

# ASIA PACIFIC YOUTH POSITION PAPER TOWARDS RIO +20

Kathmandu Nepal

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#### **Preamble**

- 1. In recent years, the Asia-Pacific region has experienced robust economic growth with emerging economies. However, key challenges remain in ensuring that negative environmental and social consequences are vigorously tackled and that economic opportunities benefit all.
- 2. Severe and pressing issues which have arisen as consequences include climate change, melting of glaciers, rising sea level, biodiversity loss, energy crisis, food insecurity and health problems, depleting natural resource base, natural disasters, migration and deforestation. Vicious circle of poverty is on the top of all. The transition to a green economy, revision of institutional frameworks on sustainable development and enabling of low-carbon solutions to energy issues are therefore at central to address these interconnected challenges.
- 3. It is our firm belief as Asia Pacific youth [representing over 50% of the worlds population], that Rio+20 marks an important milestone for the global community to critically reassess our collective commitment towards sustainable development and to implement the reforms that are necessary to transform our societies and economies. The decisions made at Rio+20 will have potentially widespread implications for the Asia-Pacific region. It is us, the youth, who will be affected in future with the decisions made today, and we have to take lead in the coming era in effecting and establishing better economic structures and mechanisms for conservation of our environment.
- 4. Therefore, it is crucial that we effectively and strongly participate in decision making processes through the provision of important perspectives, thereby taking ownership of the trajectory of the Asia-Pacific's development path leading to a more sustainable future.
- **5.** Keeping in view the diversity of the Asia-Pacific region, this paper sheds light on the most pragmatic recommendations made by youth, as vital change makers, to address our regional issues.

# **Green Economy to Eradicate Poverty**

# **Background**

The Asia Pacific region is more vulnerable towards the impact of climate change; therefore, urgent adaptations and actions to protect the environment have become an utmost priority. Youth of today should own the responsibility and promote the concept of green economy to tackle the issues of the region. Poverty eradication and environment conservation are the ingredients of Green Economy. According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), "Greening the economy refers to the process of reconfiguring businesses and infrastructure to deliver better returns on natural, human and economic capital investments, while at the same time reducing greenhouse gas emissions, extracting and using less natural resources, creating less waste and reducing social disparities."

A question always arises who has the ownership right of ecosystem services? Neither the government nor the rich has complete right, the major possession of natural resources lies with the local communities including the vulnerable and marginalised inhabiting in the mountains and remote areas, actually deserve to benefit from the ecosystem services, both tangible and non-tangible benefits. As per the Polluter Pays Principle "Polluter has to pay for the damages caused by him/her to the environment and not the ignorant." Mankind enjoying the luxury of nature in several forms of services has been posing great threat to the environment and never realised the extinction of species, disappearance of resources and is presently responsible for climate change. Green economy is the best solution to food crisis and so to alleviate poverty. Green economy is the stair-case to achieve sustainable development.

According to the User Pays Principle "one has to pay for deriving benefits from the ecosystem, it may be the government, private sector, public or any other stakeholder". Earth is not the premise to dump all the waste and extract all the resources, this way we are ruining our own future leading to low GDP resulting into low economy growth.

Green economy aims to profit the people and the planet. It acts as a fulcrum to maintain a balance between the sustainable development of mankind and GDP growth. Due to expanse of urbanization the demand and supply curve of availability of resources has shown an abnormal growth, with more demand of resources (natural and manmade) and less availability with increasing span of time. Green economy is the best option to bridge the gap between scarcity of resources and growth and thus eliminating social inequity.

#### Challenges

- **6. Poverty**: Barring a few outliers, the Asia Pacific region has seen a significant amount of economic growth in the recent past. However, there still exists a wide divide between poor and rich and social inequity which hampers the overall development of the nations.
- **7.** Climate change and natural disasters: Changing climate is exacerbating the pressure on natural resources and the region is witnessing its impact in the form of glacier melting, floods, droughts, sea-level rise, loss of biodiversity etc.

- **8. Over exploitation of natural resources**: To accelerate the development, people are exploiting the natural resources in an unsustainable manner, which is having multiple impacts like environmental pollution, degradation of ecosystems setting.
- **9. Unsustainable production and poor waste management**: Production of non-biodegradable products, usage of unsustainable processes and poor handling of waste poses threat to the environment.
- 10. Lack of access to clean and renewable energy technologies: Access to a reliable and adequate source of energy is inextricably linked to sustained progress and growth. However, the most common source of energy production in the region is biomass, fossil fuel burning which poses considerable risks to the environment in the short and long-term. Despite of availability of renewable resources, lack of technology has compelled people to use the resources in unsustainable ways. There needs to be strong mechanism to promote renewable energy like hydropower and other alternative energy resources.
- 11. Unsustainable urban development: More Asia Pacific cities have become the focal points as major producers, consumers and distributors of goods and services. However, many cities tend to lack sustainable services such as water, air and transport systems. Migrations levels are high in cities, creating more slums, increasing pressure on limited resources and increasing pollution.
- **12. Inefficient governance and political instability:** There is lack of good institutional framework in the Asia Pacific. The current governance system is a centralized system with top-down approach. Voice of community and other vibrant groups including youth is generally not audible to decision makers to make strategic policies as per the need of the community.
- **13.** Lack of priority given to research and development: Asia Pacific region is more vulnerable to climate change impacts, but the development activities have been practicing without basic findings of research. For example, the Himalayan region was presented as data lacking are (white spot) by 4<sup>th</sup> Assessment Report of the IPCC.
- **14. Quality of Life:** Currently, happiness, mindfulness and wellbeing of society that reflects the true quality of life is not taken into account.
- **15.** Lack of evaluation of ecosystem services: Ecosystem provides number of services with tangible and intangible benefits. Mountain ecosystems are sources of exhaustive number of services, which are not valued by consumers and providers.
- **16.** Low literacy level: Marginalised communities do not have access to the basic education and those getting are generally ignorant of the environmental issues because of the curriculum. Brain drain is another issue which is hampering the development in the region.
- **17. Unemployment and lack of opportunities**: People are not getting enough opportunities to get jobs and vocational trainings or skill development opportunities.

- **18. Food security in the HKH region:** Majority of the HKH communities are highly dependent on livestock and rain-fed agriculture for their livelihoods and due to changing hydrological regimes they are highly vulnerable.
- **19. Gender issues:** Women are worst hit as men have to migrate out for work due to scarcity of resources in the mountain region.
- **20. Melting of glaciers in the HKH range:** Melting of glaciers has contributed faster to sea-level rise in the last 350 years. It also contributes to catastrophic floods known as glacial lake outburst (GLOFs) causing heavy loss of life and property.
- **21. Health issues:** Due to less accessibility to resources, infrastructure and other health facilities the mountain communities are likely to be vulnerable to various diseases.

#### **Recommendations**

- **22.** Government, industries and people are the stakeholders of any system that has to work in a team to promote green economy.
- 23. Existing policies and programmes should be properly implemented with continuous monitoring and evaluation mechanism. Government should further carry out SWOT Analysis to assess the gaps and missing links of the present policy reforms. Sustainable Development strategies need to be prioritized and mainstreamed in the government policy framework to strengthen existing environmental laws and policies such as Air Act, Water Act, Forest Conservation Act, CBD, Waste management act, Act to safeguard the rights of local communities, Costal Zone Regulation Act and implement new acts to ensure green growth of the economy.
- **24.** Government should provide several carbon market mechanisms such as Payment for Ecosystem Services, REDD, REDD+, etc to create green jobs for the unemployed and marginalised communities inhabiting the mountain regions.
- **25.** Further assessments such as Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), Mountain Risk Engineering, Tourism Impact Assessment is recommended to restore and increase the resilience of the mountainous regions in the HKH region and to reduce the vulnerability of the communities therein.
- **26.** There is need for a monitoring, and verification system to indicate and measure sustainability with respect to the GDP of the economy.
- **27.** Industries need to use clean and green technologies to increases their carbon credits and decrease their emissions to provide increasing employment opportunities through green jobs.
- **28.** Life-cycle analysis should be mandatory for every industrial product. Implementation of 5Rs (reduce, reuse, recycle, recover, residual management) is another tool for waste management. Cradle to grave approach should be adopted.

- **29.** Techniques like organic farming should be used to ensure healthy and productive agriculture to address issues of food security and also micro financing should be introduced for the welfare of local people.
- **30.** Trainings and workshops to be conducted for local people, tourists and corporate is further recommended to aware them of the guidelines as well as their individual responsibilities to protect the environment.
- **31.** Youth involvement needs to be initiated in the policy formulation processes to get better policy reforms what impacts the youth in future.
- **32.** There is a need to establish a youth network to share the problems and good practices.
- **33.** Regional and global cooperation is needed for knowledge and technology transfer taking into consideration the intellectual property rights.
- **34.** Establishing indicators to check country development need to be incorporated such as Genuine Progress Index and Gross National Happiness (GNH).
- **35.** Entrepreneurship and skill development of the local community should be promoted to build the capacity of local communities.
- **36.** Seed funding should be made available to carry out R&D activities for developing low carbon technologies and in turn generating more green jobs.

# **Energy for Low Carbon Future**

#### Introduction

- **37.** This section of the position paper presents the collective vision of the Asia Pacific youth on measures to be adopted to drive a low carbon future.
- **38.** The Asia Pacific youth envisions a low carbon future as one in which
- 38 i) sustainable energy management is practiced;
- 38 iii) access and affordability of energy are enhanced thus ensuring the well-being of all; and
- 38 iii) emissions of greenhouse gases and other air pollutants are minimized to combat adverse effects of climate change.

# **Key Issues**

- **39.** The use of fossil fuels and other conventional sources of energy is contributing to global warming.
- **40.** In recent years the Asia Pacific region has gradually increased energy consumption and production due to several factors such as economic growth and/or population growth.
- **41.** Due to lack of affordable and accessible green energy, people are more and more dependent on the unsustainable traditional sources to fulfill their increasing demand of energy.
- **42.** The Asia Pacific countries are dependent on certain other nations for energy sources. This leaves the region highly vulnerable to volatile oil prices which can be dictated by strong industry players in the energy market.
- **43.** Emissions from fossil fuel and some of traditional energy sources such as firewood combustion lead to many diseases. Such health impacts have tremendously increased the medical cost burden to the people and contributed to a reduction in labour productivity.

## **Key Barriers**

**44.** There is a lack of definitive policies and strong legislation promoting the development of low carbon energy. The existing policies and regulations are not implemented effectively due to weak and ineffective institutional mechanisms. In particular, there are significant lacking in the aspects below:

# Ineffective collaboration & partnership

**45.** There is a lack of effective collaboration between: public and private sectors, governmental bodies and the community, national and regional-level. In addition, there is low concern of government for youth activities. Without effective collaboration, it is impossible to coordinate a concerted effort towards achieving a low carbon future between institutions.

#### Financial Barriers

- **46.** There is a lack of financial aid (support) system to support the production of low carbon energy. While it requires high start-up and operational costs, long payback periods associated with investment in low carbon technologies, this posed a financial barrier to potential investors.
- **47.** In addition, there is a lack of seed funding for youth driven entrepreneurial initiatives in the area of low carbon energy for instance, innovations in energy efficient appliances.

## Barriers to social change

- **48.** People are lacking awareness and knowledge of fossil fuel and greenhouse effect and there is a big gap in climate education for community.
- **49.** In addition, people seem unwilling to change due to the difficulties in both accessing renewable energy resources and changing their own daily lifestyle.

#### Technological Barriers

50. In most Asia Pacific countries, research and development (R&D) is quite insufficient due to limited attention and funding. In addition, we are lacking with skilled human resources. Due to these reasons, low carbon energies have shortages and limitations that hinder them from large-scale adoption.

## Unsustainable Urban Development

**51.** While lacking of institutional and policy frameworks, the rate of urbanization in Asia Pacific cities are growing fast. As a result, cities in the Asia Pacific region have to deal with rising motorization and energy consumption.

#### **Recommendations**

- **52.** The legislative framework needs to be strengthened in a way that would promote a low carbon future, enhance compliance monitoring and accountability and establish an index for the measurement of energy sustain.
- **53.** To address Ineffective collaboration & partnership

For national and regional level:

- National-level governmental bodies should communicate with regional-level governmental bodies in a timely manner and transparent way for community to see.
- Enhancing civil society's role, especially the youth's role and having an open channel of communication with the government, allowing civil society to have a say in the policy making process.
- Provide platform for communication and collaboration between the government and different stakeholders.

## For international level:

**54.** Governments should actively participate in international frameworks and intergovernmental Collaborations. Such collaborative processes should be transparent, fair, and inclusive and demand driven. Further, it is important to ensure that these commitments are sustained and the words are translated into effective action.

#### To address Financial Barriers

- **55.** In order to lower the high financial costs associated with alternative energy setups, there is necessity of:
- Fund raising for alternative energy research and project implementation and from international organizations and different financial mechanism (in a transparent manner).
- It is imperative for governments to provide greater funding (and) incentives to encourage the production of alternative energy by the private sector.
- Potential measures include tax concessions or exemptions, feed-in tariffs, subsidies ("Subsidies" should change to "incentive"), grants, and easy credit availability for improving green energy production.

## To Address Barriers to social change

- **56.** We need to improve education on low carbon technologies, sustainability, sufficiency and efficiency in using energy. This can be implemented via:
- Capacity building program, advocacy via social networking platforms, environmental oriented competitions.
- Innovative and interactive educational initiatives on environment and energy should be encouraged and institutionalized as well.
- Implementation of carbon footprint labeling.
- Implementation of policies that encourage reduction in consumption of energy and accept embodied energy in formulating policy.
- **57.** There should be integration among education and sustainable development and green job. Youth can encourage a higher willingness to pay for green products.

## To Address Technological Barriers

There needs to be enhanced diffusion of low carbon technologies from technologically advanced nations to other nations. It is proposed that efforts be made to establish an attractive investment climate for foreign clean energy companies and thus make technology transfer mutually beneficial to both the donor and recipient parties. Knowledge transfer through educational scholarships and student exchange programs should go hand-in-hand with technology transfer. There needs to be more research & development into alternative energy technologies to enhance their viability.

## To Address Unstainable Urban Development

- **59.** Cities should focus more on an integrated view of urban development including environment protection, setting low carbon footprint as one of its strategic objectives. Consider the local context as the critical point for determining the policies and programs, cities' government have to:
- 59 a) Encourage the development and use of public transport systems and the decrease in the use of personal vehicles; promote the use of non-motorized transport i.e. walking and cycling;

- 59 b) Promote integrated and collaborative energy demand management initiatives;
- 59 c) Promote the development of energy efficient and energy conserving buildings, industries and districts.
- 59 d) Increase and connecting green spaces and wildlife corridors

# Lack of enforcement

**60.** The legislative framework needs to be strengthened in a way that would promote a low carbon future, enhance compliance monitoring and accountability and establish an index for the measurement of energy sustainability.

# **Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development**

# **Background:**

- **61.** The Asia Pacific youth recognize the following key ideas would strongly encompass the concept of sustainable development.
- **62.** Public awareness & engagement allows the community to identify the problems, while capacity building ensures a good and effective deliverance of policy implementation for sustainable governance. In addition, as policies are the tools towards better governance, the use of the right policies is mandatory to ensure authoritative and operative governance in setting the values towards sustainability. Finally, good governance is necessary for effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the policies.

## Issues & Challenges in:

#### **Governance**

- Although most Asia Pacific countries have introduced a number of globally accepted principles on natural resources and sustainable environmental management in their legislative systems-ineffective implementation, lack of monitoring and evaluation systems, and corruption hinders sustainable development so that it results in a lack of accountability weakening the implementation and rationalization of environmental policies. Absence of evaluation also means the youth fail to learn from past initiatives. Therefore their capacity is compromised.
- **64.** Corruption, vested political and business interests across countries in the Asia Pacific contribute to massive exploitation of natural resources that impacts sustainable development stifles innovations and obstructs the access to information and justice and en-curtailment of the freedom of speech. Voice of youth is nullified.
- **65.** There are a number of issues during the design and implementation of equitable policies such as the chain of corruption, poor compliance, and poor due process, lack of accountability, transparency and ineffective monitoring processes within the communities. These issues exacerbate environmental degradation.

# **Policy**

- **66.** The existence of several Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), conventions, and organizations with no proper coordination, lack of effective implementation and authority hinders progress regarding solving environment and sustainable development issues.
- **67.** There is a lack of youth participation in policy making processes which in turn neglects the voice, opinions, and ideas of the future generation that could be vital in the formulation of comprehensive environmental policies.
- **68.** Lack of incorporation of environmental issues into socio-economic development policies and plans make it difficult to address sustainable development goal. Also, weak implementation of existing

laws, rules, and regulations regarding environmental conservation is a major issue in most Asian countries.

- **69.** There is a lack of awareness of potential revenue and economic growth from other resources that do not damage the environment, such as REDD (Reduces Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) projects, if necessary safeguards are taken.
- **70.** The lack of advanced scientific expertise along with inconsistencies in research methodologies creates a barrier to the formulation of effective environmental policies.

# **Capacity Building**

- 71. There is an absence of by-laws, a lack of full understanding of technical regulations, and also unclear regulations and mechanisms for enforcement, which have left government and voluntary authorities relatively free to interpret them. They are also limited by their own knowledge and capacities, leading to difficulties with proper implementation of policies.
- **72.** Low technical capacity, knowledge, experience and the high cost of training hamper their ability to incorporate environmental issues with the civil society and local community to have their sustainable works for their areas done effectively. In addition, they lack awareness of available funding for environmentally friendly projects.

# **Public Awareness and Engagement**

- 73. There is a lack of public awareness and sense of individual responsibility and civic engagement in the change of national and international environmental laws. The basic definitions and the importance of environmental laws, conservation and sustainable development are not understood. Due to this lack of awareness, the public becomes less open to positive environmental change.
- 74. The access to the information and the political will and accountability regarding the issue of Climate Change is still limited. The public, especially youth, does not receive adequate impactful education on the participatory processes that enable effective engagement with the government or government agencies on sustainable development. Though youth are willing to engage to the process of environmental protection, the sufficient effective platforms for the youth to convey their messages, initiatives and innovation are hardly found. On the government side, there is a lack of political will to engage different stakeholders and the public in these participatory processes.

#### **Recommendations**

#### **Governance**

**75.** Comprehensive environmental governance must be a top priority and all sectors must cooperate towards it.

- **76.** A general regulatory framework for the development and enforcement of environmental rules and regulations should be strengthened
- **77.** The chain of corruption can be broken by increased accountability, transparency and responsiveness on a local, district level or a federal system through the involvement of community governance.
- 78. There should be an international environmental assessment tool to annually measure how well countries are moving towards their commitments to sustainable development under practical Local Agenda 21 and it has to be binding upon signatories. In this regard, youth organisations can produce a shadow report to complement the official government report.

# **Policy**

- 79. An effective development policy strategy should involve innovative and creative thinking with nonprice based policy instruments supported by the youth while taking into account each country's unique situation. This will be important in ensuring sustainable economic growth without compromising the environment and standard of living.
- **80.** International, national, and local governments and key stakeholders need to recognize the importance of environment services equitably under the existing development plans and the legal concepts of sustainable development carried out by communities. This could be carried out by using mechanisms that facilitate payment for environmental services. Furthermore, countries could raise awareness and facilitate the implementation of mechanism among the youth and public.
- **81.** More funds should be allocated towards environmental conservation such as research and development for environmental initiatives. More importance should be given to other policies than it is being given right now so as to increase the facilitation of sustainable development.
- **82.** Minimum environmental standards for areas such as energy consumption can be set to encourage use of green technologies. In addition, the "value-added" system should be revised to include direct and indirect environmental benefits encouraging businesses to implement green practices.
- **83.** The design and formulation of environmental policies need to accommodate environmental, social and political aspects. To promote environmental policy innovations, it is recommended that environmental innovation policy centers and pilot projects be established. The innovation policy centre can be set up based on a partnership approach, spearheaded by a governmental interagency committee with collaboration with academic institutions, private associations (environment friendly traders), CBOs, NGOs and youth groups.

## **Capacity Building**

**84.** Government officials involved in the policy making process must be selected through a stringent selection process based on merits, experiences, academic achievement and technical knowledge. A review on the countries' environmental regulations must be carried out and timelines must be set

- and kept through proper monitoring and evaluation and the youth should be an integral part of this process.
- **85.** Governments should address low capacity of their officers to handle partnership collaborations with all stakeholders especially the youth through training and building up skills in community development.
- **86.** Governments should form collaborations with international organizations so that knowledge, expertise and external help are available to the country to actively tackle environmental issues. Governments must maintain an open channel of communication with the grassroots so that feedback from the public can be worked out between the youth, other communities and the government, and partnership practices, for example participatory dialogues set in place. This builds a cohesive relationship between the people and the government.
- 87. Environmental studies can be introduced as a compulsory subject in pre-tertiary education institutions. Civil society and private sectors should establish an active collaboration with local communities, especially the youth, to educate the community and act as an avenue where members of the community can turn to for environmental advice and help. Annual events that promote awareness such as 'Earth Day' can be adopted and actively participated in across Asia Pacific. These actions will enable better understanding and keep the people updated on environmental know-how. Capacity-building should be carried out by all stakeholders to enable the youth to take the lead in organising such events.
- **88.** Civil society, academia, and the government should exchange ideas, information, and scientific expertise regarding environmental research and development through dialogue sessions and public seminars. Governments should also take steps to collaborate with the youth in environmental projects which could lead to better understanding of environmental issues.

## **Public Awareness and Engagement**

- **89.** Impactful environmental initiatives from the youth, Civil Society Organisations (CSO), nongovernmental organisations (NGO), academia and the private sector should be encouraged to create a focused and targeted approach in order to raise public awareness and engagement in environmental issues. The government and relevant stakeholders should cooperate and coordinate in order to support these initiatives.
- **90.** The youth should have access to official and professional platforms to voice out their concerns at every level of the decision making process, in regards to issues such as environmental policies. There should be structural mechanisms in place to facilitate their voice, such as setting up youth councils, giving proper consideration to their recommendations, and implementing them at the local, national, and international level. Therefore, assistance must be provided to help youth to build awareness and capacity to take on such a role and be able to impact sustainable development in their respective countries and the world. And the participation must be made compulsory in legal documents.

91.	<ul> <li>Governments should also prioritize and allocate pr designed to increase public awareness and engagen issues through education.</li> </ul>	oper funding for mechanisms which nent regarding environmental policies	are and