

Rebuilding People's Power, Democracy and Multilateralism for Protecting Rights, Strengthening Nature Action, Sustainable Recovery from Covid 19 Pandemic and Achieving the SDGs

We, more than 182 peoples' movements, civil society organizations, and community based grassroots organizations, participated in a series of Asia Pacific Regional Consultations (held on 13th & 14th September) culminating in Asia Pacific Peoples (Major Groups & Stakeholders Forum) on 4th October 2021.

We underline that the Asia Pacific region has the largest share of poor and malnourished people, women and children and six out of ten largest GHG emitting countries. Despite the fact that the region is the most vulnerable region to natural disasters in the world with very high economic, social and environmental costs, most of the countries in the region and majority of the population is highly dependent on nature. The region was unlikely to achieve SDGs by 2030 even before the pandemic. On its current trajectory it may achieve less than 10% of the SDG Targets. The pandemic threatens this further. The region is regressing on critical goals like SDG13 and SDG14

The Covid 19 pandemic further exposed the structural fragilities of the economy and vulnerabilities of the society and was particularly hard to the poorest communities. The pandemic has added hundreds of millions of more people to extreme poverty and hunger. Despite significant investments in financial stimulus, recovery seems challenging. Recurrence of the Covid 19 spikes and repeated lockdowns, poor vaccination roll out, large part of the spending going to fossil fuel and industry support, as well ignoring systemic and structural barriers continue to impede recovery.

The regional priorities are very clear. Climate crisis and frequent disasters, rapid biodiversity loss, increasing poverty, inequality and hunger, increasing gender inequalities and burden of unpaid care work on women, loss of jobs and livelihoods and near non-existent social security, rapid desertification and degradation of marine ecosystems and plastics pollution as well as the ambient air pollution are the major environmental issues inextricably linked to development trajectory in the region requiring serious, genuine and adequate attention commensurate to the crises.

Strengthened political will and regional cooperation can help to address some of these issues in the region. However, complete transformation of economies and society and reversal of organized slaughter of the entire ecosystem cannot be achieved without the best multilateral cooperation and global response.

Our specific recommendations and demands from 4th Asia Pacific Ministers Forum and UNEA 5.2 are as below;

1. *Nature for Climate (and biodiversity);*

- (i) Enhancing resilience of communities through increased adaptation and loss and damage support and investing in nature is the top most priority.
- (ii) The countries of the region come out of the coal dependence, halt support to the fossil fuel subsidies (as they hardly reach the poorest), increase support to renewable energy. They must resist all false solutions and corporate led profit oriented untested and doomed to fail solutions like geo-engineering solutions, biofuels and net zero and must try to achieve emission reduction in near term so as to be able prevent the worst impacts of climate crisis.
- (iii) The major economies in the region as well as all high income countries need to substantially improve their NDCs so as to be able to prevent breaching of 1.5 degrees target of the Paris agreement.

2. *Nature for food;*

- (i) We recognise the fundamental role of agriculture and small farmers and food producers in attaining rural development and ensuring overall economic growth, and also corporate capture of food and agriculture. We reiterate that agroecological approaches and food sovereignty embedded with the right to food is the only pathway to sustainable, just and equitable food systems. All governments in the regions must make urgent efforts to achieve this transformation and reverse rather than large-scale, capital and chemical intensive industrial monocultures.
- (ii) In this context, it is critical that small and landless farmers and farm workers, and indigenous peoples and local communities have access to and control of land and other natural resources. We also call upon the governments to recognise the rights, knowledge, innovation and wisdom of indigenous peoples, small farmers and women providing sustainable solutions for environment, climate change, biodiversity and food.

3. *Nature for jobs*

- (i) We call upon the governments in the region to take immediate steps to restore decent jobs, reduce informality and substantially enhance social protections. They must ensure just and equitable transition, enhanced work force participation of women, respect labour laws and trade unions and end discrimination against migrant workers.
- (ii) In the light of huge dependence on nature for livelihoods, the governments must protect livelihoods based on nature and climate sensitive sectors like agriculture, horticulture, livestock, and fisheries along with job creation. Governments must ensure production systems that put the people and environmental sustainability at the centre of development rather than extractive systems which increase exploitation of nature along with vulnerabilities of the poor and the workers.

4. *Nature for Health*

- (i) Governments in the region should take immediate steps to restore public health infrastructure by reversing neo-liberal policies leading to erosion of public investment in health. They also must be prepared to prevent predicted increase in maternal and child mortality by all measures including safe and nutritious food, water and sanitation and health facilities. Elderly people, children as well as people with disabilities have faced significant challenges during the pandemic which must be addressed before any delay.
- (ii) Vaccine rollout in the region also manifested glaring lack of global solidarity and hoarding, and profiteering taking over public good. Lack of vaccines and poor rates of vaccinations mean that poor countries and communities may take years to be fully vaccinated. This inequality needs to be addressed immediately and actions are needed on the part of the high income countries beyond G20 commitments to make vaccines a global public good, commit more vaccines reserved by them and remove all intellectual property and trade barriers and make equitable access to vaccines to all by taking other measures necessary.

5. Structural Barriers and systemic Issues:

Environment and climate cycle cannot be restored without taking into account and addressing systemic issues upfront. The situation in the region is worsened by war and conflict, authoritarian regimes, corruption, persistent human rights violations, shrinking civic space, use of patriarchy as political tool, migration, climate refugees and forced displacement, and corporate capture and lack of regional cooperation. Unequal trade opportunities, Trade and non trade barriers, illicit financial flow, trade and investment agreement with ISDS provision undermining sovereignty of countries with, and huge sovereign debt leave no fiscal space to developing and poor countries in the region to invest in public services, eradicate poverty and hunger, provide appropriate health and other basic services including education, need to be addressed through appropriate global and multilateral responses immediately. An attempt to improve the environment without overcoming these structural barriers would be an exercise in futility.

6. UNEP @50

UNEP's 50th anniversary is an historic moment to re-imagine a global environmental authority within the UN System that responds to the unprecedented challenges of our times while defending people's interest and protecting the integrity of the planet. We need a UNEP that has the political will and teeth to enforce MEAs, enable and empower countries to adopt and enforce environmental regulations that serve the interest of people over business interests. We need a UNEP that promotes evidence to support policy decisions from diverse sources of knowledge that respect peoples' lived experiences and knowledge systems. The world needs a UNEP that provides sound horizon scanning and early warning on environmental challenges to countries and communities while building their capacities to evaluate the potential impacts of new and emerging technologies. We need a bold, radical and stronger UNEP that is not influenced by pressures and influences of corporate players, but will strongly adhere to and defend inclusive multilateralism that guarantees space for the voiceless and marginalized.

7. Recommendations to UNEA 5.2;

- (i). *Strengthening Nature action for achieving the SDGs is a welcome idea. Enhancing agroecology, strengthening natural ecosystems, rewilding, in food systems and protecting rights of small farmers and food producers should be central in pathway to not only food systems transformation but also addressing the crises in climate, food and jobs, and we would welcome UNEA to support this. However, we would also like to have a clearer definition and principles of nature action so that it is not open to interpretation for its vested interests.*
- (iii) *Strong and binding commitments are required to end marine plastic pollution and marine litter by 2030*
- (iv) *UNEA must end the ecocide and genocide by bringing an internationally binding agreement to end production, use, export and import of highly hazardous pesticides by 2030*
- (v) *Air pollution is a global emergency but a bigger regional emergency needs quick and decisive action by UNEA.*
- (vi) *We also ask UNEA to ask UNEP to prepare a report on how nature action and science policy coherence across all UN agencies and processes can be ensured and present it in the UNEA 6.*