APFSD YOUTH FORUM 2023

Asia-Pacific Regional Youth
Call to Action
Ahead of the APFSD 2023

Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels in Asia and the Pacific with Young People at the Forefront

WHO ARE WE?

We are a unique and intersectional group of over 400[1] young people, activists and advocates from 36 countries[2] across the Asia-Pacific region. We represent youth-led and feminist organisations, changemakers, social entrepreneurs, activists, and students who have gathered together for the Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) Youth Forum 2023, held in hybrid modality, from 18th - 20th March 2023 in Bangkok, Thailand. Together, we comprise diverse individuals ranging from age 13 - 30, across all backgrounds and identities including persons with disabilities, persons belonging to various sexual and gender identities and expressions, youth from ethnic and minority groups, and various socio-economic backgrounds, amongst others. Our participation in this youth forum brings forth our collective voice and is a representation of our place across various social movements in the region, reflected collectively in this call to action.

This APFSD Youth Call to Action puts forward our concerns and embodies our demand for sustainable, inclusive, and human rights focused solutions, with

focus on the SDGs under review for this year—SDG6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), SDG9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), SDG11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and SDG17 (Partnerships for the Goals), alongside SDG3 (Health and Well-being) and SDG5 (Gender Equality). As of 2023, we are now at the exact halfway point of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. While we acknowledge that there has been some development by countries in the Asia and the Pacific to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we also recognise that we are unfortunately not on track to reach any of the SDGs by the target date, and due to the onset of COVID-19 and multiple intersecting crises of conflicts and climate change, we are in fact even further behind.

The Call to Action was developed by a dedicated drafting team[3] who worked on behalf of the larger group to capture the key discussion points and demands discussed by participants in the forum. There is no doubt that we cannot build a better, more sustainable future without centering the voices of young people in all our diversities, embedded in the values of gender

equity and human rights. If we are to make meaningful progress towards the 2030 Agenda, we emphasise that this can only be achieved through enabling young people's leadership, and meaningful participation in all levels of the decision-making processes. Through this Call to Action, we present our recommendations and call upon all our Governments to address the issues collectively faced by over 60% of the world's youth who live in the Asia-Pacific.[4] We call for an inter-regional and collaborative effort by all States in the work towards implementing the SDGs in our region in ways that are intersectional, sustainable and inclusive for all.

BACKGROUND

This Call to Action was developed at a time when we are slowly trying to build back from the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although we may be past the time of lockdowns and movement restrictions, COVID-19 is not over and has left a significant impact on our societies. In addition to this, the rising effects of climate change, pushback against freedom of speech and expression, disparities in education and healthcare, alongside the growing occurrences of conflict and political upheaval within the region, has led to a wide range of inequalities, inequities and lack of meaningful participation affecting young people's sustainable development.

As of 2023, we now only have another seven years left to achieve the goals set under the 2030 Agenda. However, multiple crises at the global level have left impacts that are felt deeply across the region. COVID-19 has not only paused the progress that had been made, but in many instances, has resulted in us moving backwards. The countries within our region were not able to adapt to the pressures of COVID-19 and in doing so have created environments, established laws, and put in place regimes that have had a negative impact on our efforts in the region to achieve gender equality, provide accessible and affordable healthcare for all, ensure quality education, enable freedom of speech and media, and provide clean water, sanitation, and housing, amongst others. The ongoing and rapidly escalating climate crisis has led to more droughts, natural disasters, and extreme weather and brought on huge amounts of fiscal stress. Finally, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has led to high food prices, higher energy prices and disrupted food and energy supply systems across the region.

The Asia-Pacific is the most populated region on Earth, with more than half of the world's population living in the region.[5] There are almost one billion young people aged 10-24 years living in 32 low- and middle-income countries in Asia and the Pacific, accounting for 60% of the world's young people. However, young people's voices are not being heard or uplifted when it comes to decision-making processes. Young people from marginalised communities such as youth with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ youth, youth from lower economic backgrounds, amongst others, have been even further left behind.

SDG5 - GENDER EQUALITY

Situational Analysis

SDG5 on gender equality is also a cross-cutting issue that we have addressed across every SDG presented within this Call to Action. **We reiterate and emphasise that none of the SDGs can be fully achieved if gender equality is not realised**.

Although progress was being made on gender equality, COVID-19 had a detrimental impact on the status of SDG5 in the region, with long-standing gender inequalities being amplified and with some progress on SDG5 even being reversed in some areas due to the pandemic. The pandemic and the increased focus of governments on preventive measures have had an impact on access to other healthcare information and services including the information and services related to sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people. More than 1 in 2 adolescent girls report at least one serious problem accessing healthcare in the region.[6] For women with disabilities, and refugee/migrant women, the lack of access to healthcare has had an even greater impact.

Furthermore, violence against women has risen exponentially since the onset of the pandemic—whereas one in three women was a victim of violence in her lifetime prior to the pandemic, this figure has now risen to one in two women.[7] In the Pacific, one in two 15-24 year old women have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence. In South Asia, this figure is one in four women, and in Southeast Asia, one in six.

Young people with diverse sexual orientation or gender identity/expression (SOGIE) continue to face stigma and discrimination in all aspects of their lives - within the region, 15 countries still criminalise consensual same-sex activity between men, and 10 countries do so between women. COVID-19 also led to the deprioritisation of health services such as HIV testing and treatment, hormonal treatment and gender affirming treatments for trans individuals, hitting LGBTIQ+ youth the hardest, and many countries make accessing these services incredibly difficult due to the taboos, stigma, and even laws against LGBTIQ+ people.

Though big strides have been made with the digital landscape in the region, a significant gender digital divide exists. Women and girls are still far less likely to own or have access to digital devices and enjoy fewer opportunities to gain digital skills than boys.[8] Young people are facing numerous challenges due to limited knowledge and skills on digital, technology and innovation in the country, with those with no access to phones, computers, and/or the internet being left even further behind.

Our Recommendations on Gender Equality

1. Ensure **meaningful participation and leadership of young people, women and girls in all their diversity** in decision-making including, planning, implementation and monitoring processes related to COVID-19 recovery and the implementation of the SDGs.

2. Prioritise **gender equality, human rights, equity, meaningful and inclusive youth engagement, comprehensive sexuality education, and sexual and reproductive health and rights** (SRHR), as these are foundational values to achieving individual well- being and sustainable development.

3. Monitor and evaluate national Adolescent Friendly Health Services (AFHS) standards. The following must be enforced: 1) **Prohibit forced marriage before the age of 18 years** for girls and boys, 2) **Prohibit sexual violence**, including within marriage, 3) **Prohibit child sexual abuse** and exploitation.

4. Support and initiate more **young people and women-focused entrepreneurship programmes** to empower young people in all their diversities to live an independent life.

5. Decriminalise and ensure a positive legal environment for SRHR and LGBTIQ+ people, and **ensure legal protection against discrimination** on the basis of gender identity and expression, as well as sexual orientation.

6. Empower young women and girls, and young LGBTIQ+ people in all their diversities as **agents of change in climate action** and ensure sustainable livelihoods, agriculture, and clean energy for in COVID-19 recovery efforts.

7. Ensure gender equality and uphold sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) when responding to the climate crisis. This includes **ensuring inclusive and meaningful participation of the most affected and marginalised communities**, including young women and girls and young LGBTIQ+ persons, in decisions related to climate change at all levels of the planning, development, implementation and monitoring processes.

8. Empower, invest in and support **youth-led and youth-serving initiatives and organisations led by young women and girls**, and young LGBTIQ+ people that are working to address the barriers to COVID-19 recovery and achieve the SDGs, providing funding, technical support, and other resources to help them scale up and expand their impact.

9. Implement policies that **promote equal access to education, gainful employment particularly for marginalised communities**, especially young women and girls and young LGBTIQ+ people. This can include providing technology and internet access, increasing funding for education, and reducing education fees to ensure the recovery from COVID-19.

10. **Reinforce the availability of research and disaggregated data**, related to young women and girls, young LGBTIQ+ people and SDGs focusing on youth's mental health, discrimination, challenges and hardships, education, labour rights and decent work.

SDG6 - CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

Situational Analysis

The Asia Pacific region is not on track to achieve SDG 6, with the overall progress insufficient and decelerated. To date, the progress on all six targets of Goal 6 are slow, stagnant or regressing since 2015 and we are nowhere near to achieving these targets by 2030. Achieving Goal 6 is essential to the overall aim of the 2030 Agenda of ensuring a sustainable world where no one is left behind.

As the region has 60% of the world's population and only 36% of global water resources,[9] water scarcity is the most critical issue facing water resources and freshwater ecosystems in the region today, subsequently having the lowest per capita water availability in the world. This is only made worse by the increasing demand of water resources for agriculture irrigation, especially in South and Southeast Asia. Data from UNESCAP shows that in 2020 only about half of the rural population had access to safely managed drinking water services (52%) and safely managed sanitation services (48%).[10]

Progress needs to be accelerated multi-fold to ensure safely managed water and sanitation in the region. Women and girls in all their diversities are the most affected by the lack of safely managed water and sanitation facilities given their unique needs including their sexual and reproductive health. Data in the region shows that women bear four times more of the burden of unpaid care and domestic work and are vulnerable to gender based violence and harassment when they are forced to travel long distances to collect water. In addition, women and girls in all their diversities residing in hard to reach rural areas, in urban slums, and refugee settlements are also affected by the lack of WASH facilities.

Our Recommendations on Clean Water and Sanitation

1. Accelerate **open dialogues with multi sectors** to share explicit and tacit knowledge for creation of sustainable, safely managed water management.

2. Translate resilient, prosperous, sustainable, inclusive, innovative, and dynamic water actions at the level of local to international with ensuring their financial support mechanisms.

3. **Centralise the nexus of water-youth-climate issues** at the heart of SDGs and peak them as a political agenda for all stakeholders,

4. Employ necessarily trained service providers in the health care service centers so that they can provide support to the adolescents without any delay ensuring **privacy in clean and hygienic, water and sanitation supported facilities**.

5. Ensure **social inclusion** including gender equality and disability towards youth SRH with menstrual hygiene.

6. Include a specific focus on **adolescent SRH information and services** in universal health coverage policy, plans and financing mechanisms in safe water and sanitation facilities.

7. Ensure water and sanitation systems at community level **are functional and accessible**.

8. Invest in **strengthening the health, water and sanitation systems** by improving infrastructure, increase funding for healthcare. This will help ensure that countries are better prepared to respond to health emergencies like pandemics, ultimately supporting progress toward SDG 3 and SDG 6.

SDG7 - AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY

Situational Analysis

SDG 7 aims at achieving universal access to modern and affordable energy services, which can have transformative effects on a variety of factors, including economic status, health, education, poverty, and inequality. Access to electricity (7.1.1) and clean cooking fuels and technology (7.1.2) are to be attained by 2030, as measured by specific targets established in this objective. In the Asia-Pacific region, countries have undertaken a variety of policies, strategies, and initiatives to minimise the energy access gap, however their success rates vary. As of 2022, the region has made substantial progress towards reaching universal access to electricity, while certain rural and remote communities still lack access to power. The region has been one of the fastest-growing regions for renewable energy, as deployment of renewable energy has expanded.

Nonetheless, significant work remains in terms of improving energy efficiency, reducing reliance on traditional biomass for cooking, and investing in energy infrastructure to accommodate rising demand.

The usage of off-grid alternatives and the declining costs of renewable energy technologies have made it more viable for many regions to achieve universal electrification by the year 2030. Combining electrical services with other benefits can assist in realising the full potential of electrification, especially in remote rural areas, however the negative environmental impacts of renewable energy need to be kept in check.

In contrast, 39%, or approximately 1.8 billion people, in the Asia-Pacific region continue to utilise hazardous and polluting cooking fuels and technology. The use of traditional biomass in inadequate stoves or open flames poses a considerable risk to public health, especially for women, who are often responsible for cooking, and children, who are frequently present. The national picture of progress in expanding access to clean cooking is not encouraging, as budgetary pledges are grossly insufficient in many countries in the region.

The same importance should be placed on ensuring universal access to clean cooling systems. Such technologies are critical for achieving a triple positive effect: they allow to reduce or even avoid food waste, ensure a reliable storage of vaccines and medicines and respond to rising consumer demand amidst higher average temperatures and more frequent heat waves, especially in densely populated urban areas and megacities of the ESCAP region.

Women and girls face negative effects of inefficient energy sources used, such as wood, charcoal, dung, etc. in open fires, which puts them at risk of health hazards, including compromised air quality at the household level. Approximately 1.3 billion people (29%) continue to rely on inefficient and polluting fuels and cookstoves. There are widespread inequalities in the rate of renewal energy utilisation among low, middle and high-income countries, with the energy mix in Asia remaining mainly fossil fuel based.

Reducing wood use, saving time, enhancing air quality, and decreasing the prevalence of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease were statistically significant benefits of clean cooking programmes. Yet, price, dependability, and the implementation of ineffective technology remain obstacles. To achieve the SDG7 aim of universal access, policymakers should implement a deeper understanding of the opportunities, advantages, and tradeoffs associated with energy access policy and programme design.

Our Recommendations on Affordable and Clean Energy

1. Mandate legally-binding short and long term Paris-aligned decarbonisation targets to **implement science based, no overshoot 1.5°C scenario climate compatibility checks** for all new national legislation, policies, and projects;

2. Deliver national plans for the equitable **phase-down of fossil fuels and scale up of low-carbon energy carriers**, including renewables and enabling infrastructures, recognising Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities;

3. Commit to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goal #7 by 2030 through **advancing multilateral Just Energy Transition Partnerships** and national policies; provide clean technology transfer, capacity building, and targeted financing;

4. Increase energy efficiency in all sectors by **enacting regulatory and financial incentives and standards**, adopt policies to prevent the overconsumption of heating and cooling, and enhance the Demand Side Response;

5. Invest in **low-carbon, affordable and accessible transport infrastructure** to support active, shared and public mobility;

6. Incentivise multimodal shifts towards low-carbon mobility and **drive the uptake of low-emission vehicles and fuels**;

7. Develop national roadmaps to replace unabated fossil fuel-derived energy and feedstocks in industries with low-carbon alternatives and **increase investment in industrial decarbonisation** research and development, especially in hard-to-abate sectors;

8. **Ensure universal access to clean cooking** by 2030 by compensating households' acquisition of clean cooking appliances via grants or in-kind support.

9. Mobilise **private and public funding to support the installation of clean cooling systems** that are crucial to reducing food waste, storing vaccines and medicines and responding to rising consumer demand amidst higher average temperatures and more frequent heat waves;

10. Governments in the Asia-Pacific region should **strengthen data collection and analysis capabilities**, establish regulatory frameworks to encourage energy efficiency, increase investment in energy monitoring and evaluation infrastructure, and foster collaboration between stakeholders.

SDG9 - INDUSTRY, INNOVATION, AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Situational Analysis

One of the outstanding progresses in SDG9 in the Asia Pacific region has been the expansion of mobile network to 90% of the population in the region.[11] Although internet penetration through mobile phones has increased, most of the countries still lag behind in broadband penetration. None of the Asian countries surveyed in 2018 by a study had computer ownership higher than 6% of the population aged 15-65.[12] Geographical remoteness, cost of devices, cost of data, socio-cultural norms, and safety/security concerns serve as some of the barriers to accessing digital technology.

The total investment for infrastructure in Least Developed Countries (LDCs) has also noticeably increased. There is a need for inclusive and gender responsive infrastructure to increase access especially among the most marginalised. People with disabilities have to face many barriers to accessing different services and infrastructures including barriers to accessing digital technology.

The division of labor between men and women in the private and public realm has implications over how there has been gendering of roles in some of the professional fields. Statistically there are very few women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

Globally, only an estimated 30% of researchers in science, technology and innovation are female while this percentage is even lower in the Asia Pacific region.[13] The association of women with care and the private realm of life has also contributed to their less participation in the innovation and industrial market economy.

Lack of good working conditions for women and the marginalised including unequal wage, lack of reproductive health care benefits, sexual and gender-based violence are still prevalent. Health insurance and services are still not accessible for all especially in the labour market.

The poor and least developed countries are amongst the ones who are affected the most by the transnational climate issues and have the least capacity to cope with it. Many countries in the Asia-Pacific region are geographically vulnerable and highly exposed to the damaging impacts of climate change.[14] Environmental Harm disproportionately impacts individuals, groups and people already living in vulnerable situations including women, children, the poor, ethnic, sexual and gender minorities, migrants, indigenous people, older persons, and persons with disabilities.

According to a UNESCAP report, passenger and freight transport demand has been projected to increase in the Asia and the Pacific region to as much as 150% between 2015 and 2050.[15] Thus, integrating sustainable and resilient transport measures is critical. Also, studies have shown that merging technology with infrastructure transport development will help achieve the SDG target.

Inclusive resilient infrastructure is crucial so that women and girls in all their diversity, marginalised groups such as informal workers, persons with disabilities, and older persons utilise these infrastructures equitably. Women, young people, and marginalised groups should also be part of the infrastructure workforce.

Information regarding resilience or sustainability of infrastructure is lacking. Despite the progress in this sector, up to two-thirds of the total direct damages from disaster events are due to infrastructure failure with 90% related to climate. Only half of the infrastructure needed by 2050 is currently in operation, a gap largely felt in Asia and the Pacific.

Our Recommendations on Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure

1. **Increase investments in scientific research and development** especially encouraging opportunities for girl's education in STEM. Importance of design thinking for innovative solutions to all problems should be encouraged starting from primary school.

2. Young people are often at the forefront of innovation and entrepreneurship, and can play a key role in advancing SDG 9 through the development of new technologies and business models. In order to **foster innovation and entrepreneurship** among youths, governments and businesses should support young entrepreneurs through funding, mentorship, and networking opportunities especially on clean energy and sustainable infrastructure.

3. **Access to technological devices and safer internet should be increased** especially for those who are geographically and socio economically marginalised. Gender gap in digital access should be minimised by investing in girls' education and investing in programs to promote gender equality including initiatives to provide comprehensive sexuality education. Invest in digital literacy education for children, their families and teachers to provide quality education and to navigate technologies in safer ways.

4. Ensure **better working environments for women** with better reproductive health benefits, child care facilities, better pay and SGBV policies and its implementation in place. Universal Health coverage should be secured with ensuring health insurance for employees at the labor market.

5. Modern **infrastructures should be gender responsive, disability friendly and inclusive**. Include and engage youths with disabilities themselves to better understand their support needs and what innovation and accessibility looks like to them. The diversity of impairment groups allows us to have a more comprehensive and broader perspective of the challenges and barriers persons with disabilities experience per their impairment group. Youths with disabilities can be agents of change too. Partners and stakeholders should collaborate with organisations of persons with disabilities in their programmes and activities that will give youths with disabilities opportunities, resources and platforms for empowerment, engagement and participation. This contributes to capacity building, drives leadership and contributes to skills building. Besides, representation and visibility of women and youth from early-stage planning is necessary to ensure that the infrastructure is planned and designed to meet their needs, and give them a sense of ownership for a long term sustainable impact.

6. Countries should make an increased effort to **shift to cleaner and affordable renewable resources and sustainable infrastructure** reducing their carbon footprints. Developed and high income nations should be held accountable for their contribution to climate change and therefore should pay their share for **helping developing countries to cope with the climate crisis**. Resource-efficient and cleaner production (RECP) practices and technologies should be promoted.

7. Governments to **increase investments in public transports** discouraging the use of private transports to reduce carbon emissions.

8. **Revise and reconsider investment-friendly policies** to attract foreign and domestic investments for sustainable industrial and infrastructure development.

9. With the expansion of access to digital technologies, the complexity of the digital space is also expected to grow. As such, a robust and **rights-based cyber security system needs to be developed** that protects the data of the population, especially vulnerable groups, and upholds fundamental human rights and civil liberties while ensuring cyber safety and security.

SDG11 - SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

Situational Analysis

In 2019, the Asia Pacific region became majority urban for the first time in history. There was a rapid growth in the cities across the Asia Pacific region accelerating in urban development.[16] However, despite significant progress in previous years there has been a regression from 2000 onwards, including in key areas such as inclusion, safety, equality and environmental impact. SDG 11 acts as a strategic entry point and these actions are more crucial than ever as the region is recovering and struggling to adapt to multiple interlinked crises from the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the Asia Pacific grows increasingly urbanised, SDG 11 requires urgent attention, with comprehensive and action-oriented blueprints towards achieving sustainable cities and communities for all. This is essential to re-address planning, financing and developing the governance of the society to manage cities and human settlements in line with the SDG 11 agenda.[17]

Making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable is the overall goal of SDG11. Cities across the Asia Pacific region are experiencing rapid growth, and the pandemic has brought to the fore significant challenges faced by persons living in cities, including lack of housing, lack of education, lack of basic water and sanitation facilities, lack of access to health, including SRH services, lack of sustainable urban planning, and lack of basic social protection measures that can build resilience to economic or climate related disruptions. We are witnessing increasing exclusion and inequality, and a lack of safe spaces for women and girls. The region houses 60% of global informal settlements.[18] To tackle gender inequality, gender responsive and inclusive planning processes and basic gender-responsive infrastructure and service provision remains crucial. The lack of safely managed water and sanitation facilities puts a disproportionate burden on women, girls, young people, persons with disabilities, older persons, and marginalised and excluded groups in cities and communities.

There are many challenges to provide housing and tenure security, infrastructure inclusion and equitable accessibility for all. Moreover, cities need to turn into safe spaces for women and girls is also of paramount importance and more attention is required for transformative actions towards developing resilience to the impacts of natural disasters and climate change and resource efficiency.

Our Recommendations on Sustainable Cities and Communities

1. Advocate for the **design and implementation of disability-friendly cities**: To promote inclusivity and gender equality, it is important to advocate for the design and implementation of disability-friendly cities which includes access ramps for wheelchairs, audible pedestrian signals.

2. **Ensure accessibility for all** by implementing disability-friendly infrastructures in cities.

3. Highlight and **provide shelter for the homeless**: Homelessness is a problem in many urban areas, and lack of access to clean water and sanitation facilities exacerbates this issue. Providing shelter to the homeless can help to address this problem, while also improving access to clean water and sanitation.

4. **Increase the number of buses and subsidise public transport fuel** at the floating rate: by increasing the number of buses and subsidising public transport fuel, it is possible to reduce reliance on private vehicles and promote more sustainable modes of transportation.

5. Educate people for **public hygiene**: by educating people about the negative health and environmental impacts such as betel spitting and public urination, it is possible to reduce this harmful practice and promote more hygienic and sustainable behaviours.

6. **Listen, scale, and collaborate** with partners. Engage the local community in initiatives such as meeting with a local government on public space improvement.

7. Invest in **coral rehabilitation and mangrove**

planting in the coastal areas which will help minimise the effects of climate change.

8. Poverty is often concentrated in urban spaces and city governments struggle to accommodate the rising population in these cities. They must **ensure that there are safe urban communities** installed and enhance the living conditions of those living in poverty.

9. Investing in sustainable infrastructure that can withstand climate change and natural disasters is crucial. **Innovation in disaster prone areas to build infrastructures** that are traditional and more effective in protecting from disaster is crucial.

10. Project implementation of Smart Cities Planning needs to be **less urban-area focused and instead prioritise rural areas**.

11. **Promote walkable cities** with trees, solar energies, a safe environment near human settlements, prevention of accidents, injuries or deaths due to human-animal interactions specifically due to rising population of stray animals and promotion of our health and well-being.

12. The design of cities should be implemented with **people at the center**. Advocacy on **design and implementation of cities must be disability and elderly-people friendly**. Partnerships between people in the community must be fostered - children, adolescents, women, men, LGBTIQ+ persons, persons with disabilities, etc. must be prioritised.

13. **Prioritise and promote sustainable tourism** to protect and uplift socio-cultural aspects of marginalised communities, such as Indigenous people.

14. Provide **trainings, programmes and services that inspire, empower, and connect young people** to create innovations to help strengthen the quality of life of society.

15. Ensure the **creation and protection of green spaces** for people to exercise and create space for everyone to be involved in the community.

SDG17 - PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

Situational Analysis

Progress towards SDG17 has been slow in the Asia Pacific region and within some targets, the progress has been reversed. Inclusive partnerships at local national, regional and global levels are crucial in accelerating the progress towards the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development across financing, technology, capacity strengthening, and trade and systemic issues. Resource mobilisation through domestic and ODA channels is insufficient to address, reversal, stagnant, and slow progress across SDGs and due to this, more financial resources need to be pumped in.

Cross-movement solidarity and support from relevant NGOs, CSOs, and stakeholders such as governments and UN agencies, are essential for achieving the SDGs as they play a vital role in its implementation.

But despite efforts to increase partnerships in the achievement of the SDGs, progress towards SDG 17 is far from reaching its 2030 targets. Coordination among government agencies, across sectors, and between the central and provincial levels must be improved. Increased cross-sectoral, cross-thematic, and cross-country collaboration and the importance of highlighting the interlinkages of the SDGs in all the initiatives throughout the region is essential for making progress towards SDGs.

It is also crucial to ensure the meaningful engagement of all stakeholders in the planning, design, and implementation phases of sustainable development initiatives. Civil society organisations, especially youth-led organisations must be included in decision-making processes that affect young people. All relevant stakeholders must ensure that young people's voices are heard and included in identifying priority areas for action in the achievement of the SDGs.

Budget constraints are another major challenge hindering the implementation of the SDGs, with many developing countries relying on outside funding to

achieve their targets.[19] This creates challenges around the sustainability of development and aid programmes as developing countries lack ownership of the progressive development initiatives implemented in their country. Countries must then properly allocate budget across priority sectors, especially where progress on the SDGs is slow.

Data and statistics are also critical in guiding decision-making for development, and yet data and statistics on young people in all their diversity remains lacking due to a lack of inclusion and disaggregation in data mechanisms. According to the UN, funding received for statistical activities (except for funding for health data) has declined by 18%. Gender data and climate data declined even more than that in 2020.[20] The lack of funding on data collection and analysis leads to serious data gaps in developing countries. With the lack of inclusion of young people in many of these statistical activities, the invisibility of young people in data for the SDGs becomes even more grave. Young people, including young women and girls, young LGBTIQ+ people, young people with disabilities, and young indigenous people must be included in data and statistics used in designing and developing development initiatives.

SDG 17 Partnership for Goals in the Asia Pacific thus faces significant challenges that require collaboration between the private sector, government, and NGOs. The lack of coordination across stakeholders and sectors is hindering progress. It is imperative to create a collaborative and synergistic environment between the government, private sector, and civil society including youth to accelerate progress towards achieving the SDGs.

Our Recommendations on Partnerships for the Goals

1. **Ensure the meaningful partnerships and engagement of young people in all their diversity, regardless of their identities or disabilities, in partnership and collaboration towards the achievement of the SDGs.** It is crucial to increase the inclusive representation, visibility, voice, and meaningful engagement of all young people, including those with disabilities. This includes increasing active collaboration of stakeholders with youth-led organisations, including young persons with disabilities, young women and girls, young

LGBTIQ+ people and young indigenous people. This can be achieved by engaging young people to understand their needs and priorities with respect to the SDGs and ensuring that they are meaningfully represented in decision-making processes, whilst avoiding tokenistic inclusion of young people. Such collaborations would contribute to capacity building, drive youth leadership and skills development for young people, and promote inclusion and diversity. Governments, private sector, and international organisations must promote diversity and inclusion of young people in all their partnerships and collaborations in the achievement of the SDGs. It is essential to create an environment that is welcoming, supportive, and inclusive of all individuals to accelerate progress towards achieving the SDGs. By fostering inclusivity, the partnership can tap into the full potential of all young people in all their diversity, including young people with disabilities, to drive sustainable development.

2. **Ensure funding for the SDGs are equitably distributed without corruption and include the needs and priorities of young people in all their diversity.** Donors must ensure the equitable distribution of resources, with marginalised youth groups at the forefront, while government bodies must take responsibility for distributing resources without any corruption or misuse. Donor governments and agencies must also include young people in their funding priorities and mechanisms to ensure that the needs of young people are properly addressed and seal the gaps where young people are often left behind. There must be adequate consultation on the needs and priorities of young people to properly design and develop funding opportunities specifically to support young people in the achievement of sustainable development.

3. **Establish an enabling environment that encourages the active participation and meaningful engagement of youth organisations and youth advocates.** Youth organisations and advocates play a crucial role in the implementation of the SDGs, and their contributions should be recognized and supported. Governments must create an enabling environment for CSOs and NGOs, especially youth-led organisations to participate actively in the design and implementation of sustainable

development initiatives. This will require the creation of policies and strategies that promote collaboration, build capacity, and provide financial and technical support to youth-led organisations. By empowering youth organisations and advocates, young people increase their capacity to engage and contribute to the achievement of the SDGs, ensure that young people are not left behind, and increase the value of sustainable development initiatives as a whole.

4. **Implement transformative, experience-based educational and skills building ecosystems that actively and meaningfully engages very young adolescents (VYAs), older adolescents, and youth in policies and programs meant for them.** This will help foster an attitude of leadership, critical thinking, and relevant skills and enable young people to harness innovation. By providing young people with opportunities to engage in transformative experiences and skills building, they can be empowered to become active and informed participants in shaping the future, especially in achieving the SDGs.

5. **Increase cross-country and cross-sectoral knowledge sharing and community building platforms accessible to all relevant stakeholders, including young people.** Part of enhancing partnerships and collaboration to achieve the SDGs is ensuring that all stakeholders are adequately informed and can access the latest and up-to-date information, research and technology that can improve sustainable development initiatives. Increasing knowledge sharing and community building for all stakeholders will facilitate cross-country, South-to-South learning and will lead to enhanced partnerships, resource mobilisation, and innovation. These platforms must also include the priorities of young people to ensure that their needs for information, research, and technology are not left behind. Moreover, such platforms must be accessible to young people in all their diversity.

6. **Invest in proper data collection and analysis mechanisms that include and disaggregate data for young people in all their diversity.** Ensuring that young people are included in data and analysis mechanisms is critical in identifying the gaps where young people are left behind in light of sustainable

development initiatives. Data collection mechanisms must also disaggregate data to include young people in all their diversities, including young women

and girls, young LGBTIQ+ people, young people with disabilities, and young indigenous people. The lack of data on these vulnerable youth groups is alarming in light of our proximity to 2030. As such, it is crucial to develop and implement reliable and standardised data collection methods, as well as use appropriate technologies for data management, disaggregation, and analysis. Governments, the private sector, and civil society organisations should work collaboratively to establish effective data systems, improve data quality, and ensure timely and accurate data availability that include young people in all their diversity. Additionally, investments should be made in building the capacity of young people and youth-led organisations to collect and analyse data and promote data transparency and accessibility.

CONCLUSION

We recognise that though the Asia Pacific region has made achievements in socioeconomic development, it is crucial to be aware of the fact that progress has been uneven across and within countries and severely set back by the impact of COVID-19, the climate crises, and various global conflicts. With regards to the 2030 Agenda, at this halfway point is it now more critical than ever to center and uplift the voices of young people in the region if we are to make any form of meaningful progress towards the target goals.

The above document brings in a youth perspective to the status of progress in achieving the SDGs and highlights areas in need of attention in relation to SDGs 5 (gender equality), 6 (clean water and sanitation, 7 (affordable and clean energy), 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure), 11 (sustainable cities and communities, and 17 (partnerships for the goals). Each of these SDGs have been analysed through the lens of other related and crosscutting SDGs especially SDG 1 (poverty), SDG 3 (good health and wellbeing), and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities).

We call on Member States to adopt an intersectional, non-discriminatory and participatory approach that fosters youth empowerment and leadership, human

rights, gender equality and equity so we can collectively address the issues that affect claiming our agency, our decisions and our quality of life.

It is our belief that this regional call to action, and the national level call to action briefs, will enable our governments to strengthen their political commitments and allocate the resources necessary, to enable us, the youth of the Asia and the Pacific, to be able to affect change to make the world into a better place for all.

ABBREVIATIONS

AFHS	-	Adolescent Friendly Health Services
APFSD	-	Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development
CSE	-	Comprehensive Sexuality Education
CSO	-	Civil Society Organisation
ESCAP	-	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
GBV	-	Gender-based Violence
LDC	-	Least Developed Countries
LGBTIQ	-	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer
NGO	-	Non-Governmental Organisation
RCEP	-	Resource-Efficient and Cleaner Production
SDG	-	Sustainable Development Goals
SOGIE	-	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression
SRHR	-	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
STEM	-	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
UN	-	United Nations
VYA	-	Very Young Adolescents

ENDNOTES

1   The organisers of the APFSD Youth Forum were able to provide access to 1400 young people from across 36 Asia Pacific countries. 60 young people attended the Youth Forum in person and over 200 young people actively engaged virtually through Zoom. The remaining participants were able to engage virtually through our livestream of the event.

2   The countries represented in this Youth Call to Action are as follows: Afghanistan, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei, Cambodia, China, Cook Island, Fiji, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Russia, Singapore, Solomon Islands, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Tonga, and Vietnam.

3   The Call to Action consists of recommendations brought together by participants during the Youth Forum and was drafted and compiled by a dedicated drafting team. The development, editing, and finalisation of the document was led by Evelynne Gomez (ARROW), with support from Deepa Chandra (ARROW), Leo Villar (YouthLead), Momota Hena (ARROW), Palden Dorji (Y-PEER AP), Sharifah Norizah Syed Ahamad Kabeer (MGCY), Shiwa Karmacharya (ARROW), and Vadim Kuznetsov (MGCY). Overall supervision was given by Sai Jyothirmai Racherla (ARROW).

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