



#YOUTH2030

6th Economic and Social Council Youth Forum CONCEPT NOTE

Regional Session on Asia and the Pacific

31 January 2017
CONFERENCE ROOM 11

9:30 – 11:00 am

United Nations Headquarters, New York

1. Background & Context

The Asia-Pacific region has experienced significant reductions in income poverty over the past decades. The majority of countries in the region achieved the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of halving extreme poverty by 2015. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are more ambitious and potentially transformative than the MDGs; they go beyond aggregates and seek to “reach those furthest behind”. In this regard, SDG 1 calls for ending “poverty in all its forms everywhere”. SDG 2, on the other hand, aims to “end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round”. Other goals have equally bold and challenging objectives covering social, economic and environmental dimensions of development. For youth, SDG 4, on education, and SDG 8, which includes a target on reducing the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training, include vital issues that contribute to their learning, livelihood and development. With 17 goals and 169 targets, success in implementing the 2030 Agenda thus requires an increasingly holistic approach which addresses structural inequalities, absolute poverty and social exclusion, and which is forward-looking and seeks to identify emerging issues, while engaging youth as change makers.

In spite of the above-mentioned progress in poverty reduction, Asia and the Pacific is home to the persistence of inequalities which, in some instances, have even increased. Furthermore, youth are disproportionately affected; the working poverty rate for youth at the USD 1.90 per day tends to be consistently higher than for adults. In Cambodia, Lao PDR and Bangladesh, respectively, one-third, two-thirds and three-quarters of youth who work do so in poverty. Also of great concern is the lack of, or the differential, access to opportunities such as fundamental services in the domains of health and education. It is here where large numbers of youth become socially excluded and risk falling into an inequality trap that exacerbates poverty and ill health and acts as a root cause of disparity.

Demographic and social changes have meant that employment growth generally fell short of population growth between 1990 and 2015. The employment to population ratio showed a downward trend in every subregion of Asia and the Pacific among the working age population, with the exception of the Pacific, where it remained roughly stable. In the case of youth, a major factor behind this trend has been a greater proportion of young people remaining in secondary and higher education. Despite



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these trends, young people in most countries continue to face considerable obstacles in finding decent jobs. Regionally, the youth unemployment rate stands at 11.4 per cent and youth are up to nine times more likely to be unemployed than adults. Extended periods of unemployment, for instance 12 months or longer, have detrimental impacts on young people's chances of finding a new job since many become discouraged and stop seeking for work, while their skills become obsolete. In Mongolia, almost half of all unemployed youth have been so for over 12 months. In Japan, the number is 30 per cent and in the Russian Federation it is 20 per cent. Being out of work for sustained periods has shown, in some cases, to contribute to social unrest.

In line with concerns regarding health issues and SDG 3, much needs to be done to improve circumstances youth face. Road traffic injuries are the eighth leading cause of death globally; moreover, they are the leading cause of death among young people aged 15-29 years, both from a global and an Asia-Pacific perspective. Another threat comes from tobacco consumption, with 40 per cent of males aged 15 years and older smoking, compared with 5 per cent of females. A higher percentage of men smoke than women in every country in the region, except for Australia, Nauru and New Zealand. Turning to HIV, although new infections are falling overall in the region, they are rising among adolescents from key populations, in particular young gay men and other men who have sex with men. The rise in new infections coincides with an increase in risky behaviour, such as multiple sexual partners and inconsistent condom use, and results in Asia and the Pacific facing a 'hidden epidemic' of HIV among adolescents. In 2014, there were an estimated 50,000 new HIV infections among adolescents aged 15-19, accounting for 15 per cent of all new infections. This means that there are now around 220,000 adolescents living with HIV in the region, with large cities like Bangkok, Hanoi and Jakarta acting as hubs of new infections.

Despite progress, the Asia-Pacific region is still home to gender inequality, discrimination and gender stereotypes. These inequalities are manifest in multiple areas of daily life, social conditions and access to economic opportunities. A major concern is that, unlike other regions of the world, the female-to-male ratio in labour force participation in Asia and the Pacific is decreasing. Other significant challenges in making progress in SDG 5 on gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls relate to child, early and forced marriages. Country-level data spanning the period from 2005 to 2014, indicate relatively higher rates of marriage or union before the age of 18 years among women and girls in South and South-West Asia as compared with other subregions of Asia and the Pacific. In Bangladesh, for instance, 52 per cent of women/girls aged 20 to 24 were married before they reached 18 years of age, with approximately 18 percent married before reaching 15 years of age. In countries as diverse as Bhutan, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Thailand, and Vanuatu, between a quarter and a fifth of women had been married when they still were children. Early marriage is known to limit the degree of social capital formation among female youth at a time when they should be developing their capacities for individual and societal benefit.

While many if not all of the aforementioned issues appear hard to address, youth remain a beacon of hope, being more educated and better connected than ever before, and having the greatest potential to innovate and take on board new technologies. Youth are also among the main drivers of urban growth, thus playing a critical role in achieving SDG 9, especially since their awareness of sustainability is greater than any other generation. As with any venture, the key is promoting and harnessing the capacity of young people so that they can be more active participants in decision-making and changing



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the world, in order for poverty to be a thing of the past and sustainable development to be realized by 2030, if not sooner, and maintained throughout the future.

2. Objectives

The Asia-Pacific breakout session will engage youth to review challenges faced in achieving the SDGs and formulate innovative solutions within the context of eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity.

The format of the session will consist of an interactive panel discussion engaging in succinct exchanges, and also involving the wider audience to the maximum possible extent. To get the most out of interactive dialogue, panellists will initially have the chance to present data or key issues with interjections from other panellists and the audience where appropriate. Short questions will be asked to maintain a smooth flow and a dynamic situation with diverse contributions from those present. The aforementioned process is expected to facilitate achieving the objectives of:

- Identifying fundamental obstacles to poverty eradication and other SDG attainment, considering micro and macro level factors, and including gender dimensions.
- Exploring what role youth can play, including through the use of technology and innovation, in advocating for more balanced views and a greater degree of equity and sustainability in development processes.
- Formulating strategies that promote partnerships between diverse stakeholders and engender more active support for action from the community to the regional level.
- Mapping out the requisite modulates to accelerate and more effectively measure progress in addressing concerns regarding social, economic and environmental dimensions of the SDGs.

3. Issues at Stake

- The disillusionment and disenfranchisement of large segments of the youth population as a result of being left out of many fruits of development, and the possible social unrest that this could lead to.
- Shrinking civic space, both online and in terms of physical engagement, and opportunity for youth to express themselves and become actively involved in decision-making.
- Increasing polarization of opinions regarding what the greatest threats to prosperity are and which means are necessary and acceptable in order to overcome these.



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- Stalled or atrophied efforts to tackle poverty and hunger on a regional and global scale influenced by rising populism and inequality, and the way companies and nations trade and do business.
- Degradation of the environment brought about through inaccurate or incorrect information on the impact of climate change, resource use, and production and consumption.
- How to energize and mobilize youth to be bold and inclusive enough to turn the tide and redirect development to ensure shared prosperity and more effectively address common environment challenges.

4. Questions for Participants

- i. What are that the main challenges Asia and Pacific faces in setting a course and embarking on inclusive and sustainable development?
- ii. How are youth of different genders diversely affected by the trends in development and what can be done to make things more equitable?
- iii. What role can technology and innovation play in getting youth to be more prominent actors on the development stage?
- iv. How can youth best partner and work with other stakeholders to enhance understanding of common concerns and engage to achieve collective solutions for shared prosperity?
- v. What commitments are needed by youth to realize the SDGs and what mechanisms need to be in place to monitor and evaluate progress at subnational, national and regional levels?

5. Suggested reading Materials

Reports

Switched On: Youth at the Heart of Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific
<http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Switched%20On.pdf>

Asia-Pacific Human Development Report
<http://www.asia-pacific.undp.org/content/dam/rbap/docs/RHDR2016/RHDR2016-full-report-final-version1.pdf>

Youth Employment in Asia-Pacific
http://www.ilo.org/asia/areas/WCMS_117542/lang--en/index.htm



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Adolescents under the Radar in the Asia-Pacific AIDS Response

https://www.unicef.org/media/files/REPORT_Adolescents_Under_the_Radar_FINAL.pdf