

APFSD YOUTH FORUM 2023



Asia-Pacific Regional Youth Call to Action 2023



Pakistan

Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels in Asia and the Pacific with Young People at the Forefront

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

Pakistan has always been a big supporter of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It became the first country to adopt the SDGs as its own national development agenda through a unanimous National Assembly Resolution in 2016. Since then, Pakistan has made considerable progress by mainstreaming these goals in national policies, provincial growth strategies and Pakistan's long-term development perspective. The last few years have shown exceptional commitment and growth. In 2014, the Ten Billion Tree Tsunami Programme (TBTTTP) was launched, becoming one of the world's largest re- and afforestation schemes. A variety of youth engagement programmes were initiated like the Prime Minister's Youth Development Programme which enables Pakistani youth to become environmental and entrepreneurial stewards. However, various factors and

force majeure events managed to send us back several years. Recent examples include the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2022 Pakistan floods.

Pakistan was already recovering from the devastating effects of COVID-19 but climate change hit us hard and made us even more vulnerable. Rising global temperatures, and more frequent and intense natural disasters have all led to the loss of biodiversity and thus in turn to more deadly patterns of climate change. Agriculture constitutes the largest sector of our economy. Majority of the population, directly or indirectly, depend on this sector. Agriculture, forest, and fishing combined contributed 22.67% to Pakistan's GDP and employed 42.3% of the labour force in 2021. The floods had a direct impact on the economic design of Pakistan. Over 4 million acres of agricultural land were either destroyed or damaged and 60% of the total

crops was rendered useless. This led to increased food insecurity (SDG 2: Zero Hunger) and financial insecurity (SDG 1: No Poverty) in the country.

Pakistan's population of youth aged between 15 and 33 comprises 63% of its total. Having such a large proportion of youth will certainly prove beneficial for Pakistan, however, Pakistan also only has a 58% literacy rate. A workforce that is not educated or skilled is not of much use. The pandemic further exacerbated these low levels of literacy. Parents in rural areas were already reluctant to send their children to school due to reasons such as help with farm labour, lack of direct benefits, and because they are simply unconvinced of the value of education. Teachers in these areas are undertrained and underpaid, infrastructure is inadequate, classrooms are overcrowded and thus the purpose of education remains unachieved. During the pandemic, students in secondary and upper-secondary institutions left school to replace the earnings of their unemployed parents. Exams had to be postponed and at times cancelled, students were not promoted and the onset of digital or online school harmed many. Students from underprivileged backgrounds couldn't afford the high costs of internet and extra devices and parents were unable to help as they themselves weren't adept to use this kind of technology.

Pakistan is notorious for political instability. Frequent changes in government greatly harm the masses. New administrations bring new policies and repeal those made by the previous government. Many beneficial schemes are thus ended. The instability causes foreign investors to become wary which leads to heightened financial insecurity. Currently, Pakistan is going through a critical period of financial crisis. Inflation is at an all time high and basic necessities and staple items are becoming out of reach for the common citizen.

Gender equality is also at a tipping point in Pakistan. There is definitely a positive change which has benefitted all communities in Pakistan regardless of gender or sexuality. The proportion of women in managerial positions (SDG indicator 5.5.2) nearly doubled between 2015 (2.7%) and 2019 (4.53%). Physical violence reduced by 5.3% from 18% in 2012-2013 to 13.6% in 2017-2018 nationwide. The pandemic has also led women to become more independent both financially and emotionally. Many women in Pakistan are now living independently with their children after ending abusive relations and are thriving.

Digitalisation has helped women initiate their own businesses and startups. Selling home-cooked meals was a trend that emerged during the lockdown in 2020 and has now become a very popular entrepreneurial venture among women.

It is also true, however, that the inequality women face, be it in physical forms such as honour killings and domestic violence or in society at large, is still existent. Members of the LGBTQI+ community also face widespread intolerance in Pakistan. Homosexuality is still a federal offence punishable by a maximum of ten years' imprisonment and a fine. However, that is due to the religious beliefs of the majority which must also be respected. Poor parenting is also a factor that causes gender inequality. Many parents, especially in rural areas, consider the female child inferior to the male. This leads to low self-esteem in girls. Being uneducated also leads to severe repercussions for them. Many are still not aware of the legal rights that the Pakistani constitution guarantees them.

Pakistan also needs to deal with the issue of sustainability. At the present moment, the country is in no position to be considered sustainable. A major reason for this is the population boom in our country. In 2021, the annual change was 1.8%. Since independence, several governments have initiated efforts but have failed to curb this deadly trend. Attempts to introduce family planning failed due to rampant opposition from religious scholars. This has resulted in the proliferation of slums and informal settlements in many cities, exacerbating social inequality and environmental degradation. Urban sprawl has increased uncontrollably and combined with inadequate urban planning, is creating more and more problems. One of the primary reasons for the summer 2022 floods was in fact ill-advised urbanisation. Smog and urban heat islands are beginning to emerge in big cities which are creating serious health hazards for the local population.

In conclusion, Pakistan has a long way to go before we finally meet our country-specific goals for sustainable development. At the same time, it cannot be denied that awareness among the masses has increased and there are continuous efforts to arrest the harmful effects that Pakistan faces caused by the combination of factors listed above. Youth are empowered more than ever and are taking an active stance to ensure Pakistan's commitment to sustainable development.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

SDG5: Gender Equality

- It is important to increase access to education for girls and LGBTIQ+ people, especially in rural areas where girls often face significant barriers to education and people with LGBTIQ+ are not accepted, particularly addressing dropout rates, bullying, and lack of support systems in school.
- Expand on the current national laws and regulations that mandate the provision of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) in schools. Children should receive age-appropriate CSE that also addresses the specific needs of LGBTIQ+, trans, and gender-diverse children.
- Create an enabling environment for women and LGBTIQ+ to participate in the workforce by providing training and skill development opportunities to women and LGBTIQ+, promoting entrepreneurship and self-employment among women, providing childcare support to working mothers, and accepting people with LGBTIQ+. Inclusion of more women and people with LGBTIQ+ in the country's defence system.
- It is essential to address the issues of violence against women, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, and honor killings by providing legal and social support to victims, increasing awareness about women's rights, and promoting a culture of gender equality and respect. Diverse representation should be ensured in school policy formulation to end school-related gender-based violence.
- Pakistan should focus on increasing women's and LGBTIQ+ representation in these areas by implementing policies such as gender quotas and providing support and training to women and LGBTIQ+ seeking leadership positions.
- It is essential to address the cultural barriers and patriarchal norms by promoting gender-sensitive education and awareness campaigns, promoting positive role models for women, and engaging men and boys in the conversation about gender equality.
- Promote women role models and LGBTIQ+ role models through inclusive media representation and other advocacy policies. Production of mass media, movies, dramas, and programs that promote equality.

SDG6: Clean Water and Sanitation

- To improve access to clean water, investment in water supply infrastructure, including water treatment facilities, distribution networks, and storage facilities should be promoted.
- Increasing sanitation coverage should be promoted by investing in the construction of new toilets and promoting the use of hygienic and sustainable sanitation practices and improving its traditional sanitation methods.
- It is important to promote water conservation practices such as rainwater harvesting, efficient irrigation systems, and reducing water waste in households and industries, hence work on ensuring better reservoirs for water.
- Water governance should be strengthened by developing effective policies and institutions, promoting stakeholder engagement, and increasing transparency and accountability.
- The government should focus on increasing awareness and education on water and sanitation issues. This can be achieved through campaigns and programs that promote the importance of water conservation, hygiene, and sanitation practices, and the role of individuals and communities in achieving SDG.

SDG7: Affordable and Clean Energy

- To improve access to electricity, expanding the electricity grid and investing in off-grid renewable energy solutions, such as solar home systems and mini-grids is relevant.
- Renewable energy sources should be promoted by implementing supportive policies and incentives for renewable energy development and reducing barriers to investment in renewable energy projects.
- It is important to improve energy efficiency in construction, industries, and transportation sectors by promoting energy-efficient technologies and practices.
- Provide access to diverse forms of energy to marginalised and vulnerable communities by implementing policies and programs that target their specific needs.

- Energy governance should be strengthened by improving regulatory frameworks, increasing transparency and accountability, and promoting stakeholder engagement.

SDG9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure

- The government should increase its budget allocation for infrastructure development and create public-private partnerships to attract foreign investment.
- Encourage the use of renewable energy in the industrial sector, implement sustainable production processes, and provide incentives to industries adopting sustainable practices.
- To develop innovation hubs to promote innovation and entrepreneurship, through the establishment of incubators, accelerators, and innovation centres in different cities to support startups and provide them with mentorship, training, and funding. Also, consider adopting telecommunication and telemedicine by utilising Artificial Intelligence (AI) to aid people who live in rural areas with healthcare at lower prices.
- To develop human capital in the country by improving education and skill development programs that can meet the demands of the industry.
- Research and development should be promoted through adequate funding for research and development activities and establishing research centres in different universities and industries.
- Strengthen the regulatory frameworks to achieve SDG 9 targets by developing and enforcing policies and regulations that promote sustainable industrialisation and innovation while ensuring the protection of the environment and public health.
- It is essential to enhance its digital infrastructure to achieve SDG 9 targets. The government should invest in building a robust digital infrastructure and promote digital technologies to enhance productivity, efficiency, and innovation in different sectors.

SDG11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

- A comprehensive approach to urban planning should be adopted that includes green spaces, public transportation, and mixed-use development to promote sustainable living.
- The government should focus on providing basic services, such as clean water, sanitation, and waste management, and developing efficient public transportation systems. Call upon the government authorities, and public and private sectors to design the city with a sense of inclusivity.
- Policies that promote the development of affordable housing should be introduced, such as tax incentives and subsidies for developers, and make it easier for low-income households to access financing.
- Disaster management plans should be developed and implemented along with the provision of training to emergency responders and community members.
- Policies and regulations to reduce air pollution should be introduced, such as promoting the use of clean energy sources and implementing emission standards for vehicles and industries.
- Cultural and heritage tourism should be promoted, and sustainable tourism infrastructure and facilities, such as eco-lodges and nature reserves should be developed.
- Citizens should be involved in the decision-making process related to urban planning and development, and create platforms for community engagement and dialogue. The challenges of disabilities must be emphasised in public transportation.

SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

- The government should establish partnerships with other countries, international organisations, and private sector entities to share knowledge, resources, and best practices.
- Policies and regulations that promote sustainable trade and investment and attract foreign investment in different sectors should be introduced, such as renewable energy, infrastructure, and agriculture.
- There should be adequate investment in education, training, and research to develop a skilled workforce that can support sustainable development initiatives.
- Public and private sectors should invest in developing and adopting technologies that promote sustainable development, such as renewable energy and digital solutions for agriculture and healthcare.
- Innovative financing mechanisms, such as green bonds and impact investing, and promote public-private partnerships should be established to attract funding for sustainable development initiatives.
- It is important to ensure that policies and regulations are aligned with sustainable development goals and do not contradict each other.
- The government should involve all relevant stakeholders, including civil society organisations, academia, and private sector entities, in decision-making processes related to sustainable development.
- Encourage partnership between people in the community; children, youth, women, men, LGBTQI+, elderly, and people with disabilities.
- Partnership among stakeholders of different sectors should be ensured to establish a linkage between the goals 3, 5, 6, 7, 9 and 11.

The APFSD country and sub-regional briefs were developed through collective discussions and engagements between youth advocates at the APFSD Youth Forum in Bangkok on March 18-20, 2023. The Pakistan drafting team was led by Maria Iqbal Shah and Musa Salahud Din, with input provided by Aqsa Qalb, Atif Kiramat, Ayesha Shaikh, Hafiz Talha, Jawaria Asmat, Joshua Dilawar, Mohsin Baig, Muhammad Idrees and Zainab Jamil. Overall supervision was provided by the ARROW Call To Action team.
