

COUNTRY YOUTH

CALL TO ACTION 2025

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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



INDIA

Situational Analysis

India, the world's most populous nation with over 1.4 billion people, is at a critical juncture in its pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. The country's youthful demographic, with two-thirds of its population under the age of 35, presents a unique opportunity to drive sustainable development. However, challenges such as high youth unemployment, gender disparities, and environmental sustainability persist. This situational analysis delves into India's progress on select SDGs, emphasizing the pivotal role of youth perspectives and contributions. By harnessing the potential of young changemakers, India can address these challenges and pave the way for a sustainable and equitable future.

India's sustainable development faces critical challenges, balancing rapid economic growth with environmental conservation and social equity. Industrial and municipal wastewater pollution threatens marine ecosystems, with only 60% of coastal areas having functional waste management. Rising sea temperatures have led to widespread coral bleaching, while ocean acidification disrupts marine biodiversity.

Socially, informal workers, including gig and unpaid care labourers, remain unprotected, limiting financial access for women and communities discriminated at work and descent communities. Gender-based violence, harmful practices like witch hunting and FGM, and restricted reproductive rights persist, exacerbating mental health crises. Public health infrastructure is underfunded, with inadequate trained professionals, rising non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in rural areas, and limited access to contraception and safe abortion.

Despite legal recognition, trans and queer individuals continue to face employment and healthcare barriers, with increasing violence.

Weak governance and policy gaps further hinder progress. Poor enforcement of marine pollution laws, outdated fishing regulations, and underfunded coastal conservation stall sustainable resource management. Insufficient investment in modern education and youth-led innovations slows SDG advancement. Strengthening public-private partnerships, enforcing environmental laws, and integrating Indigenous knowledge is crucial to ensuring a just, sustainable future.

Recommendations:

Our recommendations for India on selected SDGs to achieve optimum target are as follows-

SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being

- **Strengthen Public Health Systems:** Increase budget allocations for local, affordable health services, and increase interdepartmental coordination to strengthen the delivery and quality of healthcare. Ensure a supply of essential medicines and diagnostic services at the primary healthcare level to reduce OOP expenditures. Ensure universal access to contraception, safe abortion services and evidence-based information on sexual and reproductive health for young people. According to the National Family Health Survey-5 (2019-21), Dalits have higher rates of malnutrition, infant mortality, and

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maternal mortality compared to higher caste groups. Train healthcare workers in disability, queer, and trans-affirmative care to support the healthcare needs of diverse bodies. Integrate suicide prevention and trauma-informed and accessible mental health support in the public health system.

- **Introduce Comprehensive Sexuality Education for All:** Introduce evidence-based, age-appropriate and dignified Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in schools, emphasising autonomy, and confidentiality, and tailored to the needs of persons with disabilities, Indigenous populations, and LGBTQIA+ individuals.
- **Collect Disaggregated Data:** Gather detailed health data across demographics to inform inclusive, participatory policy-making and track indicators of progress toward development goals. Ensure the participation of representatives from diverse communities discriminated at work and descent groups based on caste, class, religion, disability, region, sexuality and gender identity in inclusive and participatory policy making. Systematically collect and publish disaggregated health, education, and socio-economic data for Dalits to identify gaps, monitor progress, and design targeted policies for inclusive development.
- **Ensure Accessible Healthcare for All:** Provide support services to promote independence, reduce caregiver dependency, and clarify definitions of visible and non-visible disabilities to improve service allocation. Train and sensitize healthcare workers to provide affirming care to Persons with Disabilities. Ensure accessible, affordable, and discrimination-free healthcare for Dalits by strengthening public health infrastructure, enforcing anti-discrimination laws, and implementing targeted health programs in communities discriminated at work and descent communities. Recognise and Implement the need for gender-affirming healthcare for queer and trans people.
- **Regulate Healthcare Privatisation and Eradicate Manual Scavenging:** Manual Scavenging in India has been reduced to a caste-based occupation only . Eradicate manual scavenging by enforcing strict implementation of the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, providing alternative livelihoods, and ensuring the rehabilitation and dignity of Dalit communities forced into this dehumanizing practice. Also, Initiate monitoring bodies to regulate unhindered privatisation of healthcare. Ensure that privatisation does not hinder access to affordable healthcare.

SGD 5: Gender Equality

- **End all kinds of violence against women and girls:** Ensure that women and girls across different identities can live a life free of violence. Strengthen support services for survivors of violence, and invest in sensitisation of police and stakeholders in the justice system to uphold women's right to a violence-free life. Enhance implementation of legal frameworks to combat gender-based violence. End all forms of violence against women and girls including dalits and other communities discriminated at work and descent communities by strengthening legal enforcement, ensuring swift and accessible justice, and launching nationwide awareness campaigns to dismantle caste-based discrimination and gender inequality, while empowering Dalit and other communities discriminated at work and descent communities through education and economic opportunities. Strengthen the Victim Compensation schemes to ensure support for survivors of violence. Criminalise marital rape under the present criminal laws.
- **Ending child marriage and ensuring education for all:** Schools must guarantee that girls have access to clean, safe, accessible, disability-friendly, and functional toilets proportionate to the number of girl students enrolled. Combat child marriage within Dalit communities by implementing targeted interventions, such as community awareness programs, access to education for Dalit girls, and economic support for families, while enforcing stricter penalties for violations of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, of 2006. It is crucial to appoint suitable cleaners, ensuring students are not tasked with cleaning the toilets. Transparency and accountability regarding funds received from Panchayat, State, or National levels for toilet facilities and maintenance are essential.
- **Promote Economic Participation of Women and Girls:** Implement measures to increase the workforce participation of women and make gender-sensitive policies to enhance women's participation. Encourage participation in STEM fields for women and girls, and invest in empowerment through scholarships, self-help groups, community initiatives, and sensitization programs. Actively promote the economic participation of Dalit women and girls by implementing targeted skill development programs, ensuring access to credit and markets, and creating safe, inclusive work environments to dismantle caste and gender barriers and foster their financial independence and empowerment.
- **Uphold Rights of Trans, Non-Binary, and communities discriminated at work and descent Individuals:** Guarantee self-determination, social protection,



livelihood opportunities, gender-affirming care, and mental health support, especially for those facing multiple marginalizations., access to justice and equal opportunities for safe education and employment. Embed GEDSI principles into all policies with gender-responsive planning and budgeting.

- **Engage Men and Boys in Gender Justice:** Encourage young men and boys to participate in gender justice movements, promoting positive masculinity and shared responsibilities.
- **SDG 5 Target 5.5 - Promote Women’s Political Leadership -** Invest in the political empowerment of women and gender minorities through Self-Help groups and community initiatives, creating a strong pipeline of women leaders from local governance entering state assemblies and parliament. Bring more and more Dalit and communities discriminated at work and decent women in political leadership roles to give wider representation to their issues.

SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

- **Safe and Fair Workplaces:** Guarantee access to safe, fair, and dignified workplaces with swift legal action against violators. Ensure fair and equal wages for all genders, aligned with economic growth. End all forms of hazardous caste-based labour, prioritise the delinking of caste and labour, and ensure national and regional accountability. Decriminalise sex work, guarantee decent work for refugees, and ensure migrant workers’ social protection related to Dalit women and girls. Ensure mandatory committees for hearing issues of women in workplaces.
- **Social Protection and Care Labour:** Expand and restructure social protection policies to center the lived experiences of women and gender-diverse persons. Formally recognise, socially protect, and redistribute unpaid care work and informal labour by women and gender-diverse persons. Oppose restrictions on unions and mainstream gender in state budgets to address concerns such as mobility, menstrual leave, parental leave, and state-led childcare systems. Provide protections for gig workers.
- **Financial Leadership and Ownership:** Ensure capital and non-capital investments flow toward cooperatives and enterprises led by women and gender-diverse persons. Provide state-supported seed grants, and resist corporate capture while facilitating access to equity-free transformative capital. Support this shift with skill-building, digital integration, and financial literacy for women, girls, and gender-diverse persons.

- **Upgrade Education System to Meet Industry Needs:** Modernise curricula to reflect industry requirements and provide specialised programs for individuals from rural and communities discriminated at work and descent communities to build capacity to ensure formal employment. Curriculum should be designed as per the industry needs such as AI and upskilling.
- **Promote Sustainable Livelihoods for Rural Populations:** Promote rural development programs focusing on sustainable livelihoods, skill-building, and equal access to resources for rural women and gender-diverse persons, reducing economic disparity between rural and urban populations.

SDG 14: Life Below Water

- **Enhance Marine Pollution Control & Waste Management:** Implement carbon pricing for high-emission industries to fund marine conservation. Strengthen wastewater treatment protocols, ban single-use plastics, and promote biodegradable alternatives. Support community-driven plastic clean-up initiatives
- **Conserve & Restore Marine Ecosystems:** Expand Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) to safeguard biodiversity. Rehabilitate coral reefs and mangroves for carbon sequestration and coastal defence. Implement sustainable fishing practices, including seasonal bans and alternative livelihoods like ecotourism and seaweed farming. Promote Sustainable Maritime Activities: Decarbonise maritime transport through energy-efficient technologies, sustainable port infrastructure, and alternative energy vessels like electric and hydrogen-powered ships.
- **Empower Communities & Foster Innovation:** Integrate Indigenous conservation practices into marine policies. Fund youth-led innovations in ocean conservation and pollution reduction. Provide skill development programs for coastal populations in renewable energy and marine biodiversity research. Use of traditional wisdom and indigenous knowledge coming from the communities discriminated at work and descent should be deployed.
- **Strengthen Ocean Governance & Policy Enforcement:** Establish an independent regulatory body for marine conservation. Enhance monitoring of illegal activities using AI and satellite technology to prevent overfishing and pollution.

SDG 17: Partnership for Goals

- **Foster Collaboration for SDG Achievement:** Host nationwide discussion spaces for young people



to connect and collaborate on global and national development goals. Launch a platform for civil society to list requirements and facilitate collaboration with changemakers. Strengthen government, private sector, and civil society partnerships to mobilise resources for SDG implementation.

- **Public-Private Partnerships & Investment in Sustainability:** Encourage public-private partnerships to drive sustainable investment and strengthen corporate social responsibility measures. Ensuring participation of communities discriminated at work and descent groups such as CDWD for greater representation of their issues at the global level. Inclusivity of Dalits and CDWD should be kept in mind.
- **Strategic Tools for Sustainable Development:** Systems approach and circularity principles, to align long-term and short-term goals. Facilitate technology and information transfer to accelerate economic growth and promote sustainable practices.
- **Multilateral Technology and Best Practices Transfer:** Promote multilateral cooperation to facilitate technology transfer and the sharing of best practices to accelerate economic growth and social development, particularly in key sectors like agriculture, education, and healthcare.

India's journey towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 is intrinsically linked to the active participation and empowerment of its youth. With over 65% of the population under the age of 35, young Indians are not only beneficiaries but also pivotal drivers of sustainable development. Their dynamism and contributions are vital to the country's development, green energy transition, and the realisation of the SDGs.

Empowering young changemakers through education, skill development, and inclusive policies will harness their potential to address challenges such as gender

disparities, environmental sustainability, and economic inequalities. Collaborative efforts that engage youth perspectives are essential in crafting innovative solutions and ensuring a sustainable and equitable future for all. Inclusion of communities discriminated at work and descent groups such as Dalits in India and others will help bring representation of community at the global level. Dalit youth, especially young women and adolescent girls, who face discrimination based on work and descent, must be integral to policy-making processes. Their inclusion and participation are crucial in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 3, 5, and 8, which focus on good health, gender equality, and decent work, respectively. Furthermore, their involvement is vital in SDG 17, which emphasizes partnerships for the goals, ensuring that their voices and perspectives are represented in decision-making processes.

By fostering an environment that nurtures youth leadership and participation, India can transform its demographic advantage into a driving force for achieving the SDGs, setting a precedent for inclusive growth and sustainable development on a global scale.

The APFSD country and sub-regional briefs were developed through collective discussions and engagements between youth advocates at the APFSD Youth Forum in Bangkok on 19-21 February, 2025. The India drafting team consisted of Chao Hemajit, Dewdhai Phukan, Prakhar Agrawal, Himani Singh, Anwasha, Meena C., Akhil Neelam, Annu, Ritika Sharma, Harsha Singhi, Chehak Gidwani, Nidhi Tewari, Nu Misra, and Parth. Overall supervision was provided by the ARROW Call To Action team.

