



CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR CLIMATE ADVOCACY AND ACTION IN A COVID-19-INDUCED “NEW NORMAL”

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented new challenges for working to address the climate emergency. National governments and international agencies are currently prioritizing measures to prevent the spread of the virus, revitalize their economies, and protect health and social systems from further losses, though potentially at the expense of climate action.

While the current global health crisis must be urgently addressed, the importance of climate change mitigation and adaptation and dealing with loss and damage must remain a *priority* in the international and national agendas. Early estimates have shown that the lockdown has resulted in lower greenhouse gas emissions and other environmental benefits, but this must not create an illusion of significant progress and complacency. Without drastic scaling-up of solutions, the world is still on pace to fall short of limiting global warming to 1.5°C below pre-industrial levels by 2030 and avoiding more catastrophic impacts.

Therefore, the challenge lies in translating the observed climate and environment-related benefits into more sustainable outcomes within the decade, even as national economies recover from the pandemic. With restrictions on mobility, social distancing, and other protocols implemented to limit the spread of the virus for the foreseeable future, civil society and people’s organizations are adopting new modalities to continue their operations and engagements with different stakeholders.

Given this context, the Asia Climate Change Consortium (ACCC) recognizes the following challenges and opportunities that must be anticipated and addressed:

1. Poverty and inequality creates vulnerability to disasters of different natures. Marginalized sectors such as the poor, women, youth, elderly, and indigenous peoples are among the most vulnerable to extreme weather events and slow onset impacts of the climate crisis. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic could worsen existing vulnerabilities, given their relative lack of resources, knowledges, and capacities to adapt and respond to both the virus and climate change impacts. Furthermore, as governments will focus on revitalizing sectors of the economy during recovery, avenues for climate-related dialogues and technical and financial aid for these groups to address their vulnerabilities could be more limited. Moving forward, policymakers must prepare adequate measures to protect citizens before, during, and after calamities, while still enforcing COVID-19-related measures (e.g., social distancing in evacuation centers, transporting climate refugees despite travel restrictions).
2. Not all civil society and people’s organizations have the readiness to transition their programs, projects, and activities into digital platforms. Sustaining partnerships and engagements with vulnerable communities is a significant issue, as these areas often lack online or mobile connectivity. Organizational staff must be trained in digital and online literacy, especially in using social media and communication tools. Other conditions under the “new normal” such as work-from-home arrangements and travel

restrictions also present difficulties for groups to conduct traditional campaigns, constituency-building, capacity-building, and lobbying activities.

3. Nonetheless, climate advocacy organizations must maximize the opportunities presented in digital and mobile platforms. Communication tools and applications open new channels for wider scope and reach of engagements, especially to demographics not traditionally involved in climate-related discussions. The accessibility of online media can help generate interest and awareness in organizational activities and advocacies, especially on the progress of climate action at the global, national, or local scales. CSOs must also utilize all available means of communication to strengthen partnerships with international bodies, national government agencies, and local government units, who may have the capacity to reach out to vulnerable communities with poor or no online and mobile connectivity.
4. In addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, national governments must avoid creating green recovery frameworks that could create inconsistencies with existing ones and slow down efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Frameworks as provided by the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals among others already present adequate processes and mechanisms for not only aligning recovery efforts, but also development strategies towards climate resilience and sustainability. Governments must instead focus on ensuring the proper implementation of these frameworks, with support from different stakeholders.
5. In support of the realization of the goals of the Paris Agreement and its operationalization commencing this year, the formulation, submission, and implementation of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) must not be delayed. The mitigation measures under current national policies are projected to result in a nearly 3°C warmer world by the end of the 21st century, which shows the need for countries, especially those with the highest historical and current emissions, to scale-up their emissions reduction measures and for developed countries to provide the necessary technological and financial support for vulnerable nations to adapt to extreme impacts. As of this writing, only four countries have submitted their second NDCs, which further highlights the urgency for higher climate ambition and action.