

# APFSD YOUTH FORUM 2023



## Asia-Pacific Regional Youth Call to Action 2023



**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

The COVID-19 epidemic has led to stagflation in Japan, where all prices, including food, electricity, and gas, have risen sharply from 2019, while wages are not rising at all. These challenges are a major problem not only because they are likely to reduce consumption among young people, but also because they are likely to accelerate Japan's declining birthrate and aging society. The recession is a state that represents the past 30 years in Japan, and there are calls for a decline in all kinds of services and quality due to lack of funds. In particular, the wage gap between men and women, regional disparities, and educational disparities are widening, and an increasing number of young people are suffering from mental illness due to this stagnation and lack of hope. In addition, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, OPEC's suspension of oil production increase, and China's risk of invading Taiwan have pulled foreign capital out of the country, plunging Japan, which depends on foreign countries for

much of its food and energy resources, into a recession with no end in sight. The social changes caused by COVID-19 have not merely devastated the tourism industry but have triggered a potential stagnation of the entire regional industry. In particular, the tourism industry in rural areas has lost 99% of its income, and unemployment in rural areas is about to reach 20% for the first time in the postwar period. In addition, the Tokyo Olympics and Osaka World Expo during COVID-19 have been severely affected and are facing further problems, including economic damage and difficulties in recovering the cost of preparations for hosting the international events. In addition, these blows are being felt by families with economic and educational disparities, with an increasing number of high school and college dropouts due to economic reasons.

Disparities in the decision-making process in Japan remain large, with the percentage of women in the bureaucracy and politicians hovering at less than 10%,

a situation that shows little prospect of improvement. The wage gap has also widened due to inefficient labour and increasing wage inequality, with the economic power gap between women and men further widened by the COVID-19 epidemic. In addition, the construction of frameworks to crack down on excessive sex and other industries, as well as conflicts and divisions based on faulty decision-making processes, have reduced the number of places where women can play an active role. It is imperative that immediate action be taken to address the groups behind these events that are promoting activities that treat and plunder these women, who need the support of the government, as if they were consumer goods.

Regarding education, the introduction of digital education has lagged behind that of other countries, and teachers' workloads range from club activities to home visits, making overwork a problem. In particular, the quality of teachers is rapidly declining because teachers are paid a fixed amount for overtime work, even though they are public servants. In addition, the infrequent updating of all types of education, including comprehensive sex education (CSE), has prevented the establishment of a flexible educational system that can respond to the demands of society. Furthermore, it is impossible for teachers to intervene in bullying and violence against women, and specific initiatives and support measures for victims' victimisation do not exist. These problems were also identified during COVID-19 in various parts of the country, severely hampering the right to a safe education for youth and children. While support measures for static minorities are still being built, they are still developing, and while there is no clear discrimination or persecution, Japan is experiencing a values shift.

Much of the infrastructure in Japan was built in the 1960s and 1970s and is aging, from water pipes and sewers to electric lines. In addition, the country has not been able to keep up with new industries such as semiconductors, which has led to a decline in industrial transformation, affecting local governments as a major challenge. In addition, the blind faith in sustainable renewable energy in recent years has led to frequent landslides and illegal overexploitation, and the absence of legal regulations has led to sloppy management, selection, and development based on decisions that are not based on scientific evidence. In addition to this, the effects of

diverse climate change, such as erratic rainfall, drought, and flooding, as typified by extreme weather events and guerrilla downpours, can be seen everywhere, and the limits of social infrastructure are likely to be reached.

In addition, prolonged periods of such unstable weather can be very damaging to agriculture and fisheries, causing significant damage to the region's key industries. About fisheries and agriculture, crop failures continue, and the aging production facilities make it imperative to improve the food supply system. However, due to low economic budgets, many dairy farmers and farmers are going out of business, and low food self-sufficiency is inescapable. This worsening economic recession caused by COVID-19, the increase in disasters and decline of local industries due to climate change and overexploitation, and the decline in the working population due to the low birthrate and aging population have already led to an unavoidable situation, with a sharp increase in unemployment in the informal employment sector of over 40%. In Japan, the number of non-regular employees is extremely high, with 20% of the total population living in precarious employment. Many young girls and women, especially in the formal and informal sectors, are at high risk of facing pay cuts and layoffs, and are short of physical time, including to care for the elderly.

Distortions are also occurring regarding partnerships. At this point in time, Japan is working with many domestic companies to formulate policies and develop technologies to promote environmental measures. However, inter-ministerial coordination and communication is hampered by a lack of human resources and overwork, and the closed-door process has allowed a structure to be built in which only certain sectors have a monopoly on interests. In addition, despite the experience and clear roadmaps for achieving the various SDG targets, youth and young people are not meaningfully involved in the regional planning process. In addition, policies to accelerate the roadmaps that have already been set have not been adequately presented, and decisions in the Diet are proceeding with finality, leaving citizens with only a revised tax burden and declining public services. With Japan's future workforce, it will be nearly impossible to achieve any of the SDGs, and it is of utmost importance to promote fair procedures and the provision of public services commensurate with the tax burden, based on concrete, open dialogue and citizen audits.

## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

### General Recommendations

Considering this situation, we, the diverse Japanese youth participants in the APFSD Youth Forum 2023, call on all stakeholders, including governments, international organisations, businesses, civil society, and public organisations, to:

- Promote the introduction of an education system that promotes the rapid development of sustainable and resilient infrastructure facilities and the training of engineers for this purpose.
- Revise laws and frameworks to ensure that civil servants are paid adequate wages and compensation for their work.
- Carry out a fundamental and comprehensive review of tax expenditures and an immediate improvement in the expenditures that have been used to date.
- Put in place antitrust legislation to curb vested monopolies in certain sectors.
- Introduce STEM education to promote equitable and inclusive educational opportunities at the point of compulsory education.
- Implement gender responsive approaches to sustainable development which includes access to comprehensive sexuality education to ensure young people's health and wellbeing.
- Promote the elimination of economic disparities by introducing equal pay for equal work.
- Promote active decision-making process by citizen groups and third parties, including young people, and the request for community audits
- Implement a fundamental review of land use based on scientific evidence and a comprehensive inspection of related contractors in order to promote a sustainable power supply structure
- Strengthen solid waste management infrastructure and promote the 3Rs (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) of waste management.
- Promote the optimisation of labour efficiency with the introduction of digital documents and technology
- Strengthen cooperation among funds, enterprises, and ministries for climate change countermeasures, and establish a stable resource supply system as a national policy.
- Introduce a school police officer system to maintain local public safety.
- Eliminate unjustified multiple subcontracting responsibilities and meaningless middlemen.
- Promote the creation of special economic zones to stimulate investment in technological development and human resource training.

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*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 Japan drafting team was led by Jin Tanaka and Kaori Uchiyama. Overall supervision was provided by the ARROW Call To Action team.*

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