



APFSD Youth Call to Action 2021: India¹

INTRODUCTION

In India, the despondent effect of COVID-19 has affected almost all spheres of life, particularly mental health. Youth communities were one such vulnerable group facing challenges from deteriorating mental health and inadequate resources to sustain their education. The growing digital divide between socioeconomic classes in the country led to a fall in the quality of education and learning. Migrant workers were another group that was hard hit because of the pandemic. The lockdown implications left a large number of daily wage workers stranded in their workplaces making it difficult for them to go back home to their families. The COVID-19 relief measures adopted by the government lacked the means to consider the long-term impacts of the virus. The centre also lacked the data and national aggregate in terms of healthcare facilities and the impact of COVID-19 on marginalized sections. Further, lack of adequate policies for sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services during lockdown served as a major constraint to provide adequate access to menstruation, contraceptives, abortion and other related services. The country-wide lockdown brought ongoing programmes on gender sensitization and de-stigmatization of SRH to a standstill. India currently lacks a more in-depth comprehensive approach including a lack of robust model for information dissemination on environmental degradation and its ill effects among people. Increased impacts of climate change are also visible on marginalized identities and vulnerable communities. Access to water and other natural resources are a problem in the country especially for people belonging from the

lower economic sections. A contributing factor to this is the disproportionate division and allocation of the resources. The country is still dependent on non-renewable energy and there is a slow shift towards renewable energy alternatives. Hence, although India has shown promising policy initiatives to achieve the UN's sustainable development goals, it still needs to expand the scope of its operations and include citizen participation at the ground level.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

We urge the government to take the following steps:

- Encourage social and financial empowerment of young people through upskilling programmes (including digital and green skills) in rural & urban areas with career counselling.
- Establish collaborative efforts between the local authorities and civil society organizations to address gender inequality and gender-based violence.
- Private companies' involvement needs to be increased through the sustainable business model encouraging corporate social responsibility.
- Developing robust policies to ensure inclusion and representation of young people from marginalized identities (caste, gender, religion, class, linguistic groups and ethnicities).

- Addressing gaps in accessing technology (such as digitalization, access to devices) to ensure participation of marginalized groups in workspaces and educational institutions
- Sensitization of people on mental health issues and creating national helpline directory for the same.
- Promote training and equal participation of grassroots level frontline workers, faith-based leaders, law enforcement bodies, and gatekeepers (like adolescents, parents, teachers and community members) to strengthen SRHR initiatives.
- Introduce SRHR services (online and offline) in the public health systems at an affordable price.
- Adoption of the #NothingAboutUsWithUs principle to respect the body autonomy.
- Inclusion of strict policies on sexual harassment at workplace.
- Developing curriculum on age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education and including it within formal education system across regions.
- Invest and promote in research and development to strengthen public health system
- Implement comprehensive policies for equal pay (including a person with disabilities, LGBTQI+, minorities, migrants, women, and refugees) following the ILO standards
- To develop a comprehensive community -based intervention focusing on SGD3.
- Larger investment to be made for the implementation of SDGs at the grassroots levels
- National level employment schemes (like MNREGA) to promote a curriculum (involving soft and hard skills, security benefits) to all sectors.
- Ensure active inclusion and participation of local, indigenous and vulnerable communities during policy making and implementing developmental projects involving natural resources.
- Accelerate and promote educational and research opportunities for developing sustainable and environmentally friendly alternatives in agricultural, transport and manufacturing industries.
- Form state and district level youth bodies to sensitize people and include voices of young people in policy making with respect to issues of environmental degradation and climate change.
- Develop and strengthen partnership with grassroots, local and regional organizations and individuals to work issues of climate justice.
- Promote investment on developmental projects which use sustainable technologies and renewable energy.
- Address gaps with respect to environmental policy implementation and monitor heavy penalties for law breakers.

1. The APFSD country and sub-regional briefs were developed through collective discussions and engagements between youth advocates at the APFSD Youth Forum on March 14-16, 2021. The India drafting team consists of Kashvi Chandok (kashvi.chandok.25@gmail.com), Arzoo Garg (arzoo@theypfoundation.org), Venicia Agnes Fernandes (venicia.fernandes@human.touch.ngo). Overall supervision was provided by the ARROW team.