

Amit Timilsina
Final

Excellencies, distinguished guests, fellow civil society members, Namaste!

First, I thank Helen for her powerful testimony that I believe lays down a fundamental challenge for this forum.

Allow me to start by talking of my country.

Nepal is a beautiful country with so much diversity. But its beauty is marred by poverty and its diversity is shadowed by inequality.

In Nepal, 1 in 4 lives in less than 1 dollar per day and this was made worse by the earthquake of 2015 that pushed even more people to poverty, homelessness, hunger, lack of basic sanitation and health infrastructures.

With 40% of people considered as youth, this condition is most stark among young people with many still studying in make-shift schools without protection from rains and harsh sun, or falling ill due to lack of adequate sanitary and health facilities.

While we welcome positive and progressive actions of the Nepal government in pursuing the SDGs, many challenges still remain.

Widespread food insecurity, low basic education completion rate, lack of decent employment even for educated youth, blocks in implementation of SRHR laws, deeply entrenched gender inequality, prevalence of child marriage and practices against young girls like Chaupaddi – these and more have made a lot of young people like me unsure about our present and future, leading a lot of us to migrate overseas for that mythical better life as a migrant.

But this condition of Nepalese youth is not an exception. In the first ever Youth Forum which was conducted few days ago aimed to prepare young people for effective engagement in sustainable development, I found resonance of our concerns across the young people in the region.

This was further enriched when we, young people, conversed with other sectors such as women, workers, farmers, fisherfolks, indigenous peoples, migrants, people with disabilities, people living with and affected by HIV, and LGBTs.

We are the people who will be failed by the Agenda 2030 if systemic barriers of land problems, climate change, unjust trade, militarism, corporate takeover of development, and patriarchy and fundamentalism, that are at odds with development justice are not addressed.

We urge you, do not fail the youth. Do not leave us behind.

We urge you to recognize and reaffirm that human rights, gender equality, equity, social inclusion and justice, and youth empowerment and youth leadership are central to sustainable development.

Discrimination must be addressed as well as the human rights of indigenous peoples, people of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity, and stateless people. Infrastructures must be put in place to sustainably address the issues of food insecurity and of lack of access to education, health, safe and decent work for young people.

Youth constitute the largest population of the region. Prosperity will be just a dream and poverty will be a constant nightmare if the young people's needs are not at the center of development.

Youth-led organizations, like YUWA, understand and recognize that we are agents of change. Agenda 2030 promises to transform the world. Let the youth be not only beneficiaries, but active part of that transformation.

Lastly, may this forum be a start of a truly meaningful discourse on young people's needs so in the future, we can look back and say "that's when it all began." The young people are ready and we hope this forum will be too.

Thank you very much.

-Amit Timilsina
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