



#YOUTH2030

7th Economic and Social Council Youth Forum CONCEPT NOTE

Regional Breakout Session “Asia and the Pacific”

31 January 2018

10:00 am – 11:30 am

Room 2726/2727

United Nations Headquarters, New York

1. Background and Context

The Youth population of the Asia-Pacific region, at just over 700 million, is a force to be reckoned with. Comprising the significant majority of those aged 15-24 across the world, and coming from a vibrant region at the forefront of global economic growth, these young people are more educated and healthier than any previous generation. They also have great potential to play leading roles in building sustainable and resilient urban and rural communities. Nevertheless, they also face considerable constraints, especially the more marginalized amongst them. For instance, youth with disabilities, who are some of the most disadvantaged members of societies, often face seemingly intractable barriers to education and employment.

Within the broader scheme of things, unequal opportunity drives inequalities that are seen in the domains of income and wealth. In this context, many opportunities occur during the formative years, during childhood and youth, and the greatest inequality tends to be experienced in the poorer countries. In such countries, those from richer families have great advantages. In one third of the countries of the Asia-Pacific region, secondary school attendance ratios for those of the poorest quintile are below 30 per cent. For the weakest performing four countries of these, the ratios are 10 per cent or lower. On the other hand, in many of these countries, 80 per cent of those from the richest quintile attend secondary school. Attendance gaps based on wealth tend to be considerably greater than those found between urban and rural residents, they are also greater than those based on gender lines. Since a solid education is so important for achieving all of the SDGs, along with enhancing



resilience, and wealth is such as significant determinant, greater attention needs to be directed to addressing affordability rather than just accessibility. Poor households face hardship sending their children to school not so much because there are no or few schools nearby, but because of the costs, including tuition fees, as well as the potential loss of immediate income.

Youth being not in education, employment or training (NEET) is another great challenge when looking through the lens of equity. Unlike unemployed youth, those who are NEET may have given up searching for work all together; this renders future integration into the labour force more difficult. Such young people are often less-educated and from disadvantaged groups including indigenous youth and youth with disabilities. On many occasions they also represent some of the most at-risk segments of society. In turn, they are rarely actively engaged in society, which drains the productivity of the economy (making SDG 8 less easy to attain) and could result in a threat to social stability. The NEET rate for Asia and the Pacific as an aggregate is 21 per cent; in several countries the figures are well over 30 per cent and even as high as 56 per cent.

With reference to SDG 6, on ensuring access to water and sanitation for all, marked inequalities exist in Asia and the Pacific between rich and poor, with youth, especially female youth, often being at a sizeable disadvantage. This is particularly the case with regards to piped water and access to sanitation, something female youth, many of whom lack access to safe places for menstrual hygiene management, are particularly affected by. While progress concerning certain related SDGs, such as SDG 1 on poverty, has been good in the region, the same cannot be said for the extension of access to improved sanitation. In Asia and the Pacific, 1.5 billion people are without access, and the majority of these are in rural areas. There has been a degree of progress. Between the years 1990 and 2015, South and South-West Asia saw access to improved sanitation facilities in rural areas triple, from 12 to 37 per cent, yet the upper figure is still low and half the urban area rate of 70 per cent.

Electricity is taken for granted by many and a prerequisite for learning at school and for gaining access to valuable information through the application of ICT tools and services. It is also important for maintaining health and hygiene, and learning about resilience and sustainability. In line with SDG 7, ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all brings a plethora of benefits to households. The internet is often regarded as great means of enhancing knowledge as well as other aspects of human capital, including development of networks. Primary research by ESCAP covering 10,000 youth in six countries of the Asia-Pacific region (Cambodia, India, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Thailand) shows that internet use is highly inequitable. With the division of youth into three wealth categories, roughly corresponding to the lowest quintile for the low wealth



group, the middle three quintiles for the medium wealth group and the highest quintile for the high wealth group, stark differences can be seen. Some 81 per cent of high wealth youth use the internet, as compared to only 32 per cent of the low wealth group.

In Asia and the Pacific, urbanization, especially involving young people has been occurring at a rapid rate. Phnom Penh is a growing city and an example of one which over time, has become increasingly youthful. Census data between the years 1998 and 2008 show that the city's population doubled, while the population of those aged in their 20s more than tripled, rising from 107,000 to 372,000 persons. Taken as a proportion of the city's overall population, the percentage of those in this age group increased from 17 to 30 per cent. The forthcoming census is likely to show even larger numbers of young people in the city. Data from Indonesia and many other countries also indicate that youth are over-represented in urban areas. Some of the main challenges faced by youth in cities across Asia and the Pacific, especially in the context of SDG 11 on making cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, include providing young pregnant women living in slum areas with ante-natal care, and providing youth in general with access to decent and affordable housing, along with secure tenure. Thus, youth, as a key population group contributing to and benefiting from urbanization, need to be actively involved in managing urbanization for sustainable outcomes that they and future generations can enjoy.

Youth are fundamental actors in the context of SDG 12 and ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns. They are also significant contributors to consumption of natural resources in Asia and the Pacific. As the region has experienced rapid economic development, the purchasing power of youth has risen. Greater economic wealth is related to energy-intensive vehicles, electronic gadgets and long-distance travel being bought. Another consideration is diet; Asia is the fastest-growing meat consuming region, with per capita consumption having grown 15 times since 1961. Rising meat consumption is often associated with a decline in forested land and related challenges included in SDG 15. On the positive side, youth in Asia and the Pacific are becoming increasingly aware of environmental issues. Youth activism in this domain includes work - such as raising awareness, sharing knowledge and building capacity - done by Tunza Asia Pacific Youth Network. This overarching network engages youth in the Youth Environment Networks that are found in Central Asia, North-East Asia, the Pacific, South Asia and South-East Asia.

Strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development, as espoused under Goal 17, requires including youth as critical stakeholders. When considering capacity development, a focus on youth and their organizations is a fundamental means of investing in the potential of youth. Particular attention needs to be directed to youth who are marginalized, whether due to gender, disability, wealth, ethnicity, caste, belief or residence. Much of capacity development



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revolves around education and training, and in this domain public-private partnership can play a vital role, whether from the funding side and how to manage resources to improving legislation and creating an environment where innovation is easily promoted. Related to this is entrepreneurship, an area in which Asia and the Pacific is lagging behind other regions, despite having large capital reserves. ICTs in particular can benefit youth; mobile phones, the Internet, digital information networks and diverse social media platforms, are broadly used by young people across the region, including for learning, advocacy, social mobilization and accessing government services. In this regard, it is essential to reduce the digital divide so that all can make good use of technology.

2. Objectives

The main aim of the Asia-Pacific breakout session is to draw upon the experiences of youth from across the region, and beyond, to consider challenges and potential solutions in the context of the SDGs and especially consider how youth can play a role in building sustainable and resilient urban and rural communities.

The regional break out session on Asia and the Pacific will present its recommendations to the plenary session of the ECOSOC 2018 Youth Forum.

The session will amass input from an Asia-Pacific youth perspective to inform the work of the 2018 ECOSOC Youth Forum and High Level Political Forum on SDG implementation. More specifically, the discussion will aim to:

- Identify concrete initiatives and policies that can serve as good practices with regard to youth engagement in the implementation of SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12, 15 and 17.
- Outline the responsibility of young people in promoting achievement of the 2030 Agenda.
- Provide guidance for effective youth involvement at every level of decision-making, and foster greater sustainability and resilience.
- Raise awareness of the SDGs to increase advocacy for collective youth-centred action to expedite SDG attainment.
- Promote networking and exchanges of knowledge and experience among youth of diverse backgrounds, including those from rural and urban settings.



3. Format

The session will be structured to allow for a maximum degree of interaction. Youth from Asia and the Pacific, and beyond, will be encouraged to participate in an inclusive and constructive manner, with the session being facilitated by a moderator. A rapporteur will take notes and provide feedback to the plenary session that follows the regional breakout sessions. The event will be open to all with an interest in the Asia-Pacific region.

4. Guiding Questions

In order to maximise the contribution of all participants in the Regional Breakout Session on Asia and the Pacific during the 2018 ECOSOC Youth Forum, participants are encouraged to consider the following questions to guide discussions:

- What are the greatest challenges with regard to educating Asia-Pacific youth about resilience and sustainability, including differentiation between urban and rural setting, and how can these be addressed?
- What can be done to get policymakers and the private sector to invest more in improving sanitation, and with an emphasis on equity?
- Given the state of the environment, how can youth promote and adopt sustainable energy sources, and advocate for this approach to be more comprehensively adopted at the policy level?
- What innovative means can be developed to make cities more sustainable and inclusive?
- How can youth lead the way in ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns and, relatedly, deliver on SDG 15, including the protection of terrestrial ecosystems?
- Within the context of partnerships, what is the role of youth in developing and promoting ICT amongst diverse stakeholders?
- What should be done by the United Nations system and actors involved in financing for development to support youth in working for more equitable and sustainable development?



5. Suggested reading materials

Realizing Youth Inclusion for a More Sustainable Asia and the Pacific
Forthcoming at the end of 2017 and to be available from:

<http://www.unescap.org/publications>

Sustainable Social Development in Asia and the Pacific: Towards a People-Centred Transformation <http://www.unescap.org/publications/sustainable-social-development-asia-and-pacific-towards-people-centred-transformation>

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

Comparative Analysis of Policies for Youth Employment in Asia and the Pacific
http://apyouthnet.ilo.org/resources/comparative-analysis-of-policies-for-youth-employment-in-asia-and-the-pacific/at_download/file1

State of World Population 2014: Fact Sheet - Youth in Asia
<http://www.unfpa.org/resources/state-world-population-2014-fact-sheet-youth-asia>

Urban Youth in the Pacific – Increasing Resilience and Reducing Risk for Involvement in Crime and Violence
http://www.youthpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/library/2011_Urban_Youth_Pacific_Eng.pdf

Unleashing Youth in Asia: Solving for the “Triple-E” challenge of youth: Education, Employment and Engagement
https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/dotcom/client_service/public%20sector/pdfs/unleashing_youth_in_asia.ashx