

APFSD YOUTH FORUM 2023



Asia-Pacific Regional Youth Call to Action 2023



East, Northeast, and
Central Asia



Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan
Mongolia, and South Korea

Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels in Asia and the Pacific with Young People at the Forefront

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

East Asia, Northeast Asia and Central Asia set the goal of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Today, despite the differences in the situations in this sub-region, the impact of COVID-19 has been very significant, causing, on average, nearly 30% unemployment among youth.

Water resource issues are also arising, with groundwater levels rapidly declining due to extensive flooding, excessive irrigation, resulting in frequent salinisation and other problems. The contribution of agriculture to GDP in Central Asia is 20-35%.¹ Due to climate change and drought in the region, the agricultural sector is losing its harvest. Climate change is causing frequent disasters

such as major flooding and large-scale droughts, expansion of salt-affected areas, and landslides caused by deforestation. In addition, the construction of social infrastructure has not progressed well due to many natural disasters such as earthquakes, typhoons, and cyclones, as well as the fragile ground in many areas such as deserts and frozen soil. It is difficult for a single government to maintain public health and security in the face of these large-scale disasters, and human lives are threatened. In addition, many countries are dependent on the mining industry and have yet to break away from their dependence on fossil fuels. All the above mentioned factors contribute to poor welfare, low satisfaction on the basic needs as they often result in domestic, governmental or even international conflicts.

Sources:

¹ <http://amudaryabasin.net/ru/thematic-field/514>.

Furthermore, sanitation problems are becoming more serious, and access to water resources such as drinking water and latrines is more limited in some areas than before COVID-19. Many residents of Central Asian rural areas bathe in street drains, where there are no water sanitary standards. In villages, water pumps are faulty and there is an excessive consumption of clean drinking water that leaks into the ground. Also, before the pandemic, educational institutions had an insufficient number of toilets inside the building, places for washing hands, which entailed unsanitary conditions. The situation has not changed since the pandemic. On the other hand, the scales of the wastewater reservoirs are increasing, whereas the industrial potential of such are not met. Therefore the waste water continues to aggravate the water infrastructure with polluted water, rather than add-up solutions to water management. An additional problem is the lack of non-gender toilets for trans*, non-binary, and intersex people, which causes psychological discomfort for them. The stigma and bullying of menstruation in girls make them hide this biological process and the lack of water and sanitary conditions force them to live in unhygienic conditions. This is the result of a lack of CSE and SRHR education.

Educational disparities have led to economic, gender, and regional disparities, resulting in the construction of a severely disparate society. During COVID-19, the main political measure was the transition to the online educational system, which was exclusive. As a result, 1.5 billion students in 165 countries were unable to attend educational systems. Due to a lack of awareness on electronic devices, many teachers could not meet the basic standards of educational programs. Moreover, children with poorer economic backgrounds were often denied access to knowledge due to the cost of electronic devices. All of these factors in the post-COVID-19 period have to be addressed, or otherwise may cause adults with debts in fundamental knowledge.

During the lockdowns we observed the rise of violence against women. That includes domestic violence that is still decriminalised in many Central Asian countries and poorly reported, as well cyber-bullying. On the other hand, some barriers to gender equality continue to prosper, regardless of COVID-19: for example, harassment is still not qualified nor prevented or

punished in Asian countries, significantly contributing to mental health issues of girls and women. Education and sex education for women and LGBT+ students have been closed due to COVID-19, and the rise of radical factions, deteriorating social conditions, and the educational gap between rural and urban areas is clearly widening. In particular, the restrictions on educational and employment opportunities for women and LGBT+ people are extremely strong, and many women's career paths are being obstructed. Trans* people especially have limited right of access to education due to the lack of changing gender markers in passports at the legislative level. The problem is that local communities have no opportunity to express their opposition to this situation and are taught that this situation is normal as part of their education. As no concrete opinions or measures have been offered regarding STEM education or greening education, the necessary education is not being provided.

In many of these regions and countries, the cultural and religious backgrounds have created a male-dominated/patriarchal and homophobic, transphobic society with a disdain for women, LGBT+ people, and significant restrictions have been placed on them in all career paths, including work, schooling, and employment. These are against the backdrop of the rise of radical forces and the weakening of civil society due to the economic instability mentioned earlier, which has become a major problem. In addition, the risk of accidental military conflict is higher in these areas than in other regions, and interregional, intergenerational, and intersectoral conflicts based on the idea of resource nationalism are frequent.

Also, due to economic instability and unemployment in the Central Asian region, labour migration to Russia is observed. In particular, queer people and trans* women tend to leave for the capital of Russia, but face a discriminatory situation. According to the annual poll on discrimination conducted among homosexual, bisexual and transgender people in Russia, the rate of human rights violations based on sexual orientation and gender identity has grown from 16,6% in 2014 to 64,4% by 2019.² On 5 December 2022, the RF President signed a law on a complete ban on so-called «LGBT-propaganda». Another law which discriminates against HIV+ people in Russia is “On Prevention of the Spreading of HIV in

Sources:

2 *Monitoring discrimination against LGBTQ+ people in Russia. Quantitative data (2020). Authors: Kseniia Kamarina, Daniil Zhaivoronok.*

the Russian Federation” which indicates that foreign citizens and stateless persons who apply for a Russian visa to stay within Russia’s border for a period longer than three months are to provide a certificate about them being HIV-negative, and “in case HIV is detected in a foreign citizen or a stateless person who are present on the territory of the Russian Federation, they are to be subjected to deportation outside the borders of the Russian Federation based on the procedure defined by the law.”

After the pandemic, the war between Russia and Ukraine began, and then military mobilisation in Russia occurred. This situation has negatively affected the Central Asian countries: housing and food prices have increased due to the relocation of Russian citizens. As a result of higher prices within almost all supply chains, all the vulnerable elements increased their exposure to negative factors. For example, basic needs such as women’s sanitation products (for menstruation and the postpartum period) almost doubled in price which means that they became less available for women of lower economic status and resulted in either reduced use of basic sanitation or increased financial pressure.

As for industry, many regions and nations remain dependent on fossil fuels, and the transition to sustainable industry is a long way off. This is due to a failure to build new industries and a lack of competitiveness in the government debt market relative to the size of the national budget, resulting in a very large number of citizens forced to live in contaminated water, air, and soil. In addition, regarding infrastructure industries, security is not being maintained and electricity supply is inadequate. This situation has led to human rights violations against women, kidnappings of children, and robberies, and immediate solutions are needed.

As for partnerships, geopolitical risks are increasing due to the rise of resource nationalism, and military conflicts are frequent. In addition, there is no smooth coordination among sectors due to differences in technical standards and quality control standards. In terms of internal collaboration, the introduction of SRHR and other training programmes has been delayed, and there is no collaboration among ministries and agencies in determining support measures for women and the LGBT+ community, which has prevented effective policies from being formulated. In addition to these

problems, the countries are facing several other issues, such as stagnation in industrial development, failure to build social infrastructure, and weak social systems that have not been reviewed due to the long period of distorted control by a few authorities, and the absence of a parliamentary self-cleansing mechanism. In addition, corruption is widespread, and the state budget is not distributed properly. In many areas, young people are prevented from speaking out against such a bleak society by speech controls, and they are forced to keep their mouths shut to avoid being ostracised by the local community.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering this situation, we, the diverse East Asian, Northeast Asian, and Central Asian youth and young adult participants of the APFSD Youth Forum 2023, call on all stakeholders, including governments, international organisations, corporations, civil society organisations, and public organisations to:

- Use solutions, as businesses and the private sector cannot ignore social concerns. Growing demands for social and environmental justice will transform the market by creating new jobs and solutions.
- Provide gender-neutral toilets in schools, improving access to water.
- Promote sexual and reproductive health and rights in schools, ensuring that young people have access to menstrual health and other reproductive health needs.
- Reform the education system to increase public awareness of the SDGs.
- Rebuild intergenerational knowledge exchange to reduce the generation gap and promote dialogue, access to technology, and situational awareness (agenda).
- Expand the scope of the future by teaching the educational system to use technology selectively rather than relying entirely on it.
- Improve environmental education by adopting relevant policies on water use, recycling, air pollution.
- Build waste recycling plants instead of incineration.
- Reduce the effects of meat consumption by applying qualified solutions (with a due respect to cultural heritage).
- Adopt and search for green options.

- Adopt anti-discrimination laws that include sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Adopt anti-bullying policies that include sexual orientation and gender identity as protective characteristics in the education system.
- Create favourable legislative conditions to change gender markers for trans* people.
- Ensure that education is accessible to people with disabilities and is not segregated in schools.
- Promote sub-regional cooperation to ensure a better quality of internet access.
- Encourage pastoralists to increase household income through small household partnerships rather than relying entirely on livestock numbers and overconsumption of pasture.
- Improve access to ARVs and hormone therapy for HIV+ and trans* people through delivery, non-contact therapy, and access to pharmacies.
- Include key populations and other groups in the social protection of the state.
- Repeal the norm of deportation and prohibition of entry for foreign nationals living with HIV.
- Develop a legal framework and ensure access to the full range of health services for migrants living with HIV.
- Ensure that all people living with HIV, including in places of detention, have access to HIV testing, treatment and care according to evidence based health care standards.
- Promote the immediate transformation of social systems and expand democratic and public services.
- Create special economic zones to promote the transformation of entire industries.
- Promote the introduction of an education system that will facilitate the rapid development of sustainable and resilient infrastructural facilities and the training of technicians for this purpose.
- Smoothly promote intra-ministerial cooperation and resolve diplomatic conflicts as soon as possible.
- Promote industrial revitalisation in rural areas with the introduction of renewable energy.
- Promote fundamental improvement of social infrastructure and institutions to strengthen security.
- Implement clear measures and supervision systems to address corruption issues.
- Construct measures to deal with gray water technology.
- Remove restrictions on career choice and study for men and women based on cultural and religious values.
- Allow entrepreneurship and free economic activity for all to promote a shift to sustainable industries.

The APFSD country and sub-regional briefs were developed through collective discussions and engagements between youth advocates at the APFSD Youth Forum in Bangkok on March 18-20, 2023. The East, Northeast, and Central Asia drafting team consisted of the following participants: Jin Tanaka (Japan), Kaori Uchiyama (Japan), Alexandra Mussina (Kazakhstan), Ramilia Almazbekova (Kyrgyzstan), Saruul-Ukhaan (Mongolia), Alina Sadykova (Kazakhstan), Bold Enkhbold (Mongolia), Chaeun JIN (South Korea), Hyejeong Ju (South Korea), Sora Narita and Namhaa Sharma (Japan), and Yuri SHIN (South Korea). Overall supervision was provided by the ARROW Call To Action team.
