



**APFSD**  
Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development

# Youth Forum 2025

February 19-21 | Bangkok, Thailand



Advancing sustainable, inclusive,  
science- and evidence-based  
solutions for the 2030 agenda and its  
SDGs for leaving no young person  
behind in Asia and the Pacific.

Co-convoked by:



In collaboration:



In partnership:



# APFSD Youth Forum 2025

## Report

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This report was drafted by the convening rapporteur, Vasin Boonpattanaporn, with editorial inputs from Ranjeeta Silwal, Programme Manager at ARROW. It is hoped that this report reflects judiciously the range of expertise, experiences and quality of discussions that took place.

## ACRONYMS

2030 Agenda	The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
ACE	Action for Climate Empowerment
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AI	Artificial Intelligence
APFSD	Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ARROW	Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women
AYSRHR	Adolescents and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
BBNJ	Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdictions
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
CBM	Christian Blind Mission
CGAP	Consultative Group to Assist the Poor
COP	Conference of the Parties
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
CTA	Call to Action
CSE	Comprehensive Sexuality Education
CYMG	Children and Youth Major Group
CYMG UNEP	Children and Youth Major Group to the United Nations Environment Programme
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
ESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
EAPRO	East Asia and Pacific Regional Office
FfD4	4th United Nations Financing for Development Conference
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GBV	Gender-Based Violence

GIS	Geographic Information System
GPS	Global Positioning System
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
Green Climate Fund	A global fund established to support the efforts of developing countries in responding to the challenge of climate change
HLPF	High-Level Political Forum
HR	Human Rights
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IEC	Information, Education, and Communication
ILO	International Labour Organization
IT	Information Technology
KII	Key Informant Interview
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, and other sexual and gender minorities
MGCY	Major Group for Children and Youth
MHM	Menstrual Hygiene Management
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MSM	Men Who Have Sex with Men
MTP	Medical Termination of Pregnancy
NDC	Nationally Determined Contributions
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NAYA	Nepal APFSD Youth Alliance
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
PrEP	Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis
RA No. 10354	Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act of 2012
REACH	Response, Early Assessment, and Care at Home (Singapore's mental health program)

RHRN	Right Here Right Now
SB No. 1979	Senate Bill No. 1979 (Prevention of Adolescent Pregnancy Act of 2023)
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
SoTF	Summit of the Future
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNFCCC RCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Regional Collaboration Centre
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
VNRs	Voluntary National Reviews
WHO	World Health Organization
YES Framework	Youth, Elevate Problems, Speak the Language
YECAP	Youth Empowerment in Climate Action Platform

## BACKGROUND

The 2030 Agenda, with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), was adopted by all 193 Member States at the United Nations General Assembly in 2015. This global and universal agenda envisions transformative change across social, environmental, and economic dimensions, aiming to bridge the gaps left by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and advance sustainable development for the planet.

The 2025 Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report highlights that the region is significantly behind in achieving the SDGs. Current estimates suggest a delay of at least 32 years, with the goals projected to be achieved only by 2062. Alarming, none of the SDGs are on track to be met by 2030, underscoring the urgent need for immediate and transformative action. With only six years remaining, there is immense pressure to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) Youth Forum 2025 was organized by the Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW) in together with co-conveners Y-PEER Asia Pacific Centre, YouthLEAD, the Major Group for Children and Youth (MGCY), in collaboration with the RHRN partnership, UNESCAP, UNDP and the Youth Empowerment in Climate Action Platform (YECAP), and in partnership with the Children and Youth Major Group to UNEP (CYMG UNEP). Held from 19–21 February 2025 in Bangkok, Thailand, the forum convened 121 in-person participants and over 400 virtual attendees from 34 countries across the Asia-Pacific region.

The year 2025 is pivotal for ARROW and its co-conveners, as Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being), Goal 5 (Gender Equality), Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), Goal 14 (Life Below Water), and Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) are under review at both APFSD 2025 and the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2025. In alignment with these reviews, the APFSD Youth Forum 2025 focused on assessing the progress, identifying gaps, and addressing challenges related to these five SDGs.

The overarching theme of the forum was: **“Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs, ensuring no young person is left behind in Asia and the Pacific.”** The APFSD Youth Forum provided a critical platform for young people across the region to reflect on the progress of the SDGs, advocate for meaningful action, and sustain the momentum of global commitments, particularly in the lead-up to the Summit of the Future (SoTF) 2025.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) Youth Forum 2025 was successfully convened from 19-21 February 2025 at the Prince Palace Hotel in Bangkok, Thailand. Organized by the Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW) in together with co-conveners Y-PEER Asia Pacific Centre, YouthLEAD, the Major Group for Children and Youth (MGCY), in collaboration with the RHRN partnership, UNESCAP, UNDP and the Youth Empowerment in Climate Action Platform (YECAP), and in partnership with the Children and Youth Major Group to UNEP (CYMG UNEP), the forum brought together 121 in-person participants and over 400 virtual attendees from 34 countries across the Asia-Pacific region, with UN agencies and other stakeholders attending as the observers. *[See Annex 1 for the list of participants]*

The convening, conducted in a hybrid more, had the following objectives:

- To ensure young people's voices, their realities and perspectives are meaningfully included, in setting, transforming and implementing the regional agenda on sustainable development, with specific reference to the intergovernmental APFSD and HLPF 2025.
- To build on the momentum generated by the Summit of the Future, with deliberations from the APFSD Youth Forum informing regional youth preparations for the 4th UN Financing for Development Conference (FfD4), Beijing+30 process, 2nd World Social Summit in 2025, and other key avenues.
- To sustain the dedicated youth convening space of “APFSD Youth Forum” and discuss SDG implementation with focus on “Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs for leaving no one behind in Asia and the Pacific”.
- To assess the progress, gaps, and challenges in the implementation of SDGs slated for in depth review including SDG 3,5,8,14 and17 from young people's lens, and also address structural and systemic barriers to youth inclusion in sustainable development.
- To contribute to the voluntary national review process, from a youth perspective.
- To develop the Youth Call to Action at regional, sub-regional and national level to inform the intergovernmental APFSD, HLPF, and ECOSOC Youth Forum in 2025.

### Theme and Focus

The forum's theme was "Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs for leaving no young person behind in Asia and the Pacific". This aligned with the theme of the 12th APFSD, scheduled for 25-28 February 2025, which reviewed progress and gaps on SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 5 (Gender

Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 14 (Life Below Water), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

## Structure and Content

### Day One (19 February)

Day one focused on gender equality, and health including sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). The opening session featured addresses from co-conveners and a video message from Dr Felipe Paullier, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Youth Affairs. Plenary sessions included presentations from UN agencies and experts on the status of SDGs 3 and 5 in the region, highlighting alarming statistics on maternal mortality, HIV infections, mental health issues among youth, and barriers to SRHR access.

### Day Two (20 February)

The second day centred on climate action and SDG 14 (Life Below Water), with high-level opening remarks from UNDP, UNFCCC, UNICEF, ARROW and the Embassy of Sweden. Plenary presentations highlighted critical challenges in the Asia-Pacific region, including:

- Rising greenhouse gas emissions with the region accounting for approximately 60% of global emissions
- Significant regression on SDG 13 (Climate Action)
- Disproportionate climate impacts on women and girls
- Ocean pollution with approximately 80% of global ocean plastic pollution originating from Asia

An Innovation Walk showcased 18 youth-led innovations addressing various SDGs through technology, indigenous knowledge, and community-based approaches.

### Day Three (21 February)

The final day was dedicated to finalising and adopting the Youth Call to Actions and discussing ways forward for youth engagement in regional and global forums. Representatives from five national APFSD Youth Alliances (Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Mongolia, and Papua New Guinea) shared their experiences of establishing country-level platforms to advance SDG implementation and youth engagement at the national level.

## Key Outcomes

The principal outcome of the forum was the APFSD Youth Call to Action 2025, a comprehensive document containing youth recommendations for advancing the SDGs in the Asia-Pacific region. This document was formally adopted on the final day and will be presented at subsequent forums:

- APFSD People's Forum (23-24 February 2025)
- 12th APFSD Intergovernmental Forum (25-28 February 2025)
- ECOSOC Youth Forum (15-17 April 2025)
- High-Level Political Forum (14-23 July 2025)

Additionally, 24 country-specific and sub-regional Call to Actions were developed, reflecting contextualised recommendations for SDG implementation.

## Significant Findings and Concerns

Several critical issues were highlighted throughout the forum:

1. **SDG Progress:** The Asia-Pacific region is significantly behind in achieving the SDGs, with estimates suggesting a lag of at least 32 years. None of the goals are on track to be met by 2030.
2. **Youth Exclusion:** Despite comprising 60% of the world's youth population, young people in the Asia-Pacific face systemic exclusion from decision-making processes.
3. **Gender Inequality:** Women and girls bear disproportionate burdens of climate impacts, unpaid care work, and health disparities.
4. **Climate Crisis:** The region is experiencing accelerating climate impacts, with three SDGs showing particularly concerning trends: SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 14 (Life Below Water).
5. **Structural Barriers:** Participants identified systemic issues including neoliberal economic models, shrinking civic spaces, and financial systems that concentrate wealth while burdening developing countries with debt.

## Way Forward

The forum outlined several pathways for continued youth engagement:

1. **Representation at APFSD:** At least 39 Youth Forum participants will represent the collective at the People's Forum and the 12th APFSD, including delivering the Call to Action at the APFSD plenary session.
2. **Side Events:** Multiple side events are planned to disseminate the Call to Action during the APFSD.
3. **Country-Level Action:** National APFSD Youth Alliances will continue mobilising youth to advance SDG implementation at the country level.
4. **New Alliances:** Forum participants were encouraged to establish new country-level alliances to strengthen youth participation in SDG processes.

## Conclusion

The APFSD Youth Forum 2025 successfully created a platform for young people from across the Asia-Pacific region to contribute their perspectives to regional sustainable development processes. The adopted Call to Action represents a powerful advocacy tool to influence policy discussions and accelerate SDG implementation with young people at the centre. The energy, innovation, and commitment demonstrated by participants throughout the forum highlighted the critical role of youth leadership in addressing complex development challenges and building a more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient future for the Asia-Pacific region.

# PROCEEDINGS

## DAY ONE: Gender Equality, Human Rights, and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Day

### WELCOME, OPENING REMARKS AND INTRODUCTIONS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

#### **Sai Jyotirmai Racherla**, Deputy Executive Director, ARROW

Sai warmly welcomed both in-person and online participants. She reflected on the journey that began in 2017 to create a civic space for young people in Asia and the Pacific to defend the gains of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Sai emphasized the need for youth to both safeguard these achievements and propel the agenda forward.

She highlighted the forum's growth, expanding from 60 participants in 2017 to approximately 150 physical attendees and 97 online participants in 2025, with around 400 registered virtually. The partnership of co-conveners has also grown over the years, starting with Youth LEAD and Y-PEER Asia Pacific Centre, later joined by the Major Group for Children and Youth (MGCY), the Children and Youth Major Group to UNEP (CYMG UNEP), and most recently, the Youth Empowerment in Climate Action Platform (YECAP).

Sai underscored the forum's strategic relationship with UNESCAP, ensuring that youth deliberations are integrated into official UNESCAP spaces, where Member States can engage with the youth agenda. She recognized UNESCAP's ongoing support, initially under Dr. Katinka and now through Juliet's team, which has helped ensure youth Calls to Action are published on the UNESCAP website.

She also discussed the evolution of country-level mobilization, with APFSD Youth Alliances established in Nepal, Bangladesh, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea, and Bhutan. These alliances connect grassroots voices to regional platforms and facilitate national-level action. Concluding her remarks, Sai described the forum as "an unstoppable regional youth movement for SDGs" and reiterated ARROW's commitment to "building young people's sustainable leadership one person at a time."

#### **Ikka Noviyanti**, Regional Coordinator, Youth LEAD

Ikka welcomed participants and emphasized the forum's significance in providing young leaders a platform to exchange insights and drive meaningful action. She highlighted Youth LEAD's

commitment since 2017 to ensuring that youth are not just beneficiaries but active change-makers shaping a more inclusive and sustainable future. She stressed that youth voices, ideas, and actions are essential in accelerating progress towards the SDGs, especially as the world navigates complex global challenges. She encouraged participants to use the forum to shape ideas, inspire each other, and collaborate to take bold steps forward, turning ideas into action.

Ikka encouraged participants to use the forum to generate new ideas, inspire each other, and collaborate towards impactful action.

### **Sangeet Kayastha**, Regional Coordinator, Y-PEER Asia Pacific

Sangeet reflected on the historical context of youth participation in development discussions. He recalled how, in 2013, young people had limited opportunities to engage in conversations around the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). By contrast, the APFSD Youth Forum has allowed young people to proactively engage with the SDGs before government deliberations.

Sangeet celebrated the uninterrupted continuity of the forum since 2017, even during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the increasing involvement of younger participants. He urged attendees to engage with their governments upon returning home, even if direct access to high-level authorities remains challenging. He highlighted successes in engaging local governments and securing funding for youth-led initiatives.

Sangeet proudly noted the expansion of national APFSD forums in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, and Mongolia, encouraging continued youth engagement in policy discussions.

### **Abhijit Mathew**, Data Focal Point, MGCY

Abhijit welcomed participants from across Asia and the Pacific. He described MGCY as a designated self-led youth constituency representing young people across multiple intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder processes.

Abhijit expressed inspiration at seeing participants gather to discuss SDGs, inclusivity, and the principles of leaving no one behind. He emphasised the critical role of the APFSD Youth Forum in ensuring that young people's voices are heard at the APFSD Forum, where discussions on sustainable development and inclusivity take place. He noted that the discussions and resulting Call to Action would be vital in ensuring youth voices are heard at both the APFSD

Intergovernmental Forum and the upcoming High-Level Political Forum (HLPF). Abhijit wished participants productive discussions and deliberations, expressing anticipation for the Call to Action that would emerge as the outcome document.

### **Fithriyyah Iskandar**, Regional Focal Point, CYMG UNEP

Fithriyyah, Regional Focal Point for Asia Pacific in the Children and Youth Major Group to UNEP, welcomed and congratulated participants on their selection as youth forum scholars. She explained that CYMG UNEP is one of the official youth constituencies under the United Nations Environment Programme, and since 2022, they have actively participated in supporting ARROW to organise the APFSD Youth Forum.

Fithriyyah outlined CYMG's role in advocating for the inclusion, empowerment, and meaningful participation of young people in global and regional environmental governance and sustainable development processes. She highlighted the significance of this year's forum theme: "Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science, and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs for leaving no young person behind in Asia and the Pacific."

She emphasised that the forum represents a crucial moment for reflection and insight on SDG progress, particularly as only five years remain until 2030. Fithriyyah encouraged participants to maximise the forum for networking, collaboration, and developing strong Call to Actions that could be advanced at the APFSD People's Forum and APFSD Intergovernmental Forum. She expressed hope that together they could shape a more inclusive and sustainable future for young people across Asia and the Pacific, looking forward to powerful discussions and impactful actions.

### **Saumya Surbhi**, Climate Justice and Youth Coordinator, UNDP

Saumya welcomed all participants, both in-person and online, emphasising that despite being in different physical spaces, everyone was part of the APFSD Youth Forum for the next three days. She encouraged online participants to remain engaged throughout the proceedings.

On behalf of YECAP and its co-convening UN agencies (UNDP, UNICEF, and UNFCCC RCC Asia Pacific), Saumya expressed gratitude to the co-conveners—ARROW, Youth LEAD, Y-PEER, MGCY, and CYMG to UNEP—and to all the young people whose passion, dedication, and innovation made the forum possible. She looked forward to connecting with participants over the coming days and beyond, as they collectively work to share and strengthen youth voices and inclusion for the realisation of the SDGs.

## YOUTH REPRESENTATIVE ADDRESS

### Shayal Nand, Fiji

Shayal from Fiji welcomed participants with greetings in multiple languages: "Malo, Nisambula and Namaste." She framed the forum as more than a gathering, describing it as "a platform where our voices, ideas, and demands take centre stage to shape the future we will inherit." She emphasised that participants were not merely attendees but "architects of the future we want to see."

Shayal highlighted the urgency of youth involvement, stating that young people "do not have the luxury of waiting" as decisions made today will define their future. She noted the systemic barriers faced by young people, especially young women, across Asia and the Pacific, who remain excluded from key decision-making spaces despite their innovation, energy, and solutions.

Her address emphasised several key points:

- Youth inclusion must not be symbolic but a priority for achieving the SDGs
- Policies are often designed without considering their impact on youth: climate policies lacking urgency, economic policies overlooking youth unemployment, and gender policies that fail to dismantle inequality
- The forum provides an opportunity to challenge decision-makers and push for inclusive, intersectional, and youth-driven development
- Young people are already creating change by leading movements, shaping solutions, and demanding accountability
- There is a need for stronger investment in youth-led initiatives, as "the best solutions come from those who are directly affected"
- The importance of building alliances and strengthening collective movements, as "our struggles are interconnected, so must be our solutions"

Shayal concluded by calling for the forum to be a space of real engagement where youth voices are not just heard but valued, and where ideas translate into concrete action. She stressed that the responsibility of youth "does not end with participation. It begins with it."

## Video Messages from National Youth Alliances

Representatives from five APFSD Youth Alliances shared video messages highlighting national consultations and Calls to Action

**Bhutan:** Bhawana, a core member of Bhutan Asia Pacific Center and the Bhutan SDG Youth Alliance, highlighted their national forum as the first of its kind in Bhutan, bringing together young people from various youth groups to collaborate, discuss key issues, and collectively develop Bhutan's call to action.

**Mongolia:** Noman from Y-PEER Mongolia recommended working at a regional level, bringing SDG and intergovernmental issues to the forefront, and collaborating closely with government organisations to address these challenges.

**Nepal APFSD Youth Alliance (NAYA):** Deepak Limbu, Senior Programme Officer at Visible Impact (serving as NAYA's secretariat), highlighted key achievements including creating safe spaces for dialogue between young individuals and key decision-makers at federal and local levels, initiating the localisation of SDGs in Nepal, and ensuring that youth are at the forefront of SDG implementation in the country.

**Papua New Guinea:** Jusua Lato represented the national alliance, noting the development of a strategic roadmap to ensure youth voices are included in decision-making processes at both national and regional levels.

**Bangladesh APFSD Youth Alliance:** Mosleuddin Suchak, Coordinator of the Bangladesh APFSD Youth Alliance, described the platform as empowering young change-makers to drive sustainable development. He highlighted the development of the Call for Action Bangladesh as a key outcome from their first national consultation, demonstrating the power of youth voices in shaping national policies and actions for a sustainable future.

The alliance representatives collectively emphasised the importance of young people's involvement in decision-making processes, encouraging participants to take leadership roles, amplify their voices, and hold governments accountable to their commitments. Their shared message was that youth ideas, energy, and leadership are crucial for building a better world.

## KEYNOTE ADDRESS

### Dr. Felipe Paullier, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Youth Affairs

Dr. Felipe Paullier, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Youth Affairs and Head of the United Nations Youth Office, delivered a video message highlighting the critical need for meaningful youth inclusion in decision-making at all levels. "Our core mandate is to ensure that young people are meaningfully included in decision-making spaces, ensuring that their voices and perspectives are heard," Dr. Paullier stated.

He emphasized the demographic significance of youth, noting that 1.9 billion young people globally—nearly half of the world's population under 30—are often excluded from policymaking. He warned that such exclusion results in a loss of energy and ideas, impacting both present and future generations. He emphasized that harnessing the full potential of youth is essential to building resilient and inclusive societies.

Dr. Paullier referenced the Pact for the Future in 2025 and stressed the importance of ensuring youth are not merely consulted but actively engaged as co-creators in shaping policies that impact their present and future. He acknowledged the unique challenges and opportunities faced by youth in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly in the areas of climate change, digital transformation, and urbanization. To harness their full potential, he called for greater access to skills, mentorship, funding, and networks, particularly in STEM education, science innovation, and digital entrepreneurship.

Recognizing the contributions of young people to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), he acknowledged the positive impact young people across the Asia-Pacific are already making on the SDGs in areas such as health, well-being, and gender equality. He underscored the need for collaboration across borders, cultures, and sectors to address global challenges.

"Youth forums like this one are crucial because they bring together the best young minds and innovative thinkers from around the region to share ideas and to form partnerships that accelerate the achievements of the sustainable development goals. It also serves as an example for other regions on the criticality to engage young people in the discussions that will affect their present and the future of their communities." He stated. He concluded with a call to action: "Let us seize this moment to highlight that we need to collaborate, that we need to innovate, and we need to work together towards a better future. One where young people are at the forefront of sustainable, inclusive, and evidence-based solutions for the sustainable development goals."

### **Juliet Nicole Braslow, UNESCAP**

Ms. Juliet Braslow from UNESCAP provided an overview of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) and its role in the 2030 Agenda follow-up and review.

She announced that the APFSD would commence on 25 February, aligning with the Youth Forum's theme of "Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science, and evidence-based solutions." Ms. Braslow explained that the APFSD serves as the regional preparatory meeting for the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in July, where the five SDGs under discussion at the Youth

Forum would also be reviewed. She emphasized that the forum provides a platform for sharing best practices, lessons learned, and voluntary national reviews (VNRs), with 12 Asia-Pacific countries conducting VNRs this year.

Outlining the review process, she explained how discussions begin at the subnational and national levels before feeding into the APFSD and ultimately contributing to the global dialogue at the HLPF. She encouraged youth engagement in national-level SDG discussions and stakeholder consultations.

Ms. Braslow highlighted key findings from the ESCAP SDG Progress Report, noting that none of the five SDGs under review were on track for achievement by 2030. She presented concerning statistics, such as a 64% funding gap for HIV response, low representation of women in national parliaments (21%), and high rates of youth disengagement from education and employment (21%). Despite these challenges, she expressed optimism in youth-driven solutions and urged participants to contribute their insights to the APFSD.

She invited participants to remain engaged beyond the Youth Forum, pointing to over 15 children and youth-focused events at the APFSD, including the Generation Hope Goals initiative and the SDG Heroes campaign. She closed by encouraging continued energy, enthusiasm, and innovation, reinforcing that youth voices are integral to the regional and global SDG discourse.

### **Joy Quitain Hernandez, APRCEM**

Ms. Hernandez from the Asia-Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism (APRCEM) addressed the forum via video message, recognizing the dedication of youth leaders, advocates, and changemakers. She underscored the urgency of the moment, as the region grapples with escalating climate crises, deepening inequalities, and shrinking democratic spaces.

Highlighting the slow progress of the SDGs, she pointed out that only 11% of targets are on track in the Asia-Pacific region. At the current rate, full achievement of the SDGs would be delayed until 2062—over three decades behind schedule. She attributed these delays to systemic inequalities and corporate-driven economic models that perpetuate financial disparities, climate inaction, militarism, and democratic backsliding.

She pointed to the escalating challenges facing the region—climate disasters, widening inequality, and shrinking democratic spaces—while reaffirming the power of youth to change this trajectory: *"We are here because we believe in a better future—one that is just, sustainable, and built by the people, for the people."*

Ms. Hernandez provided a sobering assessment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), noting that a decade into the 2030 Agenda, progress remains "*painfully slow*," with only 11% of SDG targets on track in the Asia-Pacific region. At the current pace, the region would not achieve all 17 SDGs until 2062—over 30 years behind schedule.

She emphasised that this is not just about numbers, rather about the real struggles of real people. It's about workers who still don't earn a living wage, communities forced to flee due to climate disasters, and young people watching their futures slip away while corporations and elites continue to profit.

Ms. Hernandez argued that these failures were systemic, rooted in a neoliberal economic model that prioritises corporate profits over people and the planet, concentrating wealth and power in the hands of a few. She outlined key systemic challenges:

- A **financial system** that enriches the wealthy while burdening developing countries with debt.
- **Climate inaction** that threatens frontline communities while allowing major polluters to evade accountability.
- **Militarism and conflict** that divert resources away from social justice and sustainable development.
- **Democratic backsliding** that silences dissent and restricts youth and civil society organising.

Addressing the role of youth specifically, Ms Hernandez stated that young people fit "everywhere" in this movement, noting their leadership in climate strikes, human rights protests, and campaigns for economic and social justice. Despite this vital role, she observed that youth are often excluded from decision-making processes: "*We need to move beyond being tokenised youth voices in sustainability discussions. The youth must be at the centre of decision-making and action.*"

She outlined several key strategies for youth engagement:

1. Disrupting business as usual by challenging policies that fuel inequality, exploitation, and environmental destruction
2. Advancing development justice by demanding a system where wealth, power, and resources are fairly distributed
3. Building alternative models through community-led climate solutions, labour rights campaigns, and new economic paradigms
4. Mobilising and organising to strengthen grassroots movements of young persons and other marginalised constituencies

5. Holding governments accountable by demanding real commitments to development justice
6. Strengthening solidarity by connecting struggles across borders, movements, and generations
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11. Holding governments accountable by demanding real commitments to development justice
12. Strengthening solidarity by connecting struggles across borders, movements, and generations

She concluded with a compelling call to action: *"The system is failing us. If we don't fight to change it, who will? It's time to shift the power and reclaim development justice for the people."*

### **Sivananthi Thanenthiran, Executive Director, ARROW**

Siva opened her keynote address by expressing her excitement at speaking at the APFSD Youth Forum, which ARROW has proudly co-convened since 2017. She highlighted that this forum has become *"the most anticipated youth convening in the region."* To demonstrate its significance, she shared that this year, they received 3,125 applications from 46 countries, including some from outside the Asia-Pacific. The forum welcomed over 150 in-person participants and 428 online attendees, with many young people presenting their abstracts and innovations.

Siva provided context on the SDGs, noting their ambitious goal to "leave no one behind," but acknowledging setbacks due to crises such as the pandemic and economic challenges. She stressed the urgency to achieve the 2030 Agenda within the remaining five years. Despite extreme inequalities and the climate crisis, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region, she emphasized the powerful role of youth in addressing these challenges. With more than 1 billion young people in the region, Siva highlighted that youth voices are crucial in shaping both regional and global development agendas.

Siva specifically highlighted SDG 5 on gender equality as an example of a goal that is "very far behind" in the region, noting that "55% of countries still lack laws on equality and non-discrimination against women and girls." She posed a rhetorical question: "Can we progress as a community, as a country, or even as a global society if we are to leave behind 50% of the world?"

Drawing on the experience of the women's movement, which has been working on issues of development, equality, and women's rights for decades, Siva emphasised that the work on the SDGs will not end in 2030. Rather, "2030 is probably going to be the start of the work," requiring continuous effort to fulfil dreams and goals of equality and rights.

Encouraging critical thinking, Siva asked participants to consider how development would look from the perspectives of marginalized groups, including youth. She expressed hope that over the coming days, participants would explore these ideas and take forward their agenda, ensuring their voices are heard in global forums.

Siva expressed hope that over the next few days, participants would have the opportunity to explore these questions and envision "*what development looks like if we were going to build a completely different world.*" She concluded by emphasising that the forum was just the beginning of a process, as participants would need to share their agenda with others and ensure that the people's movement carries their voices to the intergovernmental forum.

In conclusion, Siva reaffirmed that the forum is just the beginning of an ongoing process, where youth will play a pivotal role in advocating for change, and share their agenda with others and ensure that the people's movement carries their voices to the intergovernmental forum.

## Question and Answer Session

Following the keynote address, the floor was opened for the questions:

Question 1: Strengthening Youth Participation

**Samikshya, Nepal:** *How can international organisations and regional mechanisms like APFSD strengthen youth participation beyond consultation, ensuring meaningful inclusion in decision-making and implementation at all levels?*

**Response:**

**Juliet Nicole Braslow** acknowledged that achieving meaningful youth engagement is an ongoing process: "*Every year we're trying to find different ways to test and see what works, what feels*

*like it's actually meaningful, and how we can add more opportunities for youth engagement."* She noted that this year's APFSD had included more scholars and youth activists than previous years.

**Siva** emphasized the need for persistence: *"Nobody's going to give you the power. You'll have to grab it for yourself."* She advised young people to follow up after attending meetings, push their agenda consistently, and ensure their voices are heard in decision-making spaces.

#### Question 2: Balancing Systemic and Individual Change

**James, Philippines:** *There were speakers earlier who emphasised transforming power structures, while others focused on individual responsibility. How can we balance these two approaches?*

#### Response:

**Juliet Nicole Braslow** acknowledged the complexity and stated that *"I think there's a lot of tension and paradox in life, and that's where there's some beauty... It's not easy and clear-cut, it's complex."* She noted that both individual action and collective systemic change are necessary.

**Siva** reinforced this by stating that individuals alone cannot change the world: *"Systems also need to change, so the individual needs to work with a group or a community to make that change."* She also cautioned against excessive individualism, stating: *"Your failure is not your sole failure, and your success is also not your sole success. You need to build a community that enables the success of the agenda."*

#### Question 3: Do the SDGs Address Systemic Inequalities?

**Casey, Philippines:** *If the SDGs do not challenge structural inequalities, do they remain idealistic? Are we seeing alternatives? How do we move forward?*

#### Response:

**Siva** pointed out that a key limitation of the SDGs is their failure to address power dynamics: *"One of the things that the SDGs is devoid of is the question of power, because power structures have created many of the conditions that perpetuate poverty and inequality."* She traced how elite power structures have evolved from colonialism to modern state capture and stressed the importance of challenging these power systems through collective action.

#### Question 4: Youth Inclusion in Conflict Zones and Marginalised Communities

**Gesan:** *How can young people become equal partners in decision-making in countries with conflict zones, marginalised communities, and weak democracies?*

**Response:**

**Siva** acknowledged the harsh realities of systemic barriers that prevent young people from fully participating in governance: *"We can expect that at the country level, structural and systemic barriers will be there to prevent us from putting forward our agenda."* She advised young people to be persistent: *"Keep inviting yourself into conversations, get into rooms that people are trying to keep you out of... grow a thick skin... and never give up."*

**Juliet Nicole Braslow** added that regional and global networks, like the ones built at the Youth Forum, can provide support and opportunities: *"These kinds of opportunities build the networks that can help you open doors, learn about those meetings, and continue to invite yourself to spaces where decisions are made."*

As the Q&A session concluded, **Siva** made a critical point about shared responsibility: *"We need to put the responsibility back on governments and larger organisations. They were supposed to serve you, not make you the sole agent of responsibility."*

### Briefing on Call to Action

Following the keynote addresses and Q&A session, Shiwa Karmacharya, Senior Programme Officer at ARROW, provided an overview of the Call to Action (CTA) process, which will serve as the outcome document of the APFSD Youth Forum 2025. She emphasized that the document will contribute to advocacy efforts at both APFSD 2025 and the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2025, ensuring that youth perspectives are reflected in key regional and global policy discussions.

Shiwa introduced the working group responsible for developing the Call to Action, who will oversee the drafting process and support country facilitators in developing 22 country-specific and sub-regional CTAs that reflect national and regional priorities.

To provide context, Shiwa presented examples of previous regional youth Calls to Action from 2022, 2023, and 2024, highlighting how these documents have been utilized for youth advocacy at various policy platforms. She explained that the 2025 Call to Action will focus on the SDGs under review at APFSD 2025, specifically SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 5 (Gender

Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 14 (Life Below Water), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

Participants were informed that they would engage in country-specific breakout discussions to contextualize these SDGs, identify key challenges and gaps, and propose recommendations for action. Virtual breakout rooms would be facilitated to ensure remote participants' engagement, with country facilitators responsible for incorporating online contributions into the final documents.

To guide the discussions, Shiwa outlined the key questions for consideration:

1. What is the context regarding the implementation of SDG 3, SDG 5, and SDG 8 in your country?
2. What are your recommendations to further advance the implementation of these SDGs at the national level?

Shiwa concluded the session by encouraging participants to actively contribute to the development of the Call to Action, emphasizing its role in strengthening youth advocacy and influencing regional and global decision-making processes.

## **PLENARY SESSION 1: ADVANCING YOUNG PEOPLE'S HEALTH AND WELL-BEING**

**Dr Charwisa Janekrongtham**, Public Health Support Officer, World Health Organization country office for Thailand

Dr. Janekrongtham, Public Health Support Officer at the World Health Organization (WHO) country office for Thailand, provided a comprehensive overview of key health issues affecting youth in the Asia-Pacific region. She emphasized the importance of breaking silos and fostering new connections to address systemic health challenges. Drawing from her experience as a field epidemiologist and rural doctor, she highlighted the persistent cycles of poverty, lack of education, unemployment, and inadequate resources that contribute to poor health outcomes in marginalized communities.

Dr. Janekrongtham outlined progress made towards Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3), which focuses on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages. While improvements have been recorded in maternal and neonatal mortality, malaria reduction, and skilled birth attendance, overall progress remains insufficient. Health services across the region

continue to face accessibility issues, further exacerbated by climate change, food insecurity, displacement, and conflicts.

In her presentation, Dr. Janekrongtham highlighted several critical health concerns disproportionately impacting young people in the region:

- **Maternal Mortality:** Pregnancy complications remain a leading cause of death among adolescent girls aged 15-19, highlighting the need for improved access to sexual and reproductive health services.
- **HIV Infections:** Young key populations and their partners account for approximately 25% of new HIV infections in the region, underscoring the necessity of comprehensive sexuality education and youth-friendly health services.
- **Mental Health:** One in seven boys and one in nine girls in East Asia and the Pacific experience mental health conditions, with suicide ranking as the third leading cause of death among young people, especially girls.
- **Substance Use:** Tobacco consumption, including e-cigarette use, is rising among youth due to affordability, accessibility, and peer pressure. Early initiation increases long-term health risks.
- **Injury and Environmental Health Risks:** Road injuries are the leading cause of youth mortality, while air pollution significantly contributes to respiratory diseases, mental health issues, and other non-communicable diseases.

Dr. Janekrongtham highlighted the role of social determinants of health—the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, and live—in shaping health outcomes. Persistent inequities continue to disadvantage girls, LGBTQ+ youth, and those from low-income and rural backgrounds. Limited access to healthcare, environmental threats, and the exclusion of youth from decision-making further hinder progress toward achieving SDG 3.

Recognizing youth as essential stakeholders in addressing these determinants, she identified three key roles young people can play:

1. **Communicators:** Expressing real needs and contextual realities.
2. **Translators:** Bridging generational gaps and making youth perspectives understandable to policymakers.
3. **Advocates:** Leveraging digital tools and social movements to drive change.

Dr. Janekrongtham then introduced the YES framework to guide youth participation in health policy discussions:

- Y (Youth): Embrace the unique strengths of young people, including creativity, agility, and digital fluency.
- E (Elevate Problems): Focus on articulating issues using relevant data rather than prescribing solutions.
- S (Speak the Language): Communicate effectively with decision-makers by using evidence-based arguments, economic evaluations, and risk-benefit analyses.

She ended by noting that the world has more youth than ever before, with Asia-Pacific projected to remain the largest youth population until 2080, comprising approximately 700 million young people aged 15-24, representing 60% of the global youth population.

### **Sylvia Wong**, Adolescent and Youth Technical Adviser at the UNFPA Asia and the Pacific Regional Office

Ms. Sylvia Wong shared valuable insights on youth sexual and reproductive health (SRH), underscoring the significant role of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights. She emphasized the UNFPA's mission to ensure that "every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, and every young person's potential is fulfilled." Ms. Wong's presentation focused on the importance of recognizing and supporting young people's potential, and she echoed the earlier presentation from WHO by aligning with the "YES" framework for youth engagement.

Ms. Wong highlighted that the Asia-Pacific region is home to nearly one billion young people aged 10-24, representing 50% of the global adolescent and youth population. Despite this demographic advantage, young people in the region face significant barriers to accessing health services, comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), and family planning resources.

Key data points presented included:

- Sexual Activity: Approximately 40 million adolescents aged 15-19 have engaged in sexual activity, with significant regional variations. In the Pacific, for example, 22% of unmarried girls and 41% of unmarried boys report sexual experience. This highlights the need for comprehensive health education and services tailored to young people.
- Contraception Access: Around one in three women (34%) aged 15-24 cannot satisfy their family planning needs with modern contraception. Additionally, less than one in four sexually active unmarried adolescents use modern contraceptives, leaving many at risk of unintended pregnancies.

- **Adolescent Pregnancy:** Pregnancy rates remain high in certain sub-regions, with one in six young women in the Pacific, one in eight in South Asia, and one in fourteen in Southeast Asia becoming mothers before the age of 18. Despite a decline in rates over the last two decades, progress remains slow, particularly among marginalized groups.
- **Child Marriage:** The region is home to approximately 640 million women who were married as children, with South Asia accounting for nearly half of these cases. The challenge of child marriage persists despite some progress in reducing its prevalence.
- **Gender-Based Violence (GBV):** Widespread violence affects young women, with statistics showing that one in two young women in the Pacific, one in four in South Asia, and one in six in Southeast Asia have experienced physical or sexual intimate partner violence. This underlines the importance of addressing GBV within sexual and reproductive health frameworks.
- **Stigma and Service Access:** More than half of adolescent girls report serious problems accessing healthcare services. When they do seek care, they often face stigma and poor treatment, which further discourages them from seeking necessary support.

Ms. Wong discussed UNFPA's critical work in humanitarian settings, particularly in the disaster-prone Asia-Pacific region. UNFPA's Regional Pre-positioning Initiative ensures that life-saving supplies, including reproductive health kits and dignity kits, are ready for distribution before emergencies occur. These supplies are distributed through women-friendly and youth-friendly spaces offering psychosocial support, information, and referrals. Since 2015, this initiative has reached over 251,000 people, including more than 20,000 girls and 4,000 boys across 138 emergencies in 16 countries.

In addition, Ms. Wong shared UNFPA's efforts in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, where they provide a comprehensive package of health, education, social, and development programs for Rohingya refugees. These programs focus on building resilience, reducing pregnancy rates, and preventing child marriage. To date, over 92,000 girls, boys, youth, and caregivers have benefited from these services.

Ms. Wong concluded her presentation by providing three actionable recommendations for young advocates:

1. **Advocate for Increased Financing and Investments:** Prioritize investments in adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health, including strengthening health systems to be more responsive to young people's needs. This also includes expanding access to comprehensive sexuality education both in and out of school settings.
2. **Prioritize Adolescent and Youth Issues in Humanitarian Action:** Advocate for the inclusion of adolescent and youth issues in disaster response and preparedness plans.

Ensure safe and empowering spaces for vulnerable young people in humanitarian settings.

3. Generate Evidence and Data: Lead efforts to generate disaggregated data on adolescent and youth situations, particularly focusing on girls. Ms. Wong encouraged participants to take a proactive role in collecting data at the community level to overcome existing gaps in statistics.

Through these recommendations, Ms. Wong stressed the importance of youth engagement and empowerment in shaping policies and programs that address their unique sexual and reproductive health needs.

**Jenelle Babb**, Regional Advisor on Education for Health and Well-being from the UNESCO regional office in Bangkok.

Ms. Babb, Regional Advisor for Education for Health and Well-being at the UNESCO Regional Office in Bangkok, shared her insights on the crucial intersections between education and health. Reflecting on her third attendance at the APFSD Youth Forum, she expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to learn from youth leaders and innovators. Ms. Babb emphasized the integral relationship between education and health, noting that these two sectors are "two sides of the same coin."

Ms. Babb explained that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim to address interlinkages across various sectors, with UNESCO's work focusing on the intersection of health and education. She argued that investing in young people's health and well-being goes beyond teaching them to value their health—it also involves creating quality educational spaces where they can practice healthy behaviors and reinforce their health knowledge from an early age.

Building on Dr. Janekrongtham's presentation, which highlighted education as a social determinant of health, Ms. Babb positioned the relationship from the perspective of SDG 4, emphasizing that quality education enables youth to "learn to be healthy and be able to be healthy to learn." She also pointed out that SDG 4 includes well-being indicators to track and monitor the health and well-being of young people, which further solidifies the connection between education and health.

Ms. Babb introduced the concept of a "health-promoting school," an approach backed by nearly 30 years of evidence demonstrating its effectiveness in both health and educational outcomes. These schools promote equity, inclusion, and gender equality, while also contributing to climate

resilience. Importantly, they offer a strategic entry point for ministries of education and health to collaborate on addressing young people's health and well-being issues.

She shared the eight global standards for health-promoting schools, developed by WHO and UNESCO. Among these, she particularly highlighted Health literacy in school curricula and the socio-emotional environment of schools where all students should feel safe, welcome, and supported.

Ms. Babb focused on the pressing issue of school violence, which affects millions of young people worldwide. In the Asia-Pacific region, as in other parts of the world, one in three students reports experiencing bullying within the last month. She outlined the gendered patterns of school violence:

- Girls are more likely to face psychological bullying, cyberbullying, and harassment.
- Boys are more likely to experience physical violence and corporal punishment.
- Students with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities are more vulnerable to violence than their peers.

The consequences of school violence—ranging from bullying to gender-based violence—are severe and long-lasting. Victims often experience anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, self-harm, and other mental health issues. Moreover, research shows that children who are bullied are twice as likely to feel lonely, suffer sleep problems, and contemplate suicide. Even those who perpetrate violence may face poor mental health outcomes. These experiences of violence contribute to poor physical and mental health, substance use, and risky sexual behaviors, further underlining the need for safe, supportive educational environments.

Despite the evident need for education that supports healthy behaviors, Ms. Babb pointed out significant gaps in the school curricula related to sexuality education. In a survey of 28 countries, more than 35% reported that key topics such as sexually transmitted infections (STIs), gender norms, and gender equality were either not included, covered briefly, or their inclusion status was unclear.

She presented findings from a 2019 online survey conducted with over 1,400 young people from 27 Asia-Pacific countries. When asked about the topics they wanted to learn but didn't receive, young people prioritized:

1. Sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression
2. Gender equality
3. Sexual violence, abuse, and harassment

These results emphasized the critical need for CSE programs as preventive education for addressing poor sexual and reproductive health outcomes, gender-based violence, and mental health challenges. However, even in places where CSE exists, there is room for improvement. The survey revealed that LGBTI youth and youth with disabilities were less satisfied with the content and delivery of school-based sexuality education compared to their peers.

Ms. Babb concluded her presentation with three key recommendations for advancing health education in schools:

1. Centre young people's voices and experiences in health education, ensuring that curricula, teaching, and learning meet their needs in both formal and non-formal education settings.
2. Recognise that students are key in shaping positive school cultures, practising their skills, and applying their knowledge for healthy and respectful interpersonal relationships. Duty-bearers should empower their leadership and participation.
3. Normalise age/developmentally appropriate and contextually relevant CSE that is scheduled in the school timetable and delivered by trained and supported teachers as essential health education within the framework of health-promoting schools.

Ms. Babb's presentation highlighted the critical need for education systems that prioritize both the health and well-being of young people and provide them with the tools to lead healthy lives. She underscored that CSE is not just an educational issue but a health issue, with profound implications for the future of youth well-being across the region.

## Question and Answer with Panellists

Following the presentations, the session moved to a brief Q&A segment.

### **Question 1: Financing for youth-led and women-focused organisations amidst global funding cut**

*How can international organisations, funders, and governments support feminist funding, youth-led initiatives, and AYSRHR while breaking down silos and fostering collaboration?*

**Ms Wong** acknowledged the disruption in international development and humanitarian funding in the past few weeks. She highlighted a regional trend where many countries are moving towards upper-middle-income status, suggesting a shift towards domestic resource mobilisation. She recommended advocating with governments to allocate more domestic

resources to health sectors. Additionally, she mentioned performance-based financing opportunities that could engage the private sector or development banks. Ms Wong emphasized the importance of linking SRHR issues to the priorities of finance ministers and international financial institutions, noting that the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has shown interest in climate impacts on maternal health outcomes. She also suggested highlighting gaps in SRHR services to attract high-net-worth individuals and philanthropic players, citing MacKenzie Scott's support for women-led and youth-led initiatives.

### **Question 2: Interlinkages between climate change and SRHR**

*How to communicate the broader implications of these issues to government officials and stakeholders beyond women and girls. What strategies can be used, and what projects could be recommended from a financial perspective?*

**Ms Wong** suggested that addressing the interlinkages between climate change and SRHR requires communicating the broader impacts, especially the effects on maternal health outcomes. She emphasized demonstrating the connection between SRHR issues and the priorities of finance ministers and international financial institutions, as well as highlighting how climate change exacerbates maternal health problems. She recommended exploring projects that focus on the intersection of climate and health, using financial strategies that align with government priorities for national development or economic growth.

### **Question 3: Climate Resilience**

Samikshya, Nepal asked UNESCO about the issue of climate resilience in school buildings, particularly regarding how extreme climatic conditions disrupt education and affect female students. *How can young people advocate for solutions to improve access to education, SRHR, and mental health amidst climate disasters?*

**Ms Babb** explained UNESCO's technical support to governments and education ministries at both school and systems levels. She outlined improvements being made to infrastructure to make school buildings more resilient to extreme weather and climate-induced patterns. Additionally, UNESCO promotes flexible learning modalities, such as hybrid, remote, or online learning, with the necessary IT infrastructure. Ms Babb also discussed the health-promoting school model, which integrates curriculum changes, sustainable practices, and a focus on healthy consumption. She mentioned UNESCO's work with governments to use population data and geospatial modelling to forecast future scenarios, which helps in making decisions about investing in climate-resilient schools.

### **Question 4: Health and youth**

Sandeep Kumar Paul, Bangladesh raised a question about youth smoking in Bangladesh and the "coolness factor" undermining health warnings. *What practical strategies can effectively denormalise tobacco use and redefine what is considered "cool" for youth? What roles can young people play in this process?*

**Dr Janekrongtham** suggested reframing the issue of smoking by focusing on the harm caused to others—future generations and loved ones—rather than just the self-harm aspect. She recommended continued education using creative approaches, particularly leveraging young people's ability to use social media and memes for advocacy. She encouraged young people to remain persistent in their advocacy efforts, using creativity to link health-related issues and their broader effects on others, thereby challenging the "coolness" factor associated with smoking.

## Conclusion and Transition to Breakout Sessions

In her concluding remarks, Sai quoted feminist scholar Audre Lorde, stating, "There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we are not living single-issue lives." She emphasized the interconnectedness of issues, urging participants to consider the intersections between SDG 3, gender equality, and education in their advocacy work. She stressed the importance of addressing systemic barriers, acknowledging diversity, and focusing on health system strengthening, particularly in ensuring young people have safe and non-discriminatory access to services.

### Breakout Room 1: Adolescent Health and Wellbeing

#### **Presentation 1: Effects of Menstrual Hygiene Management on Rural Women and Girls Quality of Life**

*Speaker: Sumaiya Afroj*

Sumaiya highlighted the challenges women and girls in rural and coastal Bangladesh face regarding MHM, such as a lack of fresh water, limited access to sanitary products, inadequate sanitation, and cultural taboos. Her research, using a mixed-method approach with 200 survey respondents, 5 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and 10 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), focused on the Chila area in Bangladesh. The findings revealed that 54.5% of women had limited access to sanitation products and many girls lacked understanding of

menstruation and its proper disposal. The conclusion suggested that improving MHM could significantly enhance the quality of life for these women and girls.

### **Presentation 2: Perceptions of Filipino Adolescent Students on Adolescent Pregnancies**

*Speaker: Christian Kelsey*

Christian discussed the Perceptions of Filipino Adolescent Students on Adolescent Pregnancies. He pointed out that adolescent pregnancy is a major issue for Filipino women and girls, with many pregnancies involving older men. Kelsey's study, using a mixed-method approach with 30 respondents, found that adolescent pregnancy negatively impacted various aspects of life, such as career, education, familial relationships, and financial stability. Additionally, the study highlighted differences in perceptions between adolescent men and women regarding pregnancy. He emphasized the need for accessible healthcare, Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), and stronger legislative measures, such as the Prevention of Adolescent Pregnancy Act of 2023 and the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act of 2012.

### **Presentation 3: Gender Analysis of SRHR Curriculum in South Asia: A Focus on Pakistan's Inclusive Life Skills-Based Education (LSBE) Approach**

*Speaker: Danish Tariq*

Danish's presentation focused on Pakistan's **Inclusive Life Skills-Based Education (LSBE) Approach**. He evaluated the inclusivity and responsiveness of LSBE, highlighting gaps and barriers. The research involved a desk review of various policies and consultations with educators, policymakers, and youth advocates. The study found that the current SRHR curriculum does not fully address gender-specific needs and lacks inclusivity for diverse identities and experiences.

### **Presentation 4: Optimizing Sustainable Solutions for Equitable Adolescent Reproductive Health Access Through Government Collaboration to Achieve SDGs 2030**

*Speaker: Ahmad Fazri*

Ahmad discussed the vulnerability of 63 million teenagers in Indonesia to unhealthy sexual behavior and presented a research approach using the appreciative inquiry method, which includes discovery, dream, design, and destiny stages. The study aimed to explore government collaboration to improve reproductive health access for adolescents.

**Presentation 5: Breaking Barriers: SRHR & CSE Storytelling on Instagram**

*Speaker: Dina Charaeni*

Dina introduced the Sexdugram platform, which uses Instagram for comprehensive premarital sexuality education. Instagram's visual and interactive features make it a powerful tool for SRHR and CSE advocacy, especially in Indonesia, where there are over 191 million active social media users. Dina discussed challenges in SRHR advocacy, such as cultural taboos, misinformation, and the lack of credible, age-appropriate resources. She also led a hands-on activity where participants created their own digital stories for advocacy.

**Recommendations:****SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being**

- Community Involvement and Education: Investigate the role of community engagement and educational initiatives in improving menstrual hygiene management practices.
- Policy and Program Evaluation: Evaluate the effectiveness of existing policies and programs to improve menstrual hygiene management in rural areas.
- Strengthening policies on handling sexual harassment
- Establishing partnerships with the government reproductive health services
- Enhancing policies to support equal access to health services in every school health unit
- Strengthening of RA No 10354 Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Law of 2012
- Implementation of an age and developmentally appropriate, gender responsive and a rights and science based CSE curriculum

**SDG 5: Gender Equality**

- Community Involvement and Education: Investigate the role of community engagement and educational initiatives in improving menstrual hygiene management practices.
- Policy and Program Evaluation: Evaluate the effectiveness of existing policies and programs to improve menstrual hygiene management in rural areas.
- Strengthening policies on handling sexual harassment

- Implementation of an age and developmentally appropriate, gender responsive and a rights and science based CSE curriculum
- Strengthening of RA No 10354 Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Law of 2012
- Integrate comprehensive and inclusive gender-sensitive content; multilingual and context-specific into the mainstream curriculum to address diverse identities and experiences and develop specialized training programs for educators on delivering it.
- Work with policymakers, NGOs, and community leaders to strengthen LSBE integration into national and provincial education policies and establish stronger linkages between SRHR education, health services, and youth-friendly support mechanisms to ensure a holistic approach.
- Develop peer education networks where young advocates can facilitate SRHR discussions in schools and communities with the incorporation of interactive, technology-driven learning tools such as mobile apps and digital platforms to engage youth effectively.
- Develop a structured monitoring system with key performance indicators (KPIs) to assess the implementation and effectiveness of LSBE curriculum with periodic evaluations to measure the curriculum's impact on students' understanding of SRHR and gender equality.
- Introduce anonymous student feedback systems to understand their experiences and concerns regarding LSBE and SRHR education through empowering youth-led networks to actively monitor LSBE programs and report on barriers to access and learning effectiveness.
- Establish a safe, confidential complaint and grievance system for students and teachers to report curriculum-related challenges, including resistance to SRHR education or gender-based discrimination and ensure prompt follow-up actions and policy adjustments based on reports and grievances received.

**SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth**

- Develop peer education networks where young advocates can facilitate SRHR discussions in schools and communities with the incorporation of interactive, technology-driven learning tools such as mobile apps and digital platforms to engage youth effectively.

**SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals**

- Establishing partnerships with the government reproductive health services
- Work with policymakers, NGOs, and community leaders to strengthen LSBE integration into national and provincial education policies and establish stronger linkages between SRHR education, health services, and youth-friendly support mechanisms to ensure a holistic approach.

**Key questions and discussions:**

During the Q&A session, a participant raised a concern about the thin line between digital activism and performative activism, noting that digital activism often fails to address systemic oppression and primarily focuses on showcasing individual participation in movements, such as walking in a protest, without making any substantial impact. In response, Dina Charaeni agreed with the concern and acknowledged the limitations of digital activism in certain cases. She suggested, however, that one way to make digital activism more meaningful is by encouraging individuals who have done actual ground-level work to share their experiences and achievements. Rather than engaging in digital activism in isolation, Dina proposed that like-minded young people collaborate to amplify their message, thereby expanding their reach organically and building more impactful movements.

**Recommendations for Future Action**

To address the challenges discussed, the following policy and structural reforms were proposed:

**1. Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM)**

- Implement community-led education programs on MHM, particularly in rural and coastal areas, to increase awareness and improve access to sanitation products.
- Strengthen policies that ensure the availability of subsidized or free menstrual hygiene products.

**2. Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention**

- Urgently pass SB No. 1979 Prevention of Adolescent Pregnancy Act of 2023 in the Philippines to strengthen adolescent reproductive health services.
- Mandate Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in school curricula that is age-appropriate, gender-responsive, and rights-based.

### 3. Inclusive SRHR Education and Services

- Governments must integrate gender-sensitive and multilingual Life Skills-Based Education (LSBE) into mainstream curricula to address the diverse needs of adolescents.
- Strengthen linkages between SRHR education, healthcare services, and youth-friendly support systems to ensure holistic adolescent well-being.

### 4. Government and NGO Collaboration

- Establish cross-sector partnerships to promote equal access to adolescent reproductive health services in schools and communities.
- Work with policymakers to enhance accountability measures, ensuring effective implementation of existing reproductive health laws.

### Conclusion

The breakout session on **Adolescent Health and Wellbeing** highlighted critical gaps in menstrual hygiene management, adolescent pregnancy prevention, and SRHR education. Panelists presented research-based insights and innovative solutions, including digital advocacy strategies and policy reforms.

Key takeaways from the session emphasized the need for:

- Holistic, community-driven approaches to improve adolescent well-being.
- Stronger policy frameworks that prioritize gender-sensitive and inclusive education.
- Digital advocacy and youth engagement as tools to break taboos and improve access to accurate SRHR information.

The discussions underscored that achieving Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing) requires multi-stakeholder collaboration, youth leadership, and evidence-based policy interventions to create a sustainable, equitable future for adolescents across the Asia-Pacific region.

### Breakout Room 2: Health Intersection with Climate Change

#### **Presentation 1: Farms to Forums: The Case of Rural Women in India Navigating Poverty, Health Challenges, and Climate Change**

*Speaker- Nidhi Tiwari, India*

Nidhi Tewari highlighted the struggles of rural women in India, emphasizing how climate change exacerbates existing gender inequalities. Her research in Bundelkhand, one of India's most climate-vulnerable regions, revealed that women face financial instability, landlessness, and severe health issues, all worsened by the changing climate. With male out-migration on the rise, women are left with an increased labor burden, which has led to heightened levels of stress and gender-based violence. In many cases, access to essential resources like water becomes more crucial for survival than the presence of a male provider, encapsulated in the local proverb, "*Gagri na phootay, khasam mar jaye*" (Let the water pot not break, but let the husband die). Furthermore, limited healthcare access forces many women to rely on informal remedies, exacerbating reproductive health concerns. She stressed that climate change is not gender-neutral and that it deepens existing inequalities, making women more vulnerable. To address these issues, she called for policy interventions focused on ensuring land rights for women, improving financial resources, and promoting climate-resilient farming techniques. The discussion also explored potential policy measures to strengthen women's resilience to climate change and the role of grassroots activism in bridging gaps between policy and implementation.

### **Presentation 2: Eco Prescription in South Asia – A Model for Youth-Led Climate Action and Gender-Inclusive SRHR Advocacy**

*Speaker: Pranto Paul, Bangladesh*

Pranto Paul presented Eco Prescription, an initiative founded after the 2023 Sylhet floods in Bangladesh, designed to integrate climate resilience and youth-led SRHR advocacy. His project has conducted participatory training sessions, community-based environmental actions, and digital advocacy campaigns, reaching a broad audience. The initiative has trained over 20,000 students, planted 1,000 trees with local government support, and developed climate change-focused comic books for interactive learning. Additionally, virtual climate discussions have reached more than 500,000 individuals, surpassing initial expectations. The initiative is now expanding through AI-powered Eco Mobile Apps and an Eco Café initiative aimed at fostering youth discussions. Pranto emphasized that young people are not just future leaders but are already leading climate action today. His discussion also covered the role of digital platforms in strengthening youth participation in climate advocacy and strategies to make SRHR education more accessible in climate-affected communities.

### **Recommendations**

**For Policymakers:**

- Develop gender-sensitive climate policies that provide women farmers with financial and technical support.
- Strengthen healthcare access in rural and climate-vulnerable regions, particularly focusing on SRHR.

**For Youth & Advocacy Groups:**

- Expand youth-led climate education programs through AI tools, mobile apps, and social media campaigns.
- Promote community-based environmental initiatives such as afforestation and waste management projects.

**For Researchers & NGOs:**

- Conduct more field studies on the intersection of climate change, health, and gender to inform policy decisions.
- Develop interactive learning tools like climate comics and digital platforms for knowledge dissemination.

**Recommendations for Future Action**

- Scale up Eco Prescription's model across more South Asian countries.
- Strengthen global partnerships between youth organizations and policymakers to integrate SRHR into climate policies.
- Increase funding and research on the gendered impact of climate change.

**Conclusion**

The session highlighted the intersection of climate change, gender, and health, emphasizing the need for inclusive policies and youth-driven initiatives. The discussions reinforced that climate change disproportionately impacts marginalized communities, particularly women, and that empowering youth through education and advocacy is crucial for long-term resilience. The session concluded with a call for stronger collaboration between policymakers, activists, and researchers to create sustainable and equitable solutions.

**Breakout Room 3: Mental Health of young people: Ignored****Presentation 1: YOUTH-MIND: Youth-Led Mental Health Innovations for New Development**

*Speaker: Bryan Akhtur Alexander, Indonesia*

The speaker emphasised the role of young people in shaping mental health policies and programs. He highlighted that mental health is not an isolated issue but one that affects overall societal well-being, productivity, and justice systems.

A key point of the discussion was the alarming increase in adolescent depression rates, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Statistics highlight the urgency of implementing mental health programs, especially for young people. The speaker talked about best practices from different countries, including Singapore's REACH program and Laos' initiative, talking about how these nations have integrated engagement into mental health solutions.

Another significant topic was the meaningful youth participation framework in Indonesia, which ensures that young people are involved not only in implementing programs but also in pre- and post- implementation phases. This approach will facilitate youth engagement in policy development, ensuring mental health programs are designed to meet their needs effectively. He also emphasised the importance of integrating digital solutions into mental health advocacy, leveraging technology to make mental health resources *accessible*.

**Presentation 2: Rise Above the Stigma: Addressing Youth Suicide Prevention and Mental Health in India - Perspective of the Youth**

*Speaker: Nishita Upadhyaya, India*

The speaker addressed the stigma surrounding mental health and suicide prevention. Suicide remains a leading cause of death globally, and the speaker stressed the urgent need for intervention. The discussion also touched on the devastating impact of drug abuse on suicide rates and how mental health initiatives should incorporate preventive strategies to address these interlinked issues.

**Presentation 3: Using Game Toolkit to prevent Early Child Marriage and promote SDG 5: Gender Equality in Vietnam**

*Speaker: Lai Khanh Linn, Indonesia*

Lai Khanh Linn discussed how early and forced marriages affect mental health. She introduced the *Journey to Equality* toolkit, an interactive learning tool developed by the

Youth Advisory Committee and Plan International Vietnam. This toolkit educates young people on gender equality and helps them reflect on internal biases that contribute to systemic inequalities. She stressed that solutions to social challenges must come from within communities and be rooted in cultural relevance. The speaker also raised concerns about alarming suicide trends in India, emphasizing that for every person who commits suicide, many more attempt it, highlighting the need for stronger mental health interventions.

### **Key Takeaways**

- Youth-led digital solutions can significantly enhance access to mental health services.
- Suicide prevention strategies must include awareness campaigns, community support, and policy interventions.
- Addressing stigma through education and open conversations is crucial in normalizing mental health discussions.
- Interactive and culturally relevant mental health tools improve engagement and understanding.
- Multi-stakeholder collaboration is essential in designing sustainable mental health interventions.

### **Recommendations:**

- Enhance Youth Engagement in Mental Health Initiatives through capacity strengthening by providing training in policy-making, leadership, and mental health advocacy.
- Promote Cross-Sector Partnerships and collaborate with governments, NGOs, educational institutions, and healthcare providers to develop holistic and inclusive mental health solutions.
- Expand Digital Mental Health Solutions and Invest in online resources, telemedicine platforms, and AI-driven mental health tools to ensure broader access to support services.
- Localize Advocacy Efforts by ensuring inclusivity by adapting language and methodologies to cultural contexts, making mental health initiatives more relevant to diverse populations.
- Implement programs that build emotional resilience against the impact of early and forced marriage, ensuring legal frameworks and SRHR programs are integrated into educational curricula.

- Strengthen Multi-Stakeholder Collaborations to support sustainable mental health solutions for young people.
- Introduce age-appropriate mental health education, establish school-based mental health clubs, and set up national youth mental health helplines.
- Support mental health programs through innovative financing mechanisms and sustained investment in community-based services.

### **Recommendations for Future Action**

To ensure long-term impact, future efforts should focus on inclusive advocacy, localized approaches, youth leadership development, sustainable funding, and innovative financing mechanisms. These strategies will help create a supportive and effective mental health framework for young people.

### **Conclusion**

The session highlighted the pressing need to address mental health challenges among youth, emphasizing that young people must play an active role in shaping solutions. The importance of youth-led initiatives, digital solutions, and cross-sector partnerships are key to tackling mental health issues effectively. By implementing the recommendations discussed, policymakers and stakeholders can create a more inclusive and supportive mental health framework that ensures no young person is left behind.

## **Breakout Room 4: Advocacy and Partnership for Health Advocacy (SDG 17) for Young People**

### **Presentation 1: Breaking Barriers: Youth-Led Breast Cancer Awareness and the Role of Boys as Supportive Allies**

*Speaker: Noorul Jinnah Zeron Anas, Sri Lanka*

Anas provided a global perspective on breast cancer, noting that the ratio stands at 35:1, emphasizing the need for early detection and awareness. The discussion centered on breaking social stigma, particularly in South Asian communities, and promoting emotional and social support. The role of boys as allies in breast cancer awareness was highlighted, stressing the importance of gender-inclusive health education. Linked to SDGs 3 and 5, the session proposed training 1,000 youth advocates and reaching 100,000 people through awareness campaigns. Recommendations included integrating gender-inclusive education, establishing youth peer support networks, and advocating for policy changes.

**Presentation 2: Breaking the Chain: Overcoming religious and social barriers to Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights for a healthier generation and ensuring access to reproductive health for everyone.**

*Speaker: MD Jubaiar Isham, Bangladesh*

MD Jubaiar Isham emphasized the role of youth in advancing SRHR, stating, "If youth come forward, they can make changes." He highlighted the staggering statistic that 800 women die daily due to preventable causes, emphasizing the need for improved healthcare access. The discussion covered cultural barriers, climate change, child marriage, and inadequate healthcare. Solutions included increasing community engagement, awareness campaigns, and policy advocacy to enhance adolescent access to quality healthcare. Key interventions included raising awareness through interactive sessions and policy advocacy for improved healthcare services. The impact of menstrual hygiene management and religious taboos on young people was also examined, with a call to break these social barriers through education and engagement.

**Presentation 3: Abortion IS Disability Justice: Using Artivism to Dismantle Ableist Health Systems**

*Speaker: Nu Mishra, India*

Nu Mishra addressed the intersectionality of abortion rights and disability justice, using storytelling methodologies to highlight community-led initiatives. She emphasized the need to dismantle ableist healthcare structures and advocated for social media activism as an accessible tool for disabled individuals. The session discussed the barriers disabled individuals face, including chronic health issues, domestic violence, and dependency on caregivers. The concept of medical citizenship was introduced, stressing the need for legal recognition of disabled individuals in healthcare policies. Recommendations included advocating for improved access to the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act, recognizing the unique pain experiences of autistic individuals, and ensuring the legal recognition of disabled individuals' consent in SRHR decisions.

**Presentation 4: JomPrEP: A Clinic-Integrated Mobile Health Intervention to Enhance HIV Testing and PrEP Uptake Among Men Who Have Sex with Men in Malaysia**

*Speaker: Ellern Eng Hui*

Ellern Eng Hui discussed the role of digital health initiatives in improving healthcare access for men who have sex with men (MSM) in Malaysia. The discussion focused on HIV prevention strategies, particularly through the use of Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) and

mobile health (mHealth) interventions. The effectiveness of JomPrep, a digital health initiative, was explored as a tool for increasing accessibility to HIV testing and treatment. The significance of demographic data in shaping policy decisions was underscored, as well as the necessity of leveraging data-driven approaches to improve public health interventions.

### **Q&A and discussion**

The discussion featured thought-provoking questions from participants seeking insights on advocacy strategies and partnerships. Ariani from the Philippines inquired about effective ways to engage religious sectors in health advocacy and how to encourage their support for digital health applications. Another participant from Papua New Guinea raised concerns about global communication challenges in SRHR advocacy and the difficulties in initiating discussions on sensitive topics.

Panelists responded by emphasizing the importance of tailoring advocacy strategies to different cultural contexts and initiating discussions within religious spaces. They highlighted peer-to-peer communication as a valuable approach, suggesting separate discussion forums for boys and girls to create more open and comfortable conversations. Additionally, speakers stressed that advocacy should start at the individual level and gradually expand to partnerships with larger organizations, ensuring long-term and sustainable impact.

### **Key takeaways**

Following were the key takeaways from session:

- Gender barriers in health advocacy must be actively challenged to ensure equitable access to healthcare.
- Youth engagement serves as a powerful tool in driving policy changes and social transformation.
- Policy advocacy and community awareness must go hand in hand to create lasting impact.
- Intersectionality remains a critical yet often overlooked component in healthcare policies.
- Digital health initiatives, particularly mobile health solutions, are reshaping healthcare accessibility.
- Addressing religious and cultural barriers requires strategic advocacy and engagement.

- Collaborative efforts within feminist and youth-led spaces strengthen solidarity in healthcare advocacy.

### **Recommendations:**

The presenters recommended the following:

1. Integrate gender-inclusive health education into school curricula to promote awareness and early intervention.
2. Expand youth-led advocacy initiatives to ensure sustainable health interventions.
3. Build strategic partnerships with religious and cultural institutions to drive inclusive health policies.
4. Promote mobile health (mHealth) solutions to expand healthcare access, particularly for HIV prevention and reproductive health.
5. Utilize storytelling and creative activism to amplify marginalized voices and drive awareness campaigns.
6. Advocate for legal recognition of disabled individuals' autonomy in SRHR decision-making, preventing decisions from being controlled by guardians or healthcare providers.

### **Recommendations for Future Action**

#### **SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being**

- Strengthen early detection programs for breast cancer and integrate gender-inclusive education in schools and universities.
- Increase community-led awareness campaigns on menstrual hygiene, reproductive health, and chronic illnesses.
- Promote access to mobile health (mHealth) solutions to improve healthcare outreach, particularly for HIV prevention and reproductive healthcare.
- Improve access to disability-inclusive healthcare services and advocate for legal recognition of disabled individuals in medical policies.

#### **SDG 5: Gender Equality**

- Break gender-related health stigmas through youth advocacy and community engagement and encourage male allies to participate in breast cancer awareness and SRHR advocacy.
- Address cultural and religious barriers through targeted advocacy efforts and policy interventions.

**SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals**

- Strengthen partnerships between youth-led organizations, governments, and international institutions to drive policy change in health advocacy.
- Promote multi-stakeholder collaboration to ensure inclusivity in digital health interventions.
- Foster advocacy networks with religious and cultural institutions to bridge gaps in SRHR discussions.
- Enhance data-driven policy initiatives to support long-term healthcare improvements

**Conclusion**

The session reinforced the critical role of youth leadership in advancing health advocacy and policy reforms. The importance of breaking gender barriers, fostering community engagement, and leveraging technology for health initiatives was consistently highlighted. Digital health solutions, youth-led movements, and collaborative partnerships were recognized as vital components in addressing key health challenges. The necessity of addressing intersectionality in healthcare, spanning gender, disability, and socio-cultural factors, was emphasized. The discussions concluded with actionable recommendations to ensure sustainable, inclusive, and equitable health advocacy.

**PLENARY SESSION 2: DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH WITH YOUNG PEOPLE AT THE CENTRE****Ken Shawa, International Labour Organization**

Mr Shawa, Senior Economist and Head of the Regional Economic and Social Analysis Unit at the ILO's Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, began his presentation by acknowledging the importance of engaging with young people as the group that will shape the future and drive progress forward.

He started with an overview of economic growth in the Asia-Pacific region, noting that between 2015 and 2019, the region achieved an average annual per capita GDP growth rate of 3.9%, significantly surpassing global figures. This strong economic growth contributed to poverty reduction, lifting millions of people out of poverty. However, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted

this positive trajectory, causing a significant drop in output. Mr Shawa highlighted that the aggregate rate of GDP growth has fallen below pre-pandemic levels and is expected to widen further, particularly in East and Northeast Asia, as well as Southeast Asia.

Moving to labour market indicators, Mr Shawa noted that while they appear stable on the surface, they actually mask significant decent work deficits. On the positive side, the region has seen improvements in female labour market participation, which has helped offset downward trends. However, the unemployment rate has remained unchanged at 4.2% over the past two years, and informal employment remains a substantial challenge. Although informal employment has fallen from 73% in 2004 to approximately 65.6% in 2024, it remains the highest globally in absolute terms, with an estimated 1.3 billion people working informally in the region.

Mr Shawa also highlighted that a significant portion of the workforce—47.5%—remains employed in agriculture, fisheries, and elementary occupations often characterised by insufficient and irregular incomes. Despite these challenges, he noted that the most impressive change has been in poverty reduction, with extreme and moderate working poverty decreasing by approximately 41.9 percentage points between 2004 and 2024.

A key focus of Mr Shawa's presentation was the status of SDG 8 targets. He drew attention to the concerning trend that many targets are regressing rather than progressing. Those that are progressing are doing so at a very slow pace, with only nine targets having crossed the 2024 threshold line. He specifically highlighted SDG indicator 8.6.1—youth not in education, employment, or training (NEET)—as lagging significantly behind target, emphasising the considerable work still needed to support young people.

The presentation then focused more specifically on youth employment challenges. Mr Shawa pointed out that while the overall unemployment rate in the region is 4.2%, youth unemployment rates are much higher, reaching double digits. In East Asia, the youth unemployment rate is 13.8%, and in Southeast Asia and the Pacific, it rises to 15.1%. These figures underscore the necessity of prioritising support for young people to make progress on SDG 8.

Another critical metric Mr Shawa discussed was the share of youth who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET)—a measure of "idle" youth. Approximately 20% of young people in Asia-Pacific fall into this category. The gender disparity within this group is stark, with NEET rates of 30.4% for young women compared to just 11.3% for young men. Young women face greater obstacles in accessing both employment and education or training opportunities.

For those youth who are working, many are concentrated in low-productivity sectors, primarily agriculture: 34.9% in South Asia, 23.9% in Southeast Asia and the Pacific, and 21.8% in East Asia. This presents a concerning picture that calls for targeted action.

Based on these findings, Mr Shawa offered several recommendations to improve decent work outcomes for youth:

1. Increase youth engagement in decision-making processes to ensure their voices are heard.
2. Implement targeted job creation policies for youth, such as tax rebates for companies that employ recent university graduates, addressing the paradox where employers demand extensive experience that young job seekers cannot possess.
3. Support skills development and training for youth, particularly focusing on digital skills needed in the modern economy and skills that support green transition efforts.
4. Develop integrated employment and social protection approaches, such as providing income support during periods of inactivity and training.

Mr Shawa concluded by reiterating his main message—many SDG 8 targets are regressing, and those specifically targeting youth are making insufficient progress. He emphasised that collective action is needed to change this trajectory and improve employment prospects for young people in the region.

### **Izza Leghtas**, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

Ms Leghtas began her talk by addressing the concept of vulnerability in migration and its relation to human rights, with particular focus on the rights of youth and children on the move. She explained that whilst international law recognises certain categories of people with specific rights, such as refugees, migrant workers, or victims of trafficking, many migrants do not fall within these categories. Nevertheless, she emphasised that international human rights law applies to everyone regardless of status or categorisation.

Ms Leghtas highlighted the concept of "migrants in vulnerable situations," noting that migrants are not inherently vulnerable but may find themselves in situations that place them at higher risk of human rights violations. States have a heightened duty to protect these individuals. She stressed the importance of recognising migrants' agency and resilience when discussing vulnerability.

Ms Leghtas outlined three broad categories of vulnerable situations relevant to migration:

1. Reasons for leaving their country of origin, including climate change, disasters, conflict, generalised violence, or inability to enjoy basic human rights such as health, decent work, adequate housing, or education.
2. Risks encountered during migration journeys, including exposure to violence, trafficking, lack of food or water, and arbitrary detention due to irregular status.
3. Vulnerabilities associated with individual characteristics or identity, such as age (particularly unaccompanied or separated children), gender identity, sexual orientation, or disability.

Ms. Leghtas further discussed the drivers of migration, emphasising that when people cannot access their rights at home—particularly decent work opportunities—they may feel compelled to migrate through precarious pathways that increase their risk of exploitation. She argued that when discussing migration, it is crucial to consider rights in countries of origin; if people can enjoy their rights at home, migration becomes a genuine choice rather than a necessity for survival.

She mentioned that OHCHR has developed a guide on protecting the human rights of migrants in vulnerable situations and offered to share it with the organizers.

Lastly, Ms Leghtas addressed the right to family in the context of migration. She noted that when children or youth migrate with their families, they have rights to freedom from arbitrary detention, education, health, food, and adequate housing, regardless of immigration status. However, she also highlighted situations where families are separated during migration, such as when parents migrate for work whilst children remain behind. OHCHR is examining ways to preserve family unity and the right to family life, either by enabling families to migrate together or by facilitating regular visits to maintain family bonds. She concluded by affirming that migration discussions should center on human rights, rather than being solely dictated by economic considerations.

**Karla Correa**, Regional Child Rights and Business Specialist, UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO)

Ms Correa introduced the concept of the care economy—an often-overlooked topic despite its significant impact on young people. She emphasized that understanding this agenda could strengthen youth advocacy efforts with governments and the private sector to create better conditions for working families, children, and young people.

After gauging participants' familiarity with the care economy concept, Ms Correa presented key data on the Asia-Pacific region's employment landscape. She highlighted that the region is home to two billion workers—representing two-thirds of global employment—and serves as a hub for global supply chains in agriculture, manufacturing, and services.

Ms Correa drew attention to persistent gender inequalities in employment, noting that women are concentrated in low-value-added sectors such as agriculture and retail trade, where decent work deficits are prevalent. She particularly emphasised the invisibility of unpaid care work, stating that women and girls perform 76.2% of total unpaid care work—3.2 times more than men. This disparity significantly limits their opportunities for education, employment, and advancement.

The presentation highlighted that unpaid care work is the primary reason why women remain outside the labour force, with 647 million people of working age (606 million women and 41 million men) not participating in the labour market due to family responsibilities. Mothers of young children aged 0-5 years suffer an employment penalty compared to fathers, even in economically vibrant countries like Malaysia and Thailand that are approaching high-income status.

Ms Correa also noted that children and young people are significant providers of unpaid care work, especially in Africa and the Asia-Pacific region, though their contributions often remain invisible. When families lack decent working conditions, this affects the livelihoods, opportunities, and wellbeing of children and young people.

Using Thailand as a case study, Ms Correa outlined several demographic challenges: the country faces its lowest birth rate in over 70 years and an ageing population expected to reach one-third of the total by 2040. Despite imminent high-income country status, Thailand has inadequate provisions for paid parental leave and workplace breastfeeding support. Consequently, breastfeeding rates remain low despite doubling from 14% in 2019 to 29% in 2022—still well below the Global Nutrition Target of 50% by 2025.

Ms Correa referenced a UNICEF study from Fiji showing that nine out of ten working parents reported childcare responsibilities impacting their work through absences, lateness, or distraction. She noted that these issues affect not only family wellbeing but also workplace productivity, making it relevant to both governments and employers.

Globally, only 15 countries have implemented three basic national policies that adequately support parents and caregivers: six months of paid maternity leave with four weeks of paid paternity leave, six months of paid breastfeeding breaks, and two years of tuition-free pre-primary education. Meanwhile, the Asia-Pacific region, despite its economic vibrancy, is

home to an estimated 122 million children aged 5-14 who are compelled to work for survival, with millions not enrolled in school.

Ms Correa explained UNICEF's vision of moving from a "care economy" to a "care society." She defined the care economy as focusing primarily on paid care work (both formal and informal) and unpaid care work, typically centred on working-age caregivers, particularly women. However, it often excludes the roles of children, persons with disabilities, and older persons. To transition to a more inclusive care society, these groups must be included in care systems.

She emphasised that young people should understand and advocate for care policies and regulations, as these will affect their opportunities throughout their lives—from childhood through adolescence and into adulthood. Since 2019, UNICEF has advocated for family-friendly workplaces that provide the time, resources, and services necessary for working parents and caregivers to give their children the best start in life.

Ms Correa concluded by encouraging participants to join UNICEF in advocating with governments and businesses (as employers) to create a society of care that provides optimal conditions for children and young people through supporting the wellbeing of working families and caregivers. In a region with two billion workers, she stressed the importance of pressuring both governments and the private sector to implement supportive policies.

## Question and Answer with the Panellists

Following the presentation by the panellists, the floor was opened for the questions:

### Question 1: SRHR and Disability Justice

Nu, India: Nu, expressed interest in the care economy concept and asked *how the speakers viewed disability-based violence through an intersectional lens?*

Nu emphasized the importance of centering disabled people in policies rather than merely ensuring no one is left behind. Specific forms of disability-based violence highlighted included confiscation of mobility aids, withholding of medicine, abusive caregivers, intimate partner violence disguised as assistance, and violations of consent. Nu also asked about *government perspectives on these issues and what policy changes were being implemented*, noting that current policies often only vaguely mention disabled girls and women rather than centering their experiences.

**Ms. Correa** acknowledged that current policies are neither sensitive nor transformative regarding persons with disabilities. She emphasized the importance of listening to persons with

disabilities themselves to inform policy development. The "care and support" agenda, she noted, includes support precisely because of the specific needs of persons with disabilities and the inequities in existing systems. She pointed out that while policies like paid parental leave exist, they are insufficient to address the challenges faced by persons with disabilities. Companies are beginning to improve facilities, but these efforts remain limited.

**Mr. Shawa** added that the ILO works with governments to raise awareness about supporting people with disabilities and implements deliberate actions within its organization. These actions include providing support for interns and job applicants with disabilities and mainstreaming disability considerations in national policies and strategies.

**Question 2: NEET Disparities** – Directed to Mr. Shawa

*What are the main structural or systemic factors contributing to the significant disparity in NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) rates between young women and young men?*

Mr. Shawa highlighted that while the overall NEET rate in the region is about 20%, young women are almost three times more disadvantaged than young men (30% vs. 12%). He attributed this disparity to the gendered distribution of unpaid care work, where young women are more likely to be involved in household responsibilities, keeping them outside the labour force. He referenced an earlier audience discussion on domestic work, where participants indicated that mothers and sisters typically perform more household labour than fathers and brothers. This pattern, he explained, underpins systemic barriers that young women face, exacerbated by cultural and economic factors.

**Question 3: Unemployment Crisis**

*What immediate actions can be taken to address the youth unemployment crisis in rural and urban areas, particularly in countries facing economic instability or climate change effects?*

Mr. Shawa outlined three key immediate actions:

1. Targeted youth employment policies, such as implementing tax rebates for companies that hire young people without requiring extensive prior experience to incentivize firms to train and employ youth.
2. Skills development focusing on areas attractive to young people, such as digitalisation and artificial intelligence, to enhance employability.
3. Shock-sensitive social protection measures creating social safety nets that specifically address youth unemployment, particularly in response to climate change effects.

#### Question 4: Economic opportunities and decent work

*How can young people raise their voices about economic opportunities and decent work while struggling with unemployment, unpaid work, and systemic inequalities?*

Ms. Leghtas referenced the second Asia-Pacific review of the Global Compact on Migration in Bangkok, emphasizing the importance of meaningful youth and migrant participation in policy discussions. She noted that convenors of such platforms have a responsibility to ensure accessibility and genuine engagement, citing an example where a youth representative spoke at the plenary alongside migrant organization representatives.

Ms. Correa concluded by emphasizing that while creating jobs is not the responsibility of young people, their voices are crucial in policy discussions. She encouraged participants to continue advocating and applying pressure to ensure youth perspectives are integrated into policy reforms and new initiatives.

#### Conclusion and Transition to Breakout Rooms

Agatha, who was moderating the panel thanked the speakers for their insights and emphasized that youth unemployment is a form of systemic oppression, reinforcing the need for an intersectional approach to address structural barriers like capitalism and racism. The panel then transitioned to breakout rooms for further discussion.

##### **Breakout Room 1: Ending Harmful Practices and Violence against Women and girls; Unpaid Care work; Decent Work; Technology**

##### **Presentation 1: Women in White Coats, Are They Safe? A Study on the Caveats of Workplace Safety for Female Healthcare Professionals in Bangladesh**

*Speaker: Dr. Sabrina Monsur, Bangladesh*

Dr. Sabrina Monsur Start her presentation with Dr. Moumita rape and murder case in India and presented findings from research on workplace safety issues. According to her study, 86.6% of participants reported feeling unsafe at work, with many experiencing sexual violence, physical violence, and verbal abuse. These safety concerns were shown to significantly reduce motivation at work. The speaker emphasized the need to say no to workplace harassment and called for greater awareness and stricter policies.

Sexual violence was highlighted as being deeply rooted in patriarchal social structures, making certain professions more vulnerable than others. She stressed the necessity of raising awareness and implementing structural changes to ensure safety for all workers.

**Presentation 2: “No one is sharing this information to us” Are Migrant Workers Left Behind? A Case Study and Advocacy Implementation on Intimate Partner Violence and Non-Partner Violence among Informal Sector Myanmar Migrant Workers in Thailand Violence in Migration and Labor Rights**

*Speaker: Aye Myat Win*

Aye Myat Win addressed intimate partner violence, non-partner violence, and violence in migration, focusing on mass migration to Thailand and the impact of low socioeconomic conditions on migrant workers. It was noted that labor rights, rather than gender-specific issues, are often prioritized, leaving migrant women particularly vulnerable to violence. Her research on rubber migrant workers found that many do not recognize violence or report it due to cultural norms. Additionally, there are limited organizations working specifically on women’s issues within migrant labor rights frameworks. An intersectional approach was recommended to better protect migrant women in labor sectors.

**Presentation 3: Thuma Tech: Empowering Women with Digital Security and Privacy in Myanmar**

*Speaker: Khun Sint Phoo Wai*

Khun Sint Phoo Wai introduced the Thuma Initiative (“She” in English), which seeks to combat digital gender-based violence. The discussion highlighted the fear of stigma and limited legal protections for women facing online harassment. A real-time support system via Messenger chatbot was developed to provide immediate aid to women experiencing online violence. The Digital Intellectuals Aid Center was also introduced as a key intervention. One of the key takeaways from this discussion was the notion that if women are safe online, they are empowered offline. This reinforced the importance of digital safety as a prerequisite for broader gender equality initiatives.

**Presentation 4: Policy Evaluation of Child Marriage Prevention in West Nusa Tenggara (2016–2023): Advocating Grassroots Interventions for Sustainable Change**

*Speaker: Wahyu Candra Devi*

Wahyu Candra Devi presented an evaluation of child marriage policies, emphasizing that child marriage remains a major obstacle to gender equality. It was noted that child brides

are more prone to domestic violence, lack decision-making power, and face economic hardships. Cultural factors also play a role, as in some communities, child marriage is viewed as an economic necessity. The practice of abducting young girls to force them into marriage was discussed as an issue in Indonesia. The lack of safe sexual education and awareness among both children and parents further exacerbates the problem.

A major challenge highlighted was the inconsistency of child marriage policies, particularly in cases where rape victims are forced into marriage as a form of social resolution. The lack of continuation programs to support young girls after escaping child marriage was another concern. A bottom-up approach to child protection, community-based interventions, and improved legal frameworks were recommended to address these issues.

The participant asked about the Traditional and national law, Push back from , Community based child protection, Role of Community where The speakers noted that raising awareness remains a major challenge, particularly in indigenous communities where child marriage is prevalent. Additionally, language barriers make it difficult for some groups to understand legal protections and their rights.

### **Q&A Discussion and Key Interactions**

During the Q&A session, participants raised crucial questions, such as the root causes of workplace violence. Speakers identified patriarchal mindsets, weak policy enforcement, and economic vulnerabilities as primary factors. Advocacy efforts to combat workplace violence should include community-based child protection programs and greater engagement with local leaders. Another key discussion point was the digital divide, with participants questioning women's access to mobile devices and their digital literacy levels. Speakers emphasized the need to integrate digital education with gender-sensitive policies, noting that AI and social media can either empower or further marginalize women. Awareness campaigns, policy enforcement, and safe reporting mechanisms were recommended as necessary interventions. While the timeframe for impact varies by region, sustained advocacy and community engagement were emphasized as critical for long-term change.

### **Key Takeaways**

1. Workplace violence and harassment remain widespread issues, reducing workers' motivation and well-being.

2. Gender-based violence is deeply rooted in societal structures and requires systemic interventions.
3. Migrant women face heightened risks of violence due to economic and legal vulnerabilities.
4. Digital safety measures can empower women, reducing the risks of online and offline gender-based violence.
5. Child marriage remains a pressing challenge, necessitating stronger legal frameworks and community action.
6. Sustained advocacy and awareness efforts are needed to drive meaningful policy and behavioral changes.

### **Recommendations for Future Action**

#### Workplace Safety and Gender-Based Violence

- Strengthen laws and workplace policies to ensure protection against harassment and violence.
- Conduct regular workplace safety audits and enforce strict reporting mechanisms.
- Implement awareness campaigns focusing on workers' rights and gender-based violence prevention.
- Ensure gender-sensitive training for law enforcement, employers, and employees.

#### Migrant Labor Rights and Intersectionality

- Incorporate gender-focused policies in migrant labor rights frameworks.
- Strengthen support services for migrant women, particularly those vulnerable to violence.
- Promote intersectional approaches that address economic, cultural, and gender-based vulnerabilities.
- Establish accessible reporting channels for migrant workers to seek assistance.

#### Digital Safety for Women

- Expand real-time digital support services for women facing online harassment.
- Strengthen cyber laws to protect women from digital gender-based violence.
- Increase digital literacy programs, ensuring women understand their rights online.
- Foster partnerships with technology companies to enhance women's digital security.

#### Child Marriage and Protection of Girls

- Enforce stricter legal age limitations and prevent forced marriages.
- Improve access to education and economic opportunities for young girls.
- Raise awareness on the consequences of child marriage, engaging both children and parents.

- Support community-based child protection programs to empower local stakeholders.

### **Conclusion**

The discussion highlighted the urgent need for better policies and community programs to protect workers from violence and exploitation. Issues like workplace violence, migration risks, online abuse, and child marriage need a combined approach, including legal changes, awareness campaigns, and digital solutions.

For real change, education, policy improvements, and community involvement must continue. The session emphasized that gender-focused policies should be a key part of labor rights discussions to ensure all workers, no matter their gender or migration status, are safe and empowered.

### **Breakout Room 2: Gender and Leadership: Promoting diverse leadership, equitable access to resources, and decision-making opportunities for young people, with a focus on addressing gender gaps; Political participation**

#### **Presentation 1: Beyond Victims: Gender Positive Political Discourses in South Asia**

*Speaker: Akhil Neelam*

Akhil emphasized that discourse around women in politics often focuses on harassment and representation, discouraging women from joining the political arena. He highlighted the work of CGAP in promoting solution-oriented approaches, such as featuring women role models, encouraging positive narratives, and engaging men as allies in political discourse. He noted that between 2020 and 2024, their work contributed to shifts in how media titles and reporting language frame women in politics. An example included the reframing of interviews with Harini Amarasuriya, which focused on leadership and activism without sexist language.

#### **Presentation 2: Gendered and Systemic Violence: Women's Political Participation Barrier in Indonesia**

*Speaker: Intan Kusumaning Tiyas*

Intan underscored the notion that "the personal is political" and discussed how every personal issue women face is linked to politics. She raised critical questions about whether achieving numerical representation alone equates to proactive political participation. A

key focus was the dual nature of social media in supporting and harming female candidates. Her research analyzed the campaign materials of female candidates from multiple political parties, revealing the prevalence of online gender-based violence (GBV). The discussion also explored the challenges faced by women with disabilities, indigenous Papuan women, and Aceh women, particularly in the intersection of religion, tradition, and political participation.

### **Presentation 3: Breaking the gender stereotype with social entrepreneurship- Case study from Thailand**

*Speaker: Deepa Parajuli*

Deepa shared a case study from Thailand on "Breaking the Gender Stereotype with Social Entrepreneurship." She discussed the role of social entrepreneurship in economic development and how women entrepreneurs in Thailand have built businesses without corporate assistance. She highlighted a 28-year-old female entrepreneur who now mobilizes over 30 individuals, demonstrating the power of grassroots entrepreneurship in breaking gender barriers.

### **Presentation 4: Meraki : Nurturing The Next Generation Women Social Entrepreneur With Gamification**

*Speaker: Alvian Wardhana*

Alvian provided an overview of barriers faced by Indonesian women entrepreneurs, particularly in accessing capital. Meraki employs a gamification approach to train young women and NGOs in business development, project management, and policy advocacy. The initiative has reached 20 remote areas and benefited 1,800 students, demonstrating a scalable model for economic empowerment. Alvian emphasized the need for government and UN support to integrate gender perspectives into economic policies and ensure women's equal access to resources.

### **Key questions and discussions:**

The discussion included a dynamic Q&A session. One question addressed how women can better engage with technology while avoiding systemic barriers like the glass ceiling. Alvian noted that Meraki uses WhatsApp to enhance accessibility for women. Akhil highlighted that AI offers both opportunities and risks—while it enables mass mobilization, it also exposes women to online violence and deep fakes.

Another question explored representation for trans people and other marginalized groups in politics. Akhil pointed out that some political parties have transgender wings, though this remains uncommon. Deepa mentioned that while policy changes are happening, inclusivity is still a challenge, especially in Nepal. Intan shared the case of a transgender woman who ran for office in Indonesia, supported by her local community despite broader societal resistance.

**Recommendations:**

- Move from gendered commentary on women politicians' personal lives and appearances to focusing on their political achievements and leadership
- Build positive role models to inspire young women to join politics
- Engage male allies in promoting gender-positive political discourses
- Increasing substantive representation of women in politics
- Addressing violence against women in politics
- Encourage female entrepreneurs to use innovative approaches to maximize community resources, reducing costs and expanding networks.
- Train female entrepreneurs in resource optimization and community-driven innovation.
- Foster partnerships with local stakeholders to co-create sustainable solutions.
- Develop targeted policies and funding mechanisms for female-led social enterprises.
- Establish capacity-building programs to strengthen entrepreneurial skills and financial literacy.
- Highlight and scale successful female-led models to inspire others and challenge gender stereotypes.
- Create a platform to document and share case studies of successful female entrepreneurs.
- Organize workshops and networking events to amplify their impact and inspire others.
- Encourage UN bodies and governments to integrate gender perspectives into development policies.
- Support women entrepreneurs with capacity-building initiatives and access to finance.
- Develop training programs in business management, financing, and marketing for marginalized women.

## **Recommendations for Future Action**

### **1. Shifting Political Narratives**

- Move from gendered commentary on women politicians' personal lives and appearances to focusing on their political achievements and leadership.
- Build positive role models to inspire young women to join politics.
- Engage male allies in promoting gender-positive political discourses.

### **2. Enhancing Women's Political Participation**

- Increase substantive representation of women in politics.
- Address violence against women in politics.
- Tackle discrimination against women from marginalized and indigenous groups.
- Conduct further research on systemic barriers to women's political participation.

### **3. Advancing Women's Economic Empowerment**

- Leverage social innovation to encourage female entrepreneurs in maximizing community resources.
- Enhance government support through policies and funding mechanisms for women-led social enterprises.
- Showcase success stories of women entrepreneurs to challenge gender stereotypes and inspire others.

### **4. Supporting Women Entrepreneurs Through Gamification**

- Promote strategies for integrating a gender perspective into development policies.
- Support women entrepreneurs through capacity-building initiatives, access to finance, and integration into value chains.
- Develop training programs in business management, product development, financing, and marketing for marginalized women.

## **Conclusion**

The session highlighted critical challenges and solutions for achieving gender-inclusive leadership and economic participation under SDG 8. Speakers emphasized the need for positive media representation, political leadership, entrepreneurship, and economic opportunities for women.

Key takeaways include:

- The importance of reframing narratives around women in politics.
- Addressing systemic violence and barriers to entry into leadership roles.
- Social entrepreneurship and gamification as tools for economic empowerment.

The role of policy advocacy in ensuring gender-inclusive leadership

### **Breakout Room 3: Intersectionality in decent work and economic growth (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Human Rights), Climate Change**

#### **Presentation 1: Empowering Communities Through S4T: Building Financial Resilience and Disaster Preparedness in Vulnerable Areas**

*Speaker: Indra Oktora, Indonesia*

Indra Oktora highlighted the role of financial resilience and disaster preparedness in strengthening vulnerable communities in Indonesia. He emphasized savings and loan activities as critical tools for economic stability and emergency preparedness. Additionally, he addressed concerns about the rise of high-interest online loans and the necessity of community-led financial management strategies to counter economic vulnerabilities.

#### **Presentation 2: Amplifying Voices and Empowering Communities**

*Speaker: Banu (Pseudonym), Afghanistan*

Banu discussed the economic and mental support needed for women and children in Afghanistan. She presented case studies on vocational training programs that have improved women's confidence and financial independence. Furthermore, she advocated for digital storytelling and social media campaigns as tools to highlight the challenges and successes of marginalized communities, fostering a stronger sense of empowerment and visibility.

#### **Presentation 3: Art of Advocacy: Creative Pathways to Gender Equality, Legal Identity, and Belonging**

*Speaker: Sarah Czarina Mashanis, Malaysia (Online)*

Sarah Czarina Mashanis addressed issues related to legal identity and citizenship, particularly for Malaysian women married to non-Malaysian men. She showcased creative advocacy tools such as social media, poetry, and board games as effective methods to

drive awareness and influence policy change. She also highlighted the success of lobbying efforts that led to the passage of a citizenship bill in Malaysia's parliament, demonstrating the power of inclusive and innovative advocacy approaches.

### **Key Discussion Points**

- The role of financial inclusion in strengthening disaster preparedness.
- Economic support and vocational training as a means to empower marginalized women.
- Digital advocacy as a powerful tool for policy change and community empowerment.
- The significance of legal identity and gender-sensitive policies for social and economic inclusion.

### **Key Takeaways**

- Empowering women through economic support leads to broader community benefits.
- Creative and digital advocacy methods can successfully influence legal reforms and policy changes.
- Community leadership and youth involvement are essential in sustainable development efforts.
- Intersectionality must be integrated into economic frameworks to ensure fair opportunities for marginalized communities.
- Financial inclusion is fundamental for strengthening disaster preparedness and economic resilience.
- Legal identity and gender-sensitive policies are crucial for ensuring social and economic inclusion.

### **Recommendations**

- Expand the storytelling approach to highlight the lives and challenges of vulnerable communities.
- Advocate for local development projects and economic support for women in conflict-affected regions.
- Promote community leadership and youth involvement in expanding women-led businesses.
- Leverage multi-platform advocacy, including digital campaigns, to amplify marginalized voices.

### **Recommendations for Future Action**

- **Policy Advocacy:** Strengthen legal frameworks supporting women's financial independence and citizenship rights.
- **Capacity Building:** Train local leaders and youth in financial literacy and disaster preparedness.
- **Collaborative Initiatives:** Foster partnerships between grassroots organizations and international bodies for broader impact.
- **Intersectional Analysis:** Develop economic policies that are sensitive to gender and regional disparities.

### **Conclusion**

The session underscored the interconnectedness of financial resilience, gender equality, and policy advocacy in achieving sustainable development. By integrating economic support with creative advocacy, communities can foster self-reliance, legal identity, and disaster preparedness. The discussions reinforced the need for sustained efforts in policy reforms, digital advocacy, and grassroots-led financial initiatives. The inclusion of intersectional frameworks in economic policies ensures that growth benefits all, particularly the most marginalized.

### **Breakout Room 4: Collaborations for Gender Equality (SDG 17)**

#### **Presentation 1: Empowering Young Women through Vocational Training for Decent Work and Economic Growth**

*Speaker: Doleh Khan, Pakistan*

Doleh Khan highlighted his work in empowering marginalized communities by providing vocational training. He shared the impact of skill development programs in creating economic opportunities for women in rural areas. His key message was that vocational training not only transforms individual lives but also uplifts entire communities. He discussed strategies such as community engagement, networking, and financial support, which have enabled women across four districts to access training and employment opportunities. He emphasized that skill development is critical in helping women

overcome the barriers of limited educational and employment opportunities and socio-cultural restrictions.

**Presentation 2: Towards Gender-Inclusive AI in Government: Analyzing Citizen Engagement Systems in Bangladesh.**

*Speaker: Sidratul Moontaha, Bangladesh*

Sidratul Moontaha discussed the importance of gender-inclusive AI governance, raising concerns about biases in AI systems and their disproportionate impact on marginalized communities, particularly women. Her research on 500 stakeholders revealed that algorithmic bias remains a critical issue. She noted that while digital governance in Bangladesh has improved, challenges persist, including inefficient bureaucracy, corruption, and limited citizen engagement. Women have less access to technology and are underrepresented in related fields. She stressed that AI systems often reflect human biases, as seen in facial recognition software that struggles to identify Black women. She called for gender-sensitive AI development, inclusive data collection, and stronger collaborations between policymakers, AI developers, and the community to mitigate bias and improve digital governance.

**Presentation 3: Obstacles of the Agency of Adolescent Girls**

*Speaker: Nadine Sahasrakirana Acintya, Indonesia*

Nadine presented the cultural and religious barriers faced by adolescent girls, particularly in the context of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). She analyzed how patriarchal norms and religious traditions sustain these harmful practices and emphasized the need for systemic change through gender-transformative education. She highlighted that FGM is deeply rooted in religious and cultural traditions and is often perpetuated by women within families. Despite attempts to ban FGM, government and religious authorities in Indonesia have rejected such measures. Nadine argued that FGM is a challenge to religious interpretations and a major obstacle to achieving SDG 5.3. She stressed the importance of integrating gender perspectives into religious education and engaging religious leaders in policy advocacy to end FGM. Her research provides evidence for public policy advocacy and development initiatives focused on FGM prevention.

**Presentation 4: Reproductive Justice for Victims of Sexual Violence: A Feminist Legal Theory Review of Abortion Policy in the 2023 Health Law**

*Speaker: EVA Nurcahyani, Indonesia*

EVA Nurcahyani addressed reproductive justice and the legal challenges surrounding abortion policies. She provided a feminist legal analysis and emphasized the need for reforms that prioritize the rights of sexual violence survivors. She highlighted data showing an increase in sexual violence cases, leading to a rise in pregnancies among teenagers and children. She criticized the existing health laws that require victims to undergo administrative procedures before accessing abortion services, causing delays and additional trauma. She stressed the importance of legal frameworks that support reproductive autonomy and protect vulnerable women from systemic oppression.

**Recommendations:**

- Expand vocational training centers in rural areas to provide women with economic opportunities and financial independence.
- Offer diverse training programs such as tailoring and beautician courses to increase women's income-generating capabilities.
- Promote financial inclusion through micro-loans for women entrepreneurs to facilitate economic empowerment.
- Strengthen gender-inclusive policies to ensure equal opportunities for women in all sectors.
- Implement inclusive data collection practices to ensure diverse representation, particularly of rural women and youth.
- Develop gender-sensitive AI policies to prevent discrimination and mitigate algorithmic bias.
- Enhance capacity-building initiatives by fostering collaboration between NGOs, tech companies, and government bodies.
- Integrate religious perspectives into gender-transformative education to address harmful cultural practices.
- Engage religious leaders in advocacy efforts to influence community beliefs and drive policy reforms.
- Advocate for public policy measures that prohibit health workers and institutions from performing FGM.
- Ensure free and comprehensive healthcare services for women who have undergone FGM.
- Incorporate a gender lens in policy formulation and law enforcement to safeguard reproductive rights.

- Strengthen education and training for medical professionals on reproductive rights and justice.
- Improve access to accurate information on abortion, particularly for survivors of sexual violence.
- Conduct awareness campaigns and legal advocacy to uphold reproductive autonomy and dismantle systemic barriers.

### **Recommendations for Future Action**

To drive sustainable change, collaboration among governments, civil society, and youth advocates is essential. Key steps include:

- Expanding financial inclusion initiatives and economic empowerment programs.
- Strengthening legal frameworks to protect reproductive rights and gender equality.
- Addressing cultural and religious barriers through education and advocacy.
- Encouraging cross-sector partnerships to integrate gender-sensitive approaches into AI development and policy-making.
- Increasing awareness about AI ethics, reproductive rights, and gender-based violence.

### **Conclusion**

The session highlighted the interconnected challenges in achieving gender equality and the necessity of collaborative efforts. The discussions underscored the importance of policy advocacy, education, financial empowerment, and technological inclusivity. By implementing the recommendations discussed, stakeholders can contribute to creating a more just and inclusive society for all.

Participants discussed challenges in advocacy and building partnerships with stakeholders for example inaccessible policymakers, power imbalances. Changing traditional norms is not easy, especially when we are advocating against stigma issues.

The concluding discussion also focussed upon how technology brings both opportunities and challenges and therefore there is a strong need to strengthen awareness on what AI can do.

## DAY TWO: CLIMATE ACTION DAY

### High Level Opening Remarks

**Christophe Bahuet**, Deputy Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific and UNDP Director of the Bangkok Regional Hub

Speaking on behalf of UNDP, Christophe Bahuet acknowledged his team and partners for organizing the event. He emphasized the forum's collaborative nature, involving various UN entities like UNICEF, UNFCCC, and UNESCAP. He acknowledged Sweden as a steadfast supporter of the United Nations and multilateralism. He also recognized Sweden's strong partnership in youth empowerment and climate action, and ARROW's ongoing collaboration with UNDP.

Mr. Bahuet highlighted a key concern: 60% of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) fail to meaningfully recognize youth involvement. While some mention youth, most do not substantively integrate their perspectives. He expressed disappointment at this finding, noting that it contradicts UNDP's experience of youth-led climate initiatives such as YECAP and Youth Collab.

Mr Bahuet highlighted the stark contrast between diminishing political will and the strong commitment to climate action demonstrated by young people. He observed that youth across the Asia-Pacific region were increasingly vocal about their perspectives and demands, while also taking concrete actions at both community and national levels to develop innovative solutions to climate challenges.

To illustrate this point, Mr Bahuet shared two examples:

1. A recent regional dialogue in Samoa that brought together young people from across the Pacific, including Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu. He described how these youth representatives confidently engaged with governments, expressing their desire to participate in NDC 3.0 formulation and offering concrete ideas and solutions. Mr Bahuet affirmed UNDP's commitment to continue supporting such engagement across the Pacific and wider Asia.
2. The exhibition displayed in the corridor outside the meeting room, which showcased numerous practical ideas and solutions proposed by young people. Mr Bahuet emphasised the importance of translating these proposals from posters into action—a process UNDP is committed to supporting.

Mr Bahuet concluded by emphasising that youth engagement in climate action and broader development efforts is not only legitimate but also yields tangible benefits in terms of mitigation, adaptation, and climate finance. He reiterated UNDP's commitment to creating more safe spaces for young people to participate meaningfully and have their contributions reflected in policy.

While acknowledging the forum's connection to various processes, including the upcoming Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) Youth Forum and the High-Level Political Forum, Mr Bahuet emphasised that the current dialogue was primarily a valuable opportunity for participants to exchange ideas, make their voices heard, and strengthen their networks for action. His final message to the youth participants was an encouragement to continue their efforts: "Keep meeting, keep speaking, and keep acting."

**Alejandro Kilpatrick**, Manager, Capacity-Building Subdivision, MOI Capacity Building Team, UNFCCC

Mr. Kilpatrick welcomed youth participants, recognizing the dialogue as a platform to showcase initiatives, enhance resource access, and foster collaboration. He commended the YECAP initiative, co-convened by UNDP, UNFCCC, and UNICEF with Sweden's support, as well as ARROW's role in organizing the event.

He identified 2025 as a milestone year, marking the Paris Agreement's 10th anniversary and the introduction of NDC 3.0. He outlined key forthcoming climate commitments, including National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), Biennial Transparency Reports, and COP decisions on climate finance, Article 6, and indigenous and gender work programs.

Kilpatrick emphasized that youth should be seen as capacity builders, not just beneficiaries, noting that Asia-Pacific youth make up 60% of the global youth population. However, systemic changes are needed to enable their meaningful participation in policy and decision-making.

He highlighted key UNFCCC initiatives:

- The Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE), which provides a framework empowering youth through capacity building, increased participation and leadership opportunities.
- The Youth for Capacity Programme, strengthening youth capacities with support from the Italian Ministry for the Environment and Security.
- The UNFCCC Regional Collaboration Centre in Bangkok, providing platforms for youth to engage in climate discussions at all levels.

Mr. Kilpatrik underscored the need for youth participation in climate policies, including NDC forums and COP initiatives. He expressed hope that the dialogue's outcomes would create ripple effects across communities and encouraged participants to inspire future generations.

### **Myo-Zin Nyunt**, Deputy Regional Director, UNICEF East Asia and Pacific

Mr. Nyunt underscored climate change as a present reality, disproportionately affecting children, who now experience six times more disasters than previous generations. He referenced the recent devastating floods in Southeast Asia that disrupted communities and education, highlighting the urgent need for action.

Despite these challenges, he emphasized the growing leadership of young people in climate solutions and reaffirmed UNICEF's commitment to empowering youth through education, green skills development, and policy engagement. Recognizing climate change as a child rights crisis, UNICEF collaborates with governments to ensure policies address the needs of children, particularly the most vulnerable. In the East Asia and Pacific region, these efforts include strengthening climate education, expanding girls' access to green jobs, and increasing youth participation in climate action.

Mr. Nyunt also highlighted UNICEF's partnership with the Youth Empowerment in Climate Action Platform (YECAP), which provides young people with the skills and opportunities to contribute meaningfully to climate solutions. He commended youth activists for holding decision-makers accountable and leading the fight for climate justice, acknowledging the importance of their lived experiences and perspectives in shaping a sustainable future.

Recognizing the disproportionate impact of climate change on girls and young women, he urged an inclusive, gender-equal approach to climate action. He assured participants that UNICEF remains committed to supporting youth-led climate initiatives and will continue working alongside them to drive meaningful change.

### **Sivananthi Thanenthiran**, Executive Director, ARROW

Siva highlighted the APFSD Youth Forum as a vital regional platform, established in 2017, with a brief interruption during COVID-19. She emphasized its role as a self-organized civic space for young people to shape the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) and ensure youth priorities are reflected in SDG reviews.

Siva noted the forum's evolution from its initial convening partners—ARROW, Y-PEER Asia Pacific Centre, and Youth LEAD—to now include YECAP, UNDP, CYMG to UNEP, and MGCY. She shared that this year's forum received over 2,000 applications, with 150 in-person and 428 online participants, contributing to a growing alumni network of 5,000 young SDG advocates.

She commended youth-driven initiatives like the Bangladesh Alliance for Youth, which engages nationally before joining APFSD, strengthening connections across local, national, and global levels.

On climate action, Siva observed that the Asia-Pacific region is among the most climate-affected areas globally. Siva stressed that the Asia-Pacific region faces increasing climate threats, such as frequent typhoons in the Philippines. She highlighted how marginalized communities bear the brunt of these disasters, deepening cycles of poverty. She called for gender-responsive climate action, linking gender justice to climate justice. She outlined three key impacts:

Siva emphasised the need for gender-responsive climate action, noting that women, girls, and young people are at the centre of climate change effects. She asserted that gender justice and climate justice are inextricably linked, as the communities that have contributed least to climate change problems are suffering the most from its impacts.

She outlined three key intersections between climate, gender equality, and health:

1. The loss of resources and access to resources, particularly affecting women, girls, and young people from rural and indigenous communities whose natural resources are depleted due to climate change.
2. The triple burden of work faced by young people, women, and girls due to:
  - o Household scarcity of food, water, and natural resources, requiring women and girls to travel further to obtain essential supplies
  - o Increased care-giving responsibilities for the young, elderly, and sick due to the rise in vector-borne diseases associated with climate change
3. The increase in gender-based violence and heightened mortality and morbidity resulting from inadequate sexual and reproductive health and rights services during climate emergencies.

She urged participants to integrate these issues into their discussions and praised the APFSD Youth Forum for fostering multiple Call to Actions, reflecting youth-driven accountability.

**Per Linnér**, Deputy Head of the Development Cooperation Section for Asia and the

## Pacific, Embassy of Sweden in Bangkok

Mr. Linnér opened his address by expressing gratitude for the invitation and commending the engagement and diversity of participants at the dialogue. He highlighted the urgency of addressing the climate crisis, emphasizing the need for enhanced collaboration and more effective multilateralism, particularly in the face of recent global setbacks in international cooperation. He urged participants to collectively intensify their efforts to overcome these challenges.

Recognizing that the Asia-Pacific region is home to a significant portion of the world's youth, Mr. Linnér underscored the critical role young people play in climate action and democratic governance. He noted their growing participation in key platforms such as the Conference of Parties (COP), Stockholm+50, and the APFSD, where they have been instrumental in shaping discussions and advocating for stronger commitments. He commended youth contributions to national climate strategies, ensuring that policies are inclusive and reflective of future generations' needs. He affirmed that young people's involvement ensures that policies and initiatives are inclusive, forward-thinking, and reflective of future generations' needs.

Mr. Linnér acknowledged the structural challenges young people face, including high unemployment, limited access to education, and health disparities, all of which are further exacerbated by climate change. He reaffirmed Sweden's commitment to supporting climate action through innovation, digitalization, and climate finance, emphasizing Sweden's role as one of the largest contributors to the Green Climate Fund, underscoring that climate finance remains a key priority for Swedish development cooperation. He also stressed the importance of private sector engagement in the green transition. He affirmed Sweden's continued support for partners in mobilising private sector engagement and investment in green transition and sustainable business models, with particular focus on youth empowerment.

He further emphasized that a strong, transparent, and democratic society is fundamental to sustainable development, noting that open governance enables young people to engage and contribute evidence-based solutions. He asserted that climate change is a scientific reality that must be addressed through fact-based approaches. Looking ahead to COP 30, he urged participants to advocate for ambitious and comprehensive Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) in their respective countries. He acknowledged participants as leaders whose influence is valuable in shaping this dialogue with their governments.

In closing, Mr. Linnér reiterated Sweden's commitment to listening to youth voices and creating more spaces for dialogue, recognizing that young people not only bear the consequences of climate change but also hold solutions for a more sustainable future. He expressed gratitude to ARROW, YECAP, and UN partners for organizing the dialogue and wished participants productive discussions.

## PLENARY SESSION 3: URGENT ACTION TO COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACT AND PROTECTING LIFE BELOW WATER

**Jay Malette**, Regional Climate Change Specialist with UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub

Mr. Malette's presentation focused on SDG 13 (Climate Action), highlighting the progress, gaps, and challenges in combating climate change, the critical juncture the world faces, and three key ways forward to support young people as agents of change.

Mr. Malette underscored the Asia-Pacific region's vulnerability to climate change, with over 4.3 billion people affected by rising temperatures, extreme weather events, and ecological degradation. He highlighted that the past decade being the hottest on record, leading to health crises, crop failures, and infrastructure damage; Intensified storms, floods, typhoons, and droughts causing billions of dollars in damage and threatening food and water security; Rising sea levels posing an existential crisis for Pacific nations; and the melting of glaciers in the Hindu Kush mountain range, jeopardizing water security for millions.

Mr Malette emphasised that these impacts are not experienced equally, with the most vulnerable populations—those who have contributed least to the crisis—bearing the heaviest burden. He characterised the situation as a crisis demanding urgent, collective, and transformative action.

Despite these challenges, Mr Malette acknowledged some positive shifts occurring in the region including the shift to renewable energy adoption, e-mobility transitions, climate-resilient agriculture and ecosystem protection along with the growing awareness, particularly among young people, serving as a powerful catalyst for change through speaking up, demanding action, and driving innovation.

However, Mr. Malette acknowledged that progress remains insufficient, with UNESCAP's 2025 SDG Progress Report showing regression on SDG 13. He identified the key challenges including rising greenhouse gas emissions, disaster vulnerability, rapid urbanization and inadequate climate finance.

Mr. Malette highlighted a critical opportunity that 2025 marks the 10th anniversary of the Paris Agreement, with nations expected to submit new Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs 3.0). With countries expected to submit their revised NDCs this year, he emphasised that these climate action plans outline how countries will reduce emissions and adapt to changing climate conditions. Mr. Malette emphasized this as a pivotal moment to keep global warming below 1.5°C. He reiterated that the decisions made now and the level of ambition in NDC 3.0 will determine the planet's fate for the long term.

He highlighted UNDP's Climate Promise 2025, which supports developing nations in strengthening and implementing their climate commitments, ensuring inclusivity and youth engagement. He presented three ways forward to enhance youth engagement in climate action:

1. Amplifying Youth Voices in Policy-Making
2. Investing in Youth-led Green Solutions
3. Empowering youth with green skills

Mr. Malette concluded with a strong call for collective action, urging governments, institutions, and organizations to move beyond tokenism and genuinely integrate youth into climate governance. He emphasized that young people must be recognized as policy accelerators, agents of change, and implementers of solutions for a green and inclusive future.

### **Dr Sangmin Nam, Director, Environment and Development Division, UNESCAP**

Dr. Nam expressed his enthusiasm for engaging with youth, and shared his journey from student and local activism to his current role at the UN, emphasizing the importance of youth in driving immediate and long-term change. Highlighting the impact of youth movements, particularly in 2018-2019, Dr. Nam credited young activists for mobilizing political commitments toward net-zero targets across most countries in the region. He identified key Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) lagging in Asia-Pacific—particularly SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 14 (Life Below Water). He stressed that unsustainable consumption drives emissions, which in turn affect oceanic systems.

Focusing on SDG 14, Dr. Nam presented data showing slow or reversing progress across all its targets. Comparing regional and global progress, he identified SDGs 4, 8, 13, 14, and 17 as areas where Asia-Pacific lags behind, with the widest gaps in SDG 13 and SDG 14 due to the region's unique geography and population density.

Dr. Nam underscored ocean pollution, noting that 80% of global ocean plastic originates from Asia, with the Philippines and India alone contributing nearly 40%. He referenced ongoing international efforts, including a UN treaty addressing plastic pollution across its entire lifecycle, anticipated to be finalized this year.

On marine ecosystem conservation, Dr. Nam highlighted the region's dominance in global mangrove and coral reef coverage. While mangrove loss has been significant—60% of global loss over the past 25 years—recent trends in countries like Thailand, India, and Bangladesh show progress in conservation efforts. However, losses continue in Malaysia, Papua New

Guinea, and Indonesia. He emphasized mangroves' critical role in carbon sequestration, as they store four times more carbon per hectare than tropical forests.

Discussing extreme heat stress, Dr. Nam pointed to record-breaking temperatures in Southeast and South Asia in 2023 and 2024, attributing this to ocean warming driven by global climate change. He illustrated how increasing ocean heat content, particularly in the upper 700 meters, contributes to both oceanic and atmospheric warming.

Dr. Nam emphasized the ocean's role in carbon sequestration, absorbing roughly one-quarter of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions—more than terrestrial ecosystems. He introduced a regional initiative on ocean-based climate action, Bu UNESCAP and other agencies led by Indonesia and Fiji, covering four priority areas:

- **Protecting blue carbon ecosystems** (mangroves, seagrass, coral reefs, tidal flats)
- **Decarbonizing shipping** (which contributes 4-5% of global emissions)
- **Accelerating ocean-based renewable energy** (highlighting offshore wind power as a driver of energy transition)
- **Enhancing ocean and climate resilience** (addressing issues like intensifying typhoons)

Concluding his presentation, Dr. Nam urged youth to take action by mobilizing local efforts to curb land-based ocean pollution, advocating for national policies on coastal ecosystem protection, and enhancing awareness of ocean-climate action. He expressed hope that these insights would empower participants in their climate advocacy efforts.

## **Amy Reggers**, Regional Program Specialist for Climate Change and Gender at UN Women

Ms. Reggers began by expressing her appreciation for the opportunity to engage with young people and acknowledged the contributions of UNDP and UNESCAP in setting the context for the discussion. She focused on the human dimensions of climate change, particularly the gender-based vulnerabilities and inequalities that shape climate action and its impacts.

Highlighting recent statistics from late 2023, Ms. Reggers underscored the disproportionate effects of climate change on women and girls. In a worst-case climate scenario by 2050, an estimated 158 million more women and girls than men and boys would be pushed into poverty. The Asia-Pacific region is expected to be among the hardest hit, with an 18.1% increase in extreme poverty—double the global average. Additionally, food insecurity would affect 240

million more women and girls compared to 131 million men and boys, with a stark disparity in the region.

Ms. Reggers emphasized that UN Women adopts an intersectional approach to gender inequality, considering marginalized groups and diverse identities. She highlighted concerning trends linking climate change and child marriage, particularly in drought-affected areas where early marriage is increasingly used as a survival strategy. Furthermore, women and girls bear an unequal burden of care work, which intensifies during climate crises due to environmental degradation, resource scarcity, and displacement. Limited access to land, assets, and financial resources further constraints their ability to cope with climate impacts.

Referencing the *ASEAN Gender Outlook* report (2024), Ms. Reggers noted its findings on the intersection of gender and climate change within SDG progress. She stressed the underrepresentation of women in environmental decision-making, where leadership remains predominantly male and older. She called for efforts to elevate young, diverse female voices in climate governance.

Ms. Reggers outlined UN Women's work in three key areas:

### **1. Advocacy for Women's Leadership in Environmental Decision-Making**

- Integrating indigenous voices, rural women, and LGBTQI+ communities into climate discussions.
- Strengthening engagement with global processes, such as the Gender Action Plan.

### **2. Data and Evidence Development**

- Supporting decision-making with gender-focused research on climate and environment.
- Producing key reports accessible on the UN Women website.

### **3. Partnership and Convening**

- Creating platforms for affected communities to engage in climate policy discussions.
- Collaborating with governments and organizations, including networks such as *UN Women 30 for 2030*.
- Partnering with UN agencies, exemplified by initiatives like the *Girls Go Green Summit* (2024) with UNICEF.

Ms. Reggers reaffirmed UN Women's commitment to grassroots action under the "leave no one behind" principle. Through the *EmPower* programme, the organization supports

climate-resilient livelihoods, access to finance, and renewable energy technologies for women and marginalized communities across the region.

In closing, Ms. Reggers encouraged participants to adopt a human-centred approach to climate action, recognizing that SDGs like Goal 13 and Goal 14 lack sufficient people-focused targets. She shared insights from the *Girls Go Green Summit*, emphasizing the need for solutions tailored to the diversity of the Asia-Pacific region. Echoing young climate activists, she reinforced two key messages: "nothing about us without us" and the urgent need to ensure that no one is left behind in climate action efforts.

## Question and Answer with the Panellists

Following the presentation by the panellists, the floor was opened for questions:

### Question 1: Youth Representation in Policy

*While youth have spaces in policy, how do we ensure their representation isn't tokenistic but truly amplifies community voices, driving meaningful change rather than just symbolic inclusion?*

Mr. Malette responded that youth are often invited to listen and share a few points, but real change requires equipping them with the skills to engage effectively. Training is essential to enable youth to participate confidently in consultation meetings and policymaking processes. Additionally, policymakers—often older men—must take youth perspectives seriously and acknowledge their solutions and concerns.

### Question 2: Climate Action and International Frameworks

*Given the slow progress in global climate action, do you believe current international frameworks are failing? If so, what radical changes are needed?*

Mr. Malette responded that all frameworks have challenges, but they remain crucial for global cooperation. Recent setbacks in climate action are concerning, but progress is still being made, particularly with the low-carbon transition. Change depends not only on frameworks but on people using them effectively, improving them, and continuing to push for progress.

### Question 3: Holding Governments Accountable for Climate Action

*How do we, as young people, hold the government accountable for tackling the climate crisis when they deny the presence of a climate crisis completely?*

Dr. Nam responded that the existing frameworks, such as the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement, remain the primary mechanisms for mobilizing global climate action. The Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) process has seen setbacks, and global greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise. However, more governments are recognizing climate action as an opportunity. Youth can leverage these trends to influence government mindsets and advocate for stronger commitments.

Question 4: Government Education on Climate Issues

*What if the government itself is not well-educated about climate problems? What can we do?*

Dr. Nam assured that despite concerns, international frameworks are improving. For example, when the Paris Agreement was adopted in 2015, carbon neutrality commitments from developing countries seemed unrealistic. Yet today, most countries have committed to such targets. By highlighting these successes, young people can help shift government perspectives.

Question 5: Human-Centric Approaches in UN Mechanisms

*Referring to the human-centric approach you mentioned, what mechanisms, frameworks, or declarations within the UN could be implemented to apply that human-centric process and approach?*

Ms. Reggers iterated trust in multilateralism and existing frameworks is key. UN Women supports dialogues integrating gender equality and human rights frameworks, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the CEDAW Convention. The Beijing Platform for Action is currently under review, and climate change considerations are increasingly being incorporated into these frameworks. The challenge is translating these global commitments into national-level action.

Question 6: Circular Economy in the Marine Industry

*How can circular economy principles be applied to the marine industry in line with SDG 14? What innovative technologies exist for identifying ocean level changes in the Asia-Pacific region?*

Dr. Nam provided an example of the draft text of the new treaty on plastic prioritising circular economy principles, particularly in managing primary plastic polymers and products. By focusing on reducing land-based pollution, these approaches support a sustainable marine industry.

Regarding ocean acidification, knowledge of specific technologies is still developing. However, reducing atmospheric carbon dioxide emissions is crucial to addressing this issue.

Question 7: Accelerating Progress on SDGs 13 and 14

*How can young people accelerate progress on SDGs 13 and 14 through innovative, creative, evidence-based, and scientific approaches? Additionally, how can regulations address the environmental impacts of deep-sea mining in the Pacific?*

Mr. Malette responded that the young people are already generating innovative solutions. The challenge is ensuring they receive adequate support—through training, innovation challenges, and funding—to scale their work. Many local solutions can have a broader impact if given the right backing.

Ms. Reggers added that beyond investment, part of the UN's job is to "move things out of your way. systemic barriers must be removed. She explained that while young people may have solutions and receive investment, systemic barriers in decision-making and politics need to change. The UN and multilateral institutions play a crucial role in eliminating obstacles that prevent young people from influencing decision-making.

Dr Nam noted that many participants already possessed great knowledge of global goals and mechanisms. He suggested two specific frameworks for advocacy: the Global Biodiversity Framework, with its 30x30 goal (protecting 30% of areas by 2030), and the new agreement on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ). He explained that while the BBNJ agreement might take one or two more years to become effective, it addresses area-based management for high seas and sharing benefits of genetic resources, supported by impact assessment and financing tools. He encouraged participants to utilise these new international frameworks for advocacy.

## **Conclusion and Transition to Breakout Rooms**

Anh who was moderating the panel concluded the panel discussion by highlighting the critical role of young people in advancing SDGs 13 and 14, emphasizing the need for capacity building, skills development, and funding while also addressing systemic barriers. He encouraged youth to balance vision with practicality, leveraging existing frameworks to create change rather than waiting for new platforms. The panel then transitioned to breakout rooms for further discussion.

**Breakout Room 1: SDG 14 Life Under Water; Grassroot Initiatives and Innovation****Presentation 1: Stewards of the Seas: Advancing SDG 14 and BBNJ through Innovation and Community Action**

*Speaker: Arianne Joy Fabregas, Philippines*

Arianne Joy Fabregas talked about innovative technology and governance solutions in marine conservation. She explained how the ocean, covering 70% of the Earth's surface, is vital for regulating climate and supporting biodiversity. The marine ecosystem significantly contributes to national economies, yet in the case of the Philippines, it faces numerous challenges including overfishing, habitat destruction, and climate change. Highlighting the importance of the BBNJ, in how it offers transformative solutions for improved marine governance. She stressed that youth driven technological innovation, community engagement, and collaborative governance could play a critical role in advancing marine conservation initiatives.

**Presentation 2: Enhancing marine biodiversity through integrated conservation: Addressing soil erosion and protecting sea turtles in Nui Chua National Park, Vietnam**

*Speaker: Tran Ngoc Dung, Vietnam*

Tran Ngoc Dung shared insights on marine turtle conservation efforts. She highlighted the critical role sea turtles play in maintaining marine ecosystem balance by preserving seagrass beds and coral reefs. She highlighted the threats posed by climate change, habitat erosion, and human activities, all of which endanger these species. The speaker highlighted the following key strategies implemented - mangrove plantation, marine debris removal, training programmes to raise awareness, and active conservation measures such as monitoring and rescuing injured turtles.

**Presentation 3: Adapting to climate change: evidence from gendered coping strategies among young fishing households in coastal Vietnam**

*Speaker: Tran Quynh Huong, Vietnam*

Tran Quynh Huong discussed the challenges faced by fishing communities due to climate change, with a specific focus on the gendered impact of these issues. She presented findings from grassroots research, showing how some maladaptive strategies, such as using electricity

for fishing, emerge from a lack of alternative livelihood options. She emphasised the importance of traditional knowledge and social cohesion in fostering resilience and adaptation. She also noted that men and women have different adaptive pathways, with men often migrating to unsafe and low-paying jobs due to economic hardships.

### **Recommendations**

- Leverage AI and Satellite Technology for real-time monitoring of marine biodiversity and combat illegal fishing.
- Integrate Traditional Knowledge with Science to enhance conservation strategies by combining indigenous practices with modern techniques.
- Empower Youth in Conservation and support youth-led innovations and strengthen collaborative governance frameworks.
- Enhance conservation efforts through regional and international partnerships.
- Develop skill-building programmes, vocational training, and financial support for fishing communities.
- Amplify and ensure fishing communities and indigenous groups have a platform in policy discussions.

### **Recommendations for Future Action**

- Prioritise regional collaboration, enhance community engagement, leveraging AI, integrating traditional knowledge with science
- Fostering youth-led technological innovation, supporting efforts like innovation hubs and research initiatives where young people could develop AI-driven conservation tools and satellite monitoring systems.
- Strengthen engagement with indigenous and coastal communities. Participants acknowledged that the integration of traditional knowledge with modern conservation techniques could lead to more sustainable and culturally inclusive solutions. The importance of multi-sectoral collaborations and capacity building programmes was emphasised.

### **Conclusion**

The session covered various discussion points, including the potential of technological innovation in marine conservation. The speakers explored how AI, satellite monitoring, and blockchain technology could revolutionise conservation efforts. Participants discussed how these tools could enhance real-time ecosystem monitoring and help combat illegal fishing practices.

Another key aspect of the discussion was the role of community-driven approaches in environmental sustainability. The speakers emphasised the importance of including indigenous and coastal communities in conservation efforts. They acknowledged the traditional knowledge possessed by these communities and stressed that it is essential for effective marine governance. The speaker emphasised the need for youth-led research and capacity building programmes to foster equitable participation in decision making.

The inclusion of young people in governance was another important aspect in the discussion. Speakers emphasised that policy makers should involve youth in global and regional conservation strategies, allowing them to contribute meaningfully to environmental policies. The importance of collaborative governance was also highlighted, emphasising the necessity of partnerships among governments, civil society organisations, and the private sector to achieve sustainable conservation efforts.

## **Breakout Room 2: Climate Crises: Mitigation, Adaptation, Resilience with young people at the forefront**

### **Presentation 1: Advancing Carbon Footprint Mitigation Strategies in Higher Education**

*Speaker: Neil Dominic D. Careo, Philippines*

Neil Dominic D. Careo presented a case study on Bicol University Legazpi Main Campus, highlighting the Philippines' commitment to reducing 75% of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. He discussed the implementation of baseline carbon footprint assessments and GIS hotspot analysis, which informed policy recommendations. Proposed strategies included transitioning to biodiesel, decentralised wastewater treatment, solar power adoption, and public transport incentives to promote sustainable campus operations.

### **Presentation 2: Women and Environmental Rights in Southeast Asia**

*Speaker: Fithriyyah Iskander, Philippines*

Fithriyyah emphasised civil society engagement in environmental rights advocacy, identifying challenges stemming from the underrepresentation of indigenous groups. She highlighted the ASEAN Declaration on Human Rights and the UN General Assembly Resolution as key policy instruments. The session explored the ASEAN Environmental Rights Working Group's efforts

to establish policies ensuring environmental justice and inclusivity.

### **Presentation 3: Empowering Women in Renewable Energy for Climate Action**

*Speaker: Amanda Piter, Indonesia (online)*

Amanda Piter underscored the importance of women's participation in renewable energy initiatives and the pivotal role youth play in climate action. She advocated for gender inclusion in STEM and sustainability sectors, emphasising how women's leadership can drive impactful environmental solutions.

### **Presentation 3: Gender and Climate Change**

*Speaker: Maheen Khan, Pakistan*

Maheen Khan discussed the intersection of gender and climate policies, stressing the necessity of integrating local and indigenous knowledge into climate action strategies. She highlighted the challenges posed by inadequate grassroots engagement in policy frameworks and the importance of community-led climate resilience initiatives.

### **Key Takeaways**

- Institutionalised carbon monitoring in educational institutions is crucial for long-term climate mitigation strategies.
- Women's active involvement in environmental advocacy and policy-making is essential for achieving climate justice.
- ASEAN's environmental rights policy needs broader stakeholder involvement, particularly indigenous communities.
- Decolonising environmental policies and incorporating local perspectives can enhance disaster resilience.
- Governments must ensure adequate funding for sustainable infrastructure and renewable energy transition.

### **Recommendations**

- Carbon Monitoring & Policy Implementation: Establish annual greenhouse gas inventories in institutions.
- Gender-Inclusive Climate Policies: Enhance participation of women and indigenous communities in environmental decision-making.

- Sustainability in Higher Education: Appoint sustainability officers and allocate funding for energy-efficient initiatives.
- Community-Driven Climate Action: Support grassroots movements advocating for environmental justice.

### **Recommendations for Future Action**

- Strengthen research and capacity building in securing climate grants.
- Encourage governments to implement carbon footprint reduction strategies at institutional levels.
- Increase advocacy for gender-responsive environmental policies at the ASEAN level.
- Facilitate regional workshops to integrate indigenous knowledge in climate adaptation and mitigation.

### **Conclusion**

The session underscored the importance of youth and women's engagement in climate action, highlighting case studies, policy recommendations, and grassroots efforts. Participants emphasised the need for institutional, governmental, and civil society collaboration to achieve sustainable and inclusive climate solutions. The discussions concluded with actionable recommendations focused on gender equality, environmental rights, and effective climate mitigation strategies.

## **INNOVATION WALK: EXHIBITION VISIT BY APFSD YOUTH SCHOLARS**

### **Introduction to the Innovation Walk**

The Innovation Walk, a highlight of the APFSD Youth Forum 2025, featured a total of 18 innovators representing 10 different countries from the Asia-Pacific region. This exhibition showcased sustainable, community-based, and innovative solutions aimed at achieving critical SDG goals including Goal 3, Goal 5, Goal 8, Goal 13, Goal 14, and Goal 17.

The innovations were carefully curated to cover a wide range of topics from comprehensive sexuality education to alternative fuel resources, digitalisation of gender equality information, and community-led practices. Specifically, the exhibition showcased:

- Three innovations on SDG 14 (Life Below Water)
- One innovation on SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals)
- Six innovations on SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being)
- Three innovations on SDG 5 (Gender Equality and Human Rights)
- Six innovations on SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)

The session was organised into two panels of innovators who each presented their projects briefly before other participants visited the individual booths for more in-depth discussions.

## **Panel 1: Innovations for Health, Gender Equality, and Environmental Sustainability**

### **1. Revolutionising Rural Healthcare, Education & Mental Well-Being in Asia: A Scalable Model for the Future (India)**

**Presenter:** Dr Anirudh Janagam

Anirudh presented an ethical AI-driven rural healthcare and education initiative that has already reached over 50,000 households. The project has increased maternal healthcare access by 35% and reduced mental health stigma by 50% whilst employing youth and educators in indigenous and underserved communities. The initiative focuses on building self-sustaining ecosystems where technology, knowledge, and human resilience combine through ethical power diagnostics, medical health camps, and community-driven education. It is expanding from India to Nepal and other countries in the region.

When asked about the mental health advocacy approach, Anirudh explained that they provide comprehensive healthcare including physical and mental health services. Their AI companion serves as a private, ethical resource for users to share concerns they might not feel comfortable discussing with friends or family. They offer free consultation, therapy sessions, suicide prevention and crisis support, and workshops to help individuals cope with stress, particularly focusing on rural and indigenous communities.

### **2. PROBEEN - Elderly Healthcare in Bangladesh**

**Presenter:** Dr Sabrina Monsur

Sabrina presented PROBEEN, an initiative focused on healthcare for elderly populations in Bangladesh. According to the 2022 census, 15.3 million Bangladeshis (9.28% of the population) are elderly, yet they remain a neglected demographic in health initiatives. PROBEEN, currently in its ideation stage, aims to empower elderly people, reduce their health burden, and achieve universal health coverage that leaves no one behind. Sabrina has already piloted offline activities that have impacted more than 1,000 people.

The PROBEEN app includes several features:

- Pill reminder for medication management
- Emergency call button for urgent assistance
- Doctors and hospitals database with medical records
- Location detectors to help those with memory conditions

- AI-generated talking companions to reduce loneliness
- Health problem solutions with risk factor prevention and home management advice
- Lifestyle suggestions for nutrition, diet, and exercise
- Connection making to build social networks
- Supporting hands for monetary assistance
- Health monitoring for remote tracking of health metrics

When questioned about using AI to simulate deceased spouses, Sabrina clarified that the AI companion feature would offer various character options similar to applications like "Talking Tom," not exclusively recreating deceased loved ones.

### **3. Heat Sense - AI Climate Perception Analysis**

**Presenter:** Meizi You

Meizi presented Heat Sense, a project that uses large language models similar to ChatGPT to capture and analyse heat perception data from social media. The initiative aims to understand how people respond to extreme heat and what this means for climate action. To date, they have analysed data from over 50 countries, providing insights into public sentiment regarding heat-related issues.

### **4. The PERISAI Board Game - Sex Education Tool**

**Presenter:** Belva Aulia Putri Ayu Rehardini

Belva presented the PERISAI Board Game, an educational tool for CSE designed for children aged 10-12. The game addresses concerns like the lack of access to information on SRHR, which leads to increases in child marriage, sexually transmitted diseases, sexual abuse, and unwanted teenage pregnancy.

During the presentation, Belva demonstrated how the game works by having participants play a quick round. Players moved around the board, answering questions about emotions, relationships, and responses to potentially dangerous situations.

### **5. Mental Health Stethoscope - Malaysia**

**Presenter:** Wong Whui Dong

Wong presented the Mental Health Stethoscope, a sound-based solution for emotional well-being monitoring. The innovation stems from research showing that voice can reveal emotional states and mental health indicators. The device analyses speech as a voice biomarker, providing data to a companion app that can detect stress levels, depression, and other mental health issues in real-time. It particularly targets users who feel stigmatised about seeking professional help for mental health concerns.

When asked about accessibility for underserved communities given the device's cost (\$150-\$250), Wong explained that the focus is initially on psychologists' units, and that costs would likely decrease as the technology scales up.

## **6. My Life, Mere Faisle (My Life, My Decisions) - India**

**Presenter:** Harsha Singhi

Harsha presented "My Life, Mere Faisle" (My Life, My Decisions), a program that creates safe spaces for young people to express themselves and make their own decisions. Operating across five states in India, the program has worked in 25 districts, reaching approximately 5,000 people in each district. The initiative aims to address issues such as child marriages by empowering youth to take charge of their lives through a campaign called "Chhota Mu Khari Baat," which challenges the notion that young people don't have the right to speak for themselves.

Harsha shared the story of Manisha from Madhya Pradesh, who struggled with confidence but after joining the program, now confidently facilitates large group discussions. When asked about the differences between when the organisation started in 1993 and now, Harsha noted that young people continue to face similar challenges in finding spaces to express their views, both within families and broader society.

## **7. Empowering Young People with Disabilities through Accessible IEC Materials - Nepal**

**Presenter:** Jaldeep Sapkota

Jaldeep presented the work of Blind Youth Association Nepal (BYAN), which focuses on creating accessible information, education, and communication (IEC) materials for comprehensive sexuality education and sexual and reproductive health rights for youth with disabilities. Despite its name, BYAN works with all 10 types of disabilities recognised by Nepal's government.

The innovation includes:

- Tactile family planning boards with braille descriptions for visually impaired users

- Picture Exchange Communication (PEC) materials for people with autism
- Easy-to-read flip charts for people with intellectual disabilities
- Development of sign language terms for CSE and SRHR concepts

A research study by BYAN found that 96% of youth with disabilities were unaware of modern contraceptive devices, highlighting the critical need for accessible materials. In 2024, they facilitated education for more than 3,500 youths with disabilities.

## **8. Participatory Digital Map through Women's and Youth Engagement for Sustainable Disaster Risk Reduction - Indonesia**

**Presenter:** Indra Oktora

Indra presented a participatory digital hazard map developed using Google My Maps as a free alternative to expensive GIS tools. The map was successfully created by women's groups with no technical background in engineering or mapping. It uses colour coding (green for safe, red for dangerous) to indicate disaster-affected areas in real-time, allowing communities to update information as conditions change.

When asked about accessibility for users with colour blindness, Indra acknowledged this was an area for improvement that would be addressed with the community. He also clarified that while the tool focuses on real-time dashboard functionality rather than predictive forecasting, it provides valuable information for communities during disasters despite being dependent on electricity and internet connectivity.

## **9. Bio Guard - Eco-friendly Mosquito Repellent (Nepal)**

**Presenter:** Puskar Panta

Puskar presented Bio Guard, an eco-friendly alternative to chemical mosquito repellents. He highlighted that according to WHO statistics, more than 390 million people get infected by mosquito-borne diseases annually with over 30,000 deaths. Furthermore, research shows that burning a single chemical repellent coil emits formaldehyde equivalent to burning 51 cigarettes.

Bio Guard addresses these issues by using traditional materials like cow dung integrated with medicinal and aromatic plants (mint and camphor) to create chemical-free, natural mosquito repellent incense. Currently in the prototyping phase, Bio Guard plans to launch at a price point of \$0.99 per package, making it accessible and environmentally friendly.

## Panel 2: Innovations for Sustainable Economies and Climate Action

### 10. Lerak - Indonesia

**Presenter:** Arfiana Maulina Fatimah

Arfiana presented Lerak under the Water Nation Foundation and Alira Alora social enterprise, initiatives focused on eco-friendly cleaning products. She highlighted that 80% of household wastewater is caused by chemical detergents, resulting in the death of 500,000 fish annually. Their solution utilises Lerak, a fruit from Asia, to create biodegradable detergents, fertilisers, and personal care products.

The business model operates as a social enterprise, collaborating with local farmers who grow the raw materials. The initiative helps farmers increase their income while reducing carbon emissions by up to 80% when their products are used as bio-pesticides and bio-fertilisers instead of chemical alternatives.

When asked about quality assurance and farmer stakeholding, Arfiana explained that they work with chemical industry professionals to ensure product quality and formulation standards. In response to a question about what makes their innovation unique since Lerak has been used traditionally for generations, she emphasised that they are modernising the traditional knowledge for younger generations who may not be familiar with it, creating professional-grade products through scientific collaboration.

### 11. Diverseas - Virtual Reality Marine Education

**Presenter:** Brigitta Maria Andrea Gunawan

Brigitta presented Diverseas, a marine literacy project using virtual reality in classrooms. The initiative films conservation initiatives in local areas and trains educators and learners to use these assets in both online and in-person workshops. The technology utilises standard smartphones inserted into VR headsets, making it accessible without expensive equipment.

Diverseas operates as a volunteer-run program under 30x30 Indonesia, connecting students with conservation initiatives in their areas through immersive experiences. They have volunteers in multiple countries including the US, Nigeria, and Australia, and use grant funding to strategically distribute hardware where needed.

### 12. Elzian Agro - Sri Lanka

**Presenter:** Lilan Dayananda

Lilan presented Elzian Agro, a precision agriculture company supporting farmers to utilise limited resources at optimal levels to increase fish yield and crop yields. Their technology uses Internet of Things (IoT) to collect data from farmlands, which is then processed through automation systems to optimise resource use. They also employ image processing and AI machine learning models to identify fish genders, helping farmers make better decisions.

The solutions are customisable based on farmers' specific needs and financial capacities, with simpler options being more affordable. When asked about accessibility given the startup nature of the business, Lilan mentioned the possibility of future partnerships with banks to increase accessibility, though this is not yet implemented.

### **13. Groundshift - Carbon Accounting for Businesses (Thailand)**

**Presenter:** Apithep

Apithep presented Groundshift, an AI-powered carbon accounting software-as-a-service designed to help small businesses track and reduce their carbon footprint. The innovation addresses three key problems: the expertise needed for carbon tracking and calculating, the inefficiency and high costs of sustainability initiatives, and the lack of actionable insights for carbon reduction.

Groundshift simplifies the process by allowing businesses to upload documentation like receipts, which their AI then analyses to calculate emissions according to the user's country and relevant standards. The system provides real-time dashboards and actionable optimisation plans to reduce carbon footprints and operational costs.

The presenter shared a case study of an aluminium company in Chiang Mai where Groundshift has saved over 50,000 carbon tons since January 2024, resulting in financial savings of over 120,000 euros. When asked about the carbon footprint of the AI technology itself, Apithep explained that they use low-carbon data centres and track their own corporate footprint using their software.

### **14. EcoShe - Pakistan**

**Presenter:** Maham Shahzadi

Maham presented EcoShe, a project converting agricultural waste into paper products. In Pakistan, approximately 650 million metric tons of agricultural waste is burned annually. EcoShe works with local farmers to redirect this waste to two community-based paper-making machines operated by local women.

The project has organised 51 women into two cohorts of 25-26 members each, who operate the machines and receive payment for their work. The initiative creates a circular economic model where waste from the community is transformed into valuable products by community members. If they reach their commercial targets, the surplus from paper sales will fund education for approximately 100 girls from the same communities.

When asked about safety and security measures for the women involved, Maham confirmed they have psychosocial support officers and security guards working full-time with the project.

### **15. Wang Lab of Innovation - Rural Digital Literacy (Pakistan)**

**Presenter:** Abraar Roonjha

Abraar presented Wang Lab of Innovation (WALI), Pakistan's first rural innovation lab based in Balochistan. WALI bridges the digital divide by providing digital literacy, entrepreneurship, and artificial intelligence training to rural communities. The lab operates alongside WIRE (Women in Stitching and Entrepreneurship), creating a mother-daughter economic resilience model where mothers work at solar-powered stitching units while daughters learn digital marketing and e-commerce at WALI.

The project has reached 33 million people in the last three months through Urdu AI, which makes artificial intelligence concepts accessible in the Urdu language. They are also working with Google to teach AI in Urdu to approximately 6,000 people across Balochistan in the coming months. A portion of profits from WIRE supports an annual scholarship program that has provided educational funding for 700 girls this year.

### **16. Eco Artisan - Empowering Women After Disaster**

**Presenter:** Atia Hussain

Atia presented Eco Artisan, a platform empowering women artisans in Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan, particularly those affected by floods. The initiative provides training, skill development, and resources to help women showcase their traditional crafts in national and international markets. They focus on creating eco-friendly products, such as toys stuffed with collected plastic waste, which both reduces environmental pollution and creates economic opportunities.

Eco Artisan has empowered 50 women through training, engaged 150 youth, and created 500 different eco-friendly products sold to local communities and tourists. Atia shared the story of Israt, whose father died and who now supports her brother through her craft work with Eco Artisan.

## 17. Happy Power - Energy-Generating Playgrounds

**Presenter:** Becca Liu

Becca presented Happy Power, an initiative that transforms playgrounds into energy hubs by converting children's play activities into electricity. The project addresses dual challenges in low-income communities: the need for safe play spaces and frequent power shortages. The model demonstrated at the exhibition showed how a seesaw could generate power to operate a fan and light.

Their pilot project in China has already impacted 5,000 children and mobilised over 50 young leaders to drive community change. During a Category 17 typhoon (equivalent to a hurricane), the playground provided emergency power for 500 households. Beyond energy generation, the system powers interactive billboards, creating revenue streams for local communities.

## 18. Reclimate - Carbon Credits from Biochar

**Presenter:** Yovindra Kanezin

Yovindra presented Reclimate, a climate tech company empowering farming communities to take climate action through sustainable agricultural waste management. Instead of openly burning agricultural waste, which produces harmful emissions, Reclimate trains farmers to convert waste into biochar through a special pyrolysis process that operates at high temperatures (800°C) with dry conditions.

The process locks carbon in the soil for thousands of years while producing clean hydrogen fuel. For every ton of biochar produced, farmers earn two carbon credits (valued at \$100 each), creating financial incentives for sustainable practices. Reclimate's proprietary sensor technology monitors operations remotely and collects data parameters to issue verified carbon credits, which are funded by corporations worldwide.

When asked about the difference between open burning and their process, Yovindra explained that pyrolysis breaks down the biomass quickly and efficiently without producing methane, carbon monoxide, or smoke. The company has won the Shell Liveoil Competition in Malaysia and is expanding to projects in Sri Lanka and Laos.

## Conclusion

The Innovation Exhibition at the APFSD Youth Forum 2025 showcased a diverse range of youth-led initiatives addressing crucial sustainable development challenges across the Asia-Pacific region. From healthcare and education to environmental conservation and economic empowerment, these innovations demonstrated the creativity, commitment, and leadership of young people in finding solutions to complex problems.

Many projects shared common approaches, including:

- Leveraging technology (especially AI, IoT, and digital platforms) to increase access to resources and information
- Creating inclusive tools and spaces for marginalised populations
- Developing circular economy models that convert waste into valuable resources
- Empowering women and girls through skills development and economic opportunities
- Building community ownership and participation in sustainable development initiatives

These innovations collectively contribute to multiple SDGs while spotlighting youth leadership in driving regional progress toward the 2030 Agenda.

## DAY THREE : APFSD Youth Forum 2025 Call to Action

### COUNTRY ALLIANCES

Sai provided an overview of the development of country-level APFSD Youth Alliances, highlighting Nepal's pioneering role in 2021 and the expansion of alliances in Bangladesh, Mongolia, Bhutan, and Papua New Guinea. She emphasized the session's purpose: to explore how these alliances sustain engagement beyond APFSD events, foster connections among alumni, and drive national-level advocacy on SDG implementation.

### Panel with Country Alliance Representatives

Representatives from five country alliances shared their experiences:

**Nepal APFSD Youth Alliance (NAYA):** Manita Sharma explained that their journey began with a vision that young people must be at the forefront of SDG implementation and that SDGs must be localised. After attending the 2021 APFSD Youth Forum, delegates returned to Nepal with the conviction that recommendations should not remain only at the regional level but be taken back to the country. With this vision, they formed the Nepal APFSD Youth Alliance with initially 50-plus members, which has now grown to more than 300 members across Nepal. Visible Impact chairs the alliance with ten other working group members.

**Papua New Guinea Youth Alliance:** Joshua Lato explained that his motivation stemmed from recognising that many young people in PNG have limited knowledge about SDGs. He observed significant changes through the alliance's work, describing it as "important and life-changing" for people in PNG as it helps them understand the SDGs. Y-PEER PNG has received support from UN agencies, including UNFPA and UNDP, which has inspired them to engage more young people through expanded networking sessions and workshops.

**Bhutan Youth Alliance:** Palden, the national coordinator, shared that he first learned about the Nepal APFSD Alliance when attending the APFSD Youth Forum in 2022. His primary motivation was to bring diverse voices on board to ensure the national call to action was genuinely inclusive and representative. He wanted the alliance to function as a consortium of youth groups in Bhutan, addressing the challenge of convening youth groups that typically operated separately.

**Bangladesh Youth Alliance:** Omar Faruk recalled being inspired by Nepal's example. After submitting a concept note and receiving approval for collaboration, they organised the first global SDG summit in Cox's Bazar, bringing together more than 400 young people from across Asia. At the previous year's summit, they launched the Bangladesh APFSD Alliance. They engaged in consultations with various organisations including ARSR, BRAC, and Earth, resulting

in country-level Call to Action. Omar mentioned plans to share these with the government to explore collaborative opportunities with policymakers.

**Mongolia Youth Alliance:** Nomin explained that she was relatively new to the role. She was inspired to join after participating online in the 2022 APFSD Youth Forum. She emphasised that her main motivation was to share experiences, network, and meet new people. Nomin noted that Mongolia doesn't have many alliances, with just Y-PEER, Youth LEAD and a few small organisations, resulting in limited support for independent initiatives.

### **Moderated discussion on the work of the alliances**

When asked about their alliance work at the country level and anchor organisations:

Nomin (Mongolia) explained that their network operates on a peer-to-peer training model, primarily focused on sexual and reproductive health education. They collaborate with other organisations to make activities more engaging and attract diverse participants.

Omar (Bangladesh) said they have connected various organisations, including BRAC, international organisations, and Earth. Their first priority is to connect former participants from 2017 through to 2025 and organise workshops for them. A significant achievement is that the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change has agreed to meet with previous participants upon their return to Bangladesh.

Palden (Bhutan) explained that while only five representatives were present at the forum, their call to action represented 35 youth from 15 youth networks in Bhutan. Y-PEER Bhutan leads the alliance with support from the Department of Education Program. They plan to expand beyond APFSD to focus on other processes and have established contact with the UN Resident Coordinator's Office in Bhutan.

Joshua (PNG) shared that Y-PEER is at the forefront of their alliance, working with NGOs and partners across the country. With 22 provinces in Papua New Guinea, they have established networks with youth from tertiary institutions, starting from Port Moresby and spreading outward with campus coordinators in each province.

Manita (Nepal) explained that NAYA focuses on three key areas: awareness, advocacy, and accountability. For awareness, they run social media campaigns about high-level forums like HLPF. Their advocacy work involves consultations with federal and provincial ministries and planning commissions. They hold the government accountable for its 2030 Agenda commitments and recently held national youth conclaves generating recommendations from more than 150 participants across Nepal's seven provinces.

Sangeet highlighted the diversity of approaches across the five countries, encouraging participants from other countries to consider establishing similar alliances. He emphasised that each country can develop its own approach based on local conditions, whether involving youth organisations, government agencies, UN bodies, or academic institutions.

The presenters also highlighted the surprising moment they felt in the creation of the country level alliance.

Nomin (Mongolia) highlighted three surprising aspects: the large turnout at events, the unexpected openness of participants in expressing opinions (which contrasts with typical Mongolian communication styles), and the depth of discussions.

Omar (Bangladesh) noted the enthusiastic engagement of former APFSD participants in their Global SDG Summit since 2022. Large NGOs have shown interest in leading the platform, and Omar offered to exchange ideas with youth from other countries about alliance development.

Palden (Bhutan) expressed satisfaction that their current call to action is backed by 35 voices, a significant improvement from their first national event. Their "aha moment" came through youth group mapping, which revealed a surprising number of youth groups in Bhutan, most of whom were enthusiastic about being included despite initially having limited knowledge of APFSD or SDGs.

Joshua (PNG) described how participation grew from approximately 30 people at their first APFSD to a flood of registrations for their second event, with interest continuing to grow among organisations, NGOs, and even business houses.

Manita (Nepal) shared that NAYA has grown from an initial 50-plus members to over 300 young people. Before attending the current forum, they held a National Youth Conclave with virtual consultations across Nepal's seven provinces to generate their call to action, ensuring the recommendations presented at the regional forum represent voices from across Nepal.

Sai concluded the panel by acknowledging how the APFSD Youth Forum has evolved beyond a one-off meeting to become a connected process grounded in local realities and linked to regional and global levels. She invited participants to spend 15 minutes in country groups to discuss whether they were ready to form their own national alliances.

## **ADOPTION OF THE APFSD YOUTH CALL TO ACTION**

Shiwa Karmacharya expressed her sincere appreciation to all participants, with particular recognition of the country facilitators and members of the Call to Action Working Group, for their dedication and efforts in developing the Asia Pacific Youth Call to Action. She

acknowledged that over the past three days, participants had actively engaged in discussions, carefully considering various interventions and peer contributions. Their efforts resulted in the consolidation of comprehensive regional and country-specific Calls to Action that effectively captured their collective demands and recommendations on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 3, 5, 8, 14, and 17.

She further noted her satisfaction with the progress achieved, emphasizing that full drafts of the Call to Actions had been completed—an outcome that reflected the commitment and diligence of all involved. As the forum approached what she described as "the most significant part of the APFSD 2025"—the formal adoption of the Call to Action—she sought to mark the occasion with a celebratory atmosphere. Despite technical difficulties, she encouraged participants to generate their own enthusiasm and energy, ensuring the moment was properly acknowledged.

With ceremonial emphasis, Shiwa formally announced the adoption of the Asia Pacific Youth Call to Action. She highlighted that this document would serve as a crucial advocacy tool for advancing the review process, expressing hope that participants would take the call to action to key spaces at national, regional, and international levels, and to key stakeholders beyond the forum. She then handed over to Sai for closing remarks.

## **CLOSING REMARKS**

Sai congratulated all participants, highlighting their energy and achievements. She expressed hope that the youth Call to Action and country-level Calls to Action would be effectively used at the national level.

Sai proceeded to acknowledge the various organisations and individuals who had made the forum possible. She acknowledged the team members from ARROW, the co-conveners and partners and emphasised that the event would not have been possible without the full support of all co-conveners.

In her concluding remarks, Sai delivered a final message to the youth participants, emphasising that they are leaders who should not wait for others to show them the path but should instead lead the way with their peers. She encouraged them to be an inspiration to all young people in their communities, to lead the path and transform the world. She concluded by stating that the world is looking forward to transforming it into a peaceful and prosperous place.

## WAY FORWARD SESSION

Following the formal closing of the APFSD Youth Forum 2025, Sai took the opportunity to inform the participants on upcoming events and opportunities for continued youth engagement in regional and global forums. This session outlined how the work undertaken during the Youth Forum would feed into subsequent advocacy processes.

### Timeline of Key Events

Sai outlined the journey that had already begun and the path ahead:

- **18 February 2025:** Young Feminist Forum, where young feminists deliberated on development from a feminist lens and developed recommendations
- **19-21 February 2025:** APFSD Youth Forum (the current convening)
- **23-24 February 2025:** APFSD People's Forum
- **25-28 February 2025:** 12th APFSD (Intergovernmental Forum)
- **15-17 April 2025:** ECOSOC Youth Forum
- **14-23 July 2025:** High-Level Political Forum (HLPF)

Sai emphasised that 2025 marks the 10th year of implementing the sustainable development agenda, making these engagements particularly significant.

### Youth Representation at APFSD

At least 39 participants from the Youth Forum would represent the collective at the People's Forum and the 12th APFSD. Sai introduced several key representatives who would take forward the Call to Action in different forums:

- **Shayal (Fiji):** Would deliver an opening address at the APFSD plenary session on Tuesday, 25 February at 9.00, where all Member States would be present. She would share the Call to Action at this high-level gathering.
- **Maria Iqbal Shah:** Would facilitate the SDG Roundtable 5 on Good Health and Well-being: Adolescent Health and Well-being on Thursday, 27 February.
- **Sharifah:** Would participate as a panellist at SDG Roundtable 8 on Decent Work and Economic Growth on Wednesday, 26 February.

## Side Events and Interventions

Several side events were planned to further disseminate the Call to Action:

1. **APFSD Youth Forum Regional Call to Action 2025:** "Youth at the forefront reviewing 10 years of Agenda 2030 implementation and crafting sustainable, resilient and innovative actionable solutions for good health and well-being and gender equality" - scheduled for 28 February, 12.45-14.00 in Meeting Room-H, UNCC Bangkok.
2. **Accelerating environmental rights protection for women in the Asia Pacific region:** 28 February, 12.45-14.00 in the Theatre Room, UNCC Bangkok.
3. **Building An Inclusive Future: Youth Leadership and Partnerships to Advance Disability Rights and Solidarity:** 27 February, 11.30-12.45 in the Theatre Room, UNCC Bangkok.

Additionally, there would be opportunities for interventions from the floor on various agenda items during the APFSD:

- Agenda Item 2: Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda - 25 February
- Agenda Item 3: Accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda through voluntary national reviews - 26 February
- Agenda Item 4: Review of regional progress and opportunities for achieving the SDGs - 27 February

## Associated Events

Several associated events were also highlighted:

- **Towards the World Social Summit:** Contributions from Asia and the Pacific - Sharifah and Maria would participate on Monday, 24 February
- **Meeting with embassies** of countries from the region: All youth forum delegates would attend on Monday, 24 February
- **Brown Bag Session:** "Rise & Thrive - Empowering the Women and Girls of Tomorrow at the 12th APFSD" - Shayal and Nidhi would lead this on Friday, 28 February

Sai assured participants that those representing the Youth Forum at these subsequent events would share updates with the broader group. He encouraged those who would be staying on for the People's Forum to participate in strategy meetings to prepare for these engagements.

With these final activities, the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development Youth Forum 2025 officially concluded, having successfully developed and adopted a comprehensive Call to Action that would be carried forward to influence policy discussions at the regional and global levels.