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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA & YOUNG PEOPLE:

Recognising Voices and Claiming Rights

This publication draws from the outcomes of the 2017
Youth Preparatory Forum organised prior to the Asia
Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD)

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THE ASIAN-PACIFIC RESOURCE &
RESEARCH CENTRE FOR WOMEN

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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by world leaders at a historic United Nations summit in 2015, carries forward and improves on the Millennium Development Goals. The ambitious set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to be achieved by 2030,¹ is based on the principle of “leaving no one behind.” Thus, the Agenda calls for the recognition of the complexity and diversity of the world and its people.

People between the ages of 15 and 24 years comprise 1.2 billion of the world’s population of 7.5 billion.² This unprecedented proportion of youth,³ promising the potential for new areas of social progress and innovation, is concentrated in 48 of the world’s poorest countries.⁴ The Asia-Pacific region is home to 717 million people aged 15 to 24 making up 60% of the world’s youth.⁵

Despite proclamations that youth are at the heart of the SDGs, their unique issues are not adequately reflected in the Agenda. Poverty, discrimination, lack of social mobility, and

limited access to information are the main obstacles that stand in the way of youth and their right to progress. Girls who are poor are particularly affected, as they experience multiple forms and layers of inequity and oppression, which limit their choices and opportunities. For example, young girls are deprived of their sexual and reproductive health and rights,⁶ which shape virtually every aspect of their lives.⁷

This series of briefs aims to consolidate the outcomes of the 2017 Pre-Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) Youth Forum⁸ and the evidence base related to the SDGs and young people, with a focus on ensuring their sexual and reproductive health. It also recommends action to address the challenges faced by young people within the context of the issues raised in each goal in order to achieve them.

This publication was developed through a secondary literature review. It includes a brief for each of the 17 SDGs.

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SDG ONE: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

The Sustainable Development Agenda is committed to ending poverty in all its manifestations, including its most extreme forms by 2030, thereby ensuring that all people, everywhere, enjoy at least a basic standard of living. It also aims to ensure social protection benefits for the poor and the most vulnerable persons and communities and improving access to basic services in diversely affected conditions, including those affected by climate change and other shocks and disasters.¹

Goal 1 focuses on ensuring that people have equal rights to economic resources, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology, and financial services, including microfinance. The focus of the goal also emphasises that people harmed by conflict and natural hazards should receive adequate support, including services that facilitate the recovery process.

Finally, the Goal notes the need for resource mobilisation from multiple sources in order to implement programmes together with policy frameworks that are pro-poor and gender sensitive, in order to adequately end poverty in all its dimensions.²

CHALLENGES RELATED TO POVERTY AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Poverty is generally defined as deprivations in well-being resulting in an inability to meet the basic needs of the individual or family.³ Historically, the focus has been on calculating poverty by measuring income and expenditure. This is usually done through poverty line measurement, which has been presented through an international (\$1.90 per day Purchasing Power Parity)⁴ and national poverty lines.⁵ More recently, there have also been efforts to broaden definitions and measurements of poverty based on how it is experienced to include the multi-dimensions of poverty—covering both monetary and non-monetary aspects—measuring other deprivations, including poor health, lack of education, and social exclusion.⁶ Furthermore, newer vulnerabilities like economic uncertainty and environmental risks are increasing, including those related to natural disasters and extreme climate-related events.⁷

Despite the drastic drop in the proportion of the global population living below the poverty line,⁸ from 26% in 2002

to 13% in 2012,⁹ critical concerns remain—many of them with implications for young people. For example, in the Asia Pacific, levels of hunger and malnutrition have not been declining at the same pace as the decrease in the proportion of the region's poor. An ARROW publication from 2014 that examined issues related to poverty¹⁰ reports that, “South Asia not only had the highest number of malnourished children under five (30%) in 2011-12, but also exhibited marked inequalities in the decrease of child malnutrition between the richest (37% in 1995 to 26% in 2009) and the poorest (64% in 1995 to 60% in 2009).”¹¹

Gender and poverty are multifaceted, not only in terms of improving the understanding on how women and men, including young women and men, experience poverty and have to be supported to overcome it, but also how marginalisation as a result of gender affects the poverty experience. The feminisation of poverty discourse considers how women experience poverty particularly, focusing on female-headed households, intra-household inequalities, bias towards women and girls and the effects of neoliberal economic policies.¹² Thus, comparative data that is disaggregated by age and gender become crucial when developing policies and programmes to address poverty as well as in resource allocation. This would help identify income inequities and how women, including girls and young women, are disadvantaged, and their potential to break out of poverty and the socio-economic barriers they face.¹³

The effects of child poverty also have to be factored in. An overwhelming 94% of poor children live in low-income or lower middle-income countries of which India alone accounts for 30%.¹⁴ While data is limited, how children, and how boys and girls experience poverty is not the same as how adults experience it. The lack of this analysis affects how cyclical and intergenerational poverty can be addressed.

Professor Amartya Sen states that the root cause of poverty is an inequality of rights.¹⁵ Economic security expert Karen Moore warns that poverty experienced by young people is generally linked to poverty at childhood.¹⁶ A South Asia study by ARROW¹⁷ from 2012 reveals that, “anaemia is a particular concern for girls because it is associated with premature births, low birth weight, and peri-natal and maternal mortality. Anaemia¹⁸ is one of the primary contributors to maternal mortality (20-25%) and is significantly associated with a compromised pubertal growth spurt and cognitive development among girls aged 10-19 years

in South Asia. Overall, 60% of South Asian women of child bearing age are underweight and malnourished.” However, despite increasing evidence of the multiple dimensions of deprivation and their multiple consequences, these aspects of the poverty discourse do not get adequately acknowledged in government investments. The ARROW study elaborates on this concern by noting that evidence on the impact of child marriage, adolescent nutrition, and education on adolescent pregnancy and maternal and infant deaths, and disability, rarely translates into adolescent-sensitive health programmes and budgets. Furthermore, such programmes do not take into account new information on sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of adolescents and its health and other implications.¹⁹

The Asia and the Pacific has for decades been referred to as the “engine of global economic growth,” but poverty remains a reality for millions of people.²⁰ It is estimated that around 85 million youth in the region live in poverty, accounting for a larger share of those with limited access to basic services.²¹ Young people experience discrimination and disadvantage because of their age as well as gender, disability, ethnicity, caste, geographical location, socio-economic situation, and other factors. This is compounded by uncertainties and changes related to their transition towards adulthood.²² However, the lack of age-disaggregated data on the extent of poverty and how it is experienced by young people limits analysis on how the root causes can be tackled to address its cyclical and intergenerational nature.²³

People living in poverty and experiencing discrimination and marginalisation are forced to engage in economic activities and social relations that are disempowering. They have minimal access to social protection and basic services and have little opportunity to build their own networks, thus continuing to be dependent on the limited and limiting social and political capital of their households and communities.²⁴

To end poverty in all its forms everywhere it is imperative that the rights of girls are realised. Access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), including enabling adolescent girls and women to improve their menstrual hygiene and access to contraceptive services, creates conditions that enable young women to enter the labour force and families to devote more resources to each child.²⁵ On the other hand, violations against the SRHR of girls intensify their vulnerability to poverty. In poverty-stricken households, parents may assess the cost and benefits of marriage and decide to marry their daughters early if they are seen as an economic burden.²⁶ This is most common among the poor who have fewer resources

and opportunities to invest in alternative options for girls.²⁷ While enough research has demonstrated the effect of poverty on reproductive health, few have focused on the reverse relationship.²⁸ Poor reproductive health outcomes such as early pregnancies, unintended pregnancies, excess fertility, and poorly managed obstetric complications could increase the chance of women remaining poor.²⁹

ENDING POVERTY IN ALL ITS FORMS EVERYWHERE

Action Points

- **Recognise** the need to allocate adequate resources, from the national and global anti-poverty investment, to tackle youth poverty – acknowledging that young people are not passive and dependent beneficiaries but diverse people striving and working to improve their lives and prospects. They need real commitment, matched by actions and resources, to support their efforts to gain their rights and overcome the obstacles that trap them in poverty.³⁰
- **Ensure** that efforts are made, resources allocated, and capacities strengthened to improve the disaggregation of data by age and sex in poverty-related research, recognising that young women and men experience poverty in different ways to each other and in relation to adults – and that young people are diverse with diverse needs. This would enable more effective resource allocation for poverty eradication.
- **Improve** poverty analysis by taking into account life-course events such as transitions into adulthood, marriage, and childbirth, which can all play a significant part in altering a young person’s vulnerability to poverty.
- **Identify and address** the causal factors that exacerbate poverty, taking into account the differential impacts of poverty on young people. A good understanding of the dynamics of poverty can provide a sound basis for anti-poverty policy formulation.
- **Integrate** multidimensional poverty analysis in policy and programme design, and ensure that gender, age, and diversity are critical aspects of such considerations.
- **Adopt** an intergenerational perspective to poverty, because poverty experienced in youth is often linked to parental poverty (expressed as, for example, poor maternal nutrition or inadequate shelter) and childhood deprivation (for example, being forced to leave school early or do dangerous work) that can have implications across the life-course of the young person and that of their household.³¹

- **Re-visit** gender norms and roles, as well as social and cultural attitudes and behaviour, so that the state can provide adequate gender responsive public services.
- **Ensure** SRHR within the context of reducing poverty, considering its integral potential to empower young people in general, and young women in particular.³²

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SDG TWO: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture

Sustainable Development Goal 2 seeks to “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”¹ by implementing sustainable solutions to end hunger in all its forms by 2030. The aim is to ensure that every person has access to enough good-quality food to lead a healthy life.

According to target 2.4 of the Goal, achieving food security requires that countries “ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality.”²

Yet another crucial target was identified: “By 2030 to end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under five years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons.”³

CHALLENGES RELATED TO HUNGER AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Hunger has effects on health, productivity, and educational attainment. Many determinants affect the ability to access adequate food which impact women and girls that adds to the complexity around achieving this goal. Further to this, gender-based discrimination, and structural determinants, including poverty, help foster and perpetuate hunger and its manifestations – undernourishment,⁴ malnutrition,⁵ stunting,⁶ and wasting.⁷

Poor health is further affected by continuous food insecurity, which is exacerbated by the inability to afford food, inadequate access to food sources, food price volatility and the impact of natural disasters or irregular weather conditions on food production.⁸ Inadequate nutrition and its outcomes are also related to issues around food insecurity, which include food availability, distribution, quality, and cost, as well as girls’ and women’s knowledge of nutrition and their access to food.⁹ Furthermore, gender discrimination, including within the

family, affects girls’ and young women’s access to adequate food and nutrition.¹⁰ The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) reinforces this point by stating that food security is only one determinant of nutritional outcomes, especially for children. Other factors include: “women’s educational level; resources allocated to national policies and programmes for maternal, infant and young child nutrition; access to clean water, basic sanitation and quality health services; lifestyle; food environment; and culture.”¹¹ Another vital factor is people’s access to and control over agricultural and food resources.¹² However, there is limited availability of (disaggregated) data on how undernutrition and related aspects affect girls, particularly recognising that impacts may vary between boys and girls.¹³ Furthermore, attempts at addressing national nutritional needs have tended to neglect adolescents, who represent a critical physical and cognitive growth period. Addressing these needs could be an important step in addressing intergenerational malnutrition and chronic disease during adulthood.¹⁴

Undernourishment is an important indicator of hunger. Although efforts to combat hunger and malnutrition have advanced significantly since 2000, the United Nations states that ending hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition for all will, however, requires continued and focused efforts, especially in Asia and Africa.¹⁵ Hunger and malnourishment prevent poor people, especially the young, from escaping poverty because it diminishes their ability to learn, work and care for themselves.¹⁶ Malnutrition can severely inhibit young people’s ability to reach their full potential. Moreover, it implies a direct loss in human capital and productivity for the economy.

Despite recent achievements, where the number of people who are hungry has decreased, including in the Asia-Pacific region, the prevalence of hunger continues to be a problem in several countries in the region. According to the 2017 report on The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World, in 2016 the number of chronically undernourished people in the world is estimated to have increased to 815 million, up from 777 million in 2015, although still down from about 900 million in 2000.¹⁷

Poor diets, recurrent infections and long-term nutritional deprivation causes growth retardation or stunting that affects children’s mental development, school performance, and intellectual capacity. The proportion of stunted children (under

the age of five) in Asia and the Pacific in 2013 was at 19.6%, amounting to 70 million children.¹⁸ Stunting due to malnutrition affected more than 96 million children in the region in 2014. In Bangladesh, India and Nepal, the proportion of stunted children was greater than 35% in 2014.¹⁹ Malnutrition also causes wasting, a condition characterised by low weight as per the child's age. According to UNICEF, in 2016 globally, 52 million children under the age of five were wasted; 17 million of the children were severely wasted. This translates into a prevalence of 7.7% and 2.5%, respectively. In 2016, more than half of all wasted children lived in South Asia and about one quarter in sub-Saharan Africa, with similar proportions for severely wasted children. At 16%, South Asia's wasting prevalence represents a 'critical' public health problem.²⁰ The FAO notes a high degree of inequality in stunting prevalence by key socio-economic subgroups and the tendency for the inequality to persist. It underscores the importance of pro-poor economic growth, targeting specific interventions to disadvantaged subgroups, and investment in tackling other drivers of malnutrition such as sanitation, pre-natal and post-natal health care, adequacy and quality of diet during the first 1000 days of life, and access to safe drinking water.²¹

The Asia Pacific region is also witnessing a rise in obesity, which was previously associated with high-income countries. Globally, almost half of all overweight children younger than 5 years old live in Asia, particularly in South East Asia and the Pacific.²² The overweight concerns, combined with the approximately 27% of children younger than 5 years who are stunted (in 2014), has created a double burden of malnutrition for the region.²³ Obesity amongst adolescents is responsible for carrying weight-related risks like cardiovascular diseases and other non-communicable diseases into adulthood.²⁴ More importantly, obese children have a 25–50% risk of progressing to obesity in adulthood, and this risk may be as high as 78% in obese adolescents.²⁵ The first target of SDG 2 underscored the need for not just sufficient food supplies but also that the food is nutritious.

Anaemia²⁶ has a serious negative impact on growth and development during adolescence. Anaemia among adolescents is disproportionately high in South Asia and can be traced to malnutrition related to poverty and aggravated by discriminatory cultural practices towards girls.²⁷ A study from 2016 carried out in two states in India on the diets of boys and girls found that by the age of 15, boys are likely to be eating a wider variety of foods than girls. The study also highlighted the fact that India has the highest population of 10 to 24-year-olds in the world, and the world's highest burden of malnutrition, with children and young women being the most malnourished groups.²⁸ Undernutrition and anaemia amongst girls and women

of reproductive age (15-49 years) is also linked with maternal mortality and is significant in the Asia-Pacific region.²⁹ Figures Data for 2016 indicate that anaemia affects 33% of women of reproductive age globally (about 613 million women).³⁰

Furthermore, severe anaemia has implications for young women who are at risk of obstetric complications, including prematurity and difficulties during delivery, spontaneous abortion, giving birth to infants with low birth weight, foetal death,³¹ in addition to risks of other complications such as antepartum or postpartum hemorrhage, preeclampsia or eclampsia amongst other.³² Nutritional deficiencies can have negative effects on the outcome of the pregnancy as well as on the growth and development of the adolescents themselves. Poor pregnancy outcomes are more often observed in pregnant adolescents who have poor nutritional and low socioeconomic status. It can also result in intergenerational malnutrition, as well as low productivity as children reach adulthood, thereby having long-term effects across their lifecycle.^{33, 34} Thus, SDG 2 is especially pertinent for girls facing gender-based discrimination, including in food distribution and access, within families and communities.³⁵

The Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition³⁶ notes that significant proportions of a population are affected by micronutrient deficiencies,³⁷ which go largely unnoticed. These deficiencies are referred to as "hidden hunger" because even mild to moderate deficiencies, undetectable by physical signs or symptoms, can lead to mental impairment, poor health, and low productivity. Its consequences could be long lasting and devastating – poor physical and mental health, increased child and maternal mortality, and reduced cognitive development. For example, the absence of sufficient folic acid in the first weeks of pregnancy increases the risk of nervous system malformations. Deficiency of iodine, yet another micronutrient, is the world's most prevalent cause of preventable brain damage and iron deficiency leads to greater risk of death for anaemic women during childbirth and impairs physical and cognitive development in their babies.³⁸

ENDING HUNGER: ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE—PARTICULARLY GIRLS

Action Points

- Disaggregate nutritional and hunger-related data to enable improved assessments of the situation that are more sensitive to factors such as age and gender.
- Address the underestimation of the magnitude of low birth weight at the national level by improving measurement and

recording of birth weight. This would need to cover infants who are born within and outside of health institutions and ensure the disaggregation of data to monitor the difference between girls and boys.³⁹

- Analyse nutritional information and data in more depth and examine the linkages of gender inequalities that persist within societies. The focus on standardised nutritional measures may be concealing the deeper complexities and challenges that prevent meaningful change for girls.⁴⁰
- Ascertain the factors that prevent access to nutrition for young people, particularly for girls – and make focused initiatives to address such issues, including the underlying causes, which are embedded in particular economic and cultural contexts.
- Capture and generate data on the prevalence of anaemia in women of reproductive age, taking into account changing fertility patterns in countries, including girls who are increasingly sexually active that get pregnant.
- Introduce/underscore the link between nutrition and sexual and reproductive health and rights in comprehensive sexuality education.
- Recognise the risks associated with nutrition deficiency and the potential of improved nutrition – both in the short and long terms – and scale up existing interventions to address hunger and malnutrition. Moreover, integrate such programmes with other developmental initiatives by explicitly linking the country's nutrition targets, interventions and indicators across different sectors – health, education, agriculture, water and sanitation, women, and youth.⁴¹
- Address behaviour modification to bring about dietary change in adolescents through school-based nutrition interventions, using a social marketing approach and by mobilising families and communities.
- Conduct regular nutrition assessments and provide counselling services and care for adolescents during the pregnancy and postnatal period.

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SDG THREE:

Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Sustainable Development Goal 3 seeks to improve reproductive, maternal, child, and mental health; end the epidemics of HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and neglected tropical diseases; reduce non-communicable and environmental diseases; achieve universal health coverage; and ensure access to safe, affordable, and effective medicines and vaccines for all.

Significant among its specific aims are reducing global maternal mortality and ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services, including contraception. Another key target is universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services, and access to safe, effective, quality, and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all. Thus SDG 3 covers disease-specific targets as well as complex and multifactorial health determinants, including pollution, road safety, and more.

The focus of SDGs is not limited to diseases. It also sets insistent targets towards reducing inequity in health within and between societies, with an emphasis on universal healthcare, which identifies the determinants of health within and beyond the health sector. As such, target 3.8 of "achieving universal

health coverage" is a platform which incorporates all other sectors, reinforcing the existing approach on "health in all policies." The most vulnerable groups in the Asia Pacific continue to have poor access to quality health services due to intersecting socio-economic and political dimensions including social exclusion.

CHALLENGES RELATED TO YOUNG PEOPLE'S GOOD HEALTH AND WELLBEING¹

Globally, the adolescent birth rate (births to women aged 15-19, per 1,000 women) declined by 21% from 2000 to 2015; however, it remains high in two-thirds of all countries, with more than 20 births per 1,000 adolescent girls in 2015.² Many countries in the Asia-Pacific region have high adolescent fertility rates and adolescent births (children to girls aged 15-19) – in 2015, Afghanistan was at 151 per 1,000 girls, Bangladesh at 127, and Nepal at 106.³ However, across the region, unmarried/never married girls and women tend to be excluded from fertility surveys, or included but not questioned

about sexual and reproductive health.⁴ Preventing unintended pregnancies and reducing adolescent childbearing through universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare which includes youth-friendly services (YFS) and access to contraception is crucial to the health and well-being of young people.

Most maternal deaths (99%) occur in developing countries and almost a third of these occur in South Asia.⁵ Adolescent pregnancy remains a major contributor to maternal and child mortality and to the cycle of ill-health and poverty. Despite significant drops in the number of deaths attributed to pregnancy and childbirth complications since 2000 in all regions, most notably in South-East Asia where mortality rates fell from 21 to 9 per 100,000 girls, it is still the second leading cause of mortality amongst this age group.⁶ The risk of maternal mortality is highest for adolescent girls under 15 years of age and complications in pregnancy and childbirth are a leading cause of death among adolescent girls in developing countries.⁷ However, despite the high risk, cross-comparable maternal mortality data is difficult to obtain for the under-15 age group.

Harmful and traditional practices such as child, early, and forced marriages (CEFM) is related to unwanted pregnancies and limited knowledge about contraception. In many cases, lack of agency among married girls or very young women leads to unwanted pregnancies, even amongst those with some knowledge about contraception.⁸ Thus, a significant proportion of girls and women commence sexual activity and childbearing during adolescence in the context of low contraception prevalence and high unmet need for contraception.⁹ A United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) review¹⁰ of the sexual and reproductive health of unmarried young people in Asia and the Pacific notes that “unmarried young people report significant barriers that limit their access to quality, comprehensive information concerning sexual and reproductive health (SRH), with some evidence that they are increasingly turning to non-traditional sources of information such as the internet and pornography.” It also states that there are considerable barriers limiting unmarried young people’s access to SRH services and commodities. They include socio-cultural and gender norms that contribute to shame, stigma, and negative attitudes of health providers. It also highlights regional concerns about sexual violence.¹² Sexual and gender-based violence has significant implications for the health and wellbeing of young people. Physical and sexual violence is associated with higher rates of unintended pregnancy and abortion, increased risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), and

other health issues such as depression and substance use. Globally 30% of ever-partnered adolescent girls aged 15-19 years have experienced physical or sexual violence from a partner.

The proportion of young people receiving skilled care during pregnancy and childbirth varies across the Asia-Pacific region. For younger females, the consequences of pregnancy and childbirth are serious as they are at risk of death from hemorrhage, sepsis, preeclampsia/eclampsia and obstructed labour, and at risk of disability with babies that are unprepared, premature labour, delivery complications, low birth-weight, and low survival rates of children.¹³ The psychological effects and non-preparedness of being pregnant and having to care for children are further consequences.

Many young women continue to face barriers in obtaining safe and legal abortions. Obstacles usually include lack of providers willing to perform abortions, substandard conditions in health facilities, lack of awareness of the legal status of abortion, fear of stigmatisation for terminating a pregnancy¹⁴ and individual beliefs on abortion. Where abortion services are legal and available, they tend to be provided mainly within the framework of marriage. The proportion of abortions performed under unsafe conditions in Asia is not known due to lack of data; however, it is estimated that 4.6 million women in Asia (excluding Eastern Asia) are treated each year for complications from unsafe abortion.¹⁵ Poor and rural girls and women are more likely to experience severe complications from unsafe abortions because they depend on the least safe methods, which can cause long-term morbidity and even death.¹⁶ The needs of adolescent girls with regards to contraception and the unmet need for abortion would be an important indicator for implementing progressive laws and policies around abortion.¹⁷ Efforts to prevent early and unintended pregnancy rely on accurate information about adolescents’ knowledge, behaviours, and access to family planning services.

An increasing number of young people are becoming sexually active at an early age and are initiating sex outside marriage. However, many lack sufficient knowledge to negotiate safe and consensual relationships while also facing barriers to accessing services and information for safe and healthy sexual relationships.¹⁸ Evidence demonstrates how comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), which provides young people with the knowledge and skills to make healthy choices about the initiation of sex and sexual behaviours, can also prevent negative sexual and reproductive health outcomes and provide an important platform for addressing gender issues and promoting mutually respectful and non-violent relationships.¹⁹

Institutionalised discrimination and sometimes prosecutions of certain groups based on their sexual and/or gender identity, race, caste etc., result in lower health outcomes. Moreover, policies and interventions related to people's right to health and sexual and reproductive healthcare continue to disregard diversity among young people.

Global estimates reveal that approximately 20% of adolescents and youth experience mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety disorders and disruptive behavioural disorders – and those living in low-income countries make up 85-90% of this group.²⁰ An estimated one million people die from suicide each year in South-East Asia.²¹ Suicide is the leading cause of death among young people in many Asian countries.²² In the Asia-Pacific region, substance abuse disorder affects more than 90 million people. Related risk factors for youth include physical and sexual abuse, street victimisation, partner violence, and lack of peer and parental support.²³ “A Regional Overview of Youth in Asia and the Pacific” by the United Nations, notes: “Mental health is another concern among young people, as adolescence is the age when such problems first surface. Young people, especially young men, are at greater risk of dying of suicides and violence than people of older ages.²⁴ Many countries are also seeing increase in cases of depression and eating disorders – particularly among girls. Depression is the single largest contributor to the global burden of disease for people aged 15–19, and suicide is one of the three leading causes of mortality among people aged 15–35.”²⁵

In the Asia-Pacific region, which contains 60% of the world's youth population, young people face numerous barriers, including a scarcity of youth-friendly health-care services.²⁶ Youth exclusion and mental health conditions are leading causes of adjustment problems in young people worldwide, having a significant impact on the development of over a billion youth and their social and economic integration.

Globally, road traffic accidents are the leading cause of death among 15 to 29-year-old persons, with male youth accounting for the majority of all road fatalities.²⁷ Similar trends have been observed in India and Malaysia where male youth dominate the number of road traffic fatalities.²⁸ Most young people who are killed in road traffic accidents are vulnerable road users such as pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists.²⁹ Risk factors can range from speeding, driving under the influence of alcohol, and non-use of helmets, seat belts and child restraints to unsafe road infrastructure, inadequate post-crash care and inadequate law enforcement of traffic laws.³⁰ However, these studies highlight the gaps in gender disaggregated data on road fatalities in most countries in Asia. Such an analysis should also include data

on how road traffic accidents affect people beyond fatalities to determine the short and long term effects of injuries.

GOOD HEALTH AND WELLBEING: ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Action Points

- **Ensure** that sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) for young people are considered in their totality rather than largely in relation to reproductive health; and that rights-based approaches are utilised and promoted.
- **Enable** access to CSE as a key initiative to improve health and wellbeing. Implement CSE across countries to push efforts to scale-up programmes that reach vulnerable young people, especially out-of-school youth.
- **Monitor** the public health sector to ensure the provision of gender sensitive, quality SRHR services that are inclusive of unmarried young girls and respect privacy and confidentiality.
- **Address** the multiple gaps in relation to disaggregated data by age, sex, and background, which also recognises diversity amongst girls, when presenting the conditions faced by girls. The lack of data on girls, including adolescents, is a significant gap.
- **Include** disadvantaged and marginalised unmarried young people in sexual and reproductive health research, particularly those who are out-of-school, migrants, and living with disability.
- **Recognise** health disparities among people and identify specific health inequities related to specific populations or groups of people and address them through the development of focused health equity strategies as a key measure needed to implement people's right to health.
- **Ensure** that mental health policies and programmes are more comprehensive and pay attention to the particular mental health issues related to young people.
- **Review and amend** existing laws and policies, enact new ones, and implement these effectively, so that they respond to the realities of young people and uphold human rights, including sexual and reproductive rights.
- **Ensure** contingency planning for health services in emergency settings (such as the minimum initial service package or MISP).
- **Take active measures** to address the high number of young people that make up road traffic fatalities with road safety education, comprehensive post-crash care and enforcement of road traffic laws.

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SDG FOUR: Ensure inclusive¹ and equitable quality education and promote lifelong opportunities for all

Sustainable Development Goal 4 aims to ensure that all people have access to quality education and learning opportunities throughout their lives; and that all youth complete free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes, including the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development.

Moreover, it seeks to substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment and entrepreneurship. SDG 4 also sets the target of eliminating gender disparities in education and ensuring equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities and indigenous peoples.

Target no. 4.7, a key target within this Goal, focuses on ensuring that learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, and global citizenship. This target remains key to mainstreaming comprehensive sexuality education at all levels, including in national education policies, curricula, teacher education, and student assessments.

CHALLENGES RELATED TO EDUCATION AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Despite some progress, the world was unable to meet the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education by 2015. According to latest available statistics from 2013, 59 million children of primary school age and 65 million adolescents of lower secondary age were out of school.² However, most Asian countries have achieved, or are close to achieving, universal primary education. Nearly 78 million children across the region were enrolled in pre-primary education in 2013, almost double the number for 1999.³ By 2014, primary net enrolment was over 90%.⁴

Progress on equal access to education, however, has been less positive, with discriminatory structures and practices continuing to prevail.⁵ Inequality is on the increase and youth face challenges related to inclusion, quality, and relevance of education, as well as training and skills. The Asia-Pacific

region has over half of the world's out-of-school children and youth: 136 million children were still out of school in 2014 – the majority of them living in South and West Asia. School non-attendance and dropouts are largely the result of poverty, with domestic and child labour as the key factors. Despite the increase in government spending on education in some countries of the region, universal education is still not a priority in many national budgets. In fact, the education budgets of some countries are supplemented by international assistance.⁸

Over 16 million girls will never set foot in a classroom and women account for two-thirds of the 750 million adults without basic literacy skills.⁹ Factors such as poverty, geographical isolation, minority status, disability, early marriage and pregnancy, gender-based violence, and traditional attitudes about the role of women, are among the many obstacles that stand in the way of women and girls fully exercising their right to education.¹⁰ For example, poor households tend to prioritise the education of boys over that of girls and invest in their male children, assuming that the economic dividends would be greater. Girls are also expected to help with household chores and look after younger siblings. As they grow older, the pressures to be married, prove their fertility, and comply with social controls over their autonomy act as barriers to further education. Consequently, lack of education inhibits women and girls from exercising their rights – to own land or other property, to appeal against unfair judgments and unjust treatment, to live their lives free from violence. Gaps in schooling can therefore directly lead to insecurity by distancing the deprived from the ways and means of fighting against that deprivation.¹¹

Global survey data between 2008 and 2012 from 63 low- and middle-income countries show that children of primary school age are less likely to attend school if they live in rural/isolated areas, are poor, or have parents with little or no education.¹² Factors contributing to poor attendance also include gender, disability, cost/affordability, and language (when the education is available only in the dominant language). Data also reveals that children, especially girls, from households headed by someone with less than a primary education, are more than four times as likely to be out of school compared to children from households headed by someone with a secondary or higher education.¹³ Thus, where gender disparities in

educational attainment still exist, they usually intersect with other disparities.¹⁴ Without quality education, girls are more likely to marry young, have children early, and spend their life in poverty. Yet, when girls are given the opportunity to receive an education, they are more likely to improve their own lives and those of their families, helping break the cycle of poverty.

Engaging youth in sustainable development requires greater attention to a range of factors including education and training opportunities for capacity building.¹⁵ Sustainable development also requires access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for all persons, including young people. Age-responsive CSE is key to achieving this.¹⁶ For young people to develop their relationships, stay healthy, and plan their families, they must have access to CSE. The introduction of CSE programmes into school curricula has been adopted by some countries in the Asia-Pacific to promote gender education and sexual and reproductive health of female and male youth. The term “comprehensive” refers to the encapsulation of the full range of information, skills, and values to enable young people to exercise their sexual and reproductive rights and to make choices about their health and sexuality.¹⁷ CSE can empower young people to make informed decisions about their sexuality including better use of modern contraceptives leading to a reduction of teenage pregnancies and abortions, and a decrease in STIs and HIV infections as well as in sexual abuse and homophobia.¹⁸ CSE also equips young people with the ability negotiate power dynamics within relationships and to recognise gender-based violence (GBV) and non-consensual sex. It empowers them with rights-based information, access to laws and other support options.¹⁹ However, as the limited sexuality education programmes are primarily provided through secondary schools, adolescents who are not enrolled are excluded from such instruction.²⁰ Furthermore, there is a lack of trained teachers to deliver the curriculum in a comprehensive manner.

Moreover, if young women do not have the required knowledge and information regarding SRHR, and have little or no access to SRH services, it leads to unplanned and multiple pregnancies compelling them to drop out of formal education systems, impacting their economic security and increasing care responsibilities.²¹ It is significant that higher fertility rates are closely linked to lower education levels. For example, in the Asia-Pacific, fertility rates among adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 years who have completed secondary school are lower than for those who have only completed primary school. As educational attainment increases, the unmet need for family planning among girls and women in South and South-East Asia declines.²² Similarly, menstruation may hinder a girl’s attendance,

attention and achievement in school. Lack of clean and private sanitation for menstrual hygiene can discourage girls from attending school. For instance, World Bank statistics suggest that globally girls miss four days of school in every four weeks due to lack of menstruation hygiene materials.²³

A paper released jointly by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report notes that, in general, 15 to 17-year-olds are four times as likely to be out of school as are children aged 6 to 11. This is partly because primary and lower secondary education are compulsory in nearly every country, while upper secondary school is not. At the same time, these youths are often of legal working age. Many have no choice but to work while others try to combine going to school with employment.²⁴

Yet another cause for the disruption of education is school bullying. A UNESCO Asia Pacific study on school bullying, violence and discrimination, on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity notes that “... learning environments are not always inclusive and safe places in the region, and can be sites of physical, verbal, psychological and sexual violence, and social exclusion. For children and young people who are perceived as “different” and who do not fit into dominant cultures in societies, schools can be alienating and marginalising spaces.”²⁵ Those who are victimised are at greater risk of physical and mental health problems including depression and anxiety, suicidal ideation and behaviour, and substance abuse. There is evidence from the region that educational performance and achievement are also affected, leading to life-long impacts on employment and economic prospects, and broader societal level impacts.²⁶

Data on education indicators across all background characteristics, including gender, rural-urban, wealth quintiles, disability status, indigenous people and conflict affected, is yet to be available across countries and within countries. Without this, marginalised young people who face multiple layers of oppression will be unable to benefit from effective and targeted policy interventions, which require a strong, evidence-base for greater impact and inclusion.

ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN ACHIEVING EDUCATION FOR ALL EVERYWHERE

Action Points

- **Enable** more equitable learning opportunities by reducing segregation in schools and neighbourhoods.

- **Create** education facilities that are sensitive to children, disability, and gender, and provide safe and inclusive learning environments for all.
- **Ensure** that the education curricula corresponds to modern and future labour market demands, while adhering to the principles of sustainable development.
- **Invest** in school feeding programmes to help children and young people from poor communities meet their nutritional needs and boost school attendance.
- **Foster** youth-adult partnerships in decision-making on education related to sustainable development, gender, and SRHR.
- **Enabling** youth engagement in the development and delivery of sexual and reproductive health education programmes is one of the ways by which existing gaps in this area of health education can be addressed.²⁷
- **Promote** CSE in line with the international technical guidance, within the respective national curricula, placing gender and human rights at its centre, by addressing religious and cultural barriers to successfully implement policies and programmes through educational institutions.
- **Build** capacity of teachers to deliver CSE, prioritise budget allocations for this purpose and make CSE a compulsory subject for teachers in training college curricula.²⁸
- **Build** partnerships with NGOs and research organisations, to inform rights based curriculum development of CSE and engage in advocacy to influence education reforms to integrate CSE.
- **Implement** strategies that ensure that CSE courses are compulsory for all students and explore “age-specific” CSE such as aspects of sexuality education that should be introduced to primary students. CSE should be a long-term learning process starting at an early age by providing information about health and well-being, promoting health-seeking behaviours and opportunities to build skills and assess personal values and attitudes.²⁹
- **Engage** parents in raising awareness on CSE and promotion of education particularly for young girls.
- **Build** strong and inclusive coalitions and social movements (including youth-led organisations) for SRHR and CSE at the local, regional and national levels.
- **Promote** school enrollment, attendance and completion for girls and young women by addressing barriers that prevent them from accessing the right to education.

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SDG FIVE: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Ending all forms of discrimination against girls and women is essential for them to access their basic human rights. In addition, gender equality and women's empowerment are integral to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

SDG 5 recognises the need for girls and women to have equal say and position within their homes, communities and countries. To ensure that this translates into reality, eliminating all forms of violence and other harmful practices against girls and women, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation as well as ensuring they have equal access to opportunities and resources, is essential.¹

SDG 5 underscores the need to recognise and counter the gendered roles in society, to value and share unpaid care and domestic work, to ensure girls' and women's sexual and reproductive rights, and to enable women's participation in political, economic, and public life from a young age.²

CHALLENGES RELATED TO ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY

Some progress has been made in reducing gender inequality in the past few decades, particularly in issues such as education, economy and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). For example, gender gaps in access to education have narrowed in the past 25 years.³ Similarly, women's participation in parliaments have increased by 10% between 2010 and 2017.⁴ There was a steeper decline in the marriage rate among girls under 15 years of age between 2000 and 2015.⁵ Despite this, gender gaps still persist.

The inequality faced by women and girls must be observed through an intersectional lens.⁶ Oppression and discrimination based on race, religion, caste, ethnicity, disability, education level, economic and employment status, nationality, and other socio-political factors, are aggravated based on gender.⁷ This is further fuelled and shaped by religious strongholds, which control moral, behavioural, and cultural codes of society⁸ – marginalising women and subordinating their position and roles in society. Among the issues that affect women and girls unequally are access to education, employment opportunities, land and property rights, reproductive health and rights,

maternal health, gender-based violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM), and access to water and sanitation.⁹

Globally, women still enter the job market on an unequal basis to men. In Asia and other developing countries, girls and women continue to form a large majority of the world's working poor, earn less income, have less financial and social security, and are more often affected by long-term unemployment than men. They hold less secure jobs, and even have fewer rights to land ownership and opportunities outside the agricultural sector. Women perform 66% of the world's work, produce 50% of the food, and yet earn only 10% of the income and 1% of the property.¹⁰ Women's socio-economic disadvantages caused by gender-based discrimination and their double roles of being a worker and a caregiver are among the factors affecting equal employment opportunities. They often have less access to productive resources, education, skills development, and labour market opportunities than men. This is largely caused by the persistent social norms ascribing gender roles.¹¹ This can be observed by the burden of unpaid work, where globally women do 2.6 times more domestic work than men.¹² However, women's contribution to the economy through unpaid family work remains unrecognised; notwithstanding that their pay in formal economy is strikingly less than men.¹³ It was also found that girls who face discrimination in their early stages of life tend to accumulate socio-economic disadvantages, which then leads to reduced employability and higher poverty later in life.¹⁴

SRHR is essential for the empowerment of girls and women and to all quality-of-life issues concerning social, economic, and political participation by women. To neglect access to SRHR not only impedes the rights to health of women and girls, it also puts them directly in harm's way of gender-based violence, HIV/AIDS, maternal mortality, teenage pregnancy, as well as being compelled to abandon children and to have a large number of children.¹⁵

Lack of awareness and information of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) among young girls also has adverse effects on their health and wellbeing. CSE imparts critical information and skills for life as it not only includes knowledge on pregnancy prevention and safe sex, but also on understanding bodies and boundaries, relationships and respect, as well as diversity and consent. A large body of research proves the effectiveness

of CSE in terms of self-reported risk behaviours (such as delayed initiation of sex, decreased frequency of sex, fewer partners, and increased use of condoms and/or other forms of contraception).¹⁶ Moreover, access to CSE is grounded in the fundamental human rights of having the right to education, the right to health, the right to sexuality, the right to non-discrimination and the right to privacy. It has been asserted that CSE is most effective when it highlights a gender and rights perspective – and adopting an empowerment approach.¹⁷ The ability of girls and women to decide freely on their sexual and reproductive health is restricted by the lack of equal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare information, education and services. Just over half (52%) of girls and women between 15 and 49 years of age who are married or in union make their own decisions about consensual sexual relations and use of contraceptives and health services.¹⁸

Different forms of violence, including physical, sexual, verbal, psychological, and economic, as well as trafficking and other forms of sexual exploitation, continue to affect millions of girls and women worldwide. It cuts across regions, locations, income levels, socio-cultural groups and sexual preferences. Gender-based violence not only undermines the wellbeing of women, it is a major obstacle to development, and is one of the most pervasive human rights violations in the world today. The increased risk of domestic violence, including intimate partner violence, physical violence, and sexual violence, for girls who marry before the age of 15 has been established across many countries. Girls who are married young are more likely to be uneducated, live in poverty, lack autonomy, face power imbalances and submit to traditional gender norms.¹⁹

SDG 5 targets an end to the harmful practices of child, early and forced marriage and FGM. The practice of child marriage has been declining, but between 2010 and 2015, globally, nearly a quarter of women aged 20 to 24 reported that they were married before their eighteenth birthday.²⁰ South Asia has the highest rates of child marriage in the world. A quarter of the world's population lives in countries with highly restrictive abortion laws, subjecting women to risk their lives or health and depriving them autonomy in decision-making.²¹ Almost half (45%) of all women in the region aged 20-24 reported being married before the age of 18. Almost one in five girls (17%) are married before the age of 15.²² The marriage of girls aged 15-18 is still commonplace, proving the need for more efforts to protect older adolescents from marriage. The increased risk of domestic violence, including intimate partner violence, physical violence, and sexual violence, for girls who marry before the age of 15, has been established across many countries. Girls who are married young are more likely to be uneducated, live

in poverty, lack autonomy and choice, face power imbalances and submit to traditional gender roles and norms.²³

Data related to FGM is severely limited in the Asian region. The practice affects girls in select communities, with procedures being performed by traditional birth attendants. In the 30 countries where the practice is concentrated, rates of FGM overall have declined by more than 25% over the last three decades. Not all countries, however, have made progress, and the pace of decline has been uneven. Today, in these 30 countries, more than one in three girls aged 15 to 19 have undergone the procedure versus one in two in the mid-1980s.²⁴

Social norms and widespread impunity for perpetrators are key challenges fuelling intimate partner violence.²⁵ There are several limitations with regards to evidence related to violence. Much of this is based on reported incidences, which is affected by people's ability and willingness to report and share experiences, particularly when it comes to violence perpetrated by those who are related or close to the victim.²⁶ Forty-nine countries have no laws specifically protecting girls and women from domestic violence and 37 countries exempt rape perpetrators if they are married to or subsequently marry the victim.²⁷ In Asia-Pacific countries, the proportion of women who have reported experience of physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime ranges from 15% in Japan and Lao PDR, to 68% in Kiribati and Papua New Guinea.²⁸ Data from 2005 to 2016 for 87 countries shows that 19% of women between 15 and 49 years of age said they had experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner in the 12 months prior to the survey. In 2012, almost half of all women worldwide, who were victims of intentional homicide, were killed by an intimate partner or family member, compared to 6% of male victims.²⁹ Over half of Asian women report experiencing physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner during their lifetime.³⁰

Another challenge in the Asia-Pacific region is the limited focus on collecting evidence on violence related to sexual diversity/LGBTQI persons – how girls and women who do not conform to heteronormativity (heterosexuality as the normal or preferred sexual orientation) face violence. The systems that are in place to collect data on violence against women, let alone gender-based violence, also appear to be strained, as much of the data is dated.³¹

Climate change is another aspect that contributes to gender inequality as it is not a gender-neutral phenomenon and is known to impact the health of women and girls disproportionately. Women in developing countries are

particularly vulnerable to climate change because they are dependent on local natural resources for their livelihoods. Women charged with securing water, food and fuel for cooking and heating face the greatest challenges. Women experience unequal access to resources and decision-making processes, with limited mobility in rural areas.³² Evidence from the ground also demonstrated that women and girls' sexual reproductive rights (SRR), regardless of their age, ethnicity, marital status, socio-economic status, and educational level, are also negatively impacted by climate change.

While more women have entered political positions in recent years, including through the use of special quotas, they are still far from achieving parity with men. A 2012 study³³ that examined patterns of women's political participation in the four sub-regions of the Asia Pacific show that on average women's political representation is lowest in the Pacific sub-region at 3.65% (excluding Australia and New Zealand), then East Asia at 17.6%, closely followed by Southeastern Asia at 18.09% (including Brunei) and South Asia with 19.76%. The study notes that women's representation is below the global average: "In all four sub-regions, there is strong resistance to women's participation in public life evidenced in the formal statements of leaders and politicians and in the mentalities of the broader societies. Cultural, customary and religious discourses are frequently used to moralize that the 'rightful' place of women is NOT in politics."³⁴

Throughout the world, women face barriers in realising their economic rights, due to entrenched gender stereotypes and negative social and traditional norms that limit women's equal access to land, property, financial services, education, employment, and healthcare, which in turn shape outcomes for women related to labour markets, entrepreneurship and innovation. Girls' and women's secondary position within the family, community and state clearly point to the need to dismantle patriarchal systems and address its influence on laws and practices.³⁵ Moreover, the promotion of gender stereotypes through the media remains a challenge to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

GENDER EQUALITY: ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Action Points³⁶

- **Underscore** the equality clauses in national constitutions and human rights accountability mechanisms to influence governments and institutions to ensure equality and non-discrimination.
- **Advocate** for the recognition that girls and women have equal say and position within their homes, communities and countries.
- **Integrate** principles of equality and nondiscrimination into all programming and policies that focus on children and youth.
- **Form** partnerships to strengthen national statistical systems to ensure data is timely and reliable, disaggregated by sex, age, race, ethnicity, income, migration status, disability and geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts to support evidence-based policy formulation and strategic planning.
- **Expand** on existing definitions of gender-based violence to include the broad range of those who are affected and improve data collection systems and processes and service provision to victims.
- **Ensure** disaggregated data collection not only on girls who are at risk of child marriage, but also of girls who are affected by the practice, with details of how they are affected in the short and long term, aimed at developing actions that address their needs and vulnerabilities.
- **Address** FGM as a human rights abuse and invest in research on the subject, with funding for the dissemination of findings. The limited data on FGM may be indicative of the lack of or limited recognition of its existence at the national level.
- **Develop** strategic national plans to provide CSE in school and out of school, enabling young girls and boys to realise their sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- **Ensure** that systematic evidence is available to influence decisions on legal enforcement, to provide services to those affected, and to further efforts towards violence prevention.
- **Promote** and ensure more representation of people of diverse sexual orientation and gender identities and expressions in social, political, and economic spheres.
- **Ensure** the active, capable and sustained political engagement of girls and women, while addressing the systemic barriers that pose challenges to women's participation in politics.

- **Take active measures** to change societal expectations of women and to assist non-elite women's pathways to political participation through political parties, trade unions, media and civil society organisations.³⁷
- **Advocate** for internal democratic reforms in political parties and civil society organisations to attract and promote women's representation, given that women have less access than men to economic resources and to political networks.³⁸
- **Ensure** that laws are designed and enforced, where unavailable, to ensure property rights of girls and women.

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SDG SIX: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

As the world's population rapidly grows, as natural resources continue to be unsustainably extracted, and as the effects of climate change are increasingly felt – the demand for water resources has escalated. The Earth's freshwater supplies, however, are fast depleting – and increasingly contaminated by domestic, agricultural, and industrial wastes. The health consequences of unsafe water, inadequate sanitation, and insufficient hygiene are disproportionately borne by children and young people in developing countries.¹

Safe drinking water,² sanitation, and management of freshwater ecosystems are essential for human health, environmental sustainability, and economic well-being. Sustainable Development Goal 6 addresses challenges to accessing drinking water and sanitation and ensuring the quality and sustainability of water resources and water-related ecosystems. It recognises the centrality of water resources to sustainable development, and the vital role that improved drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene plays in achieving progress in other areas across the SDGs like health, education, and poverty reduction.³ Moreover, the human right to water and sanitation places obligations on states to ensure that such services are affordable.⁴

CHALLENGES RELATED TO YOUNG PEOPLE'S ACCESS TO CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

According to 2015 estimates, globally, 6.5 billion people had access to improved sources⁵ of drinking water that required no more than 30 minutes per trip to fetch water. On the other hand, 844 million people lacked even a basic drinking water services – the water source (either improved or unimproved) requiring a collection time exceeding more than 30 minutes round trip.⁶

In terms of sanitation, globally 5 billion people have access to at least basic sanitation services.⁷ The majority of the 2.3 billion people who still lack a basic sanitation service either practice open defecation (892 million) or use unimproved facilities such as pit latrines without a slab or platform, hanging latrines, or bucket latrines (856 million).⁸ Nearly 1.25 billion women and girls do not have access to safe and adequate sanitation. Out of them, 526 million do not have a toilet at all. In 2013, women

and girls living without access to toilet facilities spend 97 billion hours each year to find a place to go.⁹

The use of basic sanitation services has increased more rapidly than the use of basic drinking water services. Coverage, however, is generally lower for basic sanitation than for basic water, and no region is on track to achieve the SDG Goal of universal basic sanitation by 2030. In 2011, only 45% of schools in the least developed and low-income countries had adequate sanitation facilities.¹¹ Significant barriers to improving greater coverage in the Asia region include insufficient supply, insufficient demand, and institutional constraints.¹²

Asia is making slow progress in its attempts to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for youth and other groups. The problem is particularly prevalent in rural areas, where only 46% of the population has access to improved sanitation, compared with 75% in urban areas.¹³ Yet many urban centres are still grappling with unplanned and uncoordinated development, resulting in the lack of adequate urban water and sanitation management.¹⁴ There are no reliable estimates of the numbers of young people affected by lack of urban water and sanitation management in urban areas.

Girls in particular face significant sanitation challenges, with a lack of menstrual hygiene management and hygiene promotion, particularly in South Asia.¹⁵ The lack of safe, separate, and private sanitation and washing facilities in schools is one of the main factors preventing girls from attending school, particularly when menstruating. Moreover, the visible evidence of menstruation that can happen due to the lack of proper and affordable sanitary products leave girls vulnerable to harassment. Across the world, menstruation is often shrouded in secrecy, taboos and shame – and girls and women from different contexts are restricted from a range of activities during menstruation. This has significant impacts on the safety, well-being, and educational prospects of girls – inhibiting their progress. Women and girls also bear the burden of fetching water as the responsibility of providing water for household purposes falls disproportionately on women and girls. The time demands in terms of fetching water are enormous as often they have to trek long distances to fetch water. Consequently, they miss out opportunities for education, leisure time or other productive activities. Convenient access to water increases

privacy and reduces risk to girls and women of sexual harassment and assault while fetching water.¹⁶

Encouragingly, some Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WaSH) initiatives in South Asia and other parts of Asia actively engage young women and men – making them constructive contributors to the realisation of the sixth SDG. In Indonesia, for example, where 55 million people practise open defecation – second only to India in world ranking – campaigns involving youth, utilising social media, are proving to be effective. TinjuTinja,¹⁷ for instance, engages youth role models to raise awareness and promote urban youth as advocates against open defecation.¹⁸ As a basis for similar initiatives, UNICEF's Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) programme carried out a comprehensive overview of the experiences of girls and women across the Asia-Pacific region to determine the current status of menstrual health management (MHM) programming and action.¹⁹ UNICEF has already begun addressing menstrual hygiene with the education sector and civil society groups in many countries in the region. In June 2017, UNICEF and U-Report²⁰ in Pakistan launched the Menstrual Hygiene Innovation Challenge to encourage young girls and boys to take action in their communities on menstrual hygiene management.

Water scarcity poses a serious challenge to public health. Protecting and restoring water-related ecosystems such as forests, mountains, wetlands, and rivers is essential to mitigating water scarcity. There is also a pressing need to improve global freshwater quality by addressing water pollution and making better use of wastewater. It has been roughly estimated that about 80% of untreated wastewater from human settlements and industrial sources worldwide is discharged directly into water bodies.²¹ This has direct implications for the quality of the ecosystem that children and young people will inherit.

CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION: ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Action Points

- **Address** the inequities suffered by young people related to water and sanitation by ensuring political commitment and resource allocation as well as by involving young people in the planning of the provision of gender sensitive services.
- **Invest** in adequate infrastructure, provide sanitation facilities, and encourage hygiene at every level.
- **Ensure** the availability and prioritisation of properly constructed sanitation facilities that do not contaminate water sources and provide young people, especially

girls, with secure spaces that do not place them at risk of harassment or assault.

- **Introduce** menstrual hygiene management promotion interventions with a focus on girls and women, but involving the wider community, to break long-standing taboos around menstruation.
- **Make better** use of existing opportunities in the education sector to initiate knowledge sharing on menstruation management and sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- **Initiate** community-based sanitation campaigns that support menstrual hygiene management (MHM) through the involvement of young people who have benefited from better knowledge and services related to sanitation and hygiene.
- **Enable** youth to play an instrumental role in their local communities in the sustainable management of natural resources and work with local leaders to establish a positive environment for youth inclusion.
- **Bring together** local actors, making them essential players in the development of viable water management policies, thereby increasing public ownership and accountability.
- **Implement** integrated solutions across different sectors, especially between service delivery and infrastructure, while also enabling young people to facilitate and participate in the process.
- **Create** an action plan that focuses on cleaning current polluted water sources, with the involvement of young people both in its design and implementation.

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SDG SEVEN: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

The importance of energy to economic progress, human welfare and environmental well-being is acknowledged in the SDG 7, which focuses on sustainable energy – incorporating targets for renewable energy, energy efficiency and energy access.

Access¹ to affordable,² reliable,² sustainable³ and modern⁴ energy is crucial to achieving many of the Sustainable Development Goals – from poverty eradication to mitigating the consequences of climate change. Energy access, however, varies widely across countries and the current rate of progress falls short of what is required to achieve SDG 7.⁵

CHALLENGES RELATED TO AFFORDABLE AND SUSTAINABLE ENERGY

Globally, about three billion people still lack access to clean cooking fuels and technologies. From 2000 to 2014, the proportion of the global population with access to such fuels and technologies⁶ – used as a substitute for fossil fuels and producing less pollution – increased from 50% to 57%. However, rural areas, with 22% access to clean fuels, lag behind urban areas, with 78% access.⁷

With the world's fastest rising regional energy demand and some of the largest national deficits in energy access, the Asia-Pacific countries will largely shape progress toward achieving

global sustainable energy objectives.⁸ The region produces approximately one-third of the world's gross domestic product (GDP) and consumes more than half of the global energy supply. In 2014, the Asia-Pacific was responsible for 55% of global greenhouse gas emissions – nearly two-thirds from coal. Eighty-three of the world's top 100 polluted cities, are found in the region.⁹

Across the Asia-Pacific region, home to 4.3 billion people representing 60% of the world's population, an estimated 420 million people lack access to electricity. Significant energy access disparities exist between rural and urban populations.¹⁰ Electrification can support the functioning of healthcare centers in rural areas, which is important for improving women's health, in particular sexual and reproductive health. Provision of electricity at rural health centers are reported to have results such as fewer infections, fewer delays in providing life-saving care, more timely blood transfusions, and more successful child deliveries.¹¹ Though considerable progress has been made in rural electrification, bridging the remaining gaps continue to be a challenge¹² for reasons such as high costs of building and maintaining infrastructure and low demand of electricity in rural areas.¹³

The energy divide is also gendered, with women experiencing more energy poverty than men. As women are often linked to household activities, they are responsible for energy provision at household and community level. Lack of access to modern energy services, such as electricity and clean cooking fuels,

means that large proportion of women's and girls' time is spent on basic subsistence tasks, including collecting biomass fuels, which restrict their access to educational opportunities, decent wage employment, and social and political involvement outside their house.¹⁴

In Asia and the Pacific, almost 2.1 billion people – nearly half of the region's population – do not have access to clean cooking fuel. The World Health Organisation estimates 92 deaths per 100,000 people to indoor air pollution in Asia.¹⁵ Biomass – in the form of wood, charcoal and dung – used in open fires or inefficient stoves cause pollution and women are especially affected as they are typically responsible for food preparation. Children who accompany them in the kitchen would be affected too.¹⁶ Other impacts of energy poverty includes increased violence against women and girls during the night due to lack of street lighting and during daylight hours, where women are obliged to collect fuel from remote isolated areas.¹⁷

Women also tend to bear the burden of gathering wood for fuel, leaving them less or no time for other social or productive activities.¹⁸ In the Asia-Pacific region, small and steady gains have been made in closing the gap between those with and without access to clean cooking fuels and technologies, but the pace of improvement falls short of what is required to achieve universal access to clean cooking by 2030.¹⁹

Reducing energy intensity (the ratio of energy used per unit of GDP) can lower the demand for energy, reduce the environmental footprint of energy production, and make clean energy more affordable. Globally, primary energy intensity declined by 2.1% a year from 2012 to 2014. For the same period, three-quarters of the world's 20 largest energy-consuming countries managed to reduce their energy intensity; which is equivalent to the total energy consumed by Brazil and Pakistan combined in 2014. However, the progress is insufficient to double the global rate of improvements in energy efficiency as called for by the SDG target.²⁰

Increasingly, governments around the world, including in emerging markets, are focusing on renewable energy as an important part of the energy portfolio although not enough investment has been made towards providing people information on the options available. The Asia-Pacific region has emerged as the global leader in renewable energy investment, installed capacity and consumption. Yet, fossil fuel consumption has risen substantially, limiting the growth of the share of renewable energy (including both traditional and modern forms), and resulting in significant local and global environmental impacts.²¹

Many governments in developing countries provide some form of financial assistance for energy producers to boost energy supply or reduce prices for energy consumers.²² However, when those energy subsidies are applied to fossil fuels or fossil fuel based energy, instead of investments into increasing clean energy options, they result in boosting energy consumption and thus carbon emissions, which aggravate climate change.²³ Energy subsidy reform has the potential to relieve budgetary pressure, improve efficiency of social welfare policies, increase energy security and mitigate climate change.²⁴ Energy subsidy reform has the potential to foster nascent clean energy industries. Any efforts must engage young people and also recognise the potential varied impact of such reform on young people.

Meanwhile, the purchasing power of young people has increased due to rapid economic growth and they become a substantial part of the regional consumers of natural resources. Increasing economic wealth is inextricably linked with the purchase of energy-intensive vehicles, electronic gadgets, clothing and long-distance travel. Although the challenges posed by resource-intensive consumption are evident, surveys of the environmental perceptions of youth indicate that sustainability concerns rarely influence their consumption decisions.²⁵

AFFORDABLE, RELIABLE, SUSTAINABLE AND MODERN ENERGY FOR ALL: ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Action Points

- **Involve** young people in promoting energy-efficient lifestyles, advocating for sustainable development, and securing equal access to resources.
- **Raise** awareness, build capacity, and influence agendas around environmental protection and sustainable use of natural resources.
- **Introduce** Sustainable Energy to both primary and secondary school curricula and upgrade university level courses. This would help increase awareness among young people of sustainable and modern technology in relation to their social and economic needs.
- **Develop** a database, toolkit, or community of practice to be accessed by educational institutions, which provides tools and resources for education practitioners linked to educating youth on sustainable consumption and clean energy.
- **Ensure** that transitioning energy systems to renewables includes young people and expand and incentivise youth employment opportunities in renewable energy.

- **Build** knowledge resources and compile best practices and lessons learned in applying youth entrepreneurship and involvement for renewable energy enterprises.
 - **Train** young people in the development of renewable energy businesses, recognising that the availability of adequate energy can act as the driving force for the transition from a developing economy to a developed one.
 - **Support** the transition from biomass fuel to clean cooking to ensure the reliability and spread of technology and fuel distribution networks, along with greater efforts to improve utility and affordability.
 - **Integrate** clean cooking into energy policy frameworks, and make greater investment supporting the development of options that meet consumer needs – overcoming barriers such as cost and cultural preferences.
 - **Increase** employment opportunities for young women in rural areas to raise the opportunity cost of gathering fuel for households. With value attributed to women's time, households are more likely to choose more efficient technologies with shorter cooking times and reduced fuel gathering requirements.
 - **Engage** in multi-stakeholder dialogues on how eco-entrepreneurship and eco-employment can be launched in a sustainable manner.
 - **Ensure** government ministries provide financial incentives to drive investment and participation within the energy efficiency market.
 - **Establish** dedicated funds to alleviate technical and financial project barriers. In addition, introduce carbon taxation and emissions trading to motivate the adoption of efficiency measures in some countries.
 - **Support** energy service companies to realise the financial benefits of energy efficiency – enabling a shift from direct subsidies for energy efficiency investments towards a market-based approach.
 - **Support** the incorporation of renewables beyond the power sector – to transport and heat.
 - **Strengthen** and align legal and regulatory aspects supporting renewable energy, as investment levels are well below the amount needed to achieve the SDG target.
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SDG EIGHT: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all

Inclusive and sustainable economic growth can contribute to improved livelihoods for people around the world, leading to new and better employment opportunities and greater economic security. Sustainable Development Goal 8 targets the achievement of higher levels of economic productivity through diversification, technological upgrading, and innovation. Economic development, protection of the environment, and social inclusion, all occurring simultaneously, are prerequisites to achieving sustained prosperity.¹

Economic growth is not an end in itself and does not directly measure human welfare. However, it does give an indication of a country's potential to meet people's needs and its capacity to create jobs. It can, for example, provide resources for investment in research and development and the promotion of healthcare, education, employment and poverty eradication.

SDG 8 calls for immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking, and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025, end child labour in all its forms. It also seeks to protect labour rights and promote safe and secure work environments for all, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment.

Also prioritised is the substantial reduction of the proportion of youth not in employment, education, or training. SDG 8 also targets full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value. From a sustainable development perspective, it recognises the importance of economic growth generating not just any kind of employment but 'decent' job opportunities – those offering safe and healthy work environments, fair and beneficial employment conditions, and the potential for people to develop their skills and careers.

CHALLENGES RELATED TO DECENT WORK AND YOUTH

The different kinds of work young people do are generally based on the opportunities they have had and the work in turn shapes the opportunities they will have. When work provides sufficient earnings, social protection, decent work conditions, and career development, it lays the foundation for young people to enjoy social inclusion and mobility. But when the opposite is experienced, the consequences – especially for young people – are serious: economic and social deprivation is compounded by psychological stress, with long-term implications.²

Young people account for almost half the unemployed population in the Asia Pacific region and are at least three times more likely to be unemployed than adults.³ More young males than females aged 15-24 participate in the labour force and, with the exception of East Asia, young females are more likely to be unemployed.⁴ A key factor underpinning women's lack of agency in the economic sphere is the denial of their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Although there is limited data that shows this in young women, it is likely that they are similarly affected. Moreover, there is little acknowledgement of the link between women's, including young women's, economic and political lives and SRHR. SRHR cuts across every aspect of girls' and women's lives, both enabling and limiting life opportunities. The freedom to decide if and when they marry and have children, to live free from violence, and to make decisions regarding their bodies is key to their economic empowerment.⁵ Recent studies suggest the positive influence of lower fertility in women's economic participation: globally, female labour force participation decreases with each additional child by about 10% to 15% among women aged 25 to 39.⁶

Women and girls spend a disproportionate amount of time on unpaid care work than men on account of gendered social norms that view it as a female prerogative.⁸ Care work is also directly linked to SRHR through the inequalities within the private and public sphere. Without access to essential SRH information and services women are unable to choose if, when and how many children to have, which exacerbate existing inequalities in women's share of caregiving and her ability to enter economic activity. For girls, their right to education is jeopardised when they are removed from school entirely or have less time and energy to devote to school work due to domestic obligations.⁹

Sex work can be considered one of the most neglected areas in terms of worker rights, public health interventions and research.¹⁰ The Centre for Health and Gender Equity notes: “The global response to the health of female sex workers (FSW) has focused principally on HIV, but it is vital to recognise that the disproportionate burden of HIV borne by FSW occurs in tandem with significant unmet SRHR needs. Adolescent FSWs are especially at risk for HIV/STI infections, however, few published studies have compared sexual risk negotiations with FSWs age.”¹¹ Many FSWs face an unmet need for contraception, safe pregnancy and gender-based violence where criminalisation of sex work plays a key contributing factor.¹² UNFPA reports that all countries in the Asia-Pacific criminalise sex work or activities associated with sex work except New Zealand and one Australian state (New South Wales). “Male, female, and transgender sex workers face alarming levels of violence at work, from police and in their homes and neighborhoods.”¹³

According to an International Labour Organisation (ILO) study,¹⁴ sexual harassment at work is a manifestation of unequal power relations in society. It elaborates that, “Men are often placed in more senior and better paid positions than women and as such, women are more likely to be victims of sexual harassment precisely because they lack power, are in more vulnerable and insecure positions, lack self confidence, or have been socialized to suffer in silence.”¹⁵ In recent years, the workspace has extended beyond the traditional concept of a place outside the workers’ home – there are increasing numbers of women working at home, in the fields or on the streets. Many workers also face sexual harassment problems on their way to and from work. The ILO study quotes a female trade union leader from Bangladesh: “Even people unconnected with the workplace behave differently when they know we are garment workers. Even the bus drivers and helpers on the bus treat us condescendingly and harass us sexually.”¹⁶ The garment industry exemplifies the challenges of global manufacturing. Although it provides critical jobs that help women raise their standard of living, the wages are low, the working conditions often unsafe, and the employment contracts are “flexible” to the disadvantage of the worker.¹⁷ Approximately 80% of the world’s garment industry workers are women.¹⁸

More than one fifth of the world’s children are working and most of them reside in poor countries.¹⁹ A triangular relationship exists between child labor, poverty and illiteracy. Not only the lack of accessible, affordable and good quality schooling act as a push factor toward child labor, labor at an early age can also impede a child’s ability to go to school and learn which further perpetuates poverty.²⁰

Globally, people have not benefited equally from economic growth and do not have equal access to decent work. Current growth trajectories are not just unequal but also unsustainable. Moreover, the interdependence between countries that has been created by globalisation means that financial crises can spread quickly and is usually weathered better by richer countries. For poorer nations, the consequences could be devastating, as in the case of Indonesia during the Asian Financial Crisis.²¹ In the race to open up domestic markets in the form of trade liberalisation, countries have gone so far as trading some of its sovereignty for putative economic gains as in the case of the Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement. The gender-differentiated effect of trade liberalisation is widely acknowledged.²² International trade, a dominant force in the global economy, inevitably affect women. And trade liberalisation has a disproportional, negative impact on women. For example, worldwide, the majority of small farmers who are forced to compete with large agribusinesses comprise of women.²³

Employment segregation by gender has also emerged in new industries and occupations as firms move up the value chain. East Asia, for example, has observed a defeminisation of the manufacturing workforce when this occurred. Therefore without concrete steps that actively address inequalities, young women especially are unlikely to be able to fully benefit from the economic growth the region is experiencing.²⁴ In the Asia-Pacific, growth in per capita GDP was interrupted by the economic crisis of 2008-2009. The region made a rapid recovery in 2010, but has since fallen back. The least developed countries (LDCs) in the Asia-Pacific region need to accelerate economic growth to meet the SDG target of a minimum 7% annual per capita economic growth. This was a target the LDCs in the region had achieved before 2007, but from 2007 to 2015 it fell to a maximum rate of 5.4%²⁵ and has averaged 6.1% for the past five years.²⁶ The per capita economic growth in the region’s LDCs, landlocked developing countries and small island developing countries, averaged only 5.1% from 2006 to 2015. Moreover, economic growth has not translated into equally corresponding increases in decent jobs and higher wages for most economies.²⁷ Productivity growth also declined in the aftermath of the 2008 economic and financial crises.²⁸

Economic diversification and decent work are foundations for SDG achievement and prerequisites to reducing poverty and inequality. Young people are among the most vulnerable groups in the labour market; in particular, those who are not employed and who do not have education or training – as well as the large numbers who are involved in informal employment – poorly paid and outside the protection of the law.²⁹ Many young people

choose to migrate in search of better work opportunities. An estimated 100 million people from the Asia Pacific region are working abroad.³⁹ These migrant workers, particularly women in domestic work, face significant risks throughout the migration process. The proportion of adolescent and youth migrants in the total international migrant population is 19% in Asia (on par with Latin America and the Caribbean). In Asia, 46% of all migrants between 10 and 24 years of age are females, whilst in the Pacific there is parity among the proportion of male and female migrants of these ages. Many youth migrants, however, are undocumented and some are trafficked, including for sex work.³¹

The global unemployment rate stood at 5.7% in 2016, with women more likely to be unemployed than men across all age groups. Youth were almost three times as likely as adults to be unemployed, with unemployment rates of 12.8% and 4.4%, respectively, in 2016. Moreover, in more than 76% of countries with data, more than 10% of youth are neither in the educational system nor working. Young women are more likely than young men to fall into that category in almost 70% of countries with data.³²

Meanwhile, Euromonitor³³ predicts that women in the Asia Pacific region will earn 41.2% less than men by 2030, higher than global estimates of 35.7% in the same period.³⁴ According to the Asian Development Bank, a woman in developing Asia is paid only 77% that of her male counterpart, on average.³⁵

In 2015 the vulnerable employment rate³⁶ in the Asia-Pacific region was 54%, or 1 billion workers, where women are more likely than men to be in vulnerable employment. In South Asia, for example, the vulnerable employment rate in 2015 was 79.5% for women and 71.1% for men. In South-East Asia, the rates were 60.1% and 52.8%, respectively.³⁷ Although trade liberalisation has increased employment opportunities for women it has largely been confined to unskilled sectors such as textiles, manufacturing, and hospitality, which have been generally characterised by their inferior working conditions. Trade liberalisation encourages emerging economies to maintain low wages for women to be competitive as “firms can always find another country with a pool of women workers whose bargaining power is weaker.”³⁸ Introducing a national living wage which describes an “income level, needed for a household to afford a minimum acceptable living standard, which includes the ability to participate in society, the opportunity for personal and family development, and freedom from financial stress,”³⁹ may be a potential way to mitigate this.

PROMOTING SUSTAINED, INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH, FULL AND PRODUCTIVE EMPLOYMENT AND DECENT WORK FOR ALL

Action Points

- **Implement** a mechanism/agency to act as a human rights watch/monitor of issues related to work and employment at local and national levels. This could also provide a support system for workers, particularly young people from disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.
- **Introduce** a system that ensures government corporations and private-sector companies advance SDG 8 through the investments they make, the solutions they develop, and the business practices they adopt.
- **Enable** civil society organisations to hold government corporations and private-sector companies accountable for the investments they make, the solutions they develop, and the business practices they adopt by examining such activities through an SDG/youth lens and accessing legal expertise/services when necessary.
- **Promote** development-oriented policies and services that support productive activities, decent job creation, and entrepreneurship for disadvantaged and vulnerable young people – those who dropped out of school and started work too early, never attended school, failed to acquire literacy, or never made it to the workforce – to enter or re-enter the workforce and break out of poverty.
- **Form** multi-stakeholder partnerships where governments, private sector, research institutes and civil society organisations, including youth groups, join forces to tackle the complex challenges related to decent work and economic growth, with a focus on youth.
- **Ensure** that companies address all adverse human rights impacts and social justice issues associated with its operations and value chain, and that they give resources to mitigate adverse human rights impacts or risk, regardless of the potential cost or benefit to the business.⁴⁰
- **Encourage** corporations and companies to identify areas with high likelihood of either negative or positive impacts on the issues that the SDGs represent – giving consideration to both current and likely impacts.
- **Introduce** a mechanism that acknowledges and rewards good practice related to SDG 8, with a focus on youth.
- **Advocate** for government commitments to meet the “leave no one behind” agenda of the SDGs, by prioritising work-related outcomes for marginalised and vulnerable groups including the LGBT community – looking beyond population averages to identify who they are and what they need.

- **Consider** the impact of trade policies on women within the context of current and future trade negotiations and make related policy recommendations/changes.
- **Recognise** that migration is most often linked, directly or indirectly, to the quest for decent work and develop government policies to prevent or address the main concerns of migrant workers.
- **Set up** SRHR information and service centres/networks to meet the specific needs of workers, including migrant workers and sex workers.
- **Promote** the labour rights of sex workers, including thorough occupational health and safety standards. Law enforcement authorities should become partners in ending violence against sex workers and government programmes should invest in communities to promote collectivisation and empower sex workers through legal literacy, access to justice, and psycho-social support.⁴¹
- **Ensure** that the state adopts explicit legislation related to sexual harassment rather than addressing it under other broader statutes such as human rights – and supplement the legislation with guidelines.⁴²
- **Provide** for a wide range of damages, remedies and sanctions that both punish and deter harassing conduct.⁴³
- **Establish** an administrative body or mechanism with resources and competence to handle sexual harassment complaints and promote application of gender equality laws and policies.
- **Ensure** the regular monitoring of the gender pay gap and promote the greater participation of women in collective bargaining to close the pay gap.

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SDG NINE: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation, and foster innovation

Sustainable Development Goal 9 addresses three important aspects of sustainable development: infrastructure, industrialisation and innovation. Infrastructure provides the basic physical facilities essential to business and society; industrialisation drives economic growth and job creation, thereby reducing income inequality; and innovation expands the technological capabilities of industrial sectors and leads to the development of new skills.¹

SDG 9 calls for building resilient and sustainable infrastructure and promotes inclusive and sustainable industrialisation as a core driver for ending poverty and improving living standards. While it seeks to boost industry's share of employment and gross domestic product, SDG 9 calls for industrialisation to simultaneously be pursued in an environmentally sound way.

SDG 9 recognises the importance of technological progress and innovation for finding lasting solutions to social, economic and environmental challenges, such as the creation of new jobs and the promotion of resource and energy efficiency. Appropriate investments in infrastructure and technologies can simultaneously reduce time burdens and drudgery, curb carbon emissions, and create jobs. Sustainable and energy-efficient transport and mobility systems are key elements of a competitive economy.

SDG 9 also seeks to increase access to financial services for small-scale enterprises and to bridge the digital divide by providing universal and affordable access to information and communication technologies.

CHALLENGES RELATED TO INFRASTRUCTURE, INDUSTRIALISATION, AND INNOVATION

Achieving SDG 9 by 2030 will require addressing a range of resource constraints, especially in the context of countries that are developing and those that are least developed. Countries need to strengthen their capabilities and explore new ways of solving development challenges by involving various actors and collaborators, adopting different types of governance and practices, and accessing sources of knowledge and finance.²

Progress on inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and innovation has been uneven. Hundreds of millions of people in the Asia-Pacific region still live without access to basic infrastructure, affecting their connectivity. Gaps are also widening in certain areas, such as manufacturing value-added per capita.³ With the exception of the three largest economies in East Asia, the Asia-Pacific's growth in manufacturing value-added as a proportion of GDP has been stagnant and below the world average. This is despite the fact that between 2000 and 2015, manufacturing as a proportion of value-added grew by 30% in the region compared with only 10% for the world as a whole. This growth, however, is attributed to the rapid industrial growth in China, Japan and the Republic of Korea. The region's share of manufacturing value-added in GDP was below the world average in 2015.⁴

The Asia-Pacific saw a decline in carbon dioxide emissions per unit of GDP by 25% over the last two decades, but, at 390 grammes per unit, the region's emissions still remain higher than the world average of 313 grammes per unit. North and Central Asia had the highest carbon dioxide intensity but also recorded the highest decline from 1990 levels. Least Developed Countries (LDC), on the other hand, have substantially increased their emissions intensity as a result of rising industrialisation.⁵

Innovation plays a key role in driving industrialisation. However, middle-income countries often miss out on the quickest path towards industrialisation as their domestic production and the structure of exports are dominated by raw materials and commodities rather than manufacturers.⁶ This not only impedes the employment prospects of young people living in middle income Asian countries, it could also possibly slow down progress towards achieving education and health targets, as evidence indicates a link between the shift from agriculture to industry results in healthier, and better educated children.⁷

Countries in the region are dependent on investments such as Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to fund Research and Development (R&D) that spur innovation contributing, for example, to the growth of sustainable industries while also driving economic growth, job creation, labour productivity, and resource efficiency. Investments are crucial for a

knowledge-based economy and have a particular significance to youth. In 2013, Asia-Pacific's R&D expenditure was 2% of its GDP; this was higher than the global ratio of 1.7%. Upper Middle-income economies doubled their R&D expenditure share from 0.8% in 2000 to 1.6% in 2013. The share of R&D expenditure to total GDP of the high income economies in the Asia-Pacific region was twice that of upper middle income economies and six times more than that of lower- and lower middle-income economies.⁸

Information and Communication (ICT) infrastructure can significantly affect connectivity, which is particularly relevant to youth populations. In the past few years, mobile cellular signal coverage has widened dramatically. In 2016, 95% of the world's population and 85% of people in LDCs were covered by a mobile-cellular signal.⁹ Between 2001 and 2015, the proportion of the Asia-Pacific population covered by mobile-cellular networks grew from 43% to 97%. However, coverage in terms of newer network technology (3G older, LTE newer) varies across sub-regions, with greater disparity in the newer technologies.¹⁰ Youth who are unable to access newer technologies due to inadequate ICT infrastructure may lose out on the opportunity to access newer services such as mHealth, which uses mobile and wireless technologies to support the achievement of health objectives.¹¹ Health interventions are becoming common, as a method to connect youth to Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) information and services in order to disseminate knowledge and usher behavior change amongst youth in resource poor settings.¹² However, better understanding is needed around challenges in data privacy and phone access among younger¹³ and female adolescents.

The lack of infrastructure for essential services, such as hospitals, across many countries in the region might also negatively impact youth living in those countries. In Pakistan, for example, the total density of hospitals per 100,000 population is only 0.53, this drops to 0.35 per 100,000 population at the district rural level.¹⁴ As many as 13 low- and middle-income countries do not have at least an average of 1 district hospital per 1000,000 inhabitants,¹⁵ which is indeed alarming as the majority of curative health care is organised at hospitals.¹⁶ Education infrastructure investment is another area which will significantly impact the youth. A report by the World Bank found that high-performing education systems in East Asia and the Pacific correlated with spending on both teachers and school infrastructure.¹⁷ Investing in education infrastructure could also potentially increase young people's quality of life through increased future wages.¹⁸

BUILDING RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE, PROMOTING INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE INDUSTRIALISATION AND FOSTERING INNOVATION WITH A FOCUS ON YOUTH

Action Points

- **Consult and engage** a wide range of stakeholders, including youth, minority groups, and rural populations, to ensure that infrastructure prioritisation and development benefits and creates opportunities for all.
- **Promote** research initiatives to drive sustainability and expand the geographic reach of research and development facilities, bringing R&D capabilities to all sections of the population, including youth, minorities, and rural populations.
- **Promote** innovation by giving all stakeholders the opportunity to offer creative solutions to sustainability challenges – recognising the contributions and creativity of people through rewards based system.
- **Establish and promote** sustainability standards and regulations that ensure projects and initiatives are sustainability-based and sustainably managed.
- **Involve** students and youth in entrepreneurship incubators and platforms to push their ideas ahead – including in addressing infrastructural needs and challenges.
- **Set up** think tanks with youth representation to stimulate youth innovation and collaboration with established R&D actors, including universities and business entities.
- **Ensure** that corporations and companies are obligated to create sustainability value through the introduction of new or improved products and processes, and in the diffusion of innovation.
- **Address** inefficient and anti-competitive intellectual property protection laws that limit innovation.
- **Introduce** holistic policies in response to rapid urbanisation, to tap into the potential of cities to stimulate innovation and economic activity, while decreasing local environmental footprints.
- **Revive** industrial policy where necessary to create employment, contributing to the reduction of poverty and inequality.
- **Commit** to extensive promotion and deployment of clean technologies to increase the likelihood of achieving the proposed SDG targets.
- **Ensure** that additional sources of financing are available to step up support for sustainable infrastructure.
- **Form** multi-stakeholder partnerships to design innovative strategies and instruments for an industry based on SDG principles.

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SDG TEN: Reduce inequality within and among countries

The commitment to "leaving no one behind" requires that every individual can participate in social, economic, political, and cultural life with equal rights and enjoy the full range of opportunities stated in the 2030 Agenda. Sustainable Development Goal 10 calls for reducing inequalities based on sex, age, disability, race, class, ethnicity, and religion – both within and among countries. It recognises that inclusion strengthens all dimensions of sustainable development – economic, social, and environmental. The goal also addresses issues related to representation and development assistance.

SDG 10 seeks to progressively achieve and sustain income growth of the poorest 40% of the population at a rate higher than the national average. It promotes appropriate legislation, policies, and action to eliminate discriminatory laws, policies, and practices. It recommends that policies, especially fiscal, wage, and social protection, are adopted to gain greater equality.

SDG 10 also calls for the facilitation of regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies, and the reduction, to less than 3%, of the transaction costs of migrant remittances, and the elimination of remittance corridors with costs higher than 5%.

CHALLENGES RELATED TO REDUCING INEQUALITY AMONGST YOUNG PEOPLE

The subject of inequality appears throughout the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, both directly and indirectly, and has four key aspects – access, gender, opportunity, and outcomes.¹ In the formulation of the goals, equality of opportunity is a critical factor in reducing inequality, which is also linked with issues of access.² The various forms of inequality young people face are compounded to create even greater levels of marginalisation. Inequalities are determined by structural factors as well as policies, and typically cut across economic, social, and political spheres to become mutually reinforcing.³

At the national level, one critical strategy for reducing inequalities amongst young people is to ensure universal access to good quality basic goods, services, and resources: food, housing, basic amenities like water and energy, health services including sexual and reproductive health services, education, and social protection.⁴ Social, economic, or environmental issues are rarely confined to one country or region. Therefore, combating inequalities between countries and world regions is important not only from the standpoint of social justice, but also as a prerequisite to solving the many interconnected and critical global challenges.

Globally, income disparities are on the rise, with the richest 10% earning up to 40% of the total global income, while the poorest 10% earn only between 2% and 7% of the total global income.⁵ Bridging this growing gap is essential to enabling inclusive and sustainable growth. Economic growth in the Asia-Pacific's most densely populated countries has reduced the poverty headcount, but the economic gains have not benefited all sections of the population equally. Income inequality has stayed above the world average and even increased in China, India, Indonesia, and the Philippines, among other countries.⁶ However, over the period of four years between 2011 and 2015, 14 countries in Asia and the Pacific with available data saw the incomes of the poorest 40% of the population grow faster than the incomes of the overall national population. In three of these countries the poorest population experienced the fastest growth – Kazakhstan (8.9%), Cambodia (8.5%), and Nepal (7.5%).⁷

Social protection is central to many of the SDGs, including SDG 10, and has vital implications for the wellbeing of vulnerable groups like youth as it can be effective in tackling disparities in income and access to healthcare and education.⁸ Unfortunately, despite Asia-Pacific's impressive economic growth in recent decades, less than 1% of unemployed persons in the region receive any out-of-work benefits or support to help them retain or find a job. This is in a context where the youth unemployment rate is higher than that of adults.⁹ Moreover, there is concern that SDG 10 does not adequately address economic inequality, which is a particularly pervasive and cross-cutting form of inequality that is a pressing issue in all countries, negatively impacting human rights achievements as well as poverty reduction and growth.¹⁰ The Center for Economic and Social Rights notes that, "The indicators for SDG10 that touch on income focus solely on the bottom end of the spectrum, thereby neglecting to consider high earners and the top wealth brackets. Including the top end of the distribution, which is essential when assessing overall economic inequality given that inequality is by definition relative, and the accumulation of wealth and income at the top has direct impacts on the situation of those at the bottom."¹¹

The Asia-Pacific region has one of the highest shares of out-of-pocket expenditure in the world in terms of healthcare and the largest number of households subsisting at poverty levels unable to access healthcare services, including sexual and reproductive healthcare services. A UNESCAP working paper¹² on the role of social protection in confronting inequalities in the Asia Pacific notes: "Income seems to be a strong factor determining access to reproductive health services. In India, for example, the percentage of births attended by skilled

personnel increases almost proportionally with income." The paper also notes that there are socio-cultural barriers to people's use of healthcare services—particularly related to sexual health and reproduction.¹³ Young women and girls face additional barriers in accessing sexual and reproductive health services as they are sometimes only made available for married women due to cultural and religious perceptions of sex before marriage.¹⁴

The region has a high share of people in low-productivity jobs, often characterised by low wages, limited job security, hazardous working conditions, and minimal or no social protection against risks such as unemployment, workplace injury, sickness and disability. In this respect, the situation is quantitatively worse for youth, particularly for young women, because of their disproportionately higher shares in vulnerable employment. In India, for example, approximately 85% of youth work in the informal sector, compared to around 55% of adults. A common consequence of the lack of social protection for youth – in particular the lack of unemployment benefits and employment support through active labour market programmes – is acceptance of job offers in the informal sector. Many youth thus end up being underemployed and classified as working poor.¹⁵

Despite the growing number of youth affected by international migration, adolescent and youth migration has received little attention in social protection and migration policies and frameworks. Moreover, the benefits of remittances from international migrant workers are reduced somewhat by the generally high cost of transfer. On average, post offices and money transfer operators charge over 6% of the amount remitted; commercial banks charge 11%. Both are significantly above the 3% target set by SDG 10.¹⁶

For women and girls, gender inequalities have consequences for income as well as other basics of well-being, such as health and education. Intersections with other types of discrimination, such as those related to age, sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity, migration, economic status, multiply the burden of inequalities. Adolescent girls and young women are particularly vulnerable to physical violence, sexual violence and harmful practices. The violence is a violation of fundamental human rights; of personal integrity; of physical, sexual and emotional development.¹⁷

The criminalisation of people on the basis of their sexual orientation entrenches the associated stigma and discrimination. The LGBTI community seeks recognition as equal citizens and decriminalisation of their identity; but

progress in this area in the Asia Pacific has been slow and mixed. For example, the report of the Regional Dialogue on LGBTI Human Rights and Health in Asia and the Pacific stated that, “Court decisions in India and Nepal have been important for advancing transgender rights. In Nepal, the Supreme Court ordered the government to give transgender people citizenship as equals, but the order has not yet been implemented. In India the lengthy campaign to decriminalize homosexuality was set back by the Supreme Court in 2013.”¹⁸ Meanwhile, in the same year, Fiji’s constitution chose to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

Inequalities have historical roots but tend to persist even after the structural conditions that created them change. For example, some ethnic groups continue to experience disadvantages in countries that no longer impose formal barriers to their participation. The prejudicial treatment of people on the basis of their identity or their characteristics is a common cause of exclusion. Even where discriminatory laws have been eliminated, discriminatory practices continue to underpin group-based differences.¹⁹ The principle of non-discrimination and the right to be equal before the law requires that the state not only prevent people from discrimination from state agents but also from private entities.²⁰

Progress in reducing inequality between countries, especially across the Global South and Global North divide, has been mixed: “80% of the world’s population living in developing countries has access to less than 20% of the world’s resources, while 20% of the world’s population in the developed world has access to more than 80% of the world’s resources.”²¹ The voices of developing countries still need to be strengthened in decision-making forums of international economic and financial institutions. The International Monetary Fund, through its recent quota reform, has increased the share of developing countries’ vote to 37% in 2016, up from 33% in 2010. That increase is still short of the 74% they represent in the membership. While the World Bank reforms of 2010 are still being implemented, that effort has not changed the 38% share of voting rights at the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development that developing countries have held since 2000.²²

ADDRESSING CHALLENGES RELATED TO REDUCING INEQUALITY AMONGST YOUNG PEOPLE

Action Points

- **Ensure** that social protection programmes consider the effects of inequality on young people and plan for them in relation to the broad spectrum of their needs, including introducing social protection methods that facilitate young people’s transition to the labour market – and mobility within it.
- **Conduct** advocacy campaigns to remove socio-cultural and institutional barriers that prevent marginalised young people from taking action to improve their well-being and expand their choices.
- **Create** an inclusive institutional environment that ensures recognition and respect for equality and diversity, and strengthen formal mechanisms that challenge values, attitudes and practices that underpin discrimination and exclusion.
- **Seek** renewed commitment from governments and institutions to act strongly against racism, xenophobia, sexism, and homophobia that perpetuate structural injustice, discrimination and exclusion, including identifying how young people are affected, creating awareness on the same and including young people in related actions.
- **Conduct** formal guidance and training, which includes components of youth effects and youth engagements, to tackle discriminatory beliefs and change mindsets of those in powerful and influential positions, such as government officials, medical doctors, health professionals and law-enforcement officers, including members of the judiciary.
- **Implement** public media and communications campaigns as well as civic education focused on tolerance, respect and rights, combined with campaigns for legal reform or better enforcement of existing laws and regulations, to confront discrimination, including that faced by young people.
- **Organise** projects that support social, economic and political inclusion of minority and under-served groups at local and national levels, that involve youth engagement and tackling youth marginalisation.
- **Underscore** the role and responsibility of the private sector in countering inequality through changes in internal policies and procedures to bring about equal and diverse workforces.²³
- **Create** productive capacity and infrastructure that results in more diversified economies, particularly in reducing the overdependence on single commodities and attaining some level of progress in more complex industrial activities.²⁴

- **Create** alternative institutions and rules to offer some level of protection against financial shocks to ensure better regional stability. To achieve this, capacity building of existing financial institutions is necessary along with creating a space for economic cooperation.²⁵
- **Reorient** monetary and financial policies to encourage greater inclusion of those excluded and provide financial security and possibilities for stable intermediation between savings and investment.²⁶
- **Emphasise** macroeconomic policies for increasing regular good quality work that is covered by basic labour protection, since levels and patterns of employment and wages are significant in determining degrees of inequality.²⁷
- **Address** inequalities between countries, which accounts for the dominant part of global economic inequality, through economic diversification, improving aggregate productivity, and enabling the shift of workers to less fragile and better remunerated activities with safe and healthy working conditions.²⁸

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SDG ELEVEN: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable

Cities offer opportunities for growth through efficient economies of scale and agglomeration – improving access to goods and services, knowledge and skills – and enabling greater productivity and generation of income. In the global political economy, cities are considered nodes of growth and hubs of enterprise that turn challenges into opportunities for people to advance both economically and socially. However, there are a range of challenges: congestion and pollution, high poverty levels and unsafe living conditions, unsustainable use of energy, inadequate basic services like sanitation and waste disposal, inequity and segregation.

Sustainable Development Goal 11 seeks to enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanisation and capacity for participatory, integrated, and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries by 2030.¹ It also aims to substantially increase the number of cities and human settlements adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans towards resource efficiency, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and resilience to disasters.²

CHALLENGES RELATED TO CITIES AND HUMAN SETTLEMENTS

The turn of the century saw the world's urban population outnumbering their rural counterparts for the first time in history. By 2015, nearly 4 billion people – 54% of the world's population – lived in cities. The number is projected to reach 5 billion by 2030,³ with six in ten people living in urban areas.⁴

Economic successes in recent decades have raised millions of people in the Asia-Pacific region out of poverty and created a rapidly-growing urban middle class – but the impressive urban structures mask serious vulnerabilities and inequalities. Urban planning does not generally take complexity, diversity, and heterogeneity into account – with particular consequences for young people.

The Asia-Pacific region is home to some of the world's most polluted and unhealthy cities, the world's largest urban slum populations, and the largest concentrations of people living below the poverty line. Adequate shelter, safe neighbourhoods, clean water and sanitation, healthcare, transport and access to modern energy systems, or even a legally defined address,

are rights still not shared by all.⁵ Moreover, cities in the region are among the most vulnerable to natural disasters and the projected impacts of climate change. Almost three-quarters of the worldwide fatalities of disasters between 1970 and 2011 occurred in the Asia Pacific. Consequently, there is an urgent need to address the resilience of the region's cities.⁶

The lack of resources and opportunities in rural areas and smaller cities, result in youth migrating to large urban centres – to improve their lives through education or employment. However, urbanisation is largely unplanned and brings with it serious challenges.⁷ Youth employment in the city, for example, particularly in the informal sector, is frequently characterised by poor remuneration, and unsafe conditions.⁸ Yet, urban centres continually and increasingly attract women because they offer more economic opportunities than rural areas. This is reflected in the proportion of women, including younger women, living in urban areas steadily rising in most parts of the world.⁹

Nearly 90% of the increase in the world's urban population will take place in Africa and Asia.¹⁰ All Asia and Pacific sub-regions are experiencing urban growth at higher rates than overall population growth.¹¹ This urban growth, however, has been accompanied by the urbanisation of poverty, with the situation of poor people in cities often worse than in rural areas. As cities develop, dramatic increases in property prices are commonplace – often displacing poorer city-dwellers who can no longer afford to live in the area. This displacement of people usually occurs through the gentrification of their neighbourhoods. Poor people are also evicted from their homes in the name of development – with children and young people most affected, as such moves tend to have a huge disruptive influence on their education.

Although rural-urban migration has been a key factor in urban growth in previous decades, it now accounts for roughly a third of urban growth in the region, with natural population increase and redefining of “urban” areas accounting for the balance growth.¹² The resident populations of cities in Asia are not only growing but are, significantly, becoming younger. Phnom Penh, for example, is a growing city, with its population doubling from 1998 and 2008 – with the proportion of people in their 20s increasing from 17% to 30%.¹³ Cambodia's census of 2018 is expected to show an even higher percentage of youth

in the city. Data from Indonesia and many other countries also indicate high youth populations in urban areas.¹⁴ It is crucial, therefore, that urban planning pays particular attention to the needs of young people.

Urban space is being increasingly subject to rules of entry and use, reflecting the growing private ownership of public space and the role of the state in maintaining a particular urban order. This has serious implications for young people, especially the poor, who do not have the economic and social resources to either establish the right to occupy the spaces or to access alternative spaces for relaxation, recreation or socialisation – and maintain their mental and physical wellbeing. This situation, in turn, could have an impact on the (already antagonistic) relationship poor urban youth have with law enforcement officers.

Indeed, fear or anxiety is a common reality of city life for many. For women, youth, and children (especially girls) across the world, it is a daily experience. The predominant threat for girls is sexual violence and harassment, which they experience on public transportation, work or school, on streets, and in other public places.¹⁵ Young women are beginning to reclaim these public spaces through initiative such as the “Why Loiter” campaign in South Asia, which aims to increase awareness around safety, assert women’s right to enjoy these spaces, and address social cultural barriers that prevent women from doing so.¹⁶ Another includes the Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces initiative which has galvanised countries to transform public spaces to safe areas for women in their cities. Some governments have taken proactive steps such as making an official commitment toward Women Friendly Cities¹⁸ and the Child Friendly City Initiative¹⁹ with the aim of mainstreaming gender equality and the rights of children in planning and programming processes of local administrators. Young women must also be involved in initiatives such as these to ensure their unique experiences are adequately captured in the process.

More equitable cities have lower degrees not just of poverty but also of ill health, environmental problems, and exposure to various risks, violence, and crime. Equity not only enhances economic efficiency, needed to raise general wellbeing in the city, but it also creates conditions for vulnerable young people to improve their capacities to represent themselves and participate in a more inclusive manner in the city’s cultural and political life.²⁰

MAKING CITIES AND HUMAN SETTLEMENTS INCLUSIVE, SAFE, RESILIENT AND SUSTAINABLE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Action Points

- **Involve** young people in developing effective social protection floors and ensuring affordable housing with safe and secure land titles to address the growing insecurities related to urban slums.
- **Create** the space for young people to participate meaningfully in the institutional processes of municipal and urban development authorities to determine the direction of the city’s development, based on better-informed and more equitable public policies.
- **Engage** young people in the building of inclusive and resilient infrastructure, including the creation of open public spaces.
- **Incorporate** the priority needs and issues of youth in city planning, so that they could gain better access to services, raise living standards, and improve wellbeing.
- **Promote** age- and gender-responsive budgeting for youth-led urban initiatives and to build medium- to long-term administrative and technical capacity.
- **Institutionalise** active youth engagement in democratic, transparent, and result-oriented urban decision-making at all levels, especially for the most vulnerable and marginalised youth.
- **Focus** on increasing safety among women, youth, and children by introducing measures to prevent and reduce violence, including sexual harassment.
- **Provide** young people universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare that are affordable, accessible, and free from judgement, and ensure that young pregnant women have the ante-natal care they need.
- **Take** the informal sector into account as a positive resource for cities. Value and use the knowledge, skills, experience, and creativity of young people, to achieve sustainable city development in innovative ways.
- **Improve and expand** protection for children and young people through the development of safe zones with access to basic facilities in cases of disaster or internal conflict.
- **Ensure** the implementation of Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP), which are crucial actions to respond to sexual and reproductive health needs at the onset of every humanitarian crisis.
- **Integrate and train** young people in the implementation of MISP in crises situations.
- **Adopt** specific recommendations from the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction taking into account that children and youth are agents of change and should be given the space and modalities to contribute to disaster risk

reduction, in accordance with legislation, national practice and educational curricula.

- **Foster** the potential of youth and their engagement at all levels of governance to counter and prevent radical polarisation, violence, and extremism, and to maintain peace and resolve conflict.
- **Ensure** the access of young people, particularly the more vulnerable living in urban slums, to resources such as educational and employment opportunities, housing, and medical care.

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SDG TWELVE:

Ensure sustainable consumption and production (SCP) patterns

Consumption is a key defining characteristic of contemporary society. Ensuring that sustainable production and consumption patterns enable both efficient resource use and reduce the impact of economic activities on the environment is an alternative to global consumerism and mainstream lifestyles. This is a necessary goal considering the current trends of global consumption.

Sustainable growth also requires the minimising of toxic materials used, and the waste and pollutants generated, throughout production and consumption processes. Sustainable Development Goal 12 encourages more sustainable consumption and production (SCP) patterns through various measures, including policies and international agreements on the management of materials that can cause harm to the environment.¹

Sustainable production calls for fewer resources for the same value of economic output, and sustainable consumption reduces the need for resource extraction. Changing the way we produce and consume goods can increase gains from economic activities by reducing resource use, degradation, and pollution. SCP, by definition, calls for conserving resources so that today’s children and youth – and future generations – are not deprived of them.³

Too often, resource depletion and environmental stress arise from disparities in economic and political power. Sustainable development involves more than growth; it requires a change in the content of growth, to make it less material- and energy-intensive, less profit-oriented – and more equitable.⁴

CHALLENGES RELATED TO SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

Consumption and production patterns shape resource use management and related social and environmental impacts, thereby affecting sustainability. Global figures point to worrying and worsening trends: domestic material consumption (the total amount of natural resources used in economic processes) increased from 1.2 kg to 1.3 kg per unit of GDP from 2000 to 2010.⁵ Total domestic material consumption also rose during the same period – from 48.7 billion tonnes to 71.0 billion tonnes. The increase is due to rising natural resource use worldwide, in particular in Eastern Asia.⁶ During this century the material footprint, which measures the amount of raw material extracted to meet consumption demand, increased globally. The material footprint of people increased from 48.5 billion metric tonnes in 2000 to 69.3 billion metric tonnes in 2010. Per capita, it increased from 8 metric tonnes per person to 10 metric tonnes per person over the same period.⁷

Asia and the Pacific – with two-thirds of the world's population – has considerable influence over shaping global consumption and production patterns. In 2010, the region produced about 10 tonnes of materials for every person, comparable to the world average. Between 2005 and 2015, this average increased across the region by 54% – mostly in upper middle-income economies, which used six times more materials per person than low-income economies.⁸

Shifting towards a green economy that is resource efficient, socially just, and is within the limits of a sustainable ecosystem requires the capacity to make conscious, pro-sustainable choices. Making these changes for young people call for development of new values, competencies and knowledge embedded in education for sustainable development (ESD).⁹ However, shifting toward sustainable consumption patterns go beyond making eco-friendly choices at the individual level. The “desires” of consumers are shaped by factors such as the structure of the neo-liberal market system, technological change, consumeristic advertising, and the physical environment, which go beyond the ability of the individual consumer to change and requires changes in industrial, production and commercial practices.¹⁰

Significantly, Asia and the Pacific is home to 60% of the global population aged 15 to 24 years. While some youth live in both rural and urban areas with limited education and employment opportunities, others live in areas with world-class education and labour market facilities.¹¹ However, both urban and rural youth are negatively impacted by large corporations who

monopolise certain sectors – using their power to raise product/service prices, limit choices for consumers, suppress the wages for workers, and prevent competition and innovation. In parallel, increasing incomes and urbanisation is reshaping consumption, which is more and more driven by globalising forces – compounded by the relative youth of the population in emerging economies.¹²

Changing global food consumption patterns indicate a shift from more traditional foods to processed foods, which can place increased pressure on natural resources due to the resource-intensive production and transportation requirements of these products. Moreover, the health consequences, particularly for children and youth, are serious: there is a sharp rise in child obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. NCDs are now the major cause of deaths and disease burden in the Asia Pacific region.¹³

SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION: ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Action Points

- **Create** a platform for capacity building and knowledge exchange on sustainable production and consumption, to be targeted for youth, schools, local authorities, and consumer organisations.
- **Ensure** that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness on sustainable consumption and lifestyles, as well as the negative effects of unsustainable consumption and current trends and their effects on the environment.
- **Facilitate** the involvement of youth in decision-making on natural resources and consumption planning. Encourage their participation, individually and collectively, to develop, implement, and participate in a range of environmental initiatives.
- **Link** education authorities to consumer and youth organisations to develop mutual understandings of the problems and imbalances linked to current consumption patterns, to coherently and efficiently address these issues.
- **Empower** young people to participate meaningfully in the development of frameworks that encourage sustainable and healthy life-style decisions.
- **Provide** youth, communicators, teachers, and consumer organisations with the tools needed to efficiently communicate vital information about sustainable production and consumption; counter mass messaging around consumption that expounds that more is better; and demand sustainable products manufactured through sustainable processes.

- **Study and document** the experiences of young people affected by, and working on, matters/issues related to SCP, and leverage this knowledge and expertise to promote youth-led actions and activities.
- **Empower** young women and men to create momentum for local action and innovation to create resilient communities. Activities could include youth-led social enterprises, action research on SCP, and focused activism to influence positive change.
- **Develop** tools to monitor the impacts of sustainable development as well as unsustainable production and consumption practices on a local level. Enable youth groups to play a key role in the monitoring process.

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SDG THIRTEEN:

Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Climate change is considered one of the greatest threats to human life and development. Greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise, and are now more than 50% higher than the levels recorded in 1990.¹ Global warming is causing long-term changes to the world’s climate system, with irreversible global consequence.² The impact of climate change is experienced by everyone. However, it is most damaging for people who are least able to adapt – the poor, the young, the aged, and the disabled as they do not have the resources and capacities to effectively prepare for or respond to the threats and consequences of climate change.

The considerable impacts of climate change include rising temperatures, changing weather patterns, extreme weather events, rising sea levels, and desertification. Prolonged and frequent heat waves, heavy precipitation, and cyclonic events place overwhelming burdens on populations living in coastal and drought-prone or flood-prone areas, which are often heavily impacted by disasters related to climate change. Women and children bear the brunt of climate change. The greater vulnerability of women, including younger women, can be attributed to gender inequality i.e. the lack of autonomy and

decision-making power which has a bearing on how they are able to withstand the impact of a climatic event and adequately mitigate its effects.³

Significantly, Sustainable Development Goal 13 promotes mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management with a focus on women, youth, and local and marginalised communities. SDG 13 calls for urgent action not only to combat climate change and its impacts, but also to build resilience in responding to climate-related hazards and natural disasters.

CHALLENGES RELATED TO COMBATING CLIMATE CHANGE AND BUILDING RESILIENCE AMONG YOUTH

According to the United Nations, approximately 60% of all countries affected by extreme weather events in the past two decades are in the Asia-Pacific, accounting for huge human and economic costs.⁴ A 2015 study focusing on youth and SDGs in the region states, “Climate change, such as rising

sea levels, is exacerbating existing social and economic inequalities within and between countries, directly affecting the lives and opportunities of youth, as well as placing greater strains on water sources, agricultural land, coastal areas and marine ecosystems. Climate change has also been attributed as the cause for rising incidence of certain tropical diseases, for instance, between 2000 and 2012, deaths resulting from dengue fever for those aged 15–29 increased by 150% in the Western Pacific.”⁵

Asia’s greenhouse gas emissions are rising, which is not only contributing to global warming, but also immediately impacting the region’s own local populations in the form of hazardous levels of air pollution.⁶ Poor air quality is already having a serious impact on people living in cities like Bangkok, Beijing, Delhi, Karachi, and Patna. Every year in the last decade, there have been 3.3 million deaths on average from the effects of outdoor air pollution – more fatalities than from HIV and malaria combined.⁷ The top four countries in which these outdoor air-pollution deaths occur are in Asia: the People’s Republic of China (PRC), India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.⁸

The impacts of climate change make it even more difficult for people to lift themselves out of poverty either because their livelihoods have been destroyed or undermined, or because new vulnerabilities have been created through ill health or loss of assets. Poor people, especially, are forced to sell tangible assets to cope with climate related devastation, which in turn leads to less investment in non-tangible assets such as health, nutrition, and education, thereby possibly leading to long-term poverty.⁹ The disruption to the education of children and young people will have both short-term and long-term impacts on their wellbeing and growth.

Youth in rural areas depend largely on agriculture for livelihoods but are forced to migrate to urban areas due to agriculture’s vulnerability to climate change. This, in fact, is a climate change adaptation mechanism adopted by large numbers of young people.¹⁰ The Global Migration Group notes¹¹ that “Climate change has the potential to uproot large numbers of people. In many cases these movements will represent part of a positive adaptation strategy for families seeking improved livelihoods and habitat. In other cases it will take the form of displacement resulting from acute natural hazards or competition-related conflict, while in still others people will be relocated from areas that are no longer able to sustain human life. Often the most willing to take risks to better themselves, youth are likely to be at the vanguard of those migrating in anticipation of further environmental decline in their communities. While much of this migration is

likely to be internal, from rural to urban areas, an unknown – but likely significant – portion of young people will migrate internationally. The impacts on youth and the communities to which they migrate will vary significantly depending on the circumstances in which these movements take place.”

Adapting to climate change is about reducing vulnerability to the current and projected climate events, which is determined largely by people’s adaptive capacity. Climate hazards do not affect all people within a community or even the same household equally because some people have greater capacity than others to manage crises or prevent the effects of climatic events. The inequitable distribution of rights, resources, power and norms constrains many people’s ability to take action on climate change. This is especially true for women, young people (particularly girls, who tend to be more disadvantaged and disempowered) and other vulnerable groups. Gender and intersectionality are a critical factor in understanding vulnerability to climate change.¹²

The effects of both climate change and large youth cohorts have the potential to shape the securities environment including state capacities, economic growth and inequality.¹³ Larger youth cohorts have the capacity to boost economic growth under the right conditions. However, they can also agitate, sometimes violently, for political change if their economic needs are not met.¹⁴ Although neither youthful demographic profiles, nor climate change alone can guarantee whether violence will occur, they could multiply security risks in regions already vulnerable to poor governance with social and political instability.¹⁵ Therefore, in the context of climate change, addressing sustainable economic growth and inequality including investing in education, secure employment and representation in government, is essential in realising the needs of the marginalised youth and ensuring the peace and stability of the region.¹⁶

ARROW’s 2017 study titled “Sex, Rights, Gender in the Age of Climate Change”¹⁷ notes that, “When climate extreme events happen...the increasing workload in the household and economic hardship experienced by the family cause parents to withdraw their daughters from schools so that they could either help out at home or in the farm, or find a job to supplement the household’s income. This in turn limits their future prospects and hinders their empowerment, including learning to take care of their health and hygiene.”¹⁸ The study emphasises that access to education, even in emergency situations, is essential for girls because, without it, they will not have the information and knowledge necessary to make crucial decisions and exercise autonomy and agency, including

their ability to gain their sexual and reproductive rights through comprehensive sexuality education (CSE). This point is further reinforced and extended in an “Advocates for Youth” brief¹⁹ on sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and youth in the context of climate change: “As the largest generation of young people in history is entering their reproductive age, they must be provided with the means to be able to make informed choices regarding their health. Access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services is fundamental to increasing coping capacity and resilience in areas that are vulnerable to climate change.”²⁰

It is crucial to note that climate change related crisis is not a gender-neutral phenomenon and that young women and girls face the double discrimination of age and sex.²¹ Amongst adolescents in crisis situations, very young adolescent girls are particularly at risk of sexual exploitation and abuse due to their dependence, lack of power and their lack of participation in decision-making processes.²² Pregnant adolescents are also particularly vulnerable during crises due to their increased risk of obstructed labor where delays in treatment can lead to obstetric fistula or uterine rupture, hemorrhage and death.²³ Entrenched gender inequalities can be exacerbated by climate related crises and put adolescents and young women at added risk towards early marriage, discrimination, violence and abuse. In addition, most disasters place an undue burden on women and girls who are responsible for unpaid work such as providing care, water and food for households. Furthermore, humanitarian responses to climate change do not often include gendered responsive solutions that are, for example, better able to address the sexual and reproductive health needs of girls and women,²⁴ which reduces their effectiveness and long term impact.

While there is some recognition that climate change, human rights and gender equality are linked, it does not translate into gender sensitive policies and programmes. Moreover, the linkages to impact on young people are less available. Evidence and research to clearly establish this linkage is essential in order to provide a more nuanced understanding of the particular vulnerabilities and specific consequences for girls and women affected by climate change.²⁵

COMBATING CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS IMPACTS FOR THE BENEFIT OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Action Points

- **Conduct** research that analyses how females and males of different ages are affected by climate change in order to develop more effective adaptation response mechanisms. As part of this, key questions have to be considered including, what are their vulnerabilities, how can they be involved and what are their capacities to withstand the impact of climate change? These efforts must ensure the availability and analysis of disaggregated data, including by sex and age amongst other parameters, including land ownership, employment, heads of household, health, and access to natural resources and information.
- **Present** an intersectional analysis that elaborates on the specific impact that climate change has on the health of young people, particularly girls, including their sexual and reproductive health across the life-cycle in order to examine and elaborate on the effects on younger women and girls.
- **Present** an analysis on the systemic barriers to achieving the broad range of rights for young people, and how climate change effects could intensify these barriers and further ingrain inequalities.
- **Take stock** of what countries are doing on national adaptation plans (NAPs) with a particular focus on youth, establish a forum where lessons learned and experiences can be exchanged, and identify where additional support is required.
- **Advocate** for and implement girls’ and women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), to be placed as one of the top priorities when addressing climate change, in order to build more climate resilient communities.²⁶
- **Create** awareness among the public and local authorities on the importance of strengthening access, availability and affordability of healthcare services, including on SRHR, for girls and women, particularly to those who are most vulnerable, during non-disaster times as well as in preparation for, during, and after climate extreme events
- **Make** healthcare providers gender sensitive so that female survivors feel comfortable in seeking health services. Menstrual hygiene supplies should be included as part of the Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP).²⁸
- **Integrate** youth and gender sensitive climate change intervention strategies into National Climate Change Policy to reduce the existing gender inequality and vulnerabilities related to women’s health, including SRHR, during climate extreme events.²⁹
- **Commence** climate change and SRHR discourse at international, national and district/local levels and generate awareness among girls and women of their rights and how climate change poses barriers to exercising those rights. This will also facilitate formal and informal leadership and participation of women or women’s groups in policy discussions related to climate change.³⁰

- **Conduct** research that analyses how females and males of different ages are affected by climate change in order to

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SDG FOURTEEN: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development

Oceans cover almost three quarters of the planet, helping regulate the global ecosystem by absorbing heat and carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Over three billion people depend on marine and coastal biodiversity for their livelihood and nutrition. However, the oceans are facing greater pressures today than before. The world's fish stocks are overexploited and the yields are no longer sustainable. Marine pollution, an overwhelming majority of which comes from land-based sources such as agricultural and industrial runoff and plastic debris, is reaching alarming levels. Oceans also absorb about 30% of the carbon dioxide produced by humans, resulting in its rapid acidification. How this resource is managed is vital for the world's population as a whole.¹

If fisheries are not managed sustainably and are overfished, food production declines, the functioning of ecosystems is impaired, and biodiversity is compromised.² SDG 14 seeks to sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems, by strengthening their resilience and taking action for their restoration. One of SDG 14's key targets is to effectively regulate harvesting, end, illegal, unreported, and destructive fishing practices and implement science-based management plans. This is to restore fish stocks in the shortest

time feasible, at minimum to levels of fish, which can produce a maximum sustainable yield as determined by their biological characteristics. It also aims to increase the economic benefits from sustainable use of marine resources to small island developing states and Least Developed Countries (LDC).

CHALLENGES RELATED TO THE SUSTAINABLE USE OF OCEANS

The proportion of marine fish stocks worldwide that have been overfished, are at biologically unsustainable levels that have increased from 10% in 1974 to 31% in 2013. In 2012, Asian countries were responsible for 50% of the world's total marine capture. During the period between 2003 and 2012, the largest increases were observed for Myanmar (127%) and Vietnam (121%). For some Pacific Island states fisheries account for an increasing proportion of export income. Between the periods 2000-2004 and 2009-2013, export income for Tuvalu and Kiribati saw ten-fold and eight-fold increases, respectively.³

Regulating fishing areas nationally, regionally, and internationally have been difficult due to lack of resources and ability to track activity. Most areas in the world lack oversight over their fishing industry and practices, with activities of fishing fleets barely monitored. Exacerbating the problem, in general, is a global lack of knowledge regarding fish populations and quotas, where fishing fleets are able to bypass regulated international waters due to lack of universal standards.

Ocean ecosystems are increasingly being contaminated with plastic debris and micro plastics. The world's top five countries accounting for more than 50% of 'mismanaged' plastics in the oceans are from Asia and the Pacific: China, Indonesia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam. The most threatened coral reef area of the world is also located in the Asia-Pacific region. Coral reefs support not only local fisheries and tourism, but also global marine biodiversity.⁴ A 2016 study published in the scientific journal PLOS, notes that "In many countries, the loss of coral reefs would amount to an economic disaster, depriving fishermen of their main source of income and forcing people to find more expensive forms of protein. In addition, many countries depend on coral reefs as a key barrier to guard against incoming storms and mitigate the damage done by surging seas."⁶ The scientists found that countries in Southeast Asia such as Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines would bear the brunt of the damage.

The small island developing states in the Pacific supply one third of the world's tuna with a first-sale value of over \$4 billion; coral reef-related fisheries in Indonesia and the Philippines alone are valued at around \$2.2 billion per year and reef-based tourism is valued at another \$258 million annually.⁷ These valuable ecosystems, however, are increasingly under threat due to climate change, ocean pollution and unregulated fishing. The damage on ecosystem undermines the enterprises and livelihoods that depend on ocean resources and increase the vulnerability of coastal communities to disasters. For example; an estimated 60% of mangrove forests, which constitute the first level of defence against coastal hazards, have been cleared. Studies show that areas with degraded mangrove forests are more vulnerable to hazards such as erosion and have more difficulty recovering from disasters. Due to this, increasing economic returns and ensuring sustainable management of fisheries, as well as strengthening maritime surveillance and enforcement, have been identified as priorities for the region.⁸

In 2011, 61% of coral reef areas globally were moderately or highly threatened by "integrated local threats" – namely coastal development, watershed-based pollution, marine-based pollution and damage, overfishing and destructive fishing. Around 38% of

reefs are exposed to severe thermal stress, including warming sea temperatures, which can induce widespread coral bleaching. This results in changes in coral community composition and the species that depend on them – and a decline in species diversity. Bleached corals are likely to have reduced growth rates, decreased reproductive capacity, increased susceptibility to diseases and elevated mortality rates.⁹ Much of Australia's Great Barrier Reef is under threat. The South-East Asia sub region has the lowest thermal stress but the highest risk of integrated local threats. The Indian Ocean and the Middle East are above the global average for both, thermal stress and local threats such as overfishing, marine based pollution and coastal development, which will have severe implications on marine ecosystem.¹⁰ This will have severe implications for young people, particularly those living in coastal areas, whose lives and livelihoods are inextricably linked with the health of marine ecosystem. This means that food security challenges will be coupled with, and exacerbated by, livelihood issues – for both men and women.

Both men and women are involved in fisheries, but often in different roles and activities, and their involvement in the sector is cross-generational. The role of women in fisheries – mainly in post-harvest and marketing activities – has long been overlooked, underestimated, or not enumerated. Thus, an analysis of impending and intensifying livelihood insecurity of coastal populations demands that women's involvement in fisheries is examined – and taken into account. For young people in particular, decreasing opportunities in the fisheries sector will result in higher numbers wanting to migrate in search of work – posing a new set of risks with serious economic, social and health implications.

Action Points

- **Ensure** that more research is carried out on changing coastal ecosystems with a focus on youth, disaggregated by gender, and use the findings to inform policy.
- **Ensure** that governments introduce policies and laws to conserve ocean resources and monitor their implementation including those that take into consideration the effects on diverse populations. This could include "coopting" the tourism, shipping, and large-scale fisheries industries to invest in ocean conservation.
- **Initiate** programmes that will inspire more young people and women from the Asia-Pacific region to become active marine specialists with expertise in integrated ocean management planning.
- **Form** youth partnerships that use technology and social media to connect people with the oceans and help activists share ideas and coordinate action.

- **Introduce or strengthen** marine conservation studies in secondary schools and universities, with educational components on the value of the marine ecosystems brought into educational institutions.
- **Designate** more protected areas in the ocean to help reduce the effects of overfishing and coastal mismanagement.
- **Hold** governments, corporations and companies accountable for the plastic pollution crisis and end the use of destructive single-use plastics and packaging. In addition, create greater awareness of options to reduce single-use plastic, with young men and women given the opportunity to initiate and coordinate such efforts.
- **Empower** youth in coastal areas to take an active role in coastal and marine conservation through the formation of stakeholder partnerships that give youth the main responsibility and authority for holding government, the private sector and the public accountable. Ensure the allocation of government and private sector finances for this purpose.
- **Recognise** and support leadership participation of young people in marine conservation and Blue Planning i.e. ecosystem-based marine and coastal planning and management to increase their capacity and decision making roles toward sustainable use of oceans.
- **Build** public-private-community partnerships, with youth as a key target population, to make an economic and social case for the establishment and effective management of Marine Protection Areas (MPAs) as a long-term risk management strategy.

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SDG FIFTEEN: Protect, restore and promote the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

Many of the critical issues related to the world's survival – uneven development, unchecked industrialisation, economic growth, and income inequalities amongst others – are placing unprecedented pressure on land, water, forests, and other natural resources on the planet. The land degradation and resource depletion that results, also worsens poverty, affecting the most marginalised and vulnerable, including women and young people. Moreover, poverty and environmental degradation is a waste of potential and of resources – including human resources.¹

SDG 15 emphasises the need for growth that is socially and environmentally sustainable. Preserving diverse forms of life on land requires targeted efforts to protect, restore, and

promote the conservation and sustainable use of terrestrial and other ecosystems. The goal is to ensure that the benefits of land-based ecosystems, including sustainable livelihoods, will be enjoyed for generations to come, and as such young people have the most to lose and the greater stake in ensuring protection of resources.²

SDG 15 requires that countries work to halt and reverse land degradation, restore degraded ecosystems, and sustainably manage resources through a commitment to land degradation neutrality (LDN), which envisions a world where human activity has a neutral, or even positive, impact on the land.³

CHALLENGES RELATED TO PROTECTING LAND ECOSYSTEMS

From 1998 to 2013, about one-fifth of the Earth's land surface covered by vegetation showed persistent and declining trends in productivity due to land and soil degradation. Declining productivity of land has a direct impact on overall wellbeing, on incomes, and food security. These have a direct long-term impacts on hunger and malnutrition and the ability of families, communities, and countries to develop sustainably. Children and young people are particularly at risk. Reversing this trend through sustainable land management is key to improving the lives and livelihoods of more than one billion people currently under threat. Children and youth are key stakeholders in the health of the environment and will bear the consequences of the lack of commitment and inaction.

Progress in conserving and sustainably using the Earth's terrestrial ecosystems has been uneven. The pace of forest loss has slowed and improvements continue to be made in managing forests sustainably and protecting areas important for biodiversity, but land productivity and biodiversity continue to decline.⁵

From 2000 to 2016, 48 out of 57 Asia-Pacific countries experienced a significant loss in biodiversity. Natural forests declined as a share of the total forest area in all Asia-Pacific sub-regions within the tropical zone. Since 1990, natural forests in tropical countries in the zone have decreased by 5% while the area of planted forests has risen by more than 50%. As a result, planted forests have increased from 10% to 15% of total forest areas in these countries. However, the investments made by governments to maintain these forests vary in the quality of protection and the density of species that they protect.⁶

Increasing demand for food is exerting considerable pressure on land in the Asia Pacific, resulting in erosion, salinisation, acidification and pollution.⁷ South East Asia accounts for the world's largest regional increase in human pressure on land, particularly in the region's protected areas, which are affected by agricultural conversion, urban expansion, invasive species and water-related threats.⁸ Land shortage, low levels of production per person, and increasing landlessness lead to non-sustainable land management practices. Farmers living in poverty conditions attempt to survive on a diminishing resource base and are compelled to clear forests, cultivate steep slopes without conservation, overgraze rangelands and make unbalanced fertilizer application.⁹ This results in further environmental degradation – and continuing poverty. The situation in the Asia Pacific is considered to be particularly

grave as most good agricultural land has already been utilised and the region as a whole may already have passed the safe limits for agricultural expansion.¹⁰ In order to meet future climatic, economic and social challenges in agriculture, further research and investment is required for effective ecological intensification through ecosystem services to ensure future land productivity.¹¹

Yet, another crucial concern for SDG 15, which the Asia-Pacific region is witnessing, is growing income inequality – between rural/urban, women/men across ages – with implications for access to land resources, land tenure and land rights including issues around land inheritance and divorce. This in turn has a bearing on how the land is used and managed, who benefits from land resources, who controls land, and who it is passed on to.¹²

Among the most insecure landholdings are lands occupied and used by women, including younger women and women heads-of-household. According to the 2017 publication by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification on Land Rights for Sustainable Life on Land, “Whether involving insecurity for lands that women use, or expropriation from lands due to lack of land rights, or loss of land in matters of inheritance and divorce, the repercussions for food and livelihood security, and hence land degradation are significant. Laws and customs that deny effective land rights and tenure security to women discourage them from investing in sustainable land use practices for lands they do not have the rights to and can easily have expropriated. Economically, studies have shown an increased rate of productive return of lands when women have secure land rights. This is especially important given that globally, more and more women are running agricultural households and managing natural resources.”¹³ Thus, land rights is a key factor for achieving land degradation neutrality and delivering food, water, and livelihoods security for future generations, particularly the poor and those dependent on land resources.

The shift in control over land is being affected by large-scale land acquisitions, also termed land grabbing and identified by some civil society organisations as a violation of human rights because of its negative effects on local communities. It is affecting biodiversity, deforestation, land degradation, the agrarian landscape, and impacting rural populations and their livelihoods. The role of transnational land acquisition adds to the complications and dire consequences to people and has to be factored into attempts to realise this goal and the SDGs in general. The increase in transnational land investments globally, also called the “global land rush,” has been associated

to companies and actors controlling larger extents of land and the shift from small-scale agricultural systems to larger scale commercially oriented models. This shift has meant an increase in the number of actors involved in land and its use, which has moved from including local community-based actors to more global players, including multinational corporations. Those who are affected negatively are those whose wellbeing are directly related to and dependent on the land, such as small-scale farmers, pastoralists, and indigenous people.¹⁴

PROTECTING, RESTORING AND PROMOTING THE SUSTAINABLE USE OF TERRESTRIAL ECOSYSTEMS: ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Action Points¹⁵

- **Facilitate**, through key partnerships, young people's ability to become advocates of a holistic, ecosystems approach to resource management and environmental protection and to lobby governments to integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, and poverty reduction strategies.
- **Ensure** the involvement and representation of young people, including marginalised young people, in environmental and developmental decision-making by linking the relevant ministries and authorities with education institutes, youth groups, and Ministries of Education.
- **Achieve** the cross-fertilisation of youth development and sustainable development policies through the mainstreaming of youth into national sustainable development plans, and the mainstreaming of sustainable development into youth policies.
- **Engage** with young people to support the formulation and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and support campaigns initiated and conducted by young people, including marginalised young people.
- **Prioritise and commit** adequate resources for the implementation of youth-related environmental policies, including youth participation in the development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation stages.
- **Form** partnerships between government, civil society organisations (CSOs), including youth groups and women's groups, NGOs, local communities, and international actors to support land tenure security and LDN.
- **Create** opportunities that would allow CSOs, including youth groups and women's groups, to interact with government about the connection between land rights and land degradation.
- **Explore and consider** the implications for young people and how this trend will affect how young people's, including young women's, engagement with land in related interventions including improving data and analysis on how they are affected.

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SDG SIXTEEN: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

In many countries across the world, people live in fear for their lives and lack confidence in the ability of their governments to ensure their physical security and protect their human rights. At the core of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is the need to promote peaceful and inclusive societies, the rule of law, and effective and accountable institutions. Sustainable Development Goal 16 adopts a rights-based approach – emphasizing that the rule of law, respect for rights, and effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions are essential to delivering the 2030 Agenda. It particularly acknowledges the importance of good governance and peace for the achievement of sustainable development, underscoring the need for responsive, representative, and participatory decision making at all levels. The Agenda recognises the critical need for governments to ensure that their citizens can live safe, healthy, and productive lives.¹

SDG 16 calls on governments to ensure that all people are afforded protection by the state and to develop cultures that do not rely on violence as a method of resolving conflict.² It promotes non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development and seeks to develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions to ensure the rule of law, as well as equal access to justice for all – both nationally and internationally. It also aims to ensure the protection of fundamental rights like public access to information, freedom of speech and expression, and the right to equal justice.

CHALLENGES RELATED TO CREATING PEACE AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Today, 60% of the world's conflicts are located in the Asia-Pacific region, with serious implications for the region's youth.³ Moreover, the feeling of being marginalised from existing structures is becoming more common, increasing the appeal of extreme political or identity-based ideologies, particularly where violence provides a means of being heard.⁴ Engaging youth as active citizens is integral to promoting and preserving peaceful societies since conflicts increasingly tend to be protracted. This requires the dismantling of existing barriers to political participation.⁵

SDG 16 responds to the concern that too many people across the world, particularly minority groups, live in fear for their lives and have varying degrees of confidence in the ability of their governments to keep them safe and ensure their human rights. This is mainly due to the development of a culture that relies on violence as a method of conflict resolution.⁶ Youth are seen as potentially dangerous and policy approaches often regard them as the main protagonists of criminal and political violence. Thus, much of contemporary thinking on youth and conflict tends to be overly negative.⁷ The growing influence of religious extremism, including in political processes, is affecting security and stability of countries in the region. Youth are likely to be affected as their attempts to seek some positive impact in the society through expressing their identity and voices have sometimes precipitated violence.⁸ Young people are also affected by wars perpetrated in the name of religion or in the name of rooting out religious terrorism.⁹

Little effort is being made to provide youth with leadership positions in conflict prevention and peace building efforts. Moreover, increased marginalisation and exclusion of young people is creating conditions for the rise of violent extremism in the region.¹⁰ The substantive political participation of women and youth in the Asia Pacific region continues to be low, compared with other regions. Less than one in five parliamentarians in the region is a woman.¹¹ The proportion of parliamentarians younger than 30 is 1.1% for Asia and 0.6% for the Pacific, both of which are less than the global average of 2.1%.¹² However, data on SDG 16 indicators disaggregated for youth is not widely available, making it difficult to track progress towards the goal.

A range of factors, including ethnicity, age, gender, and occupation, affects how people experience conflict. While women and girls are more likely to be victims of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), it is also prevalent among men, boys and sexual minority groups.¹³ Evidence indicates that conflict affects women, men, girls and boys differently in their experiences of violence, health impacts, economic activity, and political and civic inclusion.¹⁴

Conflicts impact women's rights to expression and choice in their reproductive and sexual lives. An ARROW study¹⁵ on women's sexual and reproductive rights in conflict situations notes the wide prevalence of violent conflict in almost every country in the Asia-Pacific region: "Some are the result of struggles for self-determination and for recognition of rights of minorities, while others are struggles over control of land and natural resources. Many states also confront internal conflicts and communal riots. This situation has intensified the levels of militarisation throughout the region and also sharpened social polarisation." The study also makes the point that patriarchal forms of control that lead to discrimination against women in society at every level are reaffirmed in conflict situations in a manner that makes women's opportunities to exercise choice in matters related to sexuality and fertility almost nonexistent: "When health facilities are destroyed and the social networks that provide some degree of support for women are eroded, this heightens the vulnerability of women affected by conflict to coercion, discrimination and violence."¹⁶

Cilija Harders in her essay titled "Gender Relations, Violence and Conflict Transformation" states that feminists, and gender and peace researchers and activists all over the world have made enormous efforts to publicise and politicise the nexus between gendered injustices and collective and individual violence – challenging and questioning the narrow concepts of war (making) and/or peace (building) by stressing the interconnectedness of different types of violence: "Focusing on the micro-level of personal experience and starting from the so-called private sphere, gender scholars have discussed, for example, the highly ambivalent role of the state as the producer of "public" security and "private" insecurity."¹⁷

Good governance is integral to the creation of peaceful and sustainable societies, and controlling corruption, including creating political will, are all key elements.¹⁸ Corruption results in inefficient and unequal service provision and diverts public funds from those most in need.¹⁹ According to Transparency International (TI), the majority of Asia Pacific countries sit in the bottom half of the Corruption Perceptions Index,²⁰ undermining government's accountability to sustainable development. The poor performance is attributed to "unaccountable governments, lack of oversight, insecurity and shrinking space for civil society, pushing anti-corruption action to the margins in those countries."²¹ It also notes that high-profile corruption scandals, in addition to everyday corruption issues, continue to undermine public trust in government, the benefits of democracy and the rule of law.²² Widespread corruption is one of the factors that may contribute to young people's disengagement in the political process.²³ In Asia,

only 1.1% and 0.3% of the youth under the age of 30 are parliamentarians in lower and single houses; and upper house, respectively.²⁴

Yet another indicator of the government's failure is its inability to enable equal access to justice. Globally, the proportion of people held in detention without being tried or sentenced for a crime has remained almost unchanged – from 32% of total prisoners in 2003-2005 to 31% in 2013-2015 – an indication that no significant progress has been made in the ability of judicial systems to process and try the accused. The highest proportion of un-sentenced detainees remains in Central and Southern Asia, where over 60% of the total prison population is being detained without a trial.²⁵ Although data on youth pre-trial detention in Asia is scarce, available evidence shows that young people are often detained for long periods awaiting trial, which reduces their chance of a fair trial and increases the odds of abuse, violence and recidivism.²⁶

Human trafficking is another global concern with implications for people's security and wellbeing. SDG targets 5.2, 8.7 and 16.2 directly address human trafficking; these targets cut across issues, from poverty, inequality, decent work and corruption to migration, gender, youth, climate and conflict. In South and East Asia and the Pacific, economic forces are driving human trafficking, with 64% of identified victims trafficked into forced labor, servitude and slavery. 83% of the identified victims of trafficking in the region are women or girls, compared to 60% globally. And 40% of the identified victims in South Asia and 30% in East Asia are children.^{27, 28} Moreover, increased marginalisation and exclusion of young people is creating conditions for the rise of violent extremism in the region.²⁹

Birth registration is a first step towards safeguarding individual rights and providing every person with access to justice and social services. SDG 16 recognises that issues around official identity are often at the heart of both a person's actual and potential capacity to engage with governments and a government's ability to effectively plan and budget for basic services. Globally, 2.4 billion people do not possess legal identification documents. For young people, the lack of identity papers can inhibit access to education, employment and welfare.³⁰ Target 16.9 of SDG 16 calls for legal identity for all, including birth registration. This is vital for the 'leave no one behind' agenda as it will provide data that is critical for policy implementation. In countries where there are mechanisms in place to register vital life events, including births, deaths, marriage and migration, birth registration can help address child marriage.³¹ In Asia and the Pacific 135 million children

under the age of five have not had their births registered. Registration rates range from 17% in Solomon Islands to 100% in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Most of the unregistered are in South Asia, mainly in Pakistan with a registration rate of 34%, Bangladesh (37%) and India (72%). The children least likely to be registered are those in poor families, and in rural areas.³²

PROMOTING PEACEFUL AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Action Points

- **Put in place** mechanisms that can facilitate dialogue between various stakeholders including young people and create opportunities for young people to engage in mainstream political and economic processes.
- **Create** space for national civil society organisations to actively engage local and national governments towards the achievement of SDG 16.
- **Strengthen** demand for democratic governance by building capacities and tools of formal and informal institutions in public sphere, including youth groups, to hold the state accountable in ensuring the rights of young people.
- **Prioritise** initiatives to reduce public sector corruption, including bribery.
- **Enable** young people to make informed choices and exercise their voice by systematically expanding education, including rights-based education, and improving access to information and communication technologies.
- **Strengthen** the capacity of national agencies to collect disaggregated data and enhance the coverage, quality, and frequency of data to ensure that the most vulnerable and marginalised people are recognised and reached.
- **Increase** accountability by making information on government budget allocations and donor finance as well as related expenditure transparent and accessible.
- **Localise** SDG 16 and its targets and indicators, and actively engage youth and non-government stakeholders in these processes.
- **Introduce** gender- and age-sensitive initiatives in conflict recovery and peace building efforts.
- **Review, amend, and repeal** all laws and policies that are against the basic principles of democracy and human rights of young people, and promote free, fair, and peaceful elections, free and independent media, freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, transparency, accountability, and access to information.
- **Localise and implement** relevant international instruments on peace and security, such as the Youth Compact, UNSCR 2250 on Youth Peace and Security, and UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and its subsequent resolutions. These instruments should be made binding. They should also be implemented by regional mechanisms, such as regional inter-governmental bodies like ASEAN, SAARC, and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) to improve cross-country relations.

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SDG SEVENTEEN: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development

Achieving the ambitious targets of the 2030 Agenda requires strong global partnerships that bring together governments; civil society, including young women and men; the private sector; the United Nations system; and others. This is reflected in Sustainable Development Goal 17 that seeks to enhance the global partnership for sustainable development, which mobilises and shares knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the SDGs. It also promotes effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships.

Moreover, increasing support to developing countries, in particular the least developed countries (LDCs), has been identified as fundamental to achieving equitable progress for all.¹ A specific target of the goal is to assist developing countries in attaining long-term debt sustainability through coordinated policies aimed at fostering debt financing, debt relief and debt restructuring, and address the external debt of highly indebted poor countries.

SDG 17 also seeks to achieve, by 2020, enhanced capacity building support to developing countries, including for LDCs, to increase the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data, disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.²

CHALLENGES RELATED TO STRENGTHENING IMPLEMENTATION AND YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN PARTNERSHIPS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

If the priority needs of youth are not well recognised and addressed by state policies, programmes, and mechanisms, systemic barriers will ensure that some are left behind – of which many will be girls and young women.³ Achieving transformative change for young people, across and within the countries, calls for effective means of implementation of policies and programmes; revitalised multi-stakeholder global, regional and national partnerships; mobilisation of all available resources, both financial and non-financial; and data monitoring and accountability mechanisms in place at all levels.⁴

Asian and Pacific youth often remain at the margins with regards to participation in the creation of development policies.⁵ Insufficient political will and financial allocations, the lack of communication between the various stakeholders (government, NGOs, private sector, academia), and the lack of reliable data concerning youth are the main factors inhibiting the achievement of youth-related goals.⁶ According to the UNESCAP statistical database, aggregate data from the Asia-Pacific region can be produced for less than 30% of the proposed 232 SDG indicators. Under all the other 16 SDGs, except for indicators on affordable and clean energy (Goal 7), less than 50% of the official indicators can be monitored at the regional level.⁷

The global indicator framework for the SDGs offers the potential to gather more robust information on the situation of youth, which in turn would support better implementation of

the World Programme of Action⁸ through enhanced evidence-based youth policies.⁹ Moreover, the SDGs require youth-related data on a wide array of issues that were not measured with World Programme of Action indicators, such as gender-based violence, gender parity in average hourly earnings, time spent on unpaid domestic and care work and missing persons and trafficking.¹⁰

In Asia and the Pacific, youth policies exist in full or as a draft only in 28 countries.¹¹ According to the United Nations, challenges to the implementation of youth policies include resistance from government entities that do not traditionally engage in youth mainstreaming, and are related to financial resources. For example, currently in the Asia Pacific there is no systematic tracking of Development Assistance Committee (DAC) funding that will enable understanding around resource allocation for girls.¹² This extends to young people in general because DAC funding is tracked by sectors, without data disaggregated by sex and age. This can pose challenges to the creation of effective channels for the participation of youth, in particular vulnerable and marginalised young people. Moreover, in some ministries, including youth ministries, there is inadequate human resources and capacity to address youth issues.¹³

Science, technology and innovation (STI) is pivotal to ensuring that young people realise their full potential. The 2030 Agenda provides a platform for member states to interact and dialogue on technology needs and gaps to facilitate development and the transfer and dissemination of relevant technologies for attaining the SDGs. An innovative economy increasingly depends on access to information and communications technology (ICT). UNESCAP data for 2016 indicates that, over the past decade, in the upper-middle-income economies of the Asia Pacific, the number of internet users as a percentage of the population increased by more than 40 percentage points – above the world average.¹⁴ However, in lower-middle-income economies in the region, the proportion has remained below 26%, and in low-income economies below 13%.¹⁵ A 2017 ARROW study titled “Girls and the Sustainable Development Goals in Selected Countries in the Asia-Pacific Region” points to data gaps in the proportion of people who have internet access, with data disaggregated by age, sex, and background characteristics of wealth, education, and location: “This means that we are not able to properly and precisely gauge which sections of society are able to access the internet.”¹⁶ Globally, the internet user penetration rate for women is estimated to be about 11% lower than for men.¹⁷ Girls continue to face barriers to accessing technology and education due to existing cultural beliefs and stereotypes, which hinders their participation

in technology domains. Tracking of girls’ participation in technology investments is critical, and data in these areas is limited.¹⁸

The UN Secretary General’s 2017 Report on SDG progress points out that, “Despite some positive developments, a stronger commitment to partnership and cooperation is needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. That effort will require coherent policies, an enabling environment for sustainable development at all levels and by all actors, and a reinvigorated Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.”¹⁹ SDGs have opened up space for creative and inventive collaborations to address the needs and aspirations of young people. However, partnerships per se are not necessarily facilitating or empowering. It is important to consider how partnerships can be made more equal; for example, enabling marginalised groups of girls, to negotiate as equal partners at policy tables.²⁰

The Regional Coordination Mechanism – United Nations Development Group Asia-Pacific Thematic Working Group on Youth notes that “Public-private partnerships (PPPs) are particularly important, and, to a large extent, achievement of the SDGs will depend on scaling these up, as well as the acknowledgement that the private sector knows how to make markets work, manage risks, and engender competitiveness and innovation.”²¹ However, an essay titled “Unpacking the Dangerous Illusion of PPS”²² warns decision makers and citizens about the financial and social costs of PPPs and call for assessing the long-term real costs of PPPs in a transparent way. It notes that with PPPs the costs are spread over a long period of time: “This relieves the public treasury and reduces borrowing needs at the outset. However, PPPs may store up borrowing and debt for the future, reducing governments’ fiscal space and their ability to deliver essential services. In addition, PPP projects often create infrastructure or services that come with user fees to generate revenue, which can effectively exclude poorer citizens.”²³ PPPs therefore should not be used to fill the gap in financing development projects as a first resort.

STRENGTHENING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

Action Points²⁴

- **Invest** in capacity building opportunities for young people to better enable and empower them towards effectively contributing to development at the local, national and regional levels.
- **Build** capacities of young people and youth serving organisations to meaningfully engage with national, regional, and global SDG implementation, monitoring and review mechanisms.
- **Make available** timely and reliable data, disaggregated by age, income, gender and other characteristics relevant in national and local contexts, to enable analysis that would feed into national and international strategies prioritising youth.
- **Create** a broader and more inclusive process of technology support and education to catalyse technology innovation.
- **Provide** opportunities for girls to develop solutions that reflect their priorities through inclusive and non-disruptive technology. This also holds true for life-saving technologies for girls and women and finding practical ways to realise the right to health and education to all girls in the region.
- **Ensure** that more STI forums focus on girls. The recent development of mobile applications for comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) and violence against girls and women are examples of technological solutions for girls' empowerment.
- **Make efforts** to improve digital literacy and ICT skill development for girls, as with increased digitisation and automation in jobs, especially in key employment sectors such as transportation, logistics and sales, these are essential requirements for accessing employment opportunities.
- **Invest** in girls' education, training and capacity strengthening to ensure that all girls have the opportunity to reach their full potential. This also calls for capacity strengthening of education sector personnel, especially teachers, on imparting evidence-based education curricula, including CSE.
- **Strengthen** the capacity of health service providers to provide youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services.

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championing
women's sexual and
reproductive rights



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA & YOUNG PEOPLE: Recognising Voices and Claiming Rights

This publication draws from the outcomes of the 2017 Youth Preparatory Forum organised prior to the Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD)

ARROW is a regional and non-profit women's NGO based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and has consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. Since it was established in 1993, it has been working to advance women's health, affirmative sexuality and rights, and to empower women through information and knowledge, evidence generation, advocacy, capacity building, partnership building and organisational development.

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