

South Asia Peoples Forum on the SDGs 2021

Promote Development Justice for Meaningful Post COVID 19 Recovery

9-10 November 2021

Outcome Document

9 Key Recommendations for the 5th South Asia Forum on the SDGs

We urge decision-makers and other stakeholders to act immediately to

1. **Develop** strategies at national level for education to transform the sector to meet the SDG4 targets effectively
2. **Invest** in a people-centered economy by prioritizing women's access to decent work, social protection by creating pathways of education especially for the most marginalized groups
3. **Promote** cohesion and collaboration between all relevant stakeholders to achieve SDG14 across the South Asia region, principally on fisheries laws and environmental regulations and encourage public-private partnership
4. **Promote** infrastructure planning towards environmental considerations at policy level to reduce adverse impacts on biodiversity and ecosystem
5. **Assess** the developmental impacts of current trade and investment frameworks, including an immediate approval of the TRIPS Waiver and a moratorium on ISDS cases in the context of a strengthened role of UNCTAD
6. **Strengthen** SAARC Secretariat for effective partnerships for the Agenda 2030
7. **Institutionalize** policy coherence at all levels, including enforcement and coordination mechanisms among the development agendas and sectoral agendas in the country as well as establishing a policy framework that creates synergy in achieving agenda 2030.
8. **Strengthen** the human rights and fundamental freedoms at the provincial and national level to protect human rights defenders and victims of repression and abuse
9. **Encourage** and facilitate civil society engagement in monitoring and evaluation of UN treaty bodies at the national and international levels (including drafting of civil society reports and participation in reporting processes before international treaty bodies)

Introduction

The Asia Pacific Regional CSOs Engagement Mechanism (AP-RCEM) has organized the South Asia Peoples Forum on the SDGs (SAPF2021) on 9-10 November 2021 representing the Civil Society Organizations, civic campaigns, social movements, human rights defenders, and development practitioners, not only as a prelude to the 5th South Asia SDGs Forum organized by the UNESCAP, but also to collectivize people's voices.

The SAPF 2021 was coordinated by *Asia Pacific Regional CSOs Engagement Mechanism (APRCM)* South Asia Working Group and *National Campaign for Sustainable Development Nepal. Sri Lanka Stakeholder SDGs Platform* is contributing as the local host of the event.

The theme of the forum this year was "**Promote Development Justice for meaningful post-COVID 19 Recoveries**". This two-day event was conducted fully in virtual mode having a participation of more than 250 representatives across South Asia.

The people's forum assessed the political, economic, social and environmental situation in the South Asia region in the context of COVID-19 pandemic. The civic actions were identified with key and policy demands to protect and fulfill the rights of South Asian peoples and recommended a meaningful COVID 19 response and just recovery.

The forum was organized at the critical moment when the whole world including South Asia is grappling with COVID 19 pandemic for the last twenty months and unfortunately, South Asia is already has already been agonized with various internal issues including poverty, hunger, inequality, insecurity, environmental degradation, climate change and decaying democracy and human right situation. The fallout from the pandemic is affecting women and girls significantly. Especially the poor, marginalized, vulnerable and daily wage farmers and workers have been badly affected.

Beyond wage and income inequality, digital divide and vaccine inequality have explicitly appeared as new forms of inequality. Social exclusion has been instrumentalized as a political strategy. Geo-politics and growing nationalism are deepening challenges in the region.

Ensuring rule of law and access to justice has become challenging at the moment with the SAARC, the inter-government regional cooperation mechanism, is almost non-functional catering the issues of South Asia. In this context the forum was organized with the following objectives:

- Assess the political, economic, social and environmental situation of the region in the context of COVID-19 pandemic,
- Identify civic actions and policy demands to protect and fulfill the rights of South Asian peoples and recommend for meaningful COVID 19 response and just recovery, and
- Develop strategies to intervene in the 5th South Asia Forum on the SDGs.

Specifically, the SAPF 2021 discussed i) progress of Goal 4, 5, 14 and 15 in South Asia, ii) Partnership and Means of Implementation for the SDGs, and iii) Priority Actions for Regional Cooperation.

Key Recommendations of the South Asia People's Forum 2021

We the diverse participants of the SAPF 2021 urge all key decision-makers and stakeholders at 5th South Asia Forum on the SDGs 2021 to act urgently to address the deteriorating democratic and human rights situation and to promote rule of law and access to justice in South Asia with special focus on hunger and inequality, digital divide and environmental justice. These ambitious policy objectives are set out in SDGs of the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to which all governments across South Asia are signatories.

SDG 4

Governments and civil society concerted efforts to mobilize resources, and expertise to address the impact of COVID-19 on education is urgently required. This process should include developing long term strategies to address the needs of education in emergencies.

- **Develop** national strategy for education to transform the sector to meet the SDG4 targets effectively
- **Focus** on content development using smart systems and methods to improve the quality of the educational content
- **Promote** teacher training in all countries in South Asia to meet the education delivery needs

- **Equity and participation** towards allocating resources. These factors need to be considered when distributing resources like internet data, smart devices etc.
- **National focus** on gathering resources to facilitate education through avenues like grants and these resources need to be carefully mapped
- **Include** climate, sexual, DRR education in the education systems and beyond, and these need to be included in the curriculum
- **Establish** accountability mechanisms to assess the impacts of the existing policies
- **Rethink** long term strategies to ensure a wholesome recovery while moving away from traditional methods to improved methods
- **Device** quicker ways to recover the gaps: prioritize key learning issues, non-formal education
- **Focus** on transformative recovery, the shape of the recovery curve doesn't matter.
- **Rescale** the labor force to understand the challenges faced by the labor force, mainly faced by the immigrant workers at the national level
- **Invest** in the girl child to stop them from being victimized to the child marriage.

SDG 5

For vulnerable and marginalized groups – especially poor women and girls, gender and ethnic minorities, women and girls with disabilities— the crisis has deepened pre-existing inequalities, and the fallouts have been severe.

- **End** the discrimination against the marginalized communities/groups and include them in decision making (including the indigenous as well as the Dalits) especially in geographically inaccessible areas. e.g., lowland plains, Midwest and far western part of Nepal. These are lagging areas, with many issues such as illiteracy, child trafficking etc.
- **Prepare** inclusive plans, (including all the marginalized groups) including gender budgeting
- **Ensure** women's access to sexual and reproductive health care
- **Provide** gender disaggregated data to know who we are leaving behind
- **Reform** policies and laws to encourage women's participation labor force, encourage political participation
- **Address** the grim gender-based violation in South Asia
- **Call** for full alignment of national development strategy, plans and actions with SDGs of Agenda 2030
- **Encourage** participatory gender-sensitive approaches for addressing key climate change-related in South Asia
- **Establish** comprehensive grievance and complaints mechanisms to encourage women's ability to make their voices heard
- **Engage** existing women's and youth rights networks to support connectivity and vital information flow at national level
- **Refer** to the Sri Lanka Domestic Resource Mobilization model that was developed last year by the SDG stakeholder platform
- **Address** the scarily high ethnos religious as well as ethnos nationalistic and Resurgent Islamic insurgency / movements that further reduced the women's participation in few countries that have killed tens of thousands of women, children, troops- is absolutely unacceptable.

- **Include** the diverse group of civil society while policy making or passing the laws in parliament

SDG 14

South Asia is regressing on five SDGs and one of that is SDG 14. Out of the 8 countries, 5 countries have access to marine resources. SDG 14 has 10 targets but only 4 targets have published data across the five countries; Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

- **Improve** cohesion and collaboration between all relevant stakeholders to achieve SDG 14 across the South Asia region.
- **Improve** enforcement of fisheries laws and environmental regulations
- **Ensure** that all development activities, especially tourism infrastructure, aquaculture, construction of salt pans etc. are carried out according to current regulations
- **Change** the current EIA process to ensure all EIAs are done independently by the project approving authority and not by the project proponent
- **Prioritize** conservation and sustainable utilization of natural resource over destructive resource extraction and development
- **Identify** and remove overlapping mandates in government authorities
- **Determine** carrying capacities in resource extraction and use, especially fisheries and tourism
- **Adopt** a co-management concept for: managing MPAs and all coastal management plans should include all relevant stakeholders; promote public-private partnerships and include relevant stakeholders in resource management
- **Improve** awareness and education at all levels within the country
- **Advocate** SAARC to include the Marine environment as a key thematic area for the region
- **Adopt** a blue economy strategy for countries depending on marine resources
- **Better prepared** for maritime disasters at national level and regional levels

SDG 15

If you want to ensure Life on Land, there's need to be a heavy focus on Climate Change issues and If you want to protect the rights of land, sustainable integration needs to be aptly utilized over geo- political issues. The South Asian Natural Resources are being abused by the Private (Corporate) Sector and the Political Elite. COVID – 19 is being used as an excuse to further this agenda!

- **Stop** the aggressive push for large scale, unsustainable development projects
- **Stop** the large-scale Hydro Power and High-Power Transmission projects in the Himalayan Region
- **Stop** large scale mining ventures. (03 million hectares of land utilized for Oil Palm)
- **Reform** laws to stop Multinational Corporations for financing policies and climate action/mitigation
- **Utilize** Community Oriented Development Models
- **Emphasize** the Interlinkages to other SDGs (13, 11 etc.)
- **Implement** effective, meaningful and respectful Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) in reference to UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and other international legal instruments

- **Respect** the customary laws and practices of Indigenous Peoples and their rights on land
- **Endorse** international human rights laws into national laws to protect, restore and promote the Indigenous and traditional good practices
- **Revise** and update those laws and policies that are unfriendly towards the traditional livelihoods and practices of Indigenous Peoples in full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples
- **Guarantee** the land rights of Indigenous Peoples who have been safeguarding to the ecosystem, biodiversity, land, forest and water through their good practices
- **Immediately stop** the criminalization and militarization at the Indigenous lands and territories and respect the environmental human rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities
- **Stop** land grabbing and corporate captures
- **Protect and promote** the environmental-friendly Indigenous and traditional good practices of Indigenous Peoples and local communities

Means of Implementation

Decolonizing the global economy needs to be the key priority of the United Nations. The current global economic order is the problem, and there is a need to bring the global economy and finance back into democratic accountability so that we do not extract wealth, exploit labour, amplify inequalities, and undermine transformational efforts.

Partnership

- **Assess** the developmental impacts of current trade and investment frameworks, including an immediate approval of the TRIPS Waiver and a moratorium on ISDS cases in the context of a strengthened role of UNCTAD
- **Establish** a global technology assessment mechanism at the UN as the precursor of an inclusive and democratic governance of technology and digitalization
- **Assess** the systemic risks posed by unregulated or inadequately regulated financial sector, instruments and actors and undertake adequate regulatory interventions to bring global finance back into democratic accountability
- **TRIPS waiver needs further push** from South Asian countries, most of whom are already supporting the proposal, to facilitate technology transfer and access for increasing supply of covid related medical products
- **Strong and coordinated** actions with regards to the WTO 12th Ministerial Conference from South Asian governments and CSOs to uphold the interest of our countries and their marginalized constituencies in agriculture and fisheries.
- **Need a "Just Transition"** for the world, and with serious commitment to UN principles of Equal but Differentiated targets that are the cornerstones of the UN process and internal EU process.
- **Genuine engagement** with regards to capacity building to map a collective future, which is built on deep understanding of unique situations (and colonial heritage) that each country is straddled with.
- **Stand together** for well-being, better life, and prosperity and influence governments to respond accordingly.

Data Governance

- **Give the Control of the data** to the people while ensuring privacy rights, creating public debate, enabling checks and balances, regulations, and data security while emphasizing on data democracy

- **Create** public driven autonomous data structures and infrastructure and don't hand over to private sectors. Right to develop should be highlighted.
- **Remove** flawed decision-making systems in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and humane systems need to be put in place
- **Making the data available** and validating such data is important. CSOs are closer to people's issues and therefore the data should be available to the CSOs to make better decisions for people.
- **Stop** health surveillance which is harmful from the human rights HR perspective and its accountability for minority rights –
- **Stop** the data use for Military technology for health risk sets a precedent
- **Academic institutions** could complement the statistical capacity to substantiate data

Tax and Financing

- **The UN should also be active in partnerships** and should not be isolated just by working with corporates and influential entities.
- **Momentum** on campaigns in climate change issues at the global level should be felt at the regional level.
- **Permanent cancellation** of sovereign debt would be a great achievement while enabling proper financing for development processes in place.
- **Decolonization of the knowledge packages** is important and one should not be undermining historical knowledge of the region.
- **Remove** the special interests of developed nations, funding programs, and monetary institutions like the IMF
- **ODA** needs to be met but based on a right to development framework – that also needs to be reviewed for impact

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

- Call for uniform M&E system at national level

Global Governance

- **Remove** the conditionalities, patronage politics especially in IMF debt restructuring – recovery efforts are more difficult for the poorer countries. The need to rationalize investment spaces climate for instance – return on investment is needed to get the money/even if countries have so much less carbon footprint – the impact is worse

Partnership

- **Transform** VNR Process for overall regional monitoring framework with meaningful multi stakeholder partnerships
- **More participation** of youth for partnerships to achieve 2030 Agenda
- **Reviewing VNR drafts** in regional level before HLPF and having multistakeholder dialogues
- **Adequate financial resources** for effective participation in high level discussions for stakeholders
- **Systematic change** for a meaningful participation
- **Strengthening SAARC** Secretariat for effective partnerships for 2030 Agenda
- **Mainstream** and Inclusiveness of all marginalized groups in VNR Process
- **Enhance skills** for CSOs for meaningful participation, implement policies and creation of a national network for meaningful participation for CSOs

- UN must provide more support key meetings for CSOs on SDGs
- **Alternative VNR Regional** Level must be presented through multistakeholder participation
- More youth involvement in CSOs for effective transformation.