Subregional Office
SOUTH AND SOUTH-WEST ASIA
ESCAP

TENTH SOUTH AND SOUTH-WEST ASIA SUBREGIONAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT 2026

Leaving No Youth Behind in the Future of Sustainable Development

17-19 November 2026, New Delhi, India

Concept Note (draft as of 15 November 2026)

Background

The South and South-West Asia Subregional Forum on Sustainable Development is a platform in South and South-West Asia[1] for multistakeholder dialogue and reflection among governments, civil society, private sector, research and academic institutions, development partners and other concerned stakeholders on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the subregion.

The Forum is convened by the ESCAP Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia in collaboration with host governments, the UN system and think tank partners of the South and South-West Asia Network on the SDGs. Findings and recommendations from the subregional forum feed into the regional Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development in Bangkok in February and the ECOSOC High-Level Political Forum in New York in July of the following year.

The Tenth South and South-West Asia Subregional Forum on Sustainable Development commenced with a series of five virtual multistakeholder consultations on SDGs 4, 10, 12, 15 and 17 in June and July 2026. In November 2026, a concluding hybrid event will be held in New Delhi, India to explore the role of youth as joint contributors to the future of sustainable development, in partnership with governments and other stakeholders.

Youth and the Future of Sustainable Development

The pivotal role of young people in fostering sustainable, inclusive and peaceful societies, as well as the importance of strengthening meaningful youth engagement in policymaking and decision-making processes, has been acknowledged with the launch of the *Youth2030 UN Youth Strategy* by the UN Secretary-General in September 2018.[2]

The significance of youth development in South and South-West Asia is particularly pronounced: the subregion is home to almost half of all young people in Asia and the Pacific, with numbers still growing even as youth populations are declining elsewhere in the region. This youth bulge presents important opportunities to accelerate sustainable

[1] Comprising of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Islamic Republic of Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Türkiye.

[2] The strategy envisions a world where every young person's human rights are realized, empowering them to reach their full potential and acknowledging their resilience and positive contributions as agents of change. Aligned to the UN's reform processes, the strategy integrates the key principles of coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, accountability and transparency to ensure a coordinated and holistic approach to the UN's work on youth and on reaching the Sustainable Development Goals.
https://www.un.org/youthaffairs/en/youth2030/about

development, in view of the expansive scale of the subregion's potential youth labour force coupled with rising youth civic engagement and aspirations to contribute to their communities and countries.

Yet the demographic dividend of South and South-West Asia has not been fully realized due to structural challenges that have led to high youth unemployment and rising inequality, further exacerbated by disruptions such as rapid technological change, geopolitical multipolarity and the intensifying impacts of climate change. In particular, young people from marginalized populations face compounding exclusions in both accessing the fruits of sustainable development and contributing to its processes. They include, among others, the urban poor; unemployed or those in precarious employment; young people from rural and remote communities; the digitally excluded; those from ethnic minority, caste-affected, and indigenous and tribal communities; migrants; and young people with disabilities.

Cognizant of the essential role of youth in contributing to sustainable development, South and South-West Asian youth representatives to the 2026 virtual multistakeholder consultations on the SDGs called for closer collaboration between their constituencies, governments and other stakeholders in the policymaking cycle. They also acknowledged the role of ESCAP and the wider UN community in providing a platform to enhance such multistakeholder engagement, especially on subregional discourses shaping the future of sustainable development in the post-2030 era.

Objectives

The event seeks to serve as a platform to explore how young people from all walks of life, including those from the abovementioned marginalized populations, can access and contribute to the future of sustainable development – drawing on a decade of good practices and lessons learned under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and charting a course for the post-2030 era – by:

- Equipping youth leaders with a better understanding of the policymaking cycle at the global, regional, national and local levels, including consensus building and trade-offs, thereby empowering them to participate more effectively in these processes.
- Facilitating interaction between youth leaders, governments and core stakeholder groups, thereby enabling all actors to explore meaningful ways of engagement and collaboration throughout the policymaking cycle.
- Encouraging youth organizations to network and collaborate across borders in South and South-West Asia, thereby strengthening the cohesiveness and effectiveness of advocacy and programmatic efforts to contribute to the future of sustainable development in the subregion.
- Identify how ESCAP and the wider UN community can better support youth development and aspirations in South and South-West Asia, including youth engagement in national, subregional, regional and global discourses on the future of sustainable development.

Target Participants

- Representatives of **youth groups and organizations**, with a focus on youth leaders representing and/or serving marginalized youth populations.
- **Government officials** in charge of youth development, and those holding portfolios in technology development, education, employment, climate change, circular economy, migration, urbanization, social policy and international cooperation.
- Leaders from the **private sector**, **civil society**, **academia and think tanks**, and **international organizations including the United Nations** engaged in youth development, and those holding portfolios in technology development, education, employment, climate change, circular economy, migration, urbanization, social policy and international cooperation.

Partnerships

- **NITI Aayog, Government of India**: in alignment with ongoing national efforts to develop a regenerative post-2030 development framework, technical experts from NITI Aayog will conduct presentations on processes of the policy cycle at the event's masterclasses on policymaking session.
- **UN entities in South and South-West Asia, including Youth Taskforces**: to provide peer review in shaping event programme (both content and modality); to identify good practices on youth-government and multistakeholder collaboration for sustainable development[3], to be presented at the event; to identify youth delegates and other stakeholders to participate in the event; and to co-lead the organization and facilitation of selected sessions.
- **South and South-West Asia Network on the SDGs (SANS)**: to conduct presentations on policymaking processes at the event's masterclass on policymaking session; during the thematic visioning sessions, to serve as resource persons during the breakout segments and to provide technical feedback on youth plenary presentations; to identify subject matter experts to participate in the event.
- **Youth Advocacy Network (YAN), Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW),** and **Major Group for Children and Youth (MGCY):** YAN and ARROW to mobilize and coordinate with youth organizations across the subregion, facilitate outreach to diverse and marginalized youth, identify youth-led good practices, and support the design, delivery and follow-up of youth engagement throughout the Forum. MGCY to complement this role by broadening regional and global youth outreach, connecting participants with wider youth constituencies and supporting cross-border collaboration, advocacy and follow-up on Forum outcomes.

[3] For purposes of the event, these good practices are defined as collaborative efforts among youth groups, governments and/or other core stakeholders (civil society, private sector, academia) that have contributed to the design and/or implementation of a solution addressing a development gap at the community/local, subnational, national and/or subregional levels.

PROGRAMME

Day 1 - 17 November 2026 (Tuesday), We-The-People's Hall, UN India	
09:00-09:45	**<u>Opening</u>** *Introduction* • Ms. Mikiko Tanaka, Director and Head, ESCAP-SSWA *Welcome remarks* • Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, UN Under-Secretary-General and ESCAP Executive Secretary [video message] • Dr. Felipe Paullier, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Youth Affairs [video message] • Representative of youth participants • Mr. Stefan Priesner, United Nations Resident Coordinator to India *Group photo*
09:45-10:00	Tea break
10:00-13:30	**<u>Thematic visioning 1: Technological advancements and AI</u>** *Framing presentations [45 min]* • Mr. Ankit Bose, Head of AI, NASSCOM • Mr. Abhishek Venkateswaran, National Project Officer, Social and Human Sciences Section, UNESCO Regional Office for South Asia *LNYB fishbowl: digital exclusion in the age of disruptions [45 min]* • Facilitated by Ms. Dipali Mathur, Founder, Tara Brand Ventures *Breakout discussions [45 min]* *Plenary presentations [75 min]*
13:30-14:30	Lunch
14:30-16:00	**<u>Masterclass on policymaking 1: National processes</u>** • Lt. Col. Jitendra Verma, Official on Special Duty, Sports & Youth Affairs Division, NITI Aayog • Dr. Sabyasachi Saha, Associate Professor, Research and Information System for Developing Countries, India • Mr. Sangay Phuntsho, Deputy Chief Planning Officer, Strategic Planning Division, Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Bhutan • Ms. Dikshya Singh, Research Officer, South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics, and Environment, Nepal
16:00-16:15	Tea break

16:15-17:30	**Masterclass on policymaking 2: Financing for development** • Mr. Hamza Malik, Director, Macroeconomic Policy and Financing for Development Division, ESCAP • Mr. Christopher Michael Garroway, Economist, United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office India • Dr. Sanghamitra Dhar, Programme Lead and Coordinator for Gender Responsive Budgeting, UN Women India
17:30-18:00	Round-up of Day 1
Day 2 - 18 November 2026 (Wednesday), We-The-People's Hall, UN India	
08:45-09:00	Warm-up and introduction to Day 2
09:00-11:15	**Thematic visioning 2: Climate change and sustainability** *Framing presentations [45 min]* • Mr. George Cheriyan, Executive Director, Center for Environment and Sustainable Development India • Ms. Dikshya Singh, Research Officer, South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics, and Environment, Nepal *LNYB fishbowl – impacts of climate change and environmental degradation [45 min]* • Facilitated by Ms. Dipali Mathur, Founder, Tara Brand Ventures *Breakout discussions [45 min]*
11:15-11:30	Tea break
11:30-12:45	**Thematic visioning 2: Climate change and sustainability (cont'd)** *Plenary presentations [75 min]*
12:45-13:30	Lunch
13:30-15:45	**Thematic visioning 3: Skilling and employment** *Framing presentations [45 min]* • Ms. Radhicka Kapoor, Senior Employment Specialist and Mr Gabriel Bordado, Regional Skills Specialist, Decent Work Team for South Asia, ILO • Mr. Abhishek Gupta, Chief Operating Officer, YuWaah (Generation Unlimited), UNICEF India • Dr. Richa Bansal, Youth Project Officer, UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development *LNYB fishbowl – exclusion and discrimination in the world of learning and work [45 min]* • Facilitated by Ms. Dipali Mathur, Founder, Tara Brand Ventures *Breakout discussions [45 min]*
15:45-16:00	Tea break

16:00-17:15	**Thematic visioning 3: Skilling and employment (cont'd)** *Plenary presentations [75 min]*
17:15-18:30	**Masterclass on policymaking 3: From local to global processes** *Decision-making and service delivery at the municipal level* • Dr. Debolina Kundu, Director, National Institute of Urban Affairs *Sharing experiences of voluntary national and local reviews* • Mr. Sangay Phuntsho, Deputy Chief Planning Officer, Strategic Planning Division, Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Bhutan • Ms. Priscilla C. Ngaihte, Public Policy Specialist, CG-II, SDG Division, NITI Aayog *Revisiting the development process of the 2030 Agenda* • Ms. Mikiko Tanaka, Director and Head, ESCAP-SSWA • Mr. Oliver Paddison, Head, Countries in Special Situations Section, Office of the Executive Secretary, ESCAP [virtual]
18:30-18:45	Round-up of Day 2
Day 3 - 19 November 2026 (Thursday), ESCAP-SSWA Office	
08:45-09:00	Warm-up and introduction to Day 3
09:00-10:00	**Discussion: Building youth engagement with multi-stakeholders for sustainable development** • Moderator - Ms. Mikiko Tanaka, Director and Head, ESCAP-SSWA • Ms. Dikshya Singh, Research Officer, South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics, and Environment, Nepal • Dr. Selim Raihan, Executive Director, South Asian Network on Economic Modelling, Bangladesh [virtual]
10:00-12:00	**Youth roundtable: reflections on the Forum and building cross-border partnerships for the future of sustainable development** *Facilitated discussion on follow-up actions after the forum* • Moderated by youth conveners
12:00-12:30	**Closing** • Representative of youth participants • Ms. Mikiko Tanaka, Director and Head, ESCAP-SSWA
12:30-14:00	Lunch

Note on thematic visioning workshops:

- *Framing presentation [45 min]* on core trends envisioned in the post-2030 era, including emerging opportunities and challenges; how youth-government collaboration and multistakeholder approaches can capitalize on opportunities to narrow challenges; and examples of such collaborative efforts between youth and other stakeholders within South and South-West Asia.
- *Leave No Youth Behind (LNYB) fishbowls [45 min]* provide space for representatives of marginalized youth segments to share perspectives, lived experiences, challenges and contributions to development solutions under each theme.

  There are two circles. In the inner circle, there are 5-6 seats. Youth leaders from the various South and South-West Asian countries sharing their personal journeys and discussing the exclusion at hand sit in the inner circle, with 1-2 seats empty. Any participant from the outer circle (i.e., other youth delegates, stakeholders, technical experts) may occupy the empty seat at any time to contribute to the discussion, then return to the outer circle when finished.
- *Breakout discussions - group work [45 min]*: Each group will consist of a diversity of youth leaders from different countries and communities. To ensure youth delegates gain exposure to different stakeholder perspectives, 1-2 resource persons from the following core stakeholder groups will be assigned to each breakout group: government / academia / private sector / UN and development partners.
- *Plenary presentations [75 min]*: after the brainstorming session, each group presents a summary of discussion outcomes at the plenary. Expert presenters and resource persons may raise questions and offer suggestions at the end of each presentation.