

The Statement of North-East Asian Civil Society 2021

Final

October 22, 2021 Virtual

1. We, the participants from civil society organizations (CSOs) in Japan, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea, and the Russian Federation, welcome the North-East Asian Multi-stakeholder Forum on Sustainable Development Goals ('NEA SDGs MSH Forum') organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP) on 28th and 29th November 2021 and appreciate UN ESCAP East, North-East Asia (ENEA) Office for hosting this forum.
2. Responding to the NEA SDGs Forum, the CSO session was organized on 22nd October, which was to provide a space for NEA CSOs to share their views and voices about the implementation of the SDGs included in the agenda of the 2022 HLPF before the NEA SDGs Forum, and to prepare its collective voice in this statement which will be submitted to the UN at sub-regional and regional levels.¹
3. Our world is clearly reaching its final limits and is facing relatively new international threats such as climate change impacts and the COVID-19 pandemic. These issues have been exaggerating the old vulnerability of our world such as inequality, irresponsible behavior towards the environment and security issues. 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.
4. Toward sustainable and resilient recovery from the pandemic, we hereby call on all the stakeholders to have much stronger cooperation 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, involving all the multi-stakeholders at local, national, sub-regional levels.
5. 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 Total 90 CSOs from Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Mongolia and Russia in the CSO session: 22 volunteers for working group 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.

Review of the CSO engagement mechanism at sub-national, national and sub-regional level

Current Status

6. Strategic use of multi-stakeholder mechanisms is the key for the change in terms of 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 December 2019. 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. Out of 14 members, 3 representatives of civil societies are included. Japan has made some progress under the new Guiding Principles, including VNR of Japan in HLPF 2021 with the cooperation between the government and civil society. However, there is no public forum to discuss the SDGs implementation among a variety of key stakeholders with vulnerabilities. Civil society has been calling on the necessity of public forum on SDGs with diverse participation of such key stakeholders.
7. In Mongolia, there are several positive efforts; the national-level targets and indicators (NLTI) for SDGs were developed with participation of different stakeholders including CSOs, and a panel discussion at the recent high-level conference was targeted to get the NLTI adopted. Also, the chair of the subcommittee on SDGs of the State Great Khural indicated to introduce a Multi Stakeholder Platform for Sustainable development. However, there is a need to ensure regular and effective function of this new mechanism as well as the National Committee on SDGs led by the Prime Minister. Both of these mechanisms need to be able to review sector policies, their implementation at local level regularly to integrate NLTI of SDGs in policies, to advise for better policy coherence and coordination, eliminate or avoid conflicts and contradictions between sector policies. There is a space to improve in dealing with the increase of corruption risk, bribery and conflict of interest in Mongolia, inability to form accountable, effective and transparent institutions, the difficulty to deliver inclusive participatory decision, lack of sustainable activities to implement SDGs and the law on access to information and the law on public participation in law making process is yet to be implemented.
8. On the other hand, there is a case that has not yet established a multi-stakeholder comprehensive SDGs follow-up system in this sub-region. The responsibility of SDGs follow-up is taken by the Ministry of Environment in Korea, and many issues of SDGs are left behind without 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. It has been pending in the National Assembly for the past 5 years the bill on the Basic Law of Sustainable

Development that establishes the governance structure under the leadership of the president and regular review system at national and local level including multi-stakeholder engagement mechanism. The multi-stakeholder engagement mechanism for the SDGs in Korea is hardly put on the table as a main issue in this context.

9. Russia so far did not include SDGs in any governmental processes. Today there is no document exclusively devoted to the implementation of the SDGs, nor a separate road map for their implementation. Also there is a lack of a coordinating state structure responsible for the implementation of the SDGs in the country. Additionally, there is no regular report on the implementation of the SDGs, despite the fact that the UN recommends presenting an annual review on attaining the 2030 Agenda, supplemented by sub-national reviews, in parliament. At the same time Russia does not have any engagement mechanisms established for civil society. Moreover, civil society is currently experiencing tremendous pressure and threat from the government for any international cooperation. Many organizations and even activists are marked as 'international agents' by the Ministry of Justice without any court process which imposes restrictions on the work of civil society and threatens it with potential imprisonment of most active members.

Solutions and Recommendations

10. Given these challenging situations, we call on all stakeholders including national and local governments for actions as follows;
 - a. Establish a legal system for SD and SDGs implementation at national and local level and institutionalize Multi-stakeholder engagement mechanisms with official SDGs follow-up systems;
 - b. Make more active efforts to institutionalize local and national reviews by each local and national government; and establish and promote more effective, accessible and transparent follow-up mechanism and multi-stakeholder engagement platform such as a multi-stakeholder forums and annual SDGs implementation reports with appropriate indicators at local national and sub-regional as well as regional, and global levels;
 - c. Strengthen the institutional commitments to the decision making for the SDGs implementation and acceleration; 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.

Promoting quality education and empowerment of women

Current Status

11. Vulnerable persons and groups are marginalized in medical and educational conditions, which resulted from structural obstacles. More fundamentally, unfair governance and policies and the COVID-19 pandemic worsen the situation;
 - a. While distance education is inevitable in the COVID-19 pandemic, it increases the education inequality gap due to differences in the learning/teaching environment. Children from poor families are not able to access distance learning, and children with disabilities are no longer receiving additional support. In Mongolia, School teachers lack any form of support and assistance; A huge majority (73.3%) of Mongolian survey respondents had no teaching experience in distance learning, 75.2% did not attend any training, while 20% never used electronic media; In Korea, it is estimated that 2,030,000 students are experiencing a learning deficit, including the vulnerable and the digitally excluded people.
 - b. Education of SDGs also leaves room for development. In Russia, lack of higher education degree programs in sustainable development hampers the process of national expertise-building; while in Japan, there is also a lack of focus on adult and community education on SDGs compared to primary to upper secondary education. In Mongolia, a lack of global citizenship education content in textbooks and lack of supplementary materials were also found to be issues, with lack of teacher training and lack of support to implement GCED.
12. The COVID-19 pandemic pushed back the progress made toward Gender Equality. UN Women warned as early as the COVID-19 started to spread globally in the first quarter of 2020 that there should be gender appropriate countermeasures to the pandemic. The UN agency warned of the risks that the COVID-19 would potentially bring to women such as 1) higher risk of infection as over 70% of medical practitioners are women globally, 2) more severe economic impact on women as more women work with non-permanent contract or under unstable conditions, 3) more unpaid care burden on women, 4) increased risks of domestic violence and sexual exploitation, 5) with the high strain on the medical services due to the pandemic, the funds and resources would be diverted from Sexual and Reproductive Health service which is critical to women and girls current and future lives. Nearly a year later, the Secretary General Antonia Guterres said “the COVID-19 pandemic has the face of women.” confirming UN women’s grim warning came true in many parts of the world.
 - a. COVID-19 also exacerbated the hardships for women in vulnerable situations in Japan. 56% of women in the workforce are employed as non-regular employees with fixed term contracts, thus making them prone to be laid off. Unemployment and poverty affect health including mental health as well. In the pandemic women’s suicide number

increased. In Japan, 6,976 women took their lives last year, nearly 15 percent more than in 2019.

- b. Lack of access to SRH service and information became more pronounced during the pandemic. In Japan, without effective comprehensive sexuality education in place in the compulsory education curriculum, the number of calls from teenagers received at the pregnancy SOS telephone service increased. Limited access to the emergency contraceptive pills posed a challenge for many women and adolescent girls. With increased poverty among women and girls as well as people who menstruate, period poverty became ever more prominent, preventing them further from social participation during their period.
- c. Pregnant women faced challenges in accessing health services such as being asked to provide COVID-19 test results when accessing hospital for delivery. For people with low income, even though they were in close contact with confirmed cases, they are unable to get COVID-19 tests. This situation makes pregnant women more vulnerable to getting infected with the coronavirus from their family members, or reducing their possibility to seek timely health services, and getting diagnosed at an early stage if infected.

Solutions and Recommendations

13. 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. Develop a comprehensive program on e-learning transition, sustained training of teachers and learners, and family support for effective home learning.
 - b. Assess teacher workloads, coping mechanisms, and support during emergency situations; help teachers' transition to distance learning and assessment methods; ensure the provision of training and equipment support to teachers.
 - c. Significantly increase financing for education and mobilize resources to provide equitable, accessible, and quality education amidst and beyond the pandemic and put in place safe learning environments for all learners, especially the most marginalized.
 - d. To solve the problem of educational inequality, place a school social worker in every single school and make the student wellbeing support team in the school mandatory.
 - e. Ensure the transversal integration of global citizenship and SDGs education - across the curriculum at all grade levels.
 - f. Prompt financial support for young people with financial difficulties.
 - g. Set ESD indicators, data collection methods, and methods for evaluating the ESD plan.
 - h. Increase feminist leadership- Women, LGBTQI, PWD, Minority people in decision-making position, especially in politics.

- i. Improve access to quality Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) services. Ensure access to over-the-counter (OTC) emergency contraceptive pills
- j. Integrate Gender Studies, Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), and Digital Literacy, Government's public welfare system into the national compulsory education system.
- k. Provide timely health services for pregnant women at risk of coronavirus including treatment, safe isolating facilities, and transfer, and to ensure safe child delivery.
- l. Ensure gender mainstreaming in all aspects of policies as well as everyone's lives.
- m. Prepare for a future pandemic by making measures and policies with a gender lens to LNOB

Enhancing sustainable management and restoration of natural resources

Current Status

[Coastal and Marine Ecosystem]

14. Marine wastes management system based on the polluter pays principle and including local fisherfolk communities (ex. Korea),
In the case of Korea, generally it looks 95.2% of marine wastes are well collected by the government. However, left behind deposit marine wastes, largely fishing gears in the sea bottom that harms marine habitat and the marine wastes management system without a polluter pays principle are issues for the improved sustainable management of marine ecosystem. Most marine wastes are managed by government but ones in village fisheries management areas are in blind spot to manage. Good example to solve the issues is a local fisherfolk community-led marine waste management. In Tongyoung city, located in the southern part of Korea, a fisherfolk community has collected marine wastes every week since 2018 to protect marine biodiversity with support of local environmental NGOs. It has raised the awareness of fishermen, not only collecting wastes but also not dumping their fishing gear in the sea;
15. The national review system on biodiversity (ex. Japan),
The status of biodiversity in Japan is in very strong loss, says Japan Biodiversity Outlook 3, Summary for Policy Makers, 2021. Also noted that the most direct driver of biodiversity crisis are human activity such as development. The Marine Biodiversity Strategy of Japan, which has not been reviewed since its enactment in 2011, should be urgently revised to allow regular inspections and reviews, said in the review. Moreover, in Japan, a national review on biodiversity reveals that the term "Biodiversity" is recognized by about half of

citizens (51.8%), which implies that understanding toward biodiversity among the public is insufficient.

[Biodiversity in land]

16. Illegal development of natural resources (ex. Russia),

Regarding the real status of listed elements of the environment, it obviously results in totally exhaustive and corrupt management and use of forests, marine, mineral, land, agro and wildlife resources in Asian region of Russia. Actual special legislation for Advanced Development Territories (TOR), Vladivostok Free Port (Porto Franco) and free hectare opportunity over RFE creates a broad access for any transnational, national and criminal businesses to ignore basic national environmental and resource legislation and develop destructive mining, oil-gas, agro and other.

17. Hunting wildlife as an economic stimulus after the COVID-19 (ex. Mongolia),

The Mongolian government is preparing to propose a law to rebuild the economy in the wake of the COVID-19 epidemic. Unfortunately, Chapter 4 of the draft law, which aims to raise money by mass hunting rare and endangered species, is not entirely supportive. In Mongolia, hunting licenses are issued annually to certain species of about 20 species. Altai argali is the most popular hunting spot for tourists. It is an endangered species, and the law draft accepted for twice as much as hunting. The Mongolian Environmental CSOs Council has objected to this provision and submitted objection comments to the Parliament, the Government, and the President.

18. Air pollution (ex. Mongolia),

The country's high energy needs because of its long heating season, make Mongolia one of the most energy-intensive countries in the world. Energy sources are overwhelmingly coal-based with old technologies. Hence, the country has very high per capita emissions nearly 2.7 times greater than the global average. These coal-based emissions are more concentrated in urban areas where population density is higher and the adverse impacts on health are greater. Mongolia still suffers the worst impact of air pollution due to use of processed and unprocessed coal heating for Ger dwelling homes, and thousands of second-hand cars and/or have bad fuel quality.

Solutions and Recommendations

19. Based on impacts in biodiversity loss, we call for action to all stakeholders including city mayors, local governments and governments to promote policies for the restoration of natural resources;

- a. legal regulations need to be strengthened to prevent the influx of plastics, red soil and pollutants that threaten marine ecosystems into the sea, particularly focusing on their wastes from the fishing vessels like fishing gears;

- b. Support local fisherman-driven cleaning management and local fisherman participatory marine waste management;
- c. In order to improve the loss of biodiversity, it is necessary to raise people's sense of ownership of social transformation, and recreate of public hearings and environmental expertise for any resource use projects with free public access to its results;
- d. We call policy makers to develop and implement of laws and regulations for restoration and protection of natural resources (marine resource conservation, restoration loss of biodiversity, forest clearing, reforestation ...) for nature friendly way;
- e. Coordinate work of decision-makers for the framework concept and action/understanding of long-term sustainable development goals at all the levels of each country specially in local governments.

Endorsement (Alphabetical order)

[Japan]

Japan Civil Society Network on SDGs (SDGs Japan)

DPI-Japan (Disabled People International Japan)

Japan Center for Sustainable Environment and Society (JACSES)

Japanese Organization for International Cooperation in Family Planning (JOICFP)

Japan NGO Center for International Cooperation (JANIC)

Japan Youth Platform for Sustainability (JYPS)

Japan Women's Watch (JAWW)

Okayama Communication Network of the World Conference on Women

Peace Boat

YWCA of Japan

Yokohama NGO Network

[Mongolia]

Mongolian CSOs Network on SDGs²

Centre for Human Rights and Development (CHRD)

Mongolian Environment Civil Council

The Healthy City Network of Mongolia

[Republic of Korea]

Korea SDGs Network³

Korea Association of School Social Workers

Korea Center for Sustainable Development(KCSD)

² It is a loose platform involving a number of CSOs coalitions and networks such as "All for Education" Coalition, MONFEMNET National NGOs' Network, Food Coalition etc. and individual CSOs and individuals. Running facebook "Mongolian CSOs on SDGs" with 464 members

³ As of September 2021, total 477 CSOs covering 17 SDGs joined.

Korea Federation of Environmental Movement-Tongyoung/Geoje(KFEM-TG)

Korea Youth Platform for Sustainability (KYPS)

[Russian Federation]

Coalition for Sustainable Development of Russia (CSDR)⁴

Sustainable Development Solutions Network Youth Russia (SDSNYR)

⁴ Total 160 NGOs and 200 activists joined. The coalition includes representatives of Russian NGOs, educational institutions, research institutes, trade unions, civic activists, whose expertise covers all areas of sustainable development