



Concept Note: Plenary Session on Climate Justice in Asia

Title: *Reclaiming Power: People-Led Climate Justice in Asia*

Event: During Asia Pacific Social Forum (APSF) and International Civil Society Week

Location: Bangkok, Thailand

Duration: 1.5 – 2.0 hours

Expected Participants: Civil society actors, grassroots leaders, Indigenous groups, feminist activists, youth movements, and changemakers committed to people-centred, just and equitable climate solutions.

1. What is the Event?

This plenary session will be hosted at the Asia Pacific Social Forum and International Civil Society Week in Bangkok. APSF is a powerful convening space for civil society actors and social movements across the region to come together to envision and co-create strategies for a just, equitable, and sustainable future. This session seeks to use that space to consolidate a southern-led, people-powered movement for climate justice in Asia.

2. Background: The Climate Crisis and Strategic Challenges in Asia

Asia stands at the frontline of the climate crisis. The region's geographical, ecological, and socio-economic characteristics make it one of the most climate-exposed region. With its hot-humid, tropical, and sub-tropical climatic profiles, the region experiences increasingly frequent and intense climate events: floods, droughts, cyclones, landslides, and heatwaves. These climate shocks are destroying homes, threatening food and water security, and displacing millions.

More than half of the world's population lives in Asia. Rapid urbanization, widespread inequality, fragile democracies, and weak public services compound the impacts of climate change. Despite its own emission contributions—led by industrial giants like China, India, Japan, South Korea, and Indonesia—the region's vulnerable populations have contributed least to the crisis. Countries in Southeast Asia remain entrenched in fossil fuel development and suffer from limited progress on decarbonization. If current trends continue, Asia may face GDP losses of up to 24% by 2100.

Marginalized and structurally excluded groups are disproportionately impacted: women bear the burden of unpaid care work, Indigenous people are displaced from ancestral lands, and coastal and agrarian communities lose livelihoods. Climate injustice in Asia cannot be separated from legacies of colonialism, extractive development, and unequal global trade rules. These historical and structural inequalities shape both the vulnerability of communities and their limited access to decision-making and financial resources.

Governments across Asia express ambitions to reduce climate risks, but are held back by debt burdens, shrinking fiscal space, and insufficient international climate finance. Many developing countries in Asia are grappling with a growing debt crisis, which has significantly curtailed their ability to invest in climate mitigation, adaptation, and resilience-building efforts. The weight of debt servicing and austerity limits fiscal space, restricting vital

investments in public infrastructure, disaster response, and social protection systems needed to confront escalating climate threats.

Civic space is under attack, with activists facing surveillance and criminalization. However, resistance movements persist. Youth-led climate campaigns, women's rights organizations, Indigenous defenders, and trade unions continue to demand justice, sovereignty, and local leadership in climate solutions.

3. Strategic Climate Justice Issues in Asia

i. Climate Finance

One of the most urgent issues is the gross inadequacy and inequity of climate finance. Despite rising needs, the region has received only a fraction of the required international support. Between 2013 and 2020, South and Southeast Asia secured just \$113 billion in climate finance, far below the \$1.3 trillion needed annually until 2030. Even more concerning is that less than 0.5% of this finance is locally led, meaning that communities on the frontlines of climate impacts have virtually no role in deciding how funds are used. Dominated by institutions like the Asian Development Bank, World Bank, and AIIB, climate finance in Asia continues to be delivered primarily in the form of loans, deepening the debt burden of vulnerable nations.

False Solutions in Climate Finance

The global trend toward financializing climate action—through mechanisms such as green bonds, blended finance, and public-private partnerships—often sidelines the needs of communities and reinforces market-based logics. These instruments frequently prioritize profit generation over justice and accountability, shifting risk to the public while rewarding private investors. Many of these approaches also facilitate the rebranding of polluting industries and the continued exploitation of natural resources under the guise of “green” development. As a result, such models can enable land grabs, undermine Indigenous sovereignty, and divert funds from real, community-led solutions.

ii. Lack of Financing for Adaptation and Loss and Damage

Adaptation and resilience remain underfunded, despite their centrality to survival in climate-vulnerable regions. While global attention often prioritizes mitigation, many Asian communities are already living with climate impacts and urgently need support to adapt. Women-led and nature-based adaptation practices exist across the region, from agroecology and water governance to disaster preparedness, yet these are often unrecognized and poorly resourced. Loss and damage from climate-induced destruction—including irreversible loss of land, livelihoods, and cultural heritage—also lack sufficient financial support. Existing mechanisms often fail to respond quickly or equitably and are driven more by donor priorities than community needs.

iii. Finance Accessibility Issues

Access to climate finance remains severely restricted for local communities and southern governments due to complex application procedures, burdensome eligibility requirements, and unclear governance structures. The lack of transparency, excessive technical jargon, and top-down funding models exclude those who are most affected and best positioned to drive transformative change on the ground.

iv. Just Energy Transition

Although energy demands in Asia continue to rise, with around 66 million people still lacking electricity access, energy transitions across the region are still shaped by fossil fuel dependence and large-scale industrial projects. International finance often backs "false solutions" such as fossil gas, while neglecting community-owned renewable energy alternatives. Just Energy Transition (JET) must prioritize democratic ownership, gender justice, Indigenous sovereignty, and public participation in designing energy futures that truly serve communities.

v. **5. Loss and Damage**

Asia faces immense climate-induced destruction that includes both economic and non-economic losses. However, there is little access to dedicated and timely financing to recover from irreversible damage. Civil society demands urgent investment in community-led mechanisms for loss and damage recovery that are grant-based, fast-disbursing, and aligned with the real needs of those most affected.

vi. **Shrinking Civic Space**

All of these issues unfold in a context of shrinking civic space across Asia. Environmental defenders, Indigenous leaders, journalists, and youth activists are under strict surveillance, criminalized, and harassed. Authoritarian governance, corporate capture, and state repression limit public participation and civil society advocacy. Nevertheless, resistance continues to grow. Movements must now come together to amplify their voice, connect across sectors, and build collective strategies for a people-centred climate future.

4. Objectives of the Session

- **Unite climate justice movements in Asia** by creating space for deeper alignment and solidarity.
- **Elevate community-centred alternatives** to existing systems and advocate for decolonized finance and energy governance.
- **Foster youth and feminist leadership**, with intentional focus on structural transformation and climate sovereignty.
- **Build a strong regional narrative on climate justice in Asia**, grounded in equity, historical responsibility, and local leadership.

5. Expected Outcomes

- **Narrative Building:** Strengthened and widely shared regional narrative of climate justice in Asia that challenges dominant paradigms and centers equity, reparations, and local leadership
- **Movement Strengthening and Solidarity:** Civil society actors, grassroots leaders, feminist groups, youth movements, and Indigenous organizations are better aligned, connected, and positioned to collectively advocate for climate justice in Asia
- **Elevated Leadership of Youth and Feminist Actors:** Concrete strategies are identified to further embed youth and feminist leadership in climate justice advocacy, policymaking, and implementation at all levels

6. Format and Agenda

Time (TBD)	Agenda Item	Duration	Format
Opening & Welcome	Session framing and objectives	05 mins	One presenter
Panel			
Climate Finance	Needs, Challenges, and solutions	10 mins	
Locally led adaptation	Existing models and challenges	10 mins	
Just energy transition	Asia's pathway and false solution	10 mins	
Climate movements in Asia	Overview of current movement in Asia led by youth, feminist organization and other ad how to strengthen	10 mins	
Q & A	Open for all participants	45 Min	
Synthesis & Closing	Summary and collective roadmap	10 mins	One presenter

7. Suggested Panel Speakers

Session chair:

Panel speaker 1: Climate finance-

Panel speaker 2: Locally led adaptation-

Panel speaker 3: Just energy transition-

Panel speaker 4: Climate justice movements in Asia-