

COUNTRY YOUTH

CALL TO ACTION 2025

APFSD Youth Forum | Feb 19-21, 2025

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



PAKISTAN

Situational Analysis

Pakistan's progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is uneven, with significant gaps in key areas. According to the 2024 Sustainable Development Report, Pakistan ranks 137th out of 166 countries on the SDG Index¹ reflecting slow progress in meeting its targets.

In SDG 3: Good Health and Wellbeing, Pakistan's healthcare system is underfunded, with public health expenditure at only 1.2% of GDP, far below the global average of 6% (WHO, 2023). Mental health issues among Pakistani youth are often stigmatized, leading to underreporting and inadequate support. A survey revealed that over 40% of adolescents and young adults in Pakistan hold stigmatizing attitudes toward utilizing professional psychiatric services, significantly hindering effective management of mental illnesses. This stigma is particularly pronounced among disabled youth, exacerbating their challenges. In addition, the Transgender individuals face significant barriers to healthcare access, including discrimination and lack of specialized services. Approximately 70% of transgender individuals report receiving poor quality healthcare, with 92% experiencing some form of discrimination, such as refusal of care, harassment, or verbal abuse. These barriers result in unmet health needs and discourage transgender individuals from seeking necessary medical attention.

In SDG 5: Gender Equality, it is another critical challenge, with women's labor force participation at just 22%, one of the lowest in South Asia (World Bank, 2023). In Pakistan, women's labor force participation rate stands at 21.9%. Approximately 47 million women are not part of the labor force, and 55 million women remain unbanked,

highlighting significant economic disparities. Incidents like the brutal attack on Sobia Batool Shah, who was assaulted by her father for seeking a divorce, highlight the pervasive issue of gender-based violence and the urgent need for protective measures.

In SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, as of 2023, Pakistan's youth unemployment rate stands at 9.65%. This high rate necessitates targeted interventions to create job opportunities for young people. Transgender individuals and young women often face discrimination in the job market, limiting their economic participation and growth.

In SDG14: Life Below Water, it is one of the most complex SDGs Pakistan is working on due to its massive lack of awareness and facing major challenges in marine areas due to corruption and security threats. There is a National Water Conservation Strategy for Pakistan Policy 2023-2027² but it also faces challenges of implementation due to lack of accountability mechanisms and personal interests.

In SDG 17: Partnership for the Goals, the SDGs Unit under The Ministry of Planning, Development, and Special Initiatives has been taking vital steps in building a synergy within their initiatives and other stakeholders to build awareness at the educational institutions. Pakistan has also established SDGs support units at the federal and provincial levels; and to create a linkage within the government i.e., Prime Minister's Youth Program (PMYP) and other programs.

Co-convended by:



In collaboration:



In partnership:



Recommendation

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

SDG 3: Good Health and Wellbeing:

- Government and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) should adopt a simultaneous approach in which the top-tier (both Federal and Provincial) policy makers should collaborate and work collectively with local stakeholders and community mobilizers for the integration of CSE/LSBE into the primary and secondary education curriculum.
- The CSE/LSBE should be integrated into the existing curriculum with the accountability mechanism in place so the integration would be monitored if it is taught or not.
- The teachers training should be organized at least bi-annually so the faculties would be occupied with an understanding of the sensitivities and have capacities to teach.
- Develop and enhance the already in place youth-friendly health services (YFHS) centers that provide inclusive comprehensive mental health and SRH information and services that would also help in increasing the Contraceptive Prevalence Rate (CPR).
- The service providers (both government and CSOs based) should leverage technology to offer confidential counseling and support services, mitigating the barriers posed by stigma and geographic limitations.
- The government should increase public health spending to 3% of GDP to improve healthcare access and to reduce maternal and infant mortality rates.
- The government should enhance the current school nutrition program i.e., School Health Nutrition Programme and initiate more provide free meals in government schools, addressing malnutrition and for boosting the attendance.
- The government should establish a gender-responsive disaster relief framework to ensure women and transgender individuals have access to healthcare and resources during emergencies.
- The government should reinstate the Sehat Sahulat Program and prioritize universal health coverage (UHC).

SDG 5: Gender Equality:

- Implement and enforce gender-inclusive hiring policies that mandate equal job opportunities for women and transgender individuals, including bias-free recruitment, pay equity audits, and anti-discrimination safeguards to ensure a fair and diverse workplace.
- The federal government should work with the provincial governments to increase the girl child's marriageable age to 18 years where it still has not been enacted.
- The government should also enhance the accountability mechanism to put an end to the early and forced child marriages as it affects health and puts a constraint on education. Government should enforce strict laws against child marriage with designated fast-track courts.
- Government should also enforce strict laws against gender-based violence with designated fast-track courts and should create accountability mechanisms for transparent tracking.
- The government should promote gender-inclusive education by implementing scholarship programs for girls, transgender individuals, and people with disabilities alongside creating safe and supportive learning environments through strict anti-harassment policies, gender-sensitive curricula, and mentorship programs that encourage equal participation in all fields of study, especially in STEM and vocational training.
- Implement financial literacy programs and design loan schemes that are accessible to young women and transgender entrepreneurs, facilitating their entry into the formal economy.

SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth:

- The government should expand vocational training programs focused on green skills (e.g., renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and eco-friendly manufacturing) to enhance rural employability for women and transgender individuals. These programs should include accessible training centers, digital learning options, and partnerships with local industries to ensure practical job placements and long-term career growth.
- The government should provide entrepreneurial training programs tailored inclusively focusing on business management, digital literacy, financial skills, and access to funding opportunities.
- The government should partner with microfinance institutions, build government schemes, and private sector investors to offer seed funding, mentorship, and market linkages to support sustainable businesses.



SDG14: Life Below Water:

- The Government should work on reducing plastics pollution by building implementable policies for waste management that affect the life below water massively.
- The government should implement and expand marine protected areas to safeguard biodiversity, restore coral reefs, and protect endangered marine species, ensuring sustainable ocean ecosystems for future generations.
- The government should enforce strict regulations on plastic waste, industrial runoff, and chemical pollutants while promoting eco-friendly alternatives and community-led beach cleanups to preserve ocean health and marine life.
- Implement science-based quotas and support community-led fisheries management to secure marine food sources.

SDG 17: Partnership for the Goals:

- Government needs to take effective measures to address the rising tokenism trend, exploiting potential young talent in the name of unpaid work or internships with extremely limited stipends.
- Government institutions in Pakistan, instead of calling out the unpaid work culture, themselves joined the trend with their recent 8 hours per day unpaid Parliament internship. This needs to be stopped right here with strict measures against other sectors following in footsteps.
- Government should further join hands with the global private sector to introduce training programs like leadership or professional training in government schools and colleges to upscale the capabilities of their students.

- The government should promote and work on transparent and democratic governance by strengthening accountability mechanisms, open data policies, and inclusive decision-making processes.
- Encourage the development of independent and autonomous institutions, including the judiciary, by promoting transparent governance, accountability, and fair legal frameworks.
- Establish a national fund specifically earmarked for youth-led projects focusing on health, education, and entrepreneurship, ensuring transparent and equitable access to resources.

Develop robust mechanisms for collecting and analyzing data on youth, with variables including age, gender, disability status, and socioeconomic background, to inform targeted policy interventions.

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 Pakistan drafting team consisted of Hadiqa Bashir, Maham Shahzadi, Danish Tariq, Maham Jamaly, Abrar Roonjha, Doleh Usman, Attia Hussain, Maheen Khan, Maria Iqbal shah, Hamza, Sayed Zeeshan Haider, and Tayaba Atiq. Overall supervision was provided by the ARROW Call To Action team.

ENDNOTES

1 <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/profiles/pakistan>

2 <https://pcrwr.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/National-Water-Conservation-Strategy-for-Pakistan-2023-27.pdf>

