

Panel Discussion

Leaving No Youth Behind in the Age of Disruption: Perspectives on the Post-2030 Agenda

In collaboration with UNESCAP and YAN

The trajectory of youth development in South and South-West Asia is shaped by the convergence of megatrends and disruptions that will define the future of sustainable development, including climate change, demographic shifts, urbanisation, technological change, rising inequalities and geopolitical multipolarity. With fewer than four years remaining until the 2030 deadline and the region off track on many of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), these forces will also shape the development agenda that succeeds the 2030 Agenda. Today's young people will be its principal inheritors and implementers.

Demographically, the subregion is [home to almost half of all youth in Asia and the Pacific](#), with numbers still growing even as youth populations are declining elsewhere in the region. In Pakistan, [two-thirds of the population is under the age of 30](#). This youth bulge presents significant opportunities to accelerate sustainable development, given the scale of the potential youth labour force and rising youth civic aspirations to contribute to their communities and countries. Where managed appropriately, rapid urbanisation can generate new economic prospects in cities and expand access to services and opportunities for young rural-to-urban migrants, while the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) can open new pathways for young people in digital economies. Emerging technologies and circular economic models also offer young people a generational stake in shaping more sustainable and resilient communities, locally and beyond, well past 2030.

Yet the age of disruption carries just as many risks for the youth of South and South-West Asia. The demographic dividend of the subregion has not been fully realised due to structural challenges leading to high youth unemployment and rising inequality, with young people from marginalised populations facing compounding exclusions in both accessing the fruits of sustainable development and contributing to its processes. In Pakistan, [unemployment](#) among graduates aged 20–24 stands at 32.8%, rising to 42.3% among young women in the same age group, with persistent disparities in access to quality education, digital connectivity and economic opportunity across provinces and between urban and rural areas.

Critically, South and South-West Asia also faces a rapidly intensifying multi-hazard risk landscape, spanning extreme heat, floods, droughts, glacial melt and desertification. Geopolitical instability, as acutely illustrated by the ongoing Middle East crisis, further precipitates economic shocks that compound these risks and fall disproportionately on the most vulnerable, including young people from marginalised populations. Unless these gaps are addressed, they risk being carried forward into the post-2030 era.¹

In the backdrop highlighted above, the panel will discuss the compounding impacts of technological change, urbanisation and climate change on youth from marginalised populations, and explore how young people can nonetheless take advantage of the

¹ They include, among others, the urban poor; those in precarious employment or not in employment, education or training; those from rural and remote communities; the digitally excluded; those from ethnic minority, caste-affected, and indigenous and tribal communities; migrants; and persons with disabilities.

opportunities presented by these megatrends to improve their lives and actively contribute to the future of sustainable development. It will also reflect on lessons from the 2030 Agenda and consider how youth priorities, voices and leadership can be placed at the centre of the global development framework that follows. Key questions that will be addressed include:

- What are the impacts of technological change, urbanisation and climate change on youth from marginalised populations? How and to what extent has socioeconomic exclusion been exacerbated?
- What policies, programmes and practices are undertaken by government, civil society, academia and the private sector, including multistakeholder approaches, to support youth development and aspirations in the context of these emerging megatrends? How and to what extent have these initiatives been effective?
- How can youth capitalise on opportunities presented by megatrends to empower themselves and their communities, and thereby contribute actively to the future of sustainable development? How can government, civil society, academia and the private sector facilitate and support youth empowerment, including through multistakeholder approaches?
- What lessons does the 2030 Agenda offer for youth inclusion, and what should a post-2030 development framework do differently to ensure that no young person is left behind?
- What are the key national and subregional youth priorities that Pakistan's young people should carry forward?

Organisers:

Ms Zainab Naeem, Associate Research Fellow, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Pakistan

Email: zainabnaeem@sdpi.org

Engr. Ubaid ur Rehman Zia, Head/Lead of Energy Unit & Senior Research Associate, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Pakistan

Email: ubaid@sdpi.org

Ms Mikiko Tanaka, South and South-West Asia Office (ESCAP-SSWA), United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, New Delhi

Email: mikiko.tanaka@un.org

