Position Paper on the final draft of Voluntary National Review of Korea for HLPF

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Introduction
This position paper is to officially deliver comments on the final draft of 'Voluntary National Review (herein VNR)' prepared by Korean government for High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (herein HLPF) to be held on 11-22 July 2016, and to offer suggestions on 'national implementation of the SDGs and reporting system' to the government.

This paper was created through a review meeting, after receiving English draft of report from the government on the evening of 24th June 2016, and around of opinion gathering through email and SNS.

Korean Civil Society Network for SDGs (herein KCSN) is composed of local and national CSOs encompassing women, people with disabilities, economy, society, environment and governance, and officially launched on June 14 to work together on addressing Korean VNR's content and procedural problem as well as following-up a participation system for SDGs implementation by Korean government after HLPF. A meeting of CSO activists held on March 10 2016 for domestic and foreign tendency of SDGs information interchange was the starting point of the KCSN.

This document consists of two parts: 1) A general comments on VNR, 2) Suggestions and calls for the establishment of participatory implementation system of SDGs. Attached separately is opinion on details of VNR.

General Comments on VNR
SDGs adopted by UN on 25 September 2015 is an objective that each government would agree and implement while recognizing the importance of responding to economic, social and environmental challenges each government and global society are facing.

Ahead of HLPF to be held this July to discuss construction of international implementation system of the SDGs, our government has diligently prepared VNR as a chairman country of HLPF. Unfortunately, however, it seems that the government's preparation of VNR is very insufficient. Above all, based on the draft report up to now, we doubt whether the government is aiming to implement the SDGs and whether they have the will to implement as a matter of content and form.

The report has nothing to do with SDGs overall, or is invalid, or is cobbled together from the government policy retreated. That is 'The 3rd Master Plan for National Sustainable Development', 'The Three Year Plan for Economic Innovation', 'national political agenda', 'The Second Five Year Plan for Green Growth', and 'The Second Master Plan for International Development Cooperation'.

These plans do have partial relationship with SDGs, but they are not for national
implementation of SDGs. The true content is far from implementation of SDGs. For example, according to the VNR, the 3rd Master Plan for National Sustainable Development (2016-2020) was developed after considering the success and limitation of the 2nd Master Plan for National Sustainable Development and seeks to resolve issues such as climate change, biodiversity, social polarization, and low economic growth. The review links its actions to SDGs implementation plan and policies; however, the stated issues are still not resolved or even exacerbated. Furthermore, the national task or economic innovation in practice was reduced from the initial promise of the current government, and many of these are not properly implemented or ineffective.

On the other hand, the UN guideline requires the VNR to contain present implementation status, problems, pending issues, and follow-up measures. But the review draft does not state the economic, social, environmental, and governance problems that South Korea faces, and consequently lacks relating policies and follow-up implementation plan. In addition, despite the importance of domestic implementation, it concentrates on global co-operation and development rather than domestic implementation plan.

Currently Korean society is faced with structural crisis and pending issues that betray our expectation for sustainable society. Korea has revealed many problems such as civil safety issue (Sewol ferry tragedy, humidifier sterilizer, defoliant contaminated army base, anthrax testing, MERS illness, safety in work environment), failing industrial structure innovation and economic recession, peaking youth unemployment rate/elderly poverty ratio/household debt, skyrocketing monthly housing rent, deficiency in provision of rental housing, taxation policy that simply focuses on increasing taxation but far from fair taxation, mass production of temporary employee and discriminatory treatment, economic industrial policies favouring large companies, government’s block and control of access to information, governmental institution’s collection and surveillance of personal information, restriction of people’s basic human rights such as freedom of expression and freedom of assembly and association, doubts about justice of jurisdiction, threat to peace and ideological conflict due to confrontation between South and North Korea, energy (extension of coal-fired electrical power plant plan), fine dust, cancellation of Greenbelt, etc. This indicates that past and present government has serious limitations and problems. Therefore, VNR should disclose the causes of these problems and present effective solutions and implementation plans.

More specifically, the 3rd Master Plan for National Sustainable Development’s contents is less inclusive than past two master plans. The past National Master Plans were established by the Presidential Commission on Sustainable Development(PCSD) as a control tower based on the active participation of multi-stakeholders including civil society groups. However, after the enactment of the Framework Act on Low Carbon and Green Growth Law in 2010, PCSD fell under the Ministry of Environment as an advisory committee, the Committee on Sustainable Development, diminishing its authority and function. Additionally, the participation of major groups and stakeholders in decision-making process of national sustainable development has become very limited. Therefore, there are fundamental problems in the 3rd master plan in terms of integrative issues, inclusive implementation system, and practical means of implementation. In other words, it is described as more concentrated in range and content that the Ministry of Environment can accept rather than as a plan that prepares overall nation’s sustainable development. This also means that the 3rd Master Plan for National Sustainable Development’s relationship to SDGs’ goal is very
unnatural and unreasonable.

In the contents of ‘3-year plan for economic innovation’, although this year is the last year of the plan, we have lack of implementation in three strategies: fair and efficient economy, growth through innovation, and balance between exports and domestic consumption. Expected outcome has been off the social and economic status. Even though the plan selected stabilizations of household debt, housing market, and lease market, we can find debt and average price of housing market went up. In spite of this, VNR ambiguously mentioned as if ‘3-year plan for economic innovation’ gives a positive effects on welfare and income for youth, women, and elderly. In reality, however, Korean society broke the record on youth unemployment rate in 2015, has not reduced income gap between women and men, and has deepened inequality to non-regular workers. It should not indicate hopeful expected outcomes but our challenges, and should have suggested a direction for a solution. Since ‘3-year plan for economic innovation’ ends in this year, we need to start a discourse for the next sustainable economic policy. For that, we need to re-interpret SDGs in the context of Korean society as a priority. To set an initiative for sustainable economic growth, government should include two contents in the VNR: 1) what process the government has had to share opinions on policies with labor groups, enterprises, CSOs, and scholars until now and 2) how governments effectively have developed sharing system for the implementation of SDGs during 2015.

In the contents of international development and cooperation, governments proposed ‘Better life for girls initiative’ and ‘Safe life for all initiative’ as a major plan for implementation of SDGs. However, Korean government does not clearly indicate the linkage between initiatives and SDGs (including targets), and prepare detailed and proper policies as well. And government should delete the description about Saemaul Undong in which only positive side is narrated saying that it is the ROK’s unique rural development case in the 1970s. In the paragraph describing influences on farming villages, this report does not embody the controversy and a counterargument on Saemaul undong such as outflow of rural population and balancing income gap between urban and rural areas. It is not appropriate to apply a country’s past development experience to today’s developing countries without considering political and social context. Especially, it cannot be suitable to initiate developing country into a developing policy designed by a dictatorship without evaluation from a variety of aspects. When we take these issues into account, it is difficult to have support and agreement from international society on the contents of Samaul Undong as a main initiative for SDGs implementation.

‘Gender equality’ is specified in SDGs as 5th goal out of 17 goals by raising serious and urgent issues such as economic power and capacity empowerment of women, violence against women and reproductive rights. Targets of other SDGs (1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 10, 11, 13, and 17) reflect gender issue by specifying that it belongs to not only gender issue but also cross-cutting issues and emphasizing the importance of statistics on gender segregation. However, VNR does not explain how the goals, outcomes and challenges are connected with gender equality even if the report describes a master plans which have a variety of policies current governments are carrying now. Furthermore, in some part it has factual errors in a description of detailed policies. And it does not have any policies for improvement of female human right and current situation such as violence against women and femicide. The report also remains silent on the issue of Gender Gap shown by the ratio of women in the
population living in poverty, gap in the working hours of domestic work, major proportion of women in elderly poverty, wage gap which is ranking top among OECD countries for many consecutive years. Special recognition on these issues and plans for improvement at the policy level as well as proper gender statistics are lacking. The vision of SDGs to adopt gender perspectives as a cross-cutting issue is not being properly reflected. It is required to evaluate existing policies for the implementation of the 10 gender-related goals and targets and to complete remaining tasks in the Korean context.

According to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs) and the reporting guideline for Voluntary National Review, the government shall keep the entire process of implementing open, inclusive, participatory and transparent and support reporting by all relevant stakeholders. However, the Korean government’s approach to a limited range of CSOs casts this principle into the shade. There were no opportunities of participation for workers who are struggling with the flexibility of labour, farmers groaning with the failure of agricultural policies, the youth as future generations, women’s group working to mainstream gender issues. The report mentions CSOs’ inputs in the process of review and its efforts to promote ownership of multi-stakeholders such as parliament, local governments, private sector, and civil society. Nevertheless, these efforts were either made in a very narrow sense or exaggerated from activities independently conducted by various actors. Even with the limited range of participation, the information was not sufficiently shared in a timely manner. This all led to producing a report that is far from the reality.

Recommendations

The civil society is deeply concerned of the initial state of the government’s plan for the implementation of the SDGs after reviewing the VNR report. The government’s policy itself cannot be directly deemed as the plan for SDGs implementation without a will to go through internal transformation. The implementation of SDGs should be major national tasks, not just empty rhetoric. The Korean government should show its will to substantially implement the SDGs through consultations with the civil society before it is late any longer.

With this point of view, we demand the government to comply with core principles of SDGs as follows:

1. ‘Leave no one behind’: ensure broad, inclusive, predictable and official participation

The theme of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs) adopted at the UN General Assembly in September 2015 is ‘Leave no one behind’ which represents the core principle of SDGs that is based on universal participation and equity. Various mechanisms should be established to ensure participation of all, from the local level to national level with major groups and other stake-holders, especially vulnerable groups and the minority groups. In order to make this possible, an independent accountability mechanism should be introduced at the local and central governmental level. That is, we need a system that can impose the government responsibilities for regular mandatory evaluation and collect reports of the local authorities. Most of all, all stake-holders should be able to participate in the entire process of planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating when the central and local governments set up the strategies for SDGs implementation. Especially, regular consultations with marginalized groups are essential. The evaluation must take place at the highest political level.
2. **Transparent innovative and accountable monitoring and review**

Monitoring and reporting are critical elements for enhancing accountability of the government. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs) clearly states that the actors should review the progress based on data which is high-quality, accessible, timely, reliable and disaggregated by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migration status, disability and geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts (para. 74). To this end, a transparent and participatory reporting system should be put in place and be recognized as a duty of the government and a right of citizens. We need to develop an adequate ambitious set of indicators that can address agenda from local level to national level without leaving a single issue behind.

The monitoring and reporting process should not only focus on the implementation of SDGs itself. Key principles of SDGs, such as redistribution of wealth, intergenerational fairness, and respect of the global environment should also be the part of evaluation as well as contribution for international implementation of SDGs.

Civic data produced by the civil society or other stakeholders should be reflected in the national report. This can lead to taking further steps by narrowing the gap between data and the reality and broadening the scope of data collection. Above all, shadow reports of the multi-stakeholders should be recognized as a legitimate part of the process of reviewing SDGs. Without this, the participation of multi-stakeholders is likely to be seen as a mere formality.

**Call for Participatory Process for SDGs Implementation in a Formal, Predictable and beforehand manner**

Based on the principle 'leave no one behind', KCSN calls for the followings to the government in order for major groups and other stakeholders to actively participate in building implementing infrastructure; level of government's implementation will be a barometer reflecting their will to implement the SDGs.

1. **Hold a public meeting within one month after the HLPF meeting in July to share results of HLPF and further implementation plans for major groups and stakeholders including civil society, particularly, individual meetings for vulnerable groups of the society including women, people with disabilities, and youth.**

2. **Hold a formal dialogue with major groups and stakeholders, in particular, individual dialogue with women, people with disabilities, and youth, to discuss national indicators of SDGs in developing process of national indicators that will be completed until the late of October this year.**

**Korean Civil Society Network for SDGs:**