

The Statement of North East Asian Youth 2021

15th, October 2021, Online

We, the participants from youth organizations in Russia, China, Japan, Mongolia, and the Republic of Korea, welcome the Youth Session of the 5th North-East Asian Multi-stakeholder Forum on Sustainable Development Goals. We highly appreciate the UN ESCAP East and North-East Asia (ENEA) Office for supporting this session.

People on the globe are facing different hardships today, and the pandemic is exacerbating the situation. In particular, those in vulnerable positions, such as women and the disabled, are more susceptible to the threats than the majority. The youth is not an exception. The youth, or those who are under 30, has yet to be recognized as an independent constituency in many places. That's why this Youth Session has been held to collect the voices of the youth in North-East Asia. The youth organizations from 5 countries discussed the progress and challenges regarding the six sustainable development goals and presented the most successful and efficient youth solutions to accelerate its implementation further.

By this time, despite the efforts made by varying levels of civil society, challenges in gender and educational inequalities are widening amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Climate disruption and degradation are worsening, with future generations facing the most significant risk of unprecedented calamities. We cannot achieve the sustainable development goals thematically without addressing the agendas in governance, education, gender equality, climate change mitigations, and biodiversity preservation. During the pandemic, we see that sharing experiences and lessons learned to advance the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda becomes of greater importance for the global community, especially youth. Given the discussions in the Youth Session, we call for all stakeholders to collaborate to address the prominent challenges in the following four main sectors.

**Promoting quality education and empowerment of
women**

Current Status

1. In regards to education in general, namely SDG 4, prominent achievements have been recognized so far. For instance, in Russia, 88% of citizens get higher education. 66.5% of kids have access to preschool education. In addition, the ratio of educated female citizens reached 60%. In Mongolia, SDGs indicators show that SDG 4 is achieved by 72.73%. The figure is the second-highest in Mongolia.
2. Youth significantly contribute to the implementation of SDG 4. For example, in Russia, there are educational projects aimed at increasing the quality and versatility of school education, advanced training of young teachers, socialization projects for vulnerable youth groups, educational projects for young people on topics such as gender equality and tolerance to appearance. These youth solutions contribute to the rapid progress of SDG 4 at the national level.
3. In regards to gender equality in education, there is still room for improvement. For instance, in Japan, women are still underrepresented in science education. The Cabinet Office admits, in its fifth gender equality plan, that although the ratio of women in Japan who engage in research and technical positions is currently on the rise, the figure remains 16.6%, which is lower compared with that of foreign countries. In addition, as for university and graduate students, who are in the preliminary stage of becoming researchers, the ratio of females in science and engineering departments is lower compared with the figure in other departments. To ensure the fair representation of females in the field of science, further measures should be taken.
4. In regards to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, there is room for further improvements, too. In general, Emergency contraceptive pills are available at pharmacies in more than 90 countries at an affordable price. However, this is not the case in some NEA countries. For instance, in Japan, emergency contraceptive pills are not available without paying around 100\$ and getting prescriptions from doctors. Furthermore, other contraceptive devices, specially made for women, are not available with the current regulations. In addition, the lack of comprehensive sexual education makes it difficult for youth to reach out to reliable sources on sexualities.
5. In regards to gender as a whole, there are still gender gaps in North-East Asia countries. For instance, Mongolia ranked 71st by its Gender Inequality Index (GII=0.322)5 out of 188 countries in the world. Gender inequality is prominent along with indicators such as the average life expectancy rate (75 for females and 65 for males), labor force participation (50.9% for females

and 61% for males), the employment rate of young people between 15-34 is 45,9% (56% for males and 35% for females), and representation in politics at decision-making levels (women hold 17.1% of the seats in the national parliament). Japan also ranked 147th by its Gender Gap Index out of 156 countries. Its gender gap is prominent in various forms including politics, promotion in corporations, and so on.

6. In particular regarding equity in job hunting, a significant number of youth have experienced sexual harassment through the process. In Japan, according to the youth statement to Cabinet Office with the public comments on the fifth gender equality plan, sexual harassment in job hunting is a serious problem that plagues job hunters, ranging from discriminatory remarks in interviews to rape. According to a February 2019 study by Business Insider, one out of every two job hunters suffers from sexual harassment. Sexual harassment in job-hunting occurs in places where companies cannot recognize, such as mobile applications for alumni community and matching, which are increasingly used these days. In the job hunting process, students are judged on their own words and actions, so many students feel that they have no choice but to endure without speaking up even if they are uncomfortable.
7. Covid-19 pandemic put the vulnerable stakeholders into an even more difficult situation as the CSO statement suggests.
8. In regards to ESD, Education for Sustainable Development, progress is recognized at the national level. For instance, in Japan, UNESCO Schools, which are schools that practice peace and international cooperation, are positioned as centers for promoting ESD and supporting ESD practices. In addition, the new Courses of Study, which have been implemented since FY2020, include the concept of becoming "creators of a sustainable society", in their preamble and general provisions. (Japan VNR report 2021.)
9. In this context, youth organizations promote SDG-related education. For example, in Japan, various youth organizations raise awareness of critical problems such as the loss of biodiversity, whose importance is not recognized to enough extent in the present situation. (This will be further explained in the environmental section.)

Solutions and Recommendations

Given these challenging situations, we call on all stakeholders including national and local government for actions as follows;

- a. to promote gender equality in every discipline including the field of science, politics, corporations.
- b. to scrutinize and take measures against unfounded harassment, especially in the process of job hunting.
- c. to reassess the existing regulations and educational curriculums in regards to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights.
- d. to recognize and promote Education for Sustainable Development to raise awareness of the critical problems and to give them the sense of participants.

Dealing with climate change and Preserving Biodiversity

Current status

1. In regards to climate change, several countries in North-East Asia recognize climate change and show their willingness to mitigate its progress. At the stage of rapid industrialization and urbanization, China's objective to achieve carbon neutrality by 2060 was broadly welcomed. Japan declared the goal of carbon neutrality by 2050. Civil society's awareness is also increasing. In Korea, 68.8% of the young generation have a positive opinion on eco-friendly campaigns of enterprises, according to consumer trend report research.
2. However, backcasting approaches to achieve them have room for improvement. In Japan, in the sixth energy basic plan, the goal in terms of the energy mix by 2030 and the goal of the proportion of sustainable energy is set at 36 to 38%, which is just close to the current rate of several European countries. The concrete means for achieving this energy mix should be specified and much more ambitious goals by 2050 to achieve carbon neutrality are necessary.
3. In regards to biodiversity, protecting the ecosystem is a prerequisite for other SDGs that should be considered more seriously. Although biodiversity and ecosystem are the foundation for human activities, their

importance has yet to be recognized enough by the general public. In Japan, a national review on biodiversity reveals that the term “Biodiversity” is recognized by about half of citizens (51.8%), which implies that understanding toward biodiversity among the public is insufficient. In Korea, the government is enlarging its biodiversity conservation infrastructure, but it is still necessary to promote a more eco-friendly lifestyle by improving management and conservation systems, securing biological resources, and enhancing people’s awareness. This requires participation at a broader level.

Solutions and Recommendations

Given these challenging situations, we call on all stakeholders including national and local government for actions as follows;

- a. to establish a more stringent and holistic monitoring system to protect sea life and the overall ecosystem’s biodiversity;
- b. to carry out a vulnerability assessment and regional strategies in need to address climate change;
- c. to civil society; to require collective work to reduce greenhouse gas emission based on the Paris Agreement of UNFCCC as well as to raise awareness in the coexistence of people and nature.

Youth Partnerships for the Goals

Current status

- a. Insufficient support from the government - Russia
 - i. Often, attempts to make progress in the SDGs at the country level led to half-hearted results because the state does not always fulfill its role as a mobilizer of all parties (NGOs, businesses, etc.). Also, there is no overall federal plan for achieving the national SDGs. Due to the lack of a systematic approach to the SDGs, there is not enough state support and financing for NGOs, and youth organizations.

- ii. For example, the number of organizations included in SDSN Russia and SDSN Youth Russia is not sufficiently compared, with the number of members in the same network in other countries where NGOs and organizations are directly related to the promotion of SDGs are supported by the government.
2. Active participation in policy advocacy - Mongolia
 1. Universal Progress MILC has been involved in advocating the Action Plan 2021-2030 for Mongolia's Long-Term Development Policy "VISION 2050". This addresses the need to transfer the educational system to online platforms. It has also suggested the Ministry of Education and Science consider the needs of students with disabilities.
 2. The "Watch on Campaign Promises" project highlighted Women's Employment issues. In addition, YPWn (Youth Platform for Women) has been involved in advocating for women's working rights and has suggested the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, fulfill the Government Promise of creating 150,000 jobs.
 3. Youths dismissed as non-constituency - Japan
 1. In national voluntary review (VNR) meetings in Japan, the youths still do not have a dedicated seat to represent their opinions, despite their presence is crucial to leading the aging society.

Solutions and Recommendations

To counter these issues, youths across the countries have been involved in advocating and addressing their voices to the governmental organizations, and this is exemplified by youth organizations specializing in climate action, in Korea and Japan.

Understanding these current circumstances, we demand all stakeholders:

- a. to establish a comprehensive policy coordination system for SDGs implementation with a multi-stakeholder engagement mechanism at the local and national level, practically including the young generation as stakeholders;
- b. to enhance the access and opportunities for the public to participate in civil society mechanisms regarding the understanding and implementation of SDGs;

- c. to expand and institutionalize the space for youth organizations and young leaders to engage in the active decision-making process, with an integrated follow-up system.

In this regard, we reaffirm the importance of reflecting the youth perspective and their field experiences in the thematic areas of SDGs implementation. Along with the forum, a Youth Statement on the situation of sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific will be subsequently presented. We look for a future where the young generation can strengthen their active participation in the global community and positively inspire others to make our world a better place. Thank you for your attention.