



Asia Pacific CSO Statement Global Environmental Commons

Delivered by: Elenita Dano, ETC Group

As the world is grappling with the unprecedented impacts of Covid-19, it is prescient that the GSDR 2019 discussion on GEC entry point mentioned that: “Infections and diseases may emerge and spread faster with climate change, especially when coupled with human mobility (p. 96)”. This global pandemic also highlights the impacts of competing claims for land and water resources and accelerated degradation that have driven farming communities closer to wildlife habitats as a result of increasing scarcity of GEC. An important structural concern mentioned in the report is how benefits from the use of GEC are highly imbalanced in favor of those who can afford access, in particular the private interests who can afford to buy land at the cost of evicting local peoples and own infrastructures through which the rest can access global commons such as intellectual property rights, including corporations who are profiting from exploitation of GEC. The linkage between gender and GEC, how women bear the key responsibility in conserving and protecting the commons such as biodiversity and how they suffer most from degradation of these common resources were not at all explored in the report. The GSDR Report 2019 also fails to discuss how the deficiency in democracy and violations of human rights of the environmental defenders are damaging the global environmental commons.

Lack of access to GEC results to environmental injustice, and the degradation of one environmental common increases the risk of deteriorating other commons as they are closely interconnected. GEC provide environmental public goods which are meant to be collectively consumed without excluding anyone. However, when access to public goods is left at the mercy of the market in the name of ecosystem services, privatization for sustainable use or value addition, the profit-making interest of the market creates inequalities that exclude and marginalize the poor from the use of GEC. Negative externalities are not internalized by market mechanisms, but the impacts of adverse consequences are left for affected communities and societies to bear. Indigenous peoples who are the frontline defenders and conservers of GEC are often denied access to resources that they have nurtured for generations when these are acquired by business or controlled by military interests. Trade rules often exacerbate environmental problems which disproportionately impact women and girls due to existing gender norms and inequalities especially in countries with weak environmental policies.

Fossil fuel extraction, processing, distribution and use are major contributors to environmental pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. Public finance for coal power-generation and subsidies for fossil fuels are undermining global action to protect GEC, particularly on climate change. The operation and practices of extractive and fossil fuel industries, infrastructure and energy development, and agribusiness are also causing natural resource depletion, biodiversity loss and human rights violations. Yes, there is still no dedicated international agreement that address production and consumption, even relating to plastic pollution.

Multilateral agreements that promote fair access to resources are needed for governance of GEC to safeguard a stable and resilient Earth system for long-term wellbeing of all humans and the survival of all

living species. Stronger public sector commitment, appropriate policies and regulations (e.g., polluters pay act, removing harmful subsidies, progressive carbon taxation) are required to protect GEC from global to local levels. APRCEM supports the establishment of a Regional Environmental Entity in Asia Pacific to enhance safety and accountability standards at the national level. The entity can help standardize environmental protection in the region by instituting support mechanism for national governments to hold multinational corporations accountable for environmental degradation, which is currently impossible due to imposed onerous neoliberal measures like Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS)

The world needs new economic and financing models to protect and enhance resilience of the GEC. Financing for renewable energy, climate resilience, sustainable land management and conservation agricultural practices is imperative. Those responsible for climate change must commit the most of finances, technology and technical resources required for mitigation and adaptation measures. The introduction of environmental taxes as policy instruments to correct inequalities and a retrospective taxation regime for corporations mainly responsible for GHG emissions to finance developing countries must be seriously considered.

Governance of GEC must address human well-being, environmental injustice and gender inequality by empowering people and social movements on environmental public good. Governments should create space for people's participation to improve their understanding on science-policy-society cooperation to achieve the SDGs. Citizen-led data collection and reporting on the GEC must be supported and promoted. Science and technology facilitation mechanisms through North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation based on common but differentiated responsibility and guided by the precautionary principle must be put in place to accelerate the SDGs linked with GEC entry point. The world must move away from reliance on free market mechanisms which are already proven inefficient and inadequate in combatting global environmental challenges.