WAYS FORWARD FOR GLOBAL AND LOCAL CLIMATE ACTION DURING RECOVERY FROM THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The current decade is a critical period for addressing the climate emergency at the global, national, and local levels. Countries must scale up their mitigation and adaptation measures to limit global warming to within 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels by 2030 to prevent further large-scale changes in climate and environmental systems. However, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has forced governments, businesses, and civil society organizations to rethink their immediate and long-term strategies for development. With protocols enforced to limit the spread of the virus that also significantly impact economic and social systems, these institutions and organizations are changing their modes of operations to continue their respective programs, projects, and activities with different stakeholders.

This imperative is more urgent for nations and communities in Asia, many of whom are among the most vulnerable to both rapid and slow onset events. Sectors that have high vulnerability to climate change including the urban poor, farmers and fisherfolk, women, and indigenous peoples are also among those who could experience the brunt of socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, policies must be enacted to not only address the immediate needs of these groups, but also lower their climate vulnerabilities and build their capacities to adapt to multiple impacts.

When developing these policies, national governments must consider the different natures of these two urgent global issues. While nations can implement measures on their own capacities to contain the spread of COVID-19 and limit economic losses, global cooperation is necessary to slow down global warming, mitigate extreme impacts, and in the case of low-income countries and communities, minimize loss and damage.

Given this context, the Asia Climate Change Consortium (ACCC) recommends the following ways forward for advancing climate action:

1. **Nature-based solutions must be mainstreamed into national and local programs among countries in Asia, projects, and activities, amid a stronger call for planetary and human health.** Preserving terrestrial, freshwater, coastal, and marine ecosystems results in services that not only reduces greenhouse gas emissions in the environment, but also increases resilience of the ecosystems themselves and nearby communities against climate-related hazards. Nature-based solutions are also more cost-effective in the long run than technical approaches, while also providing additional social, health, and economic benefits that aid local and even national development. Given the challenges in accessing adequate resources and capacities for addressing climate change impacts especially as economies recover from COVID-19, strengthening nature-based solutions, especially ecosystems-based adaptation, should be prioritized by governments, with support from funding agencies and non-government stakeholders.

2. **The vulnerability of sectors most prone to climate change impacts would increase as the COVID-19 pandemic would result in restructured economies.** Stimulus packages for restarting sectors of national economies must include the provision of livelihoods with sufficient incomes for the vulnerable groups, aligned with the goals of poverty alleviation and leaving no one behind. These livelihoods could also contribute to mitigating or adapting to the impacts of climate change and increasing resilience to potential catastrophic events, provided these sectors are allocated with sufficient technical, technological, and financial resources for operations. Priority areas for support should include farming and fisherfolk communities, whose resilience is also key to national food security.

3. **Climate action at the local level face even more stresses due to the COVID-19 pandemic, adding to issues such as mismatches between institutional responsibilities and capacities, difficulties in accessing available funds and other modalities of support.** Thus, it is important that in recognition of the realities of the climate emergency, local governments must be empowered more to address extreme weather and slow onset impacts through adequate technical and financial support from national governments and other stakeholders. Prioritization for support must be directed towards ecosystems-based adaptation and averting loss and damage. Spaces for local multi-stakeholder participation in planning, implementation, and monitoring climate change adaptation and mitigation measures must be provided or strengthened.

4. **Given the complexity of interactions between economic, environmental, political, and social factors that affect climate change from the global to local levels, there remains largely unexplored areas in research and development, especially on the impacts of slow onset events on long-term food, water, and human security.** Thus, governments must allocate sufficient resources for climate change-related studies, with a focus on communities and ecosystems at high risk. Future research can also investigate the long-term impacts of slow onset events on vulnerable communities in Asia, as well as the linkages between mitigation measures and cross-cutting issues related to adaptation, such as poverty alleviation, health, education, gender, and youth development.

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