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Now is the time to take measures based on the principles of the SDGs Japan Civil Society Network on SDGs Statement on combating COVID-19

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"Transforming our world into a sustainable society free of poverty, leaving no one behind" is the philosophy underlying the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the global guidelines formulated by the United Nations in 2015. We at the SDGs Civil Society Network (SDGs Japan) believe that the key to overcoming COVID-19 lies in the philosophy of the SDGs.

As countries around the world come up with emergency measures, we need to revisit the SDGs and inject a spirit of solidarity and inclusion into these measures. The Social Distancing strategy entails temporary isolation and segregation but we must transcend all forms of discrimination and disconnection which lie deep within this strategy. The 2019 coronavirus response must not lead to divisions and exclusion based on national and prefectural boundaries, disease and disability status, gender, race and age. From this standpoint, we propose the following three recommendations based on the philosophy of the SDGs.

1. Introduce measures for economic and social inclusion that leave no one behind, including the future generations. Goal 1 (poverty), 3 (health), 4 (education), 5 (gender), 8 (sustainable growth and employment), 10 (inequality), 11 (sustainable human settlement)

The implementation of policies based on the "Social Distancing Strategy" has left 1.37 billion children out of school and many people out of work, causing them to incur economic losses and social isolation. This must be addressed with economic policies that are made in the spirit of the SDGs, in a way that "puts the farthest people first" and "leaves no one behind." It is necessary to limit the economic damage to society as a whole and keep the economy afloat, but more than that, we need to do our utmost to save the lives and livelihoods of those who are in the most severe circumstances. Also, the global spread of COVID-19 has made the various challenges in the world that existed before, even more serious. The segregation and isolation caused by emergency measures has an even more severe and excessive impact on people suffering from poverty, disease, conflict and persecution, and the negative impact of COVID-19 emergency measures on other global challenges and humanitarian assistance must be minimized. Furthermore, we need to improve our ability to respond to the healthcare challenges brought about by COVID-19 on a global basis.

2. Solidarity and inclusion to bridge the physical distance between them. Goal 16 (participation), 17 (partnership)

To reduce new infections as much as possible, temporary interdiction and isolation based on the "social distancing strategy" is necessary. However, these measures should be the minimum necessary, based on scientific evidence. There has never been a time when "the establishment of human rights" has been more urgent than now.

In particular, people infected with COVID-19, those suspected of being infected and those subject to self-quarantine should be proactively guaranteed alternative means of connection to society, such as access to the media and the Internet. Furthermore, there is a need to further strengthen and practice mutual aid, symbiosis and solidarity, where people help, acknowledge and respect each other across all boundaries and divides.

3. Ensure transparency and openness, and comply with democracy and legal procedures in policy formulation and response. [Goal 16 \(Governance\)](#)

Measures based on the "social distancing strategy" may restrict the constitutional rights guaranteed to citizens, including freedom of economic and social activities and freedom of movement. The introduction of these measures must be carried out with maximum transparency and openness and in compliance with democracy and the legal process. In addition to the fight against COVID-19, maximum measures must be taken to eliminate discrimination, prejudice, and misinformation related to COVID-19, and to ensure that all rights, including human rights, are guaranteed to the maximum extent possible and that economic losses are compensated to the maximum extent possible.

The Japan Civil Society Network on SDGs calls for all measures related to COVID-19 to be implemented in line with the principles of the SDGs, including a focus on universal health coverage (UHC) and global infectious disease control, respect for human rights, gender equality, elimination of poverty and disparities, economic and environmental justice, and guarantee of educational opportunities.

We also call on civil society throughout the world to reaffirm our basic principles of participation, solidarity and collaboration.

(Reference: Tips for connecting COVID-19 measures and the SDGs)

1. Goal 17: "Partnership"

In Goal 17, the SDGs emphasize multi-stakeholder decision-making processes as "strengthening the means of implementation for sustainable development and revitalizing global partnerships." This is a point that should be given the utmost importance when considering measures to be taken.

2. Transformation to a sustainable society, economy and environment

The SDGs are based on the idea that the world and Japan in 2030 are unsustainable if things continue as they are, and they call for transformational change from the policies of the past. In terms of economic measures, the global epidemic of COVID-19 has the potential to further marginalize vulnerable people, especially those affected by economic deprivation and discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, disability, nationality and ethnicity, and their complex and intersectional influences. In terms of COVID-19 measures, in addition to universal health coverage (UHC), it is essential to expand "global infectious disease control", including the enhancement of and access to advanced medical care and the expansion of temporary isolation facilities that meet international standards, such as the Sphere Standard.

3. Goal 16: "Participatory democracy and governance that is transparent and accountable"

At a time when there is no cure and no vaccine, as in COVID-19, the announcement of measures by governments and international organizations must be transparent and accountable, with the goal of "promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development... and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels."

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