school fees;
 - c. People with disabilities have threatened their fundamental rights to caring or personal assistance, mobility, and education. Furthermore, collapse of the nursing and medical care system and severe shortages of medical resources have led to attempts to “prioritize” standards on life. For example, the elderly are more deprioritized rather than the younger when equipped with artificial respirators. Such selection of life depending on a patient's age, disability or social status violates the dignity of the patient.

Solutions and Recommendations

6. Considering these related challenging situations, we call all stakeholders, including government and ministries of each country, private sectors and CSOs, for actions based on the principle of “Leave No One Behind” below;
 - a. Implement social policies fully respecting the principle of “Leave no one behind” in all sectors and aspects including education and health service, equality, and non-discrimination;
 - b. Ensure and expand space for CSOs and vulnerable people to engage in decision-making processes at all levels of national, sub-regional, regional, and global

³KYODO NEWS “Coronavirus forces 1 in 13 students in Japan to consider quitting: survey” April, 2020
URL: <https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2020/04/3e4502b6c22f-virus-forces-1-in-13-students-in-japan-to-consider-quitting-survey.html>

levels in the role of empowering those on the periphery of society and reflecting their voices in policy decisions which directly affect their lives, delivering needed support to people in difficult situations, and serving as a nodal point, bringing together various stakeholders;

- c. Refine current laws and policies to be more effective; eradicate Gender Based Violence (GBV) in the workplace, provide related law on duty to employers;
- d. Provide financial and material aids to vulnerable people when distributing of relief supplies on street-level;
- e. Enhance the quality of online-based education by ensuring equal and continuous access to digital device for students to be able to keep on learning, and more fundamentally, not to suffer from digital gaps;
- f. Cooperate with ministries, CSOs, companies, educational institutions, and other stakeholders, also enhance mental support for vulnerable people including women, children and youths by listening to concerns that they recently have in the digital spaces as well as in their lives, and ensuring social protection floor if they need;
- g. Conduct concentrate empirical research with rights-based approaches, curriculum development as an academic; fulfill the development of “Data to Leave No One Behind” , which is mentioned in “the Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2020” by ESCAP;
- h. Improve capabilities of service, public education, advocacy, as well as cooperation and solidarity; meet with civil organizations continuously by knowing what they really want and need; also promote continuous engagement of NGOs in solidarity with the UN system.

Reducing stress on the environment through green economic development

Current Status

7. An increase in domestic waste;
 - a. During COVID-19 outbreak, in case of Korea, the waste from food delivery and online shopping has hugely surged to 31%, compared to the same period of last year⁴. Most food containers were wasted unclean, so it cannot be reused or recycled. With increasing plastic usage, using plastic cups for to-go is banned from cafes;
 - b. Recyclable resources from the waste surpassed the standard of waste disposal in public facilities, 5000t per day, and that is about an 11.2% increase from last year⁵. In a survey for asking the subjects in charge of the reusable plastic issue, by Seoul Digital Foundation, what gets the highest score was cooperations with 4.69 points;
 - c. The current waste issue is profound as Mongolia ranks 12th in the waste issue in the world and produces about 3kgs of garbage per person a day. The central waste point has increased from 415 in 2016 to 639 in 2018, and total disposed waste has also risen 1.5times over the period. There has been a continuous effort of waste

⁴ Korea Federation for Environmental Movements

⁵ Korea Federation for Environmental Movements

management experts by participating in national/international meetings and implementing projects for disposal for the last 20 years.

8. Too low an awareness for establishing a systematic waste management system;
 - a. There is a shortage of professionals who have sufficient knowledge and understanding of waste management for reuse and recycle in the process of policy-making.
 - b. Both civil society and industry have low levels of awareness of waste management for reuse and recycle.

9. The absence of a safety net for workers in the delivery industry;
 - a. There are many industrial accidents that occur in the delivery industry. It is because most workers aren't guaranteed a positive work environment. For example, the delivery workers work for 14 hours per day, which is well above the average working time of 8 hours in Korea. Furthermore, most workers are in charge of both sorting and delivering items because the companies don't hire people to exclusively sort in order to save the cost.

10. The severity of air pollution
 - a. The level of air pollution is very flexible depending on seasonal change in Mongolia. Unprocessed coal-burning stoves which are essential to heat traditional Ger dwelling homes in the sub-zero temperatures. 726 thousand cars are used in Mongolian public and 90% of these are second-hand cars and/or have bad fuel quality.
 - b. Additionally, since one-third of all greenhouse gas emissions are composed of CO₂ from forestry and other land uses, fluorocarbons, methane and others, other types and sources have been emitted as well as energy-derived CO₂⁶. Hence, it is strongly stressed that all types and sources of greenhouse gas emissions be targeted for mitigation measures;
 - c. In Mongolia, for example, power plants take around 6% of air pollution cause analysis. Soil-pollution gets worsened because of inconvenient waste management/institutions. Government is implementing the policy for air pollution reduction through ceasing the use of raw coals and subsidized electricity used by households. The National Committee on Reduction of Air Pollution formed by an ordinance of the Prime Minister of Mongolia is taking various measures for the reduction of air pollution.

Solutions and Recommendations

11. Understanding plastic waste challenges, we call for action to all stakeholders including governments in order to conduct integrated health approaches below;
 - a. Raise awareness of the drastic increase of plastic uses during and after the COVID-19 pandemic;
 - b. Encourage use of the reusable bags, masks, packaging, and cups;

⁶ Figure SPM.2 graphic from IPCC(2014), "AR5 Synthesis Report" URL : <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/syr/synthesis-report/>

- c. Limit fundamental overproduction of plastic products;
 - d. Promote instructions of proper ways to dispose of recyclable plastics through various routes.
12. We also call for action to all stakeholders in order to change a waste management policy for reuse and recycle and address challenges and financial system;
- a. Organize training and advocacy including governments, international organizations and agencies, and major groups and other stakeholders(MGoS);
 - b. Coordinate work of decision-makers for the framework concept of long-term sustainable development goals at all the levels of each country as well as those of sub-region, region, and global.
13. Acknowledging the delivery industry’s challenges, we recommend all the actions below;
- a. Establish law and legislation related to the industry’s logistics;
 - b. Assign more integrated and distributed work for the sorting process;
 - c. Raise commission fee for delivery workers.

Closing the digital gap and strengthening multi-stakeholder engagement governance for Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID- 19 Pandemic

Current Status

14. Effective governance with the principle of multi-stakeholder engagement and partnership is crucial for planning, implementation and evaluation of SDGs. For example, a whole-government approach has been taken in Japan. Japan's SDGs Promotion Headquarters is headed by the Prime Minister with all of the ministers as members, pursuing SDGs planning and implementation under the SDGs Implementation Guiding Principles revised last December. SDGs Promotion Roundtable, which is the multi-stakeholder advisory group set by the government including civil society and representatives of each ministries, monitors and gives advice for the policy development, implementation and evaluation of the Government. It has been more active under the new Guiding Principles.
15. Likewise, in Mongolia, the National Council on SDGs led by the Prime Minister. The Parliament Subcommittee on SDGs was formed under the Economic Standing Committee. The National Development Agency is in charge of compliance, planning and implementation of SDGs with the national policies and programs, National Statistics Office is responsible for the development of methodology to evaluate SDGs implementation and reporting. However, there is a lack of institutionalized structure and mechanism for multi-stakeholder engagement and there is not so much engagement from the side of CSOs to the National Council and Parliament Subcommittee on SDGs.

16. On the other hand, there is a case that has not yet established a comprehensive SDGs follow-up system in this sub-region. Still the responsibility of SDGs follow-up is taken by the Ministry of Environment in Korea, and many issues of SDGs are left behind without a proper and integrated coordination. The Korean government still has less interest in renovating the SDGs governance system despite the trend of governance renovation under the top decision making unit around the world. The multi-stakeholder engagement mechanism for the SDGs in Korea is hardly put on the table as a main issue in this context.
17. Meanwhile, it is concerned that some governments of this sub-region have been using SDGs for promoting “export-oriented” economic growth as well as science and technology innovation without any sufficient consciousness of human rights, more specifically reduction of poverty, inequality, and explanation of digital labour. Such policies by digitalization often lack democratic, participatory, accountable and transparent governance and inclusive growth such as social welfare and public education as well. For example, in case of the “Digital New Deal” policy in Korea, it has economic trends towards corporate profits mostly, in an air of economic growth but a lack of SDGs.;
18. Furthermore, digital transformation often entails three risks in market place: reverse discriminations resulting from unfair competition between domestic and multinational IT companies, and the abuse of big data and privacy risks in FinTech and BigTech Industries, and possible market failure such as oligopolies, monopsony, and monopolization;
19. In addition, the absence of technology ethics is also problematic in terms of the absence of freedom of expression such as hate speech, and bias and discriminations among human beings and by AI including international discriminations. For example, anonymous defamations are hard to be regulated, and AI Systems, such as a recognizer, are able to discriminate against the human, as designed by developers intentionally;
20. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the delay of digitalization has been exposed through implementing measures against the pandemic. For example, in a case of Japan, when doctors report COVID-19 by doctors, they send handwritten diagnoses to public health centres via fax;

Solutions and Recommendations

21. Given these challenging situations, we call on all stakeholders including national and local government for actions as follows;
 - a. Make more active efforts to voluntary local and national reviews by each local and national government; and establish and promote more effective follow-up mechanism and multi-stakeholder engagement platform such as a multi-stakeholder forums at local national and sub-regional as well as regional, and global levels;
 - b. Adopt basic principles of digital corporations, guidelines to protect the rights of workers, farmers, youths and women in digitalization of manufacturing, agriculture and services;

- c. Come up with a study on the contributions and value of indigenous and traditional knowledge, often passed on through women, in sectors and areas that are threatened by digitalization such as countryside area and agriculture sector;
- d. Update national taxation laws and global policies to cover the scope and nature of e-commerce and digital platforms and ensure that public finances generated will support social protection measures; and also ensure inclusive digital system including social welfare and public education;
- e. Encourage compliance with safety soundness and transparency for the limitation of available use for big data in BigTech and FinTech Industries;
- f. Strengthen the institutional commitments to sustainable production and consumption in the digital economy; and also promote the transboundary nature of the digitalization with governance mechanism at sub-regional, regional and global levels with universal state memberships with ensuring accountability, transparency and liability among actors.

Endorsement (Alphabetical order)

[Japan]

Japan Center for Sustainable Environment and Society (JACSES)

Japan Civil Society Network on SDGs (SDGs Japan)

Japan NGO Center for International Cooperation (JANIC)

Japan Youth Platform for Sustainability (JYPS)

[Mongolia]

Mongolian CSO Network on SDGs

[Republic of Korea]

Incheon Dream Forest Citizens Organization(IDFCO)

Incheon Water And Future (IWAF)

Korea SDGs Network⁷

The Korea Center for Sustainable Development

[Individuals]

Koh Moon Hyun, Professor at Soongsil University

⁷ Total 30 NGOs and national coalitions covers 17 SDGs: Kyunggi Women's Associations United, Korea Women's Associations United(KWAU), Korea Women's Hot Line, Open Network, Korea Differently Abled Federation(KDAF), Korea Disabled Forum(KDF), Disability Discrimination Acts Solidarity in Korea, YMCA, Thinkerbell Korea, Korea Fair Trade Organization, Korea Social Economy Network(KSEN), CIATE KOREA, Global Citizen Leadership Academy, Joongrang Cultural Institute, Korea Center for City and Environment Research(KOCER), Korea Health Welfare Social Cooperative Federation(KHWSCF), PEACEMOMO, The Korea Center for Sustainable Development(KCSD), Green Environment Youth Korea(GEYK), Green Future, Green Energy Strategy Institute, Green Korea United(GKU), Korean Women's Environmental Network(KWEN), Ulsan's Network for River and Watershed, Korea Federation for Environmental Movements(FoE Korea), Citizen's Movement for Environmental Justice(CMEJ), Korea LOHAS Association, Korea NGO Council for Overseas Development Cooperation (KCOC), Korea Civil Society Forum on International Development Cooperation (KoFID)