

# ASIA PEOPLE'S CHARTER OF DEMAND

## GLOBAL WEEK OF ACTION



Central Asian Expert Network of Women with Disabilities

Central Asian Disability Forum



[This charter has been prepared based on the discussions held in the Asia Regional People's Assembly on 22nd September 2021]

The Covid-19 pandemic accompanied by various forms of lockdowns is widening wealth and income inequalities and has vast impacts on the social, economic and environmental fabric of the world. Like in other parts of the world, a large majority of people are facing unprecedented challenges in Asia. The pandemic has exposed the glaring discrepancies in the healthcare and social protection mechanisms; inequality in access to education and an alarming rise in violence against women and girls. Older people, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, Dalits, nomadic communities, minority communities, migrants, refugees and displaced people, women, transgender community, sex workers and children are among the worst sufferers from the pandemic.

Inequality in vaccination among and within countries protracts the pandemic threat and is exacerbated by the Delta variant. The vaccination level in most Asian countries is low due to the non-availability of vaccines, which is a direct fall out of the patent restrictions on the vaccines and practice of "vaccine nationalism" by the rich countries.

Civil society groups have been pushing governments for structural and systemic changes to address the challenges of the pandemic, vaccine inequity, social protection, climate justice and demanding to "build forward better" by implementing the 2030 Agenda to leave no one behind.

In the SDG Global Week of Action, the wider Civil Society, coordinated by the Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP) organised the **Global People's Assembly** from 21<sup>st</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> September. The **Asia Regional**

**People's Assembly** was organised on 22<sup>nd</sup> September in virtual mode to discuss the key issues affecting the most marginalised groups in Asia region.

### **Asia Regional People's Assembly**

The assembly was addressed by representatives from the Indigenous Women's Network in Thailand, Young Dalit women's group from Bangladesh, Women with disabilities group from Kazakhstan and Nepal and Women from the Bedhiya nomadic community from India. They brought to discussion the community challenges and put forward strong recommendations to the governments for their actions to address the challenges. Two Parliamentarians from India and an officer of UNESCAP shared their insights into strengthening people's demands for equality and justice. Participants of the Assembly were divided into five sub-groups to deliberate on key issues of human rights and democracy, vaccine inequality, shrinking civic space, inequality and loss of livelihood and climate justice in the region and bring them to the plenary for further deliberations which provided the basis for the development of this '**Asia People's Charter of Demand**'. The Charter of Demand is further whetted through circulation among the organising partners, collection of their inputs and further finalised by the Charter Drafting Committee. The Charter draws from the global process and civil society interventions and statements in all key areas discussed here.

## **CHARTER OF DEMAND**

### **1. Human Rights and Democracy**

#### **Issues:**

- The Covid era has seen an onslaught on human rights and democratic norms by the authorities across the region. Pandemic has been used by governments to curb already shrinking civic space, uproot labour and welfare laws and boost privatisation. In the name of enforcing pandemic necessitated lockdowns and shutdowns, the governments have invoked emergency clauses to trample civil rights. The human rights and democratic situation in conflict areas has been worse.
- The world has failed countries like Afghanistan and Myanmar in the region. Women's rights are badly impacted under the new regime in Afghanistan.
- A form of 'deficit democracy' is evident in the region where opportunities for representation and equal participation of women and marginalised groups are prevented. Democratic functioning has seen a downward trend across countries.
- Over the years, the South Asian politics has attracted dominant and authoritarian figures in governance with a resultant increase in violence on women, minorities and marginalised social groups.

#### **Demands:**

- Protect human rights of everyone through ensuring functioning democratic spaces and oversight institutions.
- Promote the participation of marginalised social groups and women in all levels of governance
- Reform electoral processes from the 'first past the post' to a more representative system.
- Legislations should not be misused to silence voice of minorities, opposition parties or curb dissent.
- Recognise and protect the role of civil society in promoting human rights and democracy.

## **2. Public Health: Need People's Vaccine**

### **Issues:**

- Migrant workers and displaced people have limited access to general and Covid related healthcare, though they are in the high-risk of Covid-19 infection. They are not treated equally by the governments in their place of destinations.
- The Covid situation has been made complex and has been poorly addressed with limited information and spread of mis-information in far-flung areas among the nomadic communities, so also the migrant communities. This has accentuated the vaccine hesitancy among them.
- Vulnerable communities such as sex workers, LGBTQI communities, persons with disabilities and such groups have been denied and discriminated in accessing vaccination and healthcare even when they urgently need them.
- In the name of clinical trials, people in third-world countries may have been victimised which needs a serious discussion.

### **Demands:**

- Free, fair and universal access to the Covid-19 vaccine should be ensured. COVID vaccine should be treated as a People's Vaccine, not a profit vaccine.
- Accessibility to vaccines should be ensured for all by emphasising inclusion of vulnerable and marginalised populations reckoning with the geographically isolated regions.
- Big-pharma companies who had received public funds for R&D should be made responsible and accountable by the governments in sharing the technical know-how/ vaccine recipes. Profiteering in pandemic must not be allowed.
- The restrictions of intellectual property on vaccines should go. All Asian governments, specifically the rich countries like Singapore, Japan and South Korea, must support the demand for WTO TRIPS waiver for vaccine products, processes and technologies so countries with capacities can augment the vaccine production.
- The vaccine hoarding by rich countries does not eliminate the threat of the pandemic even to them. No one is safe until everyone is vaccinated. They should stop hoarding the vaccines.
- The governments should stop discriminating against people based on which vaccine they have taken. Their right to mobility should be protected.
- Health has to be recognised as a basic human right and provided as public good. State must ensure universal health care with special provisions for marginalised and vulnerable populations, such as, disseminating information in local and indigenous languages, and ensuring access of facilities and services to the persons with disabilities.
- Access to health and other essential services to migrant workers should be provided by the governments in the country of destination.
- External debts of the low-income countries should be cancelled to give governments the fiscal space to strengthen their public health system and other basic services. The fund received under the Special Drawing Rights (SDR) should be used for the vaccination process, strengthening the health systems and funding other basic services.

### **3. Civic Space**

#### **Issues:**

- South Asia, South-East Asia, North East Asia and Central Asia are witnessing shrinking civic space and human rights violations which have been further exacerbated during Covid-19 pandemic.
- Civil society organisations in many countries face threats in supporting marginalised communities address their disadvantages and challenges. They face restrictions in movements, challenges in raising funds and administrative barriers.
- Governments increasing and unilateral control over the digital space and cyber-attacks are becoming an increasingly pressing problem for civil society.
- Women and girls particularly those from marginalised communities like the indigenous communities, Dalits and other communities discriminated on work and descent (DWD), persons with disabilities and so faced increasing human rights violations and sexual harassment during the pandemic.
- In countries like India, the countrywide lockdown was imposed without giving people time to provide for themselves has put untold miseries on the poor who live on daily labour and wages and particularly the migrant population who walked hundreds and kilometres back home and many died enroute.

#### **Demands:**

- Civil society's role and contribution in promoting democracy and human rights especially for the marginalised sections should be recognised, protected and supported to preserve the civic space.
- CSO must be resourced and empowered to protect itself and the state must respect the digital space for CSOs at the time of the pandemic/conflict.
- In order to complement the service of the government the CSOs should be proactively facilitated to reach people to meet their needs during the lockdowns and shutdowns.
- The state should refrain from intimidating and invoking criminal actions against the civil society actors who bring to the fore the cases of violations of human rights during the pandemic.
- The unnecessary administrative measures taken by several countries to squeeze the fund flow and harass the NGOs should be undone. The legal environment should be made CSO friendly for smooth functioning.

### **4. Climate Justice**

#### **Issues:**

- Climate changes causing disasters (flash floods, droughts, forest fires) are destroying people's lives and livelihoods, culture, knowledge and skills.
- The institutional mechanisms to prevent/address disasters, protect people or meet their needs in times of crises is weak.
- Extractive industries, mining and hydropower sectors and aggressive forms of development accelerate climate changes affecting the vulnerable sections.
- Access to clean water and other natural resources are depleting rapidly.

## **Demands:**

- National Climate action plans should be reviewed not to only address climate changes but also ensure justice to those who are affected by the climate crisis- so integrate aspect of climate justice into policies.
- Need more integrated planning to address climate change which are contextual and locally relevant.
- All countries should make the energy transition and expand the use of alternative energy.
- The government must ensure that the marginalized and affected populations are included in the decision making and policy making processes.
- States should recognize that rampant land acquisition, colonization, globalization and unregulated transnational trade, militarization, forced eviction and the displacement of Indigenous peoples as detrimental to, and obstruction of, Indigenous Women's right to self-determination in their own socio-cultural development, livelihood and well-being. Effective legal and policy environment ought to be created to protect the right to determination the socio-cultural and economic development of all marginalised communities.

## **5. Income Inequality and loss of livelihood**

### **Issues:**

- Coronavirus has unleashed a health and economic crisis that has exposed and exacerbated high levels of economic inequality in Asia. While wealthy elites have been able to protect their health and wealth -even increase them, the poorest people and minorities have faced a greater risk of illness, death, and economic destitution. Government support to meet their challenges is not timely and adequate.
- There is clear choice with Asian political leaders to either continue with business as usual or address rising rich poor divide for which they must take following immediate actions.

### **Demands:**

- Commitment to tackling inequalities: Governments must develop national inequality reduction plans and prioritize financing those plans to end extreme economic and gender and intersectional inequalities. These plans must include an increase in taxation on rich individuals and corporations to generate revenue to fund starved public services.
- Invest in public services, social protection, and care, so that everyone has access to quality healthcare (including vaccines), education, and appropriate social safety nets. This means governments are addressing quality and equity of provision, and ensuring migrants, informal workers, and minority groups are no longer excluded. It also means investing in care work.
- Protect wages and workers first so that we see an end to the inequality of wages and insecure work, alongside excessive profits and shareholder pay-outs. This means providing decent jobs, living wages, and labour rights for all.
- The governments must ensure that basic services and income support is provided in the time of lockdowns for people to survive and provide for the families.
- The issue exclusion of people from availing social services due to digital divide must be addressed.
- Active fiscal support should be provided by the governments to the people to revive their small business and trade which they lost during the pandemic

**Endorsed by:**

1. Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP)
2. Asia Dalit Rights Forum (ADRF)
3. Asia Civil Society Partnership for Sustainable Development (APSD)
4. Asia Democracy Network (ADN)
5. Asia Development Alliance (ADA)
6. ActionAid Association (India)
7. Asia Indigenous People's Pact (AIPP)
8. People's Vaccine Alliance (PVAP), Asia Chapter
9. OXFAM International-Asia
10. Network of Indigenous Women in Asia (NIWA)
11. Asia Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
12. South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE)
13. Fight Inequality Alliance, Asia
14. ARGO
15. Central Asian Disability Forum
16. Central Asian Expert Network of Women with Disabilities
17. Wada Na Todo Abhiyan, India
18. NGO Federation of Nepal
19. Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM)
20. GCAP Bangladesh
21. Pakistan Development Alliance (PDA)