



**Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism (APRCM)  
Position Paper to the Theme of APFSD and HLPF 2021**

## **Solidarity and System Change are the Antidotes to COVID-19**

### **Executive Summary**

Unless we deal with the systemic failures that render exploited groups more vulnerable, there will be no recovery for COVID-19.

The ESCAP SDGs Report 2021 shows that Asia Pacific is not on track to achieve most of Agenda 2030, and the pandemic has further pushed the region off-track. The pandemic presses the need to dismantle the neoliberal development model to realize a transformative, fairer and resilient future for all.

*Resilient and Sustainable Recovery from COVID-19 cannot be realized without **addressing systemic barriers** to sustainable development.* The crisis has exacerbated prevalent inequalities of wealth, power and resources exposing the violence of neoliberalism, corporatisation and capitalist hegemony hijacking our democracies, international economic, trade and monetary frameworks restricting state policy space, militarism breeding conflict, patriarchy widening authoritarianism across state and social institutions, and flawed governance marginalizing the poorest. The crisis has exposed the lack of political will across key strategic sectors like health, education and social protection, a decent standard of living, and a safe eco system. The crisis has uncovered globalized capitalism as the catalyst of calamities and proven the failure of neoliberal development at large.

HLPF's thematic and ministerial segments must analyse the systemic determinants of lacking progress. The process should focus on efficient recovery for developing, least developing and countries in special situations by reducing debt distress, curbing illicit financial flows, and protecting state policy space to safeguard public interest through fundamental reconfiguration of global economic, trade, tax, monetary and financial frameworks. Rather than pushing poor countries for domestic resource mobilization, multilateral processes should synergize taxation architecture to avoid massive tax evasions; help resist debt conditionalities designed to constrict public financing across key sectors; and, help redress hegemonic trade rules and agreements, with instruments like ISDS plundering billions of dollars away from nation states leaving no fiscal space for development or sustainability.

**On VNR**, the process needs to be democratized to avoid tokenistic representation and to involve subalternized voices for inclusive and transparent progress reviews. National VNR processes must recognize the potential of citizen-led and civil society generated data for measuring change.

**The HLPF**, needs an annual comprehensive review of all SDGs goals and must reassess the current clustered approach in the next HLPF cycle. There needs to be (i) Interim VNRs submissions to the regional forums and mechanism for VNR follow up reporting in the region; and (ii) Systematic integration of regional forum outcomes and perspectives into the HLPF with a continuous feedback loop into regional, sub-regional and national levels for efficient follow up.

Peoples movements, grassroots communities and civil society in Asia and the Pacific propose a clear vision of COVID-19 recovery. It emphasizes the possibility to realize a rights-based people-centered development

model that addresses inequalities of wealth, power and resources within and among countries, between rich and the poor, and between men and women as well as other marginalized groups. It proposes Development Justice - that strives for redistributive, economic, environmental, social and gender justice, and accountability to peoples - as the way forward for people and planet.

## **Regional Progress and Systemic Barriers to the Implementation of 2030 Agenda**

The ESCAP 2021 SDG progress report shows that, even before COVID-19, the region was not on track to achieve most of the 2030 Agenda. Under the present conditions, disrupted by a global pandemic, we have taken further steps back and the region is not on track to achieve ANY of the SDGs. This warrants a critical look at our development discourse. This is especially the case because countries across the region (and the world) will be facing a once-in-a-generation opportunity to invest in a greener and more just future to recover from the covid-crisis.

The backdrop is somber. Asia and the Pacific region has witnessed worsening inequalities, unprecedented levels of corporate capture, increasing threats of climate crisis and continued increase in land grabbing for development and infrastructure projects funded by International Financial Institutions. Patriarchy, embedded in social and cultural norms as well as economic policies, systemically limits women's bodies, work, decision-making power and opportunities. The region has witnessed rising conflicts between and within countries, the use of militarism and surveillance, resurgence of authoritarianism attacking human rights defenders and the 'closing down' of democratic spaces that prevent engagement and critical review towards a better future. These circumstances severely continue to undermine the ability to make the tough transformations needed with accountability, transparency and true participation.

The COVID-19 global pandemic is an unprecedented crisis and likely to be a defining moment in history. The United Nations says it is the greatest crisis the UN has ever faced. We've witnessed how COVID-19 exacerbated wealth inequality and poverty with additional 22 million to 25 million persons estimated to fall into working poverty (ILO), and global employment losses in 2020 of 114 million jobs relative to 2019. The ILO's Asia Pacific Employment and Social Outlook 2020 reported a larger decline in working hours and employment for women than men and young people have also been deeply affected by job losses. The loss of livelihoods and incomes and closure of educational facilities are keeping learners from poor families from participating in online education and other learning activities. Further, with the school closures, the World Food Programme noted that as many as 358 million children around the world are experiencing hunger, as they are missing out on their school meals on which they are dependent for their daily nutrition.

We've witnessed how autocratic measures are being taken that circumvent democratic and accountability processes in the emergency responses in many countries in Asia Pacific. Internationally agreed human rights standards and rights-based approach to the pandemic have been ignored by many governments. But countries in our region have shown that sustainable solutions to the pandemic are possible when people's voices and agency have been strengthened and heard.

We've also seen how COVID-19 exposes vulnerability of those who left furthest behind. Some of the vulnerability arises from who they are – older people, people with disabilities, people living with HIV, and people with existing health conditions. Some vulnerability arises from jobs that people do – essential workers, health workers who risk their health to serve others, farmers and fisherfolks. And some vulnerability arises from the failure of the existing systems to protect and respect human rights – people who live in communities without access to public health system, LGBTIQ, urban poor who cannot self isolate, migrant workers, precarious workers who are forced to continue working because they do not have the luxury of self isolation and have no access to sick leave. Casteism, racism, feudalism render Dalits and indigenous communities vulnerable and without adequate health rights. We've seen how women face multiple burdens in this pandemic as they deal with increased violence, increased household chores, bigger health responsibilities, even added teaching load, as they struggle to provide and care for their families.

We have also seen that even though global GHG emissions reduced during the widespread lockdowns the reduction constitutes only 7-8 percent. In fact to meet the 1.5 degree target set forth in the Paris Agreement will require annual GHG reductions of the same degree. It is clear that business-as-usual is impossible, and that serious changes are necessary in the way we “do” development. The following statement is based on an analysis of each of the SDGs under review this year (SDGs 1,2,3,8,10,12,13,16,17) in addition to analysis of other crucial issues related to peoples’ movements, sexual health and reproductive rights, financing and covid recovery and others. It is based on the Development Justice perspective, developed by regional civil society, and that is based on redistributive justice, economic justice, social and gender justice, environmental justice, and accountability to the people.

We, the 610 civil society organisations from 18 constituencies and in 38 countries across Asia and the Pacific, recognise that the pandemic is a tragedy of unprecedented proportions and will require responses unlike any governments are accustomed to. The crises have changed our societies, our economies, and our political systems forever. We cannot rely on existing systems to solve it and we can never go back to business as usual. The crisis has exacerbated the prevalent inequalities of wealth, power and resources exposing the violence of neoliberalism, corporatisation and capitalist hegemony hijacking our democracies. The crisis has exposed the lack of political will across key strategic sectors like health, education and social protection, a decent standard of living, and a safe eco system. The crisis has exposed the failure of globalised capitalism to deal with any crises. Unless we deal with the systemic failures that render exploited groups more vulnerable, there will be no recovery.

## **1. Asia Pacific CSOs position on Goal 1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16**

Our analysis and concrete recommendations for the goals reviewed in 2021 is rooted from Development Justice lens:

### **SDG 1: Poverty**

In the past year the region has seen some crucial setbacks in some of the hard-won development gains with a total of almost -1% decline in the rate of growth of GDP in the region (UNESCAP, 2020) and about half of the region’s economies recording fiscal deficits (UNDP, 2020). The repercussions on the poor are then obviously stark. The World Bank projections are that 5-9 million new poor will be living on \$1.9/day and 16 - 32 million on \$3.2/day in East Asia and the Pacific and For South Asia, already burdened with much of the regions’ poor, 78 - 82 million (63% new poor) living below \$1.9/day and 71% under the \$3.2/day poverty line (Lakner et al, 2021). While these are predictions, it is an indicator of a worsening situation. Furthermore, the global changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic has made it abundantly clear that it is a multidimensional crisis leading to increasing inequality felt sharply through access to basic needs, paid work, education, healthcare, and the lack of social protection. It has also manifested in the form of a crisis of democratic rights and good governance. Thus under these scenarios achieving SDG goal 1 has taken a considerable step back and addressing these widening gaps will not be possible without more targeted, multidimensional, equitable and a rights based approach.

Inequality is a global crisis. Globally, the world’s richest 1% have more than twice as much wealth as 6.9 billion people (Oxfam 2020). While about 500 million more people could be pushed into poverty as a result of the pandemic and the economic downturn. On the flipside, the so-called 1% is quadrupling its profits ever greater compounded by the diversion of COVID-19 recovery funds into corporate bailouts.

The causes of inequality among the rich and poor countries are also rooted in the extortive debt system in the World. Many countries were in debt distress before the Covid-19 crisis began and many more will emerge from this crisis with even higher unsustainable debts.

These inequalities have been exacerbated by the corporate capture of peoples’ lands, resources, public services and policy-making through the use of corporate driven public-private partnerships and increasing militarization. It has been aggravated by various systems of patriarchy, class, caste and other forms of oppression and marginalization.

COVID 19 had multiple forms of impact on the communities - During the lockdown, the informal sector is almost nailed and the most marginalised groups have suffered the most. They are: geographically inaccessible areas, orphan, LGBTQI, children, persons belonging to DWD (discrimination based on work and descent) including Dalit communities, sex worker, beggar, homeless, small and marginal farmers, daily wage worker in the urban areas and so on. The health service for the elderly, sick, pregnant women and women with infants have been affected. Challenging these inequalities therefore requires challenging the economic and accounting policies and institutions that entrench these inequalities and promote discrimination.

The spread of coronavirus across the globe has not only created a health crisis but has particularly affected the socio-economic and human capacities of most marginalized groups across the globe. More importantly, this virus has led to disrupting the economies, resulting in uneven impacts among the population in the developing countries of Asia. Some of the key impacts were loss of livelihood, largest migrations, hunger, paranoia and violence due to lockdown and the consequent restrictions on social communication. The majority of the workforce were suddenly pushed to the brink of unemployment and what made their situation worse was the less or no access to the COVID19 mitigation measures introduced and implemented in their respective countries.

Current global and national economic models are rigged against women. Our economies run on unpaid care and domestic work. Data from the World Economic Forum shows that at current rates of change, it will take 217 years to close the gap in pay and employment opportunities between women and men. The ground-up exploitation of women and girls makes a few super rich. Women's access to economic resources and livelihood opportunities have led them to their empowerment creating a just and equal society. However, during lockdown, women faced different kinds of discrimination and gender-based violence, particularly for dalit women experienced multiple forms of discrimination due to intersectionality of gender, caste and class

### **Key recommendations:**

As a principle, recovery measures - global and local plans - have to be based on reducing inequality and prioritising the needs of the marginalised. We also have to remember that recovery is not separate to the challenges of climate change and tackling existing systemic barriers to development. In that spirit the following recommendations are made for SDG 1:

- Reforming and transforming social protection measures is imperative. These schemes have to address the needs of marginalised groups (Dalits, indigenous groups, women, elderly, disabilities); must address the needs of those with insecure/informal/unorganised incomes, but also alsover aspects such as disaster and health and nutrition.
- Ensuring that all those providing frontline services - whether it be a nurse or a cleaners or, food supply/delivery providers - are recognized and provided with adequate protection/benefits.
- Ensuring that vaccines are available among nations, within nations, among all groups – prioritizing those that are essential and vulnerable – with equity and inclusion as a priority objective is vital.
- Prioritizing targeted livelihood recovery programmes to informal sector, social enterprises, MSMEs, where there are many low income workers, women entrepreneurs/workers – should be inclusive of aspects such as debt relief, loan schemes but also support for structural aspects for enterprises, reskilling and training and conditions of employment for employers and flexibility in roll out (documentation, access. timelines).
- Addressing rights and access to services of migrants (economic and social) - both internal and those that go abroad – to ensure that their rights as citizens are not compromised.
- Formalising the involvement of civil society and professional groups is recovery planning and response delivery at various levels so that there is better collaboration, acceptance and a new social contract and accountability among the stakeholders. In addition oversight committees are also a useful way of ensuring accountability and protecting rights.
- It is necessary to have full and effective participation of marginalized groups - such as dalits, LGBTQ, indigenous peoples in the planning and implementation of COVID19 responses.
- Prioritizing risk management measures and integrating health/pandemic management into disaster management as both health and climate change will continue to impact our daily lives.

- Addressing the technology and digital divide especially in education to reduce long term inequality is a priority.
- Implement sound social and environmental conditions on emergency responses and financial stimulus packages and other developmental programmes so that the ultimate goal of sustainable, low carbon growth and equitable growth is not forgotten.
- Mental health wellbeing and psychological disorders for all of society should be a component of recovery and response. Economically affordable mental health services that are geographically available, in languages and forms that are suitable for marginalised groups should be in place.
- Disaggregated data by gender, ethnicity and disability, types of work are needed for better targeted COVID19 planning, intervention and monitoring of support to marginalized and vulnerable sectors.

## **SDG 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture**

Food, nutrition and agriculture closely intersect with many other goals in the SDG framework. Progress in SDG 2 will impact on the achievement of these other goals, most especially on health, education, gender, biodiversity and climate. At the same time, without significant progress in each of these goals, sustainable food systems and nutrition patterns will not be achieved. As cited in the GSDR 2020, macro economic, social and political issues could have impacts on the progress of SDG 2 such as monopoly control and agribusiness consolidation in the seeds, agrochemicals, farm machineries, commodity trading, food retail, etc. Land grabbing in Asia-Pacific for agricultural expansion, renewable energy, tourism and large infrastructure development; lack of tenurial rights and gender discrimination in access to and control over resources all contribute to food insecurity and malnutrition at the household and local levels.

The most important underlying factor behind unsustainable food system is the gross neglect of the well being of farmers, in particular smallholders and landless farmers and food producers. Among the sectors worst hit by the impacts of and responses to the COVID-19 global pandemic are the small, marginalized and landless farmers including women, majority of whom work as daily wagers both in rural and urban areas. Government responses to the pandemic such as lockdowns have severely disrupted the agricultural supply chain. The pandemic has exposed the inherent weaknesses of a long supply chain that involve large food miles to bring food from the farm to the market and relies heavily on the role of middlemen, consolidators, distributors and wholesalers that squeeze value from farm produce that leave farmers with very low prices for their harvests. The COVID-19 global pandemic has further exposed the unsustainability and unjustness of neoliberal globalization which has put entire economies at the mercy of profit-seeking corporations, to the detriment of public healthcare, social security, and livelihoods, especially those engaged in informal work. And yet, loans by IFIs, more trade liberalization measures, and corporate bail-outs which are at the root of dismantling local food and social protection systems, access to healthcare in many countries are still being promoted. In many parts of Asia-Pacific, militarist response of governments has disproportionately affected the poor in both rural and urban areas, often involving suppression of rights to expression and mobility in the name of enforcing Covid protocols.

### **Key recommendations:**

#### **1) Governance**

- To achieve the targets in SDG2, measures and programs needed to respond to the impacts of Covid-19 must be complemented by strategic policies that address the root causes of food insecurity and malnutrition. These include ensuring security of land tenure, genuine agrarian reforms, ban on conversion of agricultural land for other purposes, prohibition on hazardous pesticides, and protection of small farmers and their products from predatory trade practices and dumping/
- Comprehensive policy reforms must be enacted to curb inequitable distribution of land, widening inequality traps and marginalizing the poorest in Asia-Pacific. Corporate control and consolidation in the food, agriculture and nutrition sectors must be curbed and regulated through stringent competition policies and global oversight under the UN to protect global food security and human well-being.

- In the absence of a governance framework over data, the human rights framework must strictly prevail. Protection of privacy and the right to say no must be respected including in government-initiated surveillance systems for collection of data on food and nutrition which could be mis-used and diverted for private use. Free and prior informed consent must be respected and must explicitly involve transparency on collection of data and use of data collected from farmers and communities. Governments must regulate the collection and transboundary use of data to prevent misuse and for proprietary use. The UN should provide the overall framework and capacity building on data governance for developing countries.

## 2) Social Protection

- Farmers, food producers and rural population should be afforded with social protection. Access to decent health care and quality education that go hand-in-hand with programs and policies that equip farmers and rural population with skills and opportunities to develop their potentials and enable informed choices will contribute to the achievement of food sovereignty and enhancing household nutrition. Measures and policies that designate fair and decent value to farmers' labor and products should be part of the social protection system.

## 3) Gender issues

- Strengthened mechanisms to enhance food security and nutritional values of diets must give special attention to the requirements of women and children, especially in rural and indigenous communities where cultural practices expect women to prioritize the sustenance of men in the household. Policies and programs must explicitly aim to increase women's access to and rights over productive resources, markets, technology and capacity building to achieve food security and nutrition targets. Technology, innovation and capacity building efforts should integrate gender considerations in their design and deployment, and take into account traditional, local and indigenous knowledge held by women in agriculture, food and nutrition. Segregation of data on food and nutrition based on gender, age and disability is key to designing gender-responsive policies with the active participation of women, elderly and persons with disability.

## 4) Investment and Financing

- Public investments in rural development and supporting smallholders need to be increased to address the growing divide between rich and poor, between urban and rural areas, and between men and women. Addressing the problems in the rural areas will help address the root causes of migration to urban areas and associated problems in urbanization.
- Public-private partnership is not a panacea, and is not the solution to address the root causes behind food insecurity, malnutrition and highly uneven distribution of resources that seriously persist in the region halfway towards the 2030. Strategic investments in agroecology, education and the public health systems, as well as on disaster and pandemic preparedness should never be presented as potential profit-making enterprises for the private sector and must only come from the public sector and as part of basic rights of citizens. Strong partnership between the people and democratic government based on mutual trust, solidarity and recognition of each other's contributions is a far more strategic and bottom-up approach to investment and financing. The recognition of the real value of farmers' labor, genius and contribution to society is a first step towards broadening the concept of investment beyond monetary value.

## 5) Short value chain, direct relations between producers and consumers

- Enabling direct linkage between farmers and consumers provides hands-on opportunity for farmers and rural women to manage and determine fair price for their produce, while providing first-hand experience for urban consumers to understand the situation of farmers and appreciate fair market of their produce. The contribution of urban agriculture and the key role of women in providing household and local food security and nutrition and enabling short value chains and as additional source of income for the urban poor and building resilience in times of crisis and pandemic, must be recognized and adequately supported. Policies and programs that optimize the use of publicly-owned vacant and underutilized lots and promote the approaches like food production using containers and in rooftops in urban areas must be adopted.

## 6) Science, technology and innovation

- Policies and programs in food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture must recognize the role of small farmers in producing 80% of the world's food, and their innovations in food production, post-harvest and processing primarily based on agroecological practices and traditional knowledge systems. This recognition is the foundation of a sound and inclusive STI that promote diverse sources of knowledge. Technological innovations in laboratories and formal institutions need to respond to actual needs and conditions of farmers and must be culturally appropriate, gender responsive, economically feasible and ecologically sustainable. Local innovations, indigenous knowledge systems and endogenous technologies must be encouraged and promoted, and solutions to problems should not be solely limited to technological options. Promotion and adoption of appropriate technologies for sustainable farming to make agriculture economically viable will encourage poor and indigenous communities to invest their efforts and future in ensuring food and nutrition security of their family and society as a whole.
- While technology including digital technology may bring benefits to the food systems, current policy approaches reflect limited recognition of the adverse economic, social and environmental impacts of new and emerging technologies which are controlled by a few mega corporations and affect society as a whole. The UN should undertake more in-depth assessment of new and emerging technologies including digital technology to prevent adverse impacts on livelihoods, economy, culture and peoples' rights. Adoption of digitalization in agriculture and the food system should be determined farmers and communities themselves, not imposed on them.

## SDG 3: Health

SDG 3 on health encompasses an essential prerequisite for quality of life, namely human health. SDG 3 was among the best performing SDGs - until 2020, at the regional level, progress had been made on maternal mortality, child mortality, reducing the negative health impacts of pollution, providing R&D for health, and improving management of health risks.<sup>1</sup> Compared to many other SDGs, SDG 3 looked to be more on track towards being achieved by 2030 but a lot of this progress has now been jeopardized. Covid-19 has clearly illustrated the links (positive and negative) between human and environmental health.

Substantial public resources have been mobilised to support the development of diagnostics, treatments and vaccines in countries across the region, but these resources have not come with a guarantee that they will deliver universal, free services to the public and that vaccines along with key health equipment shall stay in the public domain. Covid-19 has affected health of people across the region, including the health of farmworkers; it has disrupted access to family planning and other SRH services, on supply and/or demand side, impacted fertility trends, patterns and choices, including a real potential rise in unintended pregnancies in 2021.<sup>2</sup> Disruptions and restrictions to health care is likely to fundamentally impede individual reproductive rights and choices, threatening women's abilities to take care of their health and bodies. This will limit progress towards SDGs 3.7, 5.6, and other SDG targets.<sup>3</sup>

### Key recommendations

---

1

[https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/publications/ESCAP\\_Asia\\_and\\_the\\_Pacific\\_SDG\\_Progress\\_Report\\_2020.pdf](https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/publications/ESCAP_Asia_and_the_Pacific_SDG_Progress_Report_2020.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> The Impact of COVID-19 on Human Fertility in the Asia-Pacific Region (2021). Accessed on 26.02.2021 from: [https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/210112\\_unfpa\\_impact\\_of\\_covid19\\_on\\_human\\_fertility\\_sp.pdf](https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/210112_unfpa_impact_of_covid19_on_human_fertility_sp.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> The Impact of COVID-19 on Human Fertility in the Asia-Pacific Region (2021). Accessed on 26.02.2021 from: [https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/210112\\_unfpa\\_impact\\_of\\_covid19\\_on\\_human\\_fertility\\_sp.pdf](https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/210112_unfpa_impact_of_covid19_on_human_fertility_sp.pdf)

Governments must provide universal, free access to health treatment and pharmaceuticals – they are obliged to ensure the right of everyone “to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications” as stated in the article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. TO halt exacerbating inequality, it is important that research, data, samples relating to COVID-19 remains in the public domain -freely available and replicable in all countries. Moreover, the sovereign right of countries to impose such extraordinary measures to respond to public health emergencies must be respected

Moreover, to limit detrimental negative impact of the pandemic it is necessary to waive the Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Agreement (TRIPS) of the WTO on all medicines, medical devices and other medical products to suspend future and current patents on all such products. Unilateral measures that prevent countries from obtaining essential medical equipment and medicines must end immediately.

Governments must suspend trade rules that impose corporate interests through ISDS and undermine the regulatory capacity of the states. A global and regional commitment to universal and free public health care must be an outcome of the Covid-19 pandemic. The intrinsic linkages between human and environmental health must be recognized and reflected in governments' governance arrangements. Techniques such as cross sectoral budgeting and reporting responsibilities can bring about such necessary integration between health and environment sectors. In line with this, a systems approach is required that harnesses holistic management approaches of indigenous and local knowledge systems. We need to view the pandemic as a chance to make necessary changes to move our collective path towards sustainability.

## **SDG 8: Decent Work**

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an economic and social crisis with devastating impacts on economic growth in our region with increasing unemployment, labour underutilisation, informality, insecurity, occupational hazards and poverty. Furthermore, serious attacks on the fundamental workers' rights and working conditions have been observed across the region in the pretext of virus containment and recovery from the crisis. As the employment losses and the reduction in labour income have been unevenly distributed between workers, in particular, with greater impacts on the most vulnerable such as women, youth, migrant, low-paid/skilled, informal and precarious workers, there will be greater economic and social inequality due to the pandemic.

Covid 19 has forced out more women than men from the labour force with higher informality and precarity as well as increasing burdens of unpaid works including care works on women during the pandemic. The pandemic has also limited the opportunities for quality education and trainings for young people. According to the ILO, young workers have been facing much larger decreases in post-support labour income and female workers have been experiencing more losses in post-support labour income compared with male workers. It was estimated by the ILO that over 1.6 billion informal workers, mostly residing in our region and also disproportionately occupied by women, in the globe were significantly impacted by the lockdown measures. It should be also emphasised more that Asia and the Pacific is still a region with prevalence of child labour, forced labour and modern slavery. The current economic downturn with the serious labour income losses as well as disruptions in education, there should be more decisive and collective actions to eliminate the worst forms of child labour, forced labour and modern slavery in our region. To enable marginalised women to participate back in the economy, governments must provide gender-just skills and education programs.

As mentioned, the Covid-19 crisis makes SDG 8 more relevant than ever, emphasising the importance of occupational safety and health, protecting jobs and workers' rights, strengthening social protection systems, and addressing unemployment and informality shocks. The interlinkages between SDG 8 and the other SDGs are numerous and significant. The full achievement of SDG targets largely depends on the achievement of SDG 8, premised on the promotion of inclusive and sustainable policies at social and environmental level, going beyond the economic dimension only.

Therefore, the following recommendations are put forward by workers and trade unions to governments to accelerate SDG 8 and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda:



## 1) Human well-being and sustainable and just economies

- Establish a labour protection floor that guarantees fundamental workers' rights, an adequate minimum wage, maximum limits on working time, and safety and health at work.
- Develop, amend and maintain laws that protect rights of workers, including temporary migrant workers, especially migrant domestic workers, caregivers, fishermen and seafarers, agricultural workers, seasonal workers and those in informal sector. (SDG 8, 1, 5, 10, 16)
- Extend social protection systems and access to universal health care to ensure comprehensive and universal coverage to workers in all forms of work through a combination of tax-based social protection floors and contributory social security, in line with ILO standards (Convention 102 and Recommendation 202). (SDG 8, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11)
- Implement and enforce statutory minimum wages that guarantee dignity for all workers and their families. Ensure collective bargaining rights everywhere and promote collective agreements with sectoral coverage. (SDG 8, 1, 10)
- Put in place and enforce equal pay, care services and responsibilities sharing, and gender-based anti-discrimination legislation, including pay transparency measures, and ratify and effectively implement ILO Convention 190 and Recommendation 206 on violence and harassment at work. (SDG 8, 5)
- Take concrete actions for the formalisation of the informal economy according to ILO Recommendation 204, supported by ILO Recommendation 202 on social protection floors. (SDG 8, 5, 10) • Put in place inclusive and sustainable industrial policies based on tripartite negotiations with social partners and governments. (SDG 8, 9)
- Develop and improve laws that to protect migrant workers, including temporary migrant workers, especially migrant domestic workers, recognize labor trafficking as caregivers, fishermen and seafarers, agricultural workers, seasonal workers and those in informal sector. Furthermore, craft policies to protection vulnerable workers such as migrants, women and youth from labour trafficking. (SDG 8, 9)
- Recognize labor trafficking as trafficking and craft policies to protect workers, especially migrants, women and youth, from it.
- Recognize domestic work as work. Acknowledge that migrant domestic workers are workers, not servants or slaves, and ensure their protection from exploitation, overwork and abuse.
- Ensure business accountability and transparency in investments and due diligence in global supply chains as prescribed by the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles on Multinational Enterprises and social policy. (SDG 8, 7, 11, 12, 13)
- Invest in quality public education systems, from early childhood through to higher education, and guarantee lifelong learning opportunities enabling people to acquire skills and to reskill over their entire lifetime to embrace the environmental and technological transitions. (SDG 8, 4). Even during the pandemic, the right to education and learning must continue as it is one of the most important strategies towards sustainable recovery and resiliency.
- Support the establishment of an international governance system and standard(s) for digital platform business, as well as regulations to govern data use for the technological transition. (SDG 8, 9)
- Ensure that fundamental rights of gig economy and digital platform business workers, including delivery drivers and riders--upon whose efforts made a lot of business and personal transactions during the pandemic possible--are recognized, including the right to unionize, the right to occupational safety and health; and the right to social protection.

## 2) Energy decarbonisation

- Take stock of the externalities of economic activity, such as the environmental consequences, and establish statistical measures that go beyond GDP growth.
- Promote investments in key areas for sustainable work and technological innovations to reduce the impact of production on the environment. (SDG 8, 13)
- Design and implement Just Transition plans with workers' and employers' representatives to advance energy decarbonisation, sustainable cities and resilience of rural communities, leaving no one behind. (SDG 8, 7, 11)

- Provide technical, legal and financial assistance and implement public industrial policies favouring the transition to a low-carbon, circular production model, with better levels of research development and innovation and greater social, environmental and economic sustainability. (SDG 8, 13)

### 3) Governance and collective action

- Institutionalise social dialogue processes and tripartism for the implementation of SDG 8 and the 2030 Agenda. (Governance)
- Ensure the respect of the rights to freedom of association, collective bargaining and the right to organise (ILO Conventions 87 and 98) to guarantee collective representation of workers and employers in social dialogue processes. (Collective action)
- Improve the availability and comparability of statistical data (especially for less-developed countries) to allow more comprehensive, robust and precise analyses of progress made on the SDGs, including SDG 8. (Global governance)

## SDG 10: Inequality between and within countries

Inequality is a global crisis. Globally, the world's richest 1% have more than twice as much wealth as 6.9 billion people (Oxfam 2020). While about 500 million more people could be pushed into poverty as a result of the pandemic and the economic downturn. On the flipside, the so-called 1% is quadrupling its profits ever greater compounded by the diversion of COVID-19 recovery funds into corporate bailouts.

The causes of inequality among the rich and poor countries are also rooted in the extortive debt system in the World. Many countries were in debt distress before the Covid-19 crisis began and many more will emerge from this crisis with even higher unsustainable debts.

These inequalities have been exacerbated by the corporate capture of peoples' lands, resources, public services and policy-making through the use of corporate driven public-private partnerships and increasing militarization. It has been aggravated by various systems of patriarchy, class, caste and other forms of oppression and marginalization.

COVID 19 had multiple forms of impact on the communities - During the lockdown, the informal sector is almost nailed and the most marginalised groups have suffered the most. They are: geographically inaccessible areas, orphan, LGBTQI, children, persons belonging to DWD (discrimination based on work and descent) including Dalit communities, sex worker, beggar, homeless, small and marginal farmers, daily wage worker in the urban areas and so on. The health service for the elderly, sick, pregnant women and women with infants have been affected. Challenging these inequalities therefore requires challenging the economic and accounting policies and institutions that entrench these inequalities and promote discrimination.

The spread of coronavirus across the globe has not only created a health crisis but has particularly affected the socio-economic and human capacities of most marginalized groups across the globe. More importantly, this virus has led to disrupting the economies, resulting in uneven impacts among the population in the developing countries of Asia. Some of the key impacts were loss of livelihood, largest migrations, hunger, paranoia and violence due to lockdown and the consequent restrictions on social communication. The majority of the workforce were suddenly pushed to the brink of unemployment and what made their situation worse was the less or no access to the COVID19 mitigation measures introduced and implemented in their respective countries.

Current global and national economic models are rigged against women. Our economies run on unpaid care and domestic work. Data from the World Economic Forum shows that at current rates of change, it will take 217 years to close the gap in pay and employment opportunities between women and men. The ground-up exploitation of women and girls makes a few super rich. Women's access to economic resources and livelihood opportunities have led them to their empowerment creating a just and equal society. However, during lockdown, women faced different kinds of discrimination and gender-based violence, particularly for dalit women experienced multiple forms of discrimination due to intersectionality of gender, caste and class

### **Key Policy Recommendations to address inequality between and within countries:**

1. **Government must rapidly expand their revenue base to recover from COVID-19 crisis.** Minimum global tax rate needs to be implemented, and to create a global and regional tax body to reform the taxation architecture and synergise regional cooperation on taxation.
2. **Enforce a strong binding legal framework to regulate the private sector,** in particular multinational corporations and other business activities and ensure their adherence to human rights and accountability standards such as through the proposed Legally Binding Treaty on Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises.
3. **Re-orient trade policy towards transparent, participatory and redistributive global trade rules that are people-oriented and infuse grassroots perspective**
4. We endorse the global call for the **permanent cancellation of all principal, interest and charges on sovereign external debt due in 2020** and it should not accrue into the future.
5. **Provide inclusive, universal coverage** of all marginalised communities under existing national security schemes particularly those for livelihood and income support, preventive and curative healthcare, food and nutrition security, education on an urgent and priority basis.
6. **Free and Universal Coverage of Vaccination** for all citizens with special focus on the marginalised communities

## **SDG 12: Sustainable Consumption and Production**

The current global population of 8.5 billion is set to reach 9.7 billion by 2050. The required natural resources that could provide and sustain the current lifestyle would amount to almost three planets. Rising incomes and lifestyle changes and continued resource-intensive growth patterns are expected to further worsen resource depletion and ecosystem degradation.

SDG 12 responsible/sustainable consumption and production (SCP) is about promoting resource and energy efficiency, sustainable infrastructure, and providing access to basic services, green and decent jobs and a better quality of life for all.

The progress on SDG 12 is alarming in the Asia Pacific region, and is moving in the wrong direction, struggling to achieve the targets and advancing SCP. The Pacific is the only sub-region on track, while South and South-West Asia show 'considerable' regression. Poorer countries tend to lack adequate infrastructure and mechanisms to manage key environmental challenges. And the middle and low-middle countries viz Vietnam, Myanmar, and Lao PDR have a long way to go towards SDG 12 achievement.

### **COVID -19 Impacting SDG 12 Actions**

- The global pandemic has negatively affected the economic situation worldwide.
- Importance of a reliable energy supply to enable hospitals to deliver vital care is imperative. Reduced energy consumption, in particular electricity, was a side-effect of the economic slowdown and lockdowns. Learning from the reduced consumption, during the lockdown period, could be used as an advocacy tool used for behavioural change practice.
- The new normal is in going virtual. Online use has been increased in the education sector and also increased the dependence on food delivery services, online shopping and e-commerce has profound long-term implications on waste management that has increased the demand for plastic.
- Circular economy principles need to be practiced and institutionalized. Global agreement to end plastic pollution, addressing it's upstream (produce less plastic) instead of downstream (waste).
- Use of personal vehicles, due to lack of public transport and physical distancing norms, increased to more than the pre-pandemic levels and will have severe negative impacts on achieving the targets.
- The economic and social effects of the pandemic have disproportionately affected women and risk reversing decades of progress on gender equality and women's empowerment.

- Lack of coordination between various departments within the government acts as a major challenge in meeting the targets and collecting the data on various targets.

Strategic policy directives demand a revolution in policy mind-set from environmentally policy domain to the socio-economic-technical shift requiring changes in social practices and associated infrastructure for SCP transition. Despite the growing urgency of the climate crisis, Governments are still subsidizing the fossil fuel industry. Fossil fuel subsidy reform could be a valuable toolkit for re-allocating scarce public resources. Inclusive and accountable governance systems with bottom-up approaches to enhance effectiveness, adaptive institutions with resilience to future shocks, universal social protection and health insurance and stronger digital infrastructure are part of the transformations needed. All are driven by a low carbon and environmentally sustainable infrastructure and energy transition.

The challenge, however, is how does one ensure a 'just transition' that leaves no one behind. This type of transition (i.e., transformational in nature) must be inclusive and provides equal opportunities of participation, especially for women and low-income households who have been worst hit during the pandemic, both economically and a transition towards achieving sustainable consumption and production, with cleaner production and less material-intensive lifestyles, needs to be supported by enabling policies. This would require stakeholders, notably Governments, businesses and consumers, to urgently align their own goals and actions with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

## **SDG 13: Climate Change**

Climate change exacerbates poverty, inequality, climate and disaster induced displacements, crises in agriculture, food, and water, destruction of biodiversity and ecosystems, and ravages women, persons with disabilities, indigenous populations, forest-dependent, Dalits and other marginalized communities. With COVID-19 pandemic Travel restrictions and nationwide lockdowns that occurred due to the pandemic economically impacted populations that depend on natural resources, especially in the tourism and agriculture sectors<sup>4</sup>. Throughout the pandemic, many environmentally-destructive projects continued to proliferate, with the business sector taking advantage of the lockdowns and the overall situation by pushing through with their projects. This includes mining operations which reduces carbon sink from deforestation. We have also seen business as usual patterns that put development and private interests first over the benefits and well-being of the people. Projects and plans aiming at economic recovery remain the same, adding emissions in the atmosphere and putting communities at risk.

### **Key recommendations:**

Solutions on climate change must address its root causes. We must put an end to fossil fuels and market driven solutions to climate change that exacerbate social, gender, economic and ecological problems. Countries have to keep their commitment for climate finance distinct from and additional to existing financing. Those responsible for climate change must commit the most of finances, technology and technical resources required for mitigation and adaptation measures, following the Common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDRRC).

- Climate action must be prioritized in the mainstream budgeting and planning processes across countries in the region, adhering to respective recommendations of Climate Public Expenditures and Institutional Review under the Paris Agreement. Finance for development must not be used to pay off the responsibilities of developed countries for their historical GHGs emissions.
- Climate finance should be channeled to the climate vulnerable communities and not to create social and economic burdens to communities. Communities that experience exclusion in disaster response like Dalits and women, need special protective mechanisms for inclusive and equitable humanitarian aid.

---

<sup>4</sup> [https://data.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/Report\\_Counting%20the%20Costs%20of%20COVID-19\\_English.pdf](https://data.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/Report_Counting%20the%20Costs%20of%20COVID-19_English.pdf)

- Climate actions must respect human rights and ecological balances, and have distributed benefits to communities and gender responsiveness. Focus on emission reductions is not enough, for example, evicting communities living in the area despite having a big solar farm.
- Multilateral agreements that promote fair access to resources are needed for governance of GEC to safeguard a stable and resilient Earth system for long-term wellbeing of all humans and the survival of all living species. Stronger public sector commitment, appropriate policies and regulations (e.g., polluters pay act, removing harmful subsidies, progressive carbon taxation) are required to protect GEC from global to local levels. National governments must hold multinational corporations accountable for environmental degradation, which is currently impossible due to imposed onerous neoliberal measures like Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS).
- The introduction of environmental taxes as policy instruments to correct inequalities and a retrospective taxation regime for corporations mainly responsible for GHG emissions to finance developing countries must be seriously considered.
- Countries need to ensure their NDCs reflect climate justice issues especially on finance and technologies. They need to join forces to call for developed countries to fulfil their financial obligations and provide finance for 1.5oC. Loss and damage due to climate change - economic and non economic assets/values must be compensated by those causing climate change.
- A just and equitable transition of the workforce with creation of decent and green jobs as confirmed by the Paris Agreement and reiterated by global and regional commitments is an integral part of the paradigm shift towards zero-greenhouse gas and climate resilient economies and societies for all, in addition to sustainable consumption and production. In this regard, governments must take into consideration just transition, while preparing and implementing nationally determined contributions (NDCs), national adaptation plans (NAPs) and national long-term low greenhouse gas emission development strategies in cooperation with social partners and CSOs.
- Community-led programs and initiatives must be supported, enhanced and provided to ensure local communities become resilient and can adapt to the impacts of climate change. There is a need for going beyond integrated climate change into the national plans especially for adaptation. Having a plan to assume that adaptation measures can fit all localities is a wrong decision. Engaging communities in the planning is essential to ensure effective adaptation.
- Policies in protecting environmental defenders should also be put in place. This is urgently needed since they have contributed to stopping environmentally destructive projects that make countries more vulnerable to climate change impacts and reduce their capacities to adapt.
- Climate change adaptation and mitigation measures should also include conservation and rehabilitation of ecosystems since healthy ecosystems increases our carbon sink and lessens our vulnerability to climate change impacts. We have seen during the current pandemic that disrupting ecosystems have caused the spread of illnesses.

## **SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions**

A key challenge in Asia-Pacific refers to the level of priority assigned to Goal 16 in the national context. Internal, and external conflicts continue in the region, and are approached via military solutions, armed violence rather than a human right and peace-based response.<sup>5</sup> There is deterioration in the rule of law and protection of human rights and countries are increasingly restricting civic space both in the offline and online spaces through stringent policies.

The most recently published SDG Progress Report 2021 by UNESCAP, shows poor data availability for most of the indicators within Goal 16, with only one third of indicators having sufficient data. Data on public access to information, corruption and bribery, illicit financial and arms flows, inclusive decision making, provision of legal identity and tackling violence against all especially children is not available to inform policy and programme implementation or even assess progress, gaps and challenges. There is a huge gap in

---

<sup>5</sup> Accessed via <https://www.iiss.org/publications/armed-conflict-survey/2019/armed-conflict-survey-2019/asiapacific>

Goal 16 data and its monitoring in the countries in the region. Data on most of the Goal 16 indicators is unavailable.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also affected our relationship with different forms of crime, violence and conflict, as well as people's trust in public institutions. Violence against women and girls (targets 5.2 and 16.2) increased during the pandemic while homes became "not-so-safe" spaces. The adoption of lockdown measures does not seem to affect homicide rates (target 16.1) and access to justice, especially criminal justice (target 16.3) has been severely impacted. Organized criminal groups continued to profit (target 16.4) while concerns over the transparency and accountability of emergency government funds increased (target 16.5, 16.6 and 16.10). There has also been concern for reduced civic spaces, and public participation as well as the criminalization of rights defenders in many countries (target 16.7).<sup>6</sup>

The pandemic has also worsened the crisis of democracy and good governance as governments adopted measures that deprive people from accessing transparent and accurate information and have employed draconian laws. In the middle of the pandemic, attacks to democratic rights across the globe and in the region have worsened. Digital surveillance is being used not only for contact tracing in order to control the disease, but also for controlling and preventing dissent. Press freedom is also in danger. An influx of foreign capital and investment in the region has resulted in increasing militarisation and conflicts. Displacement, massacres, mass violence, detention and torture, loss of crops, higher infant and maternal mortality, and extrajudicial and summary executions are happening in the region as a result of military operations which further result in the loss of properties, destruction of shelters, schools, religious places and other important structures in communities. In many of our countries, the prioritisation of military expenses diverts much-needed funds for basic services for people including education, health and housing. Lastly, patriarchy and the resurgence of authoritarian and patriarchal governance is on a rise. Patriarchy is a system of organizing society through a set of rules that must be routinely enforced, strengthening the status quo and ascribing gender roles while normalizing the use of power and fear in the states' relationship to its citizens and to other countries. Authoritarianism propagates the notion that countries need strong, aggressive leadership. In doing so, the state becomes increasingly patriarchal and the use of violence and authoritarian control become normalized at both the state and non-state level. The consequences are both diminished participatory democracy and a higher tolerance for sexism, racism and religious discrimination. In several countries in the region violent extremism and multiple forms of fundamentalisms are becoming increasingly evident with women routinely bearing the brunt of attacks.<sup>7</sup>

### **Key recommendations (policy advocacy/systemic change)**

- Sustainable and just economies require fundamental reforms in the neoliberal macroeconomic model, breaking the disquieting silence on debt distress reduction, confidential trade agreements, deregulation manoeuvres, corporate accountability and structural adjustment policy reforms.
- Put in place a regional tax body to reform the taxation architecture and synergise regional cooperation on taxation. The entity should also be mandated to help prevent illicit financial flows and combat corruption, costing billions of dollars that could be used for human development financing, to reduce inequalities within and among countries.
- Enforce a strong binding legal framework to regulate the private sector, in particular multinational corporations and other business activities and ensure their adherence to human rights and accountability standards such as through the proposed Legally Binding Treaty on Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises.

---

<sup>6</sup> Accessed via <https://www.unodc.org/dohadeclaration/en/news/2020/11/the-challenges-of-protecting-youth-from-crime-and-violence-in-a-pandemic.html>

<sup>7</sup> APRCEM Position Paper. APRCEM

- Re-orient trade policy towards transparent, participatory and redistributive global trade rules that are people-oriented and infuse grassroots perspectives.
- Ensure compulsory ex-ante, periodic and ex-post human rights, environmental and SDG compatibility impact assessments of all tax policies, trade and investment agreements should be implemented.
- Laws, policies, and other initiatives related to sustainable consumption and production, must be evaluated for their compatibility with human rights.
- Reverse current neoliberal policy of tax incentives that many Southern governments implement to “attract” foreign direct investment. Domestic finance should be primary and oriented to reducing inequalities.
- Progressive taxation model, proven as the most efficient socially just redistributive policy measure, should be implemented to decrease wealth and income gaps for inclusive and sustainable economies in the region.
- Comprehensive policy reforms must be enacted to curb inequitable distribution of land, widening inequality traps and marginalizing the poorest in the Asia Pacific. The associated political patronage and power patterns need to be exposed to stop land grabbing for industrial farming and other purposes leading to acute food insecurity.
- Big corporations should be held to stricter domestic rules, while MSMEs must be supported towards developing national productive capacities.
- Strengthen networking and link efforts at skills development for decent work for women especially the most marginalized among them, with efforts to demand for gender-sensitive laws/policies and gender-responsive budgets, to recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid work, to continue to raise consciousness on gender relations, to continue to organize women and build their agency.
- Ensure employment skill development efforts for LGBT+ population.
- Re-channel military spending towards spending towards social protection, environmental protection and restoration, and R&D for sustainable development
- Re-channel the regional institutions like SAARC, ASEAN to protect and promote liberal democracy based on ASEAN Charter , ASEAN Human Rights Declaration, Charter of Democracy, and other multilateral commitments
- To address corruption and SDG 16.5 ensure National Anti-Corruption Strategies and policies are adopted and implemented through a participatory process which includes our civil society, youth, private sector, parliamentarians, media and other stakeholders as advocated by Pacific stakeholders in support of Teieniwa Vision adopted in Kiribati, to strengthen public awareness and the right to information.<sup>89</sup>
- Promote equal participation of young people in institutions of governance, i.e youth councils, youth committees, youth parliament, youth budget, or quota in governments. A delicate balance needs to be explored, between bottom-up approaches that complement the cultural and political environments of member states, as well as the principles and barriers of meaningful youth engagement in the overall Sustainable Development Agenda. On one hand, traditional spaces for

---

<sup>8</sup> Accessed via GOPAC support at UNGASS21

[https://ungass2021.unodc.org/uploads/ungass2021/documents/session1/contributions/GOPAC\\_submission\\_UNGASS21.Feb2020.pdf](https://ungass2021.unodc.org/uploads/ungass2021/documents/session1/contributions/GOPAC_submission_UNGASS21.Feb2020.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Accessed via LINK to FEMM statement of support at <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2020-CSO-FEMM-Statement-Revised.pdf>



governance enable access to resources, capacity building, political will, among others. On another hand, youth representation in governance is also crucial to guarantee the legitimacy and ability of governments to act, especially in a time of crisis.

- Strengthen the involvement of oversight bodies to balance the representation of lead authorities in an institution or government; in terms of decision making process , policy making and budget implementation.

## **Inclusive societies**

- Guarantee meaningful CSO participation in decision-making, creation, and implementation of public policies.
- Recognize women farmers to help improve their social status in their community. Governments should establish strengthened mechanisms to enhance food security and nutritional values of diets, with special attention to the requirements of tribal women and children.
- Recognize migrants as members of the community and actors in development. Include them in policies and laws governing employment, human rights, and social services such as health.
- Recognize indigenous people's traditional customary institutions of security, peace and ancestral governance including creating enhanced participation on matters that affect them.
- Retract restrictive and repressive laws and disabling conditions that hinder the full operation of CSOs, i.e. registration processes (duplicating processes and requirements) and arbitrary policies, especially for those working in critically sensitive environments.
- Stop the criminalisation of civil society workers, human rights defenders, communities, and movements.
- Institutionalize support and provide assistance in emergencies for social leaders and human rights defenders, change agents, and CSOs in general, especially those representing minorities, indigenous peoples and other marginalized sectors.
- Civil societies, peoples and feminists' movements, grassroots communities - including among those, are the volunteers - are the true means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Achieving the SDGs will depend on the existence of powerful, resourced, connected people's movements. As we are encouraging the need for accelerated action and transformative pathways, we ask member states to recognise the roles of volunteers and social movements as powerful means to engage people to work together to deliver the 2030 Agenda and a just, environmentally sustainable, peaceful world, free of poverty, hunger and inequality where no one is left behind.
- Strengthen the role of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), and CSOs including women, young people, and LGBTIQ communities led organisations to strengthen institutions, exercise human rights and leave no one behind. CSOs can facilitate access to justice, redress and can remedy complaints, and support in the promotion of human rights standards, conflict prevention and peacebuilding. CSOs can provide an oversight role over the implementation of the SDGs to ensure that SDG planning, implementation and reporting is aligned with human rights standards and with a focus on "leaving no one behind."
- Incorporate the rule of law education into formal and informal education systems, to educate the public on crime prevention and criminal justice issues among young people and the community at large (from local to regional level)



## Other recommendations

### Data

- Strengthen, through financial and technical support, national statistical systems especially in two specific areas relevant to Goal 16 – civil registration and vital statistics, and illicit financial flows, especially related to criminal, commercial and tax related activities, to inform policy response to COVID-19 crises and recovery and achievement of SDGs.
- The current SDGs accountability framework needs to learn from and be informed by other review mechanisms within its own UN systems, such as the UN Treaty Body processes. Moreover, harmonisation between international human rights mechanisms and the Sustainable Development Goals will help ensure that SDG implementation is on track and prevent duplication of Member States' efforts in reporting.
- Reporting on the key forms of disaggregated data (gender, ethnicity, age and disability and all characteristics) is crucial to leave no one behind. Each government must recognize and accept the results of citizen-led data initiatives, which are ample. This could be done by using both qualitative information (case studies) and quantitative data/information in national monitoring reports.
- Bottom-up approaches should be utilized in working with communities to identify pressure points, root causes of violence and crime, and to realign federal, provincial/territorial and municipal investment towards evidence-based prevention programs.

## 3. Strengthening Means of Implementation and Financing for 2030 Agenda (goal 17)

The *decade of action and delivery for sustainable development* can only be realized if systemic barriers like global inequalities of wealth, power and resources, international economic, trade and monetary frameworks, militarism & conflict, patriarchal authoritarianism, marginalizing governance, and shrinking democratic spaces are addressed, parallelly ensuring that Means Of Implementation (MOI) are not Missing In Action.

Strengthening global partnerships for enhanced Means Of Implementation for the SDGs remains challenged due to scarce financial resources amid contentious negotiations on Financing for development (Ffd) commitments. ECOSOC forum on Financing for development follow-up report 2019 indicates that investments critical to the achievement of SDGs remain unfunded in the backdrop of rising systemic risks, especially debt distress of developing countries,[2] requiring fundamental reforms in the international financing system for sustainable development.

The unprecedented COVID-19 crisis has further exposed our world's vulnerabilities caused by neoliberal globalization and flawed macroeconomic governance structures. The Secretary General's appeal amid COVID 19 "We cannot resort to the usual tools in such unusual times", demands that mobilizing MOI ought not to be reduced to business as usual buzz-worded negotiation outcomes. The situation compels a renewed commitment to multilateral support for accelerated progress towards the Agenda 2030 as our collective roadmap, entwined with COVID 19 recovery to build back better. The level of ambition and commitment must be raised to mobilize all means of implementation in line with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and ECOSOC recommendations for financing for development.

### Finance

**Official Development Assistance (ODA)** continues to fall short of its commitment of 0.7% of GNI, evident of the fact that only 6 countries could meet their ODA targets, as of 2017, while the overall contribution amounted to US\$ 147.2 billion in 2017 against the required investments of US\$ 5-7 trillion to achieve the SDGs.[3] Developing countries face an annual financing gap of \$2.5 trillion in the current levels of investment in core SDG-related sectors.[4] On the flipside, wealth and resources continue to flow from developing countries through illicit financing, tax evasions, capital flows, asset stealth, trade mispricing, and profit shifting by multinational corporations. Conservative estimates indicate that developing and emerging economies lost US\$ 7.8 trillion in illicit financial flows from 2004 to 2013, with the outflows increasing at 6.5% per year that is twice as fast as the global GDP.[5] The terms of discussions around ODA need to change from an act of benevolence to that of responsibility on Global North, for the historical debt owed to the Global South after centuries of colonial plunder and its evolving neo-imperialist forms combined with neoliberal capitalism. ECOSOC Ffd Report 2019 also underlined that various forms of illicit financial flows and money laundering need to be identified, accounted for, and confronted to avoid adverse effects on socio-economic and political stability of developing countries.[6] The situation requires Global North to deliver its ODA commitments in full, exclusive of the technical and technological support as a special measure in COVID-19, to support developing countries in building back better.

**Debt distress** is another key challenge confronting the developing countries as COVID 19 has pushed the limits widening inequalities of wealth, power and resources. Increased debt financing, along with economic downturn, will lead to higher government debt to GDP ratio expected to rise from 41% in 2019 to 49% in 2021 among the least developing countries in the Asia Pacific. COVID 19 has affected a much larger group (40 out of 43 countries) in Asia-Pacific compared to the global financing crisis in 2008, having affected 24 countries in the region. Fiji and Maldives are among the most severely affected where the debt ratio could climb by 30 percentage points of the GDP between 2019 and 2021.[7] And yet, the World Bank and IMF continue with business as usual by introducing emergency loans targeting poor countries instead of providing debt relief and distress reduction. The newly announced rules by Development Assistance Committee (DAC) - a group of 30 countries regulating international aid spending - on counting debt relief as ODA could prove to be counterproductive with several countries already under massive unsustainable debts.[8]

The increased emphasis on **Trade for development** should not be allowed to catalyse neoliberal capitalism manifested in global trade and investment regimes, unequal economic growth, perpetual inequalities among countries, massive privatization schemes, increased reliance on public-private partnerships, land acquisitions, or investment protection policies combined with marginalizing governance enabling corporate capture of natural resources and crucial public services for profiteering purposes.[9] Trade-for-development approach in the region is further compromised by the rise of North-South and mega-free trade agreements, like the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), featuring WTO-plus rules cementing corporate capture. The current trend to push for new issues such as liberalisation of investment, e-commerce, government procurement etc. will constrict public policy space (enshrined in SDG 17.14), prevent transfer of technology and knowledge, threaten environmental conservation and natural resource protection, privatize public services negatively affecting the enjoyment of fundamental human rights of women and other marginalized groups, and limit domestic resource mobilization in the region.

### **Science, Technology and Innovation (STI)**

STI could play a pivotal role in SDGs implementation if their transformative potential is accessible for all. The increased emphasis on the collaboration in the technological front as pivotal for regional growth is appreciated, but provisions remain minimal to advance the region or address technological disparities. At the global level, giant transnational corporations continue to consolidate control over new and emerging technologies and large amounts of data to the disadvantage of vulnerable workers and at the expense of privacy of consumers. The digital and technological takeover of the agricultural, industrial and services sectors requires careful consideration of its economic, political and socio-cultural implications despite the purported benefits they bring taking seriously into account the disparate level of technological advancement

across countries. The 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution is already displacing countless jobs in industrial, manufacturing and services sectors worldwide and could inflict an unprecedented level of dehumanization through mechanization at the expense of the workforce, eroding years of struggle and advances in labor rights if strict regulations are not put in place. .

## Partnerships

The increased emphasis on **public private partnerships** should not be seen as relieving the State of its fundamental responsibility to ensure access to essential services. Corporate capture of governance and resources continues to worsen as the private sector increasingly dominates socio-economic and political realms through its technological prowess enabled by **public-private partnerships**, among others. Financing mechanisms and investment protection policies continue to enable corporations to capture our natural resource base turning it into a source of profit. The situation can exacerbate the crises in developing countries where COVID recovery funds are already diverted in corporate bailouts ahead of social protection for the poorest.

## Policy Recommendations:

- ODA needs to be reformed and reviewed for impact, as part of the formal mechanisms, with a key emphasis on commitment to uphold dignity and human rights for all beyond the politics of aid. ODA's use to catalyze private sector engagement, achieve trade, military and political objectives of donor countries, and its substitution with climate financing, refugee costs, or debt cancellation is very much *business as usual* against the spirit of the Agenda 2030.
- Development cooperation needs to be enhanced through strong multilateral support carefully recognizing that South-South cooperation could at best complement but not substitute North-South cooperation.
- Rather than pushing the poorest countries for economic self-reliance, AAAA and Ffd processes should help them address macro-economic pressures embodied in hegemonic trade agreements involving conditions of market deregulation, massive privatizations, asset stealth, and corporate capture of resources & governance; debt distress pushing poor countries into generational debt traps; and neoliberal instruments like ISDS, having crossed a 1000 mark, [10] among others, designed to plunder nations while restricting their state policy space.
- Trade, recognized as a critical MOI and engine for development, needs to be democratized through structural reforms prioritizing people and the planet over profits, parallelly upholding the social and environmental dimensions of the Agenda 2030.
- Sustainable trade practices should include a thorough review of WTO led liberalization & deregulation policies, hegemonic bi and multilateral trade agreements, and neoliberal instruments like ISDS marginalizing the poorest of the world. This presses the need for establishing and strengthening regional reform entities for SDGs Compatibility Impact Assessment of tax policies, trade and investment agreements and new technologies. Robust accountability mechanisms must ensure corporate compliance with human rights frameworks, including ILO and UN protocols, UN guiding principles on Business and Human Rights, and the OECD guidelines for MNCs.
- World Investment Report 2020 also recognizes that meaningful SDGs investments should also integrate *good environmental, social and governance practices in business operations* parallel with mobilizing funds and effectively channeling them for positive outcomes.[11]
- We call upon governments to commit to the Binding Treaty on Transnational Corporations & Other Business Enterprises and Human Rights. UN must assume its responsibility to steer the ambitious UN/Ffd-centered process to assess the crisis and agree on responses leading to an International Economic Reconstruction and Systemic Reform Summit under the aegis of the United Nations.[12]
- Corporate control of data, as the raw material for the 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution, and concentration of technological innovation in the hands of a few technology giants, must not be allowed to compromise privacy, hinder technology transfer, impede the capacity of developing countries to

develop their technological capacity, marginalize human workforce, or undermine subalternize local knowledge systems.

- Policy emphasis on digitization and technological advancements must ensure a thorough review of the potential adverse effects on livelihoods, the economy, environment, society, culture, and civil & political rights of the people.
- The UN technology facilitation mechanism established in the Agenda 2030,[14] needs to be strengthened to provide policy guidance in participatory assessment of actual and potential impacts of new technologies including digital technologies . In line with the aspiration of Rio+20 to develop regional, national and local capacity to evaluate the impacts of new and emerging technologies, it is imperative to enable civil society led participatory technology assessment platforms to ensure that STI supports the achievement of the SDGs.
- The UN should capacitate global, regional and national institutions to have thorough understanding of the implications of the 4th industrial revolution on peoples, society, economy, rights and the environment, and enable efforts on democratic governance of the technology sector to ensure equity, transparency, accountability, fairness and inclusiveness.

The decade of action demands the dismantling of neoliberal development framework that destroys the environment; starves people of resources and strips them of rights; and criminalizes those who stand for justice. The people demand Development Justice to ensure redistributive, economic, social and gender, environmental justice and accountability to peoples. It requires genuine political will to tackle structural barriers rooted in unjust global governance, and the commitment for concentrated actions to address the marginalization exacerbated by COVID-19 to enable a human dignity and rights focused sustainable, resilient and prosperous future for all.

#### **4. Accountability and Linking National, Regional and Global level**

There are 33 references to the term “regional” in the Agenda 2030. The HLPF specifically mandates regional cooperation and dialogue, through the *regional fora convened under the HLPF* . Member states have also recognized that *Regional and subregional frameworks can facilitate the effective translation of sustainable development policies into concrete action at the national level*. Member states committed to follow and review mechanisms at the regional level in four separate paras (73, 77, 80, 81) and yet some states appear to be backtracking on that commitment.

*Regional process has much to offer in many ways:*

First, it creates proximity and accessibility for local and grassroots communities to directly engage in regional discussions and work closely with their governments at the national or local level.

Second, Identifying regional priority issues vis a vis addressing systemic barriers requiring multilateral resolve to propose specific solutions at the regional level which may be difficult at global level. Such as mobilizing MOI through regional cooperation on taxation architecture; tracking of ODA commitments; curbing illicit financing, review of trade & investment agreements, and a technology review mechanism for SDGs Compatibility Impact Assessment through regional entities involving governments and civil society.

The role of regional forums could be better defined in the follow-up and review process, which can be done through:

- Regional VNR - submission of interim VNRs to the regional forums for comments and inputs, and subsequently submit the final reports to the HLPF. The year after countries report, a follow up report is submitted to the regional forums – this will lead to greater accountability
- More sessions of the HLPF should be dedicated to systematically integrate regional forum perspectives to inform global processes. To further enhance the process, a continuous feedback

loop should be created to flow back from HLPF into regional, sub-regional and national levels to track the implementation of recommended actions.

- The recommendations should also be directed at the national and regional level UN systems (including Resident Coordinators, specialized agencies and country missions), for complementarity and accountability.
- The outcome document from the regional processes (report and Chair summary) should be integrated with the ministerial declaration of the HLPF.
- Lastly, *participation of civil society in regional follow-up mechanisms should be systematically enhanced through allocations of spaces as well as financial resources.*

COVID 19 has reinforced our foundational narrative that the current neoliberal development model combined with capitalist globalization, patriarchal authoritarianism and militarism is inherently flawed. And, that it is possible (if we have the political will) to realize a rights-based people-centered development model that addresses inequalities of wealth, power and resources within and among countries, between rich and the poor, and between men and women as well as other marginalized groups. It is time for Development Justice - that strives for redistributive, economic, environmental, social and gender justice, and accountability to peoples.

## **5. Peoples' Movements Initiatives to address COVID-19 Crisis**

The Development Justice fact sheets on the goals related to pandemic recovery illustrate a colorful picture how peoples' movements, civil societies and social movements in Asia and the Pacific have been at the forefront of COVID-19 responses-- from the production of Peoples Masks and personal protective equipment to direct provision of healthcare services to better communicating key health information, policy influencing and governance in the little spaces provided. Peoples' movements, civil society and social movements play a role in services: delivery of services to working with various stakeholders, including government, to deliver human and social services at scale and raising funds. Peoples' movements, civil society and social movements also have faced challenges and would need to be supported during this time of assisting the poor and marginalized recover from the pandemic.

To deliver Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, peoples movements, civil society and social movements in Asia Pacific commit to Development Justice ensuring redistributive, economic, social and gender, environmental justice and accountability to peoples. The peoples of Asia Pacific have the answers on how to accelerate transformation towards sustainable development. All over the region, grassroots communities are coming up with solutions. Indigenous peoples can show us the ways on how to manage and equitably share resources. Workers and social enterprises have initiatives on sharing and caring enterprises. People have the solutions for sustainable development. However, governments' action and protection of people's rights are key if these solutions are to contribute to the acceleration towards sustainable development within this decade.