



APFSD Youth Call to Action 2021: Sub-region¹



Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Bhutan

INTRODUCTION

Maldives, Sri Lanka and Bhutan had faced similar issues due to this pandemic however the government's response towards the safety measures were much faster and effective in Bhutan than the rest of Sri Lanka and Maldives. Some of the issues faced by these countries:

1. Maldives faced severe issues of transportation of logistics in the country due to lack of connection between their own areas. Since Maldives have a lot of islands within the country, the peripheral areas were disconnected from the capital due to the lockdown and people faced issues of limited resources within areas. People were depending on the government's limited resources. Schools were closed down and the education system shifted to online learning. However, young people could not learn from it effectively due to internet issues. This pandemic has created unemployment in the country since most young people either did not or lost their job.
2. Similar situation exists in Sri Lanka where the lockdown was imposed a couple of times. Schools and institutions were closed down which created a huge gap between the education sector. Online lectures were implemented but it was not effective since most of the young people in rural areas did not have access to internet or electronic devices. Sri Lanka still faces internet facilities in the region. Students were stressed and under mental health issues because of the inability to cope up and do well like the others. Most of the young people often landed up in high risk areas in search of internet networks where they were often abused or harassed. High unemployment rate, young employers were abused and expelled by organizations, financial crises within families and in broad, the economy of the country has collapsed.
3. Bhutan also had similar issues with Maldives and Sri Lanka. The students had a difficult time shifting to online studies. Infact, the timing of young people was all messed up and most of them became nocturnal. Mealth health issues increased with the lockdown and SRHR services were not available during the first lockdown. But with the pandemic condition, the tourism industry in Maldives and Sri Lanka has drastically depleted. Young people in the tourism sector lost their jobs and most of them are still unemployed at the moment. Export and imports were banned for a while so it indirectly impacted the economy of the country. Most of the people started to grow their own vegetables then. Now, most young people are trained in 'Dessung; the guardians of peace' who volunteer to look after the country during such needs. They guard the borders and make sure everyone is following the covid protocols. Unemployed ones are given the opportunity and given salary by His Majesty which is a way to involve young people during emergencies. His Majesty also provides an emergency relief fund for those who are in special needs.

HOW DO WE SUSTAIN THE PROGRESS OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL AGENDA RELATED TO UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO SRHR FOR ALL YOUNG PEOPLE INCLUDING SRH SERVICES

Health Wellbeing and Sustainable Development from Young People Perspective (gender equality, human rights and intersectionality lens)

Since the societal structure is conventional in Maldives, Sri Lanka and Bhutan, the concept of reproductive health is suppressed. Especially the patriarchal mindset has hindered sexual and reproductive rights of women. In some instances, there is a misunderstanding on sexual and reproductive rights. Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Maldives always take only girls into consideration when they are talking about sexual health and rights. In the three countries there is no open platform to discuss this subject. Neither schools nor adults are giving any space for the young girls and boys to discuss their reproduction health. In the school curriculum, there are no modules on comprehensive reproduction health and rights. Even the schools' staff is not well equipped with knowledge of reproductive health. Subsequently, they are a bit reluctant to openly talk about SRH with the students and sexual and reproductive education has been considered as a taboo in the school's system. Therefore, young girls and boys have to conceal their emotions and needs which directly impacts on their mental stress. Lacking education on SRHR almost leads the sexual harassment and violence in Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Maldives. In Sri Lanka, there are many sexual crimes recorded every day. Most of the violence cases are recorded in public places. There are no mechanisms to provide training and knowledge for the academic staff on SRHR. The national level decisions on identifying solutions for the SRHR issues are not well penetrating to the bottom level due to lack of law enforcement and prevailing SRHR exclusive policies. Marginalized rights have been notably violated in Sri Lanka, Maldives and Bhutan. Basically, fishing communities, estate populations, people who live in urban shanties and slums, minor ethnic groups and LGBTQIA+ groups are categorized under the marginalized entities in the regional countries. Society has a negative impression on the marginalized communities as well as the government is passionate on the marginalized rights to be incorporated in their constituencies and policies. The hygiene and sanitary health issues of women and girls who reside in slums and estate can be clearly noted.

UNEQUAL TREATMENT IN LABOR FORCE

There is no any equal consideration on the occupations in Maldives, Sri Lanka and Bhutan. Since the entire society is constricted to the traditional framework, only few jobs are considered to be decent. Moreover, the education system doesn't leverage the youth to have decent jobs. For instance, in Sri Lanka and Maldives, basic education is not always aligned with the current job market. Thus, the youth drop out from the stream. As a result, most young people in Maldives tend to engage in tourism and hotel fields. Then the society used to label them with a negative perspective giving high demand for the jobs in the government sector. This sort of long-term conventional perspectives has been concreted in the system that has resulted in irreversible phenomenon.

THE PRIORITY AREAS FOR CLIMATE ACTION AND CLIMATE JUSTICE ISSUES IN THEM

Climate action for sustainable present and future: young people in the forefront goal focus: 12 and 13, 10, 16, 17 (intersectionality/ human rights and gender equality lens)

As the result of being the islands, Maldives and Sri Lanka are notably facing the same spectrum of issues due to climate change. Sea level rising directly impacts coastal erosion, coral degradation and coastal land inundation in both countries. The Western coastal belt in Sri Lanka has been eroding for the last few years at a significant rate. It has crafted a high-end risk on marine fauna and flora in Maldives. According to Sri Lanka's context, those who reside along the coast are suffering from the consequences of sea-level rise. Global warming has altered the weather and climate patterns. Subsequently, ordinary agricultural practices have been hindered by this unprecedented calamity. In Sri Lanka, farmers are paranoid in benefitting in yield during seasonal shifts (rainy and dry seasons). Thus, farmers and their families have become climate victims. In Sri Lanka, there has been an apparent decline of the forest density over the past few years since people have been clearing the forest for settlements, constructional and agricultural purposes. Moreover, the Sri Lankan government facilitates devastative projects (Hotel complex construction, golf course construction, Colombo port city etc.) in the middle of the EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) failures.

Sri Lanka has institutions combating climate change and building climate resilience building but they are not deployed well. Lack of institution framework and lack of disaster management mechanisms is a vibrant gap in the system. Decision makers are not following the international climate conventions (Paris agreement, COP 26, climate summits etc.) in compiling policies.

Bhutan is the only carbon negative country in the world. They also have encountered the issues due to climate change and global warming. Bhutan is susceptible to the risks of glacial lake of outburst due to global warming. There is a lack of vigorous advocacy on environment and climate action. Bhutan is a landlocked country and the inland water resources should be protected. Bhutan already has a society in our college where the environment majors can share their ideas and contribute to the environment and it is in collaboration with WWF Bhutan and RSPN (NGO).

CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS

Since the countries in Southeast and South Asia are located closer to the equator, they are most vulnerable and sensitive in terms of climate change. Maldives is also known as the floating country of Southeast Asia, in the past year of 2020 it has been recorded as the hottest day(s) in the history of Maldives. The sea levels rise up to 1.6 meters per year, according to The World Bank within the range of 10-100 centimeters by 2100, the entire country might be submerged. In Sri Lanka 50% of its 22M citizens live in low-lying coastal areas and are at risk of high sea rise levels. According to the UN Climate Index, Sri Lanka was also ranked 2nd among the climate prone countries in 2019. In Bhutan, The beautiful glaciers are receding at the range of 30-60 meters per decade. The following climate change calamities have been identified in Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Maldives.

1. Collapsing agriculture
2. Negative of impact human health
3. Flash flood (GLOF) in Bhutan
4. Coastal submerging
5. Coastal Erosion
6. Coral Reef Degradation
7. Temperature increase

Urban areas and metropolitan cities which contribute most to the climate change hence require the most climate action. The climate justice issue associated is that the people who did not pollute or contribute to climate change are forced to face the consequences of it.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Therefore, the recommendations that the team came up for a sustainable and resilient recovery from the **COVID-19 pandemic** in Asia and the Pacific from young people lens” are:

1. Implement an active nationwide plan to cope up during the pandemic. The government like in Maldives and Sri Lanka had slow reactions to issues and were not solved accordingly.
2. Provide more resources like food, logistics, internet, human resources to the rural areas. Since internet is not available in most marginalized communities, health expertise or teachers should be sent to make sure people are well taken care of regarding mental health and also students are not left behind in education learning.
3. Mental health should be taken into consideration and health sectors should immediately work on it and related issues that affect young people. E.g. SRHR, disability and stigmatization. Advocacy programs by expertise through visual displays and in local languages so that those who do not read and write understands as well.
4. Door-to-door SRHR services. Teenage pregnancy and early marriages increased during the pandemic. Most young people had to drop out of school because of the lack of contraceptives. Therefore, SRHR services are necessary. For e.g., In Bhutan, the government made sure to supply contraceptives to those who are in need by reaching them to their door by the young volunteers called ‘Dessuung’.
5. Encourage young people into the agriculture and farming sector by giving them financial support so that a certain percentage of what and how many they produced can go to the country.
6. People should start investing in domestic tourism in order to keep the economy running and also so that young people are still employed.
7. Government should strengthen internet facilities especially in rural areas for effective learning.
8. Education sector should incorporate their emergencies curriculum and make sure it is made accessible to low socioeconomic students. Implement emergency learning plan by broadcasting on national television and make printed copies accessible to underprivileged students.
9. Free toll-free number which is known to everyone so that people can seek help during the times of emergencies and clarifications.
10. Stakeholders, NGOs, CSOs and organizations should advocate on domestic violence and similar issues for a safe conducive environment at home.

Recommendations for Health and Well-being

1. Implement SRHR services at school level.
2. Incorporate CSE in the school curriculum based on age appropriateness.
3. Implementation of inclusive policies by the government is necessary and laws must be enforced to uphold young people's SRHR.
4. Governments, NGOs and private firms must provide training and capacitate teachers. on the delivery of SRHR and CSE in the schools and institutions and set up an inclusive process in terms of women and men in health talks in all the institutions.
5. Parents' awareness of SRHR and CSE must be raised and advocacy programs must take place in local languages.
6. SRHR services must be made available in and around the society. E.g. HIV testing
7. Implementation of inclusive policies by the government is necessary.
8. Ensure proper mechanism to safeguard minority and marginalized rights.
9. National level policy makers must identify the youth talents and provide a better health insurance mechanism.

Recommendations for accelerating climate action that is sustainable and inclusive in the post COVID 19 world

1. Protecting people and their assets: diversifying agriculture chains.
2. Reducing exposure: Low lying islands should consider coastal safety barriers.
3. Financing and ensuring: To maintain growth & eradicate poverty a collaborative approach is necessary, including participation by institutions.
4. Identify Alternative sources: strengthening infrastructure to withstand damage, restoring natural environment(s) and ecosystems.

5. Enact the Green Policies (Including 5 R concepts and reducing ecological footprints).
6. Encourage Green climate funding.
7. Fortifying the institutional structure for climate actions.
8. Promoting subsidies (Green funding schemes) for victimized farmer families.
9. Advocate youth groups to move with green concepts.
10. Lobbying the government officials, NGO's, CBO's, national level decision makers and private sector.

Recommendations for policy makers to create an enabling environment for youth engagement in climate action

1. Develop a National-level youth platform to support in climate resilient governance.
2. Formulate National level youth networks to combat against common climate issues in the region.
3. Add the youth climate action as a cross-cutting aspect in youth policies being implemented in Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Maldives.
4. Encourage youth to engage in climate smart organic agriculture.
5. Set-up a youth inclusive climate resilient mechanism in Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Maldives.
6. Develop a Front-Line youth network at regional level to response upon the disasters (Vigilant youth groups).
7. Establish regional-level early warning mechanisms to reduce the disaster risk.

1. The APFSD country and sub-regional briefs were developed through collective discussions and engagements between youth advocates at the APFSD Youth Forum on March 14-16, 2021. The sub-regional drafting team for the Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Bhutan consists of Pema Choden and Nimesh. Overall supervision was provided by the ARROW team.