

# SWITCHED ON

YOUTH AT THE HEART OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT  
IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC



Regional Coordination Mechanism – United Nations Development Group  
Asia-Pacific Thematic Working Group on Youth

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1 United Nations, “Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism, Thematic working groups”, available from: [www.rcm-asiapacific-un.org/thematic-working-groups.html](http://www.rcm-asiapacific-un.org/thematic-working-groups.html)

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# ACRONYMS

<b>CEDAC</b>	Centre for Study and Development in Agriculture
<b>DRR</b>	disaster risk reduction
<b>GDP</b>	gross domestic product
<b>ICT</b>	information and communication technology
<b>NEET</b>	not in employment, education or training
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>PPP</b>	public-private partnership
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>SME</b>	small and medium-sized enterprises
<b>TVET</b>	technical and vocational education and training

# FOREWORD

Investing in youth is an investment in our future. It is also fundamental for the successful implementation of the global 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This is especially true in the Asia-Pacific region, which is home to about 700 million youth, whose ambitions and abilities can make a substantial contribution to the realization of the prosperous, peaceful and sustainable future we want for all people in our region.

Engaging, energizing and empowering the youth of the Asia-Pacific region for a sustainable and rights-based future requires a better understanding their needs, interests, challenges and potential. It also necessitates acknowledging their diversity, and the importance of critical transition points, such as childhood to adulthood and school to work.

Through inclusive and participatory processes we can, together, tackle such issues as hunger and health, education and employment, as well as poverty and increased political engagement for all 15-to-24 year-olds trying to pursue lives of dignity and worth in the countries of the region.

The Regional Coordination Mechanism-United Nations Development Group Asia-Pacific Thematic Working Group on Youth, co-chaired by ESCAP and ILO, has produced this report for three main reasons: First and foremost to raise awareness of the importance of youth-related, evidence-based and strategic participatory policymaking, planning and programming. Second, to highlight the current status, challenges and opportunities for the youth of Asia and the Pacific. Third, to support the understanding and practical responses—by governments, civil society, the private sector, academia and other stakeholders—of the position and promise of youth in the region.

In line with the recently-adopted SDGs, the report examines the 2030 Agenda from a youth perspective, following the so-called ‘five Ps’—people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership. It considers the social, economic and environmental dimensions of development and stresses the need to create conditions for youth to be engaged, active and integral parts of the solutions we need.



**Shamshad Akhtar**

Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations  
and Executive Secretary of ESCAP



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The year 2015 represents a pivotal juncture for youth in Asia and the Pacific. It marks the point at which the Millennium Development Goals make way for the newly adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).<sup>2</sup> 2015 also marks the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY), which has provided “a policy framework and practical guidelines for national action and international support to improve the situation of young people.”<sup>3</sup>

Explicit reference is made to the importance of attending to the needs, and rights, of youth in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, alongside the centrality of engaging youth in implementation of the transformative agenda. The associated 17 SDGs encompass a host of issues affecting youth across the region: poverty, health and well-being, education, labour market participation, protection and management of the natural environment, and peace and security. In Asia and the Pacific, as globally, the engagement and actions of youth, in all their diversity, will be critical to the achievement of the SDGs. Accordingly, understanding, engaging and investing in youth are critical to a peaceful and prosperous future for the region’s people and the planet.

Asia and the Pacific is home to 60 per cent of the global population aged 15 to 24 years. Across this geographically, politically, socially, culturally and economically expansive region, youth are a very diverse group. While some youth live in rural and urban areas with limited education and employment opportunities, others are leading their lives in areas with world class education and labour market facilities. From ethnic and linguistic differences to the practising of all of the world’s main religions, the region’s heterogeneity provides challenges in terms of tailor-made interventions, yet also opportunities with regard to a wealth of experience to share and choose from. Accordingly, the diversity of youth issues is both explicit and implicit in the implementation of the “five Ps” of the 2030 Agenda. This report seeks to contextualize challenges related to youth development and proposes recommendations from a broader perspective.

To promote overarching policy direction in order to support youth development in Asia and the Pacific, the following actions are proposed:

- Prepare for future demographic implications
- Enhance institutional capacity and engender good governance
- Promote social dialogue and political commitment
- Strengthen the evidence base for more effective policymaking

The report also endeavours to promote understanding of and action on youth issues as they feature in the categories of people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnerships.

2 United Nations, “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (A/RES/70/1), 70th Session of the General Assembly, New York, 21 October 2015.

3 United Nations, *World Programme of Action for Youth* (New York: United Nations, 2010).

Based solely on population proportions, around 85 million youth in Asia-Pacific are living in extreme poverty. However, given that youth account for a disproportionate share of vulnerable and informal employment, and unemployment, with often limited access to basic services and social protection, this figure is likely to be substantially higher. For households living in extreme poverty, families often cannot afford to keep youth in school, hence they may forego education for employment, and end up compromising their future opportunities. Decent work is thus imperative to help end the intergenerational flow of poverty. Poverty is more than just a dollar-denominated measure; it exhibits multi-dimensional components, since it also influences youth through structural issues such as discrimination on the basis of gender or disability, and access to education, health services, potable water, sanitation and capital.

Reflective of population size, Asia and the Pacific is the region with the highest number of undernourished people globally. According to FAO, regionally there has been slow progress in reducing the incidence of hunger, though in East and South-East Asia progress has been more rapid.

Migration of young people from rural to urban areas is an increasingly important phenomenon, transforming economic and social lives, but also affecting how to address poverty and hunger. As such, ending hunger requires an integrated approach that is linked to achieving food security and promoting sustainable agriculture. Youth who are predisposed to innovation and risk-taking can play a key role in strengthening smallholder agriculture, yet they encounter obstacles in accessing land, credit and new technologies relative to their older peers.

The health and well-being of youth in Asia-Pacific needs greater attention. Adolescent fertility rates are amongst the highest in the world, while not all pregnant adolescents are guaranteed ante-natal care. Meanwhile use and abuse of illicit substances, drugs and alcohol is an on-going issue. Road traffic accidents are the leading cause of death among male youth in the region. On the other hand, suicide is the leading cause of death for female youth, which highlights the importance of mental health. In addition, female youth, relative to female children and older women, are particularly vulnerable to physical violence, sexual violence and harmful practices, often resulting in disability and death. Another concern is that an estimated 620,000 youth living with HIV and about one-third of new infections in the region occur in this age-group.

To end poverty and hunger among all youth in Asia and the Pacific in all its forms and dimensions, the following actions are proposed:

- Ensure that poverty alleviation measures are well-coordinated
- Encourage actions to increase productivity in the agricultural sector
- Promote the health and well-being of all youth
- Ensure efforts for integrated and inclusive migration for youth

The population of the Asia-Pacific region living in cities is expected to outnumber that in rural areas by 2018. Youth are at the forefront of this urbanization as well as related shifts encompassing society, economy and environment, which impact their lives and communities. Yet much of the process has been rapid and unplanned, with high resource consumption and insufficient provision of infrastructure and basic services. As a result, slums and informal settlements are common, where youth lack affordable housing, basic services, or inclusive public space and mobility options. Initiatives across the region consist of youth getting involved in managing urbanization by creating more sustainable and inclusive cities. They can thus be engaged as active stakeholders, caretakers and leaders in finding solutions to the problems of rapid and unplanned urban development, and be responsible and engaged citizens for the benefit of the planet and all people in their cities and communities.

Asia-Pacific still has a long way to go to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for youth and other groups. Around 1.7 billion people in Asia do not have access to clean water and sanitation, with 780 million practising open defecation and 80 per cent of wastewater being discharged untreated into waterways. The problem is particularly endemic in rural areas, where only 46 per cent of the population has access to improved sanitation, compared with 75 per cent of those in urban areas. Female youth face significant sanitation challenges, with a lack of menstrual hygiene management and hygiene promotion, particularly in South Asia.

Approximately 60 per cent of all countries that have been affected by extreme weather events in the past two decades are in Asia-Pacific, accounting for immense human and economic costs. Climate change, such as rising sea levels, is exacerbating existing social and economic inequalities within and between countries, directly affecting the lives and opportunities of youth, as well as placing greater strains on water sources, agricultural land, coastal areas and marine ecosystems. Climate change has also been attributed as the cause for rising incidence of certain tropical diseases, for instance, between 2000 and 2012, deaths resulting from dengue fever for those aged 15–29 increased by 150 per cent in the Western Pacific.

Youth play an important role in reducing risks, responding and fostering resilience to natural disasters, and in decision-making on natural resources and consumption. Encouragingly, there is growing evidence of youth, as individuals and collectively, conceiving, developing, implementing and participating in a range of environmental initiatives.

To effectively involve youth in Asia and the Pacific in the protection of planetary degradation and management of its natural resources and urgent action on climate change, the following actions are proposed:

- Facilitate access to adequate and resilient housing, and basic services in urban areas
- Expand access to water, sanitation and hygiene, especially in rural areas
- Prepare youth as disaster risk reduction ambassadors
- Ensure that youth are aware of sustainable consumption

# PROSPERITY

Prosperous and fulfilling lives should be an indiscriminate right, yet youth in Asia-Pacific lack equal opportunities to achieve such ends. Rather, inequality is on the increase and youth face challenges related to inclusion, quality and relevance of education, as well as training and skills, thus putting them on a lower life trajectory from the outset. The region has achieved universal primary school education enrolment, though progress concerning equal access to education has been less positive, and discriminatory structures and practices still exist.

In the same vein, young people are often trained for skills not matched by labour demands. These mismatches form one challenge within the school-to-work transition for youth, in which many are stuck in unemployment, or when they do find work, face distinct shortages of decent work opportunities. Indeed, the result is widespread working poverty and high shares of workers in vulnerable employment—these often forgoing the job and wage securities enjoyed by regular-salaried employees. At the other end of the scale, the more educated frequently become unemployed or discouraged due to insufficient jobs requiring the skills they have. To combat urban poverty and informality, a number of initiatives aim at providing innovative incentives in rural areas. Meanwhile, work-based training programmes are gaining popularity in the region and proving effective in channelling youth towards decent work. So too are technical and vocational education and training programmes, often complemented by career counselling services.

Small and medium-sized enterprises constitute a substantial source of youth employment, while strengthening decent work, addressing employment in the informal sector and promoting entrepreneurship are three basic areas for action. Business incubators are popular means of encouraging entrepreneurship. Yet youth starting their own businesses face barriers, a key one being limited access to finance, including savings, loans, insurance and other services. Enhancing the growth of enterprises and access to finance needs to go hand in hand with ensuring that youth rights at work are respected.

Such shortfalls occur against a backdrop of limited and inadequate social protection, with the vast majority of countries in the region allocating insufficient resources for these purposes. Often, the issue is not one of finding fiscal space, but a matter of political will. In the absence of improvements, migration will continue to be one potential solution to increased access to productive and decent work opportunities for youth, though carrying with it exposure to exploitation and urban poverty, as well as trafficking and discrimination, among other dangers. The risks to youth are often related, in part, to precarious legal status, physical distance from family and social networks, and exclusion from social protection measures.

To ensure that all youth in Asia and the Pacific enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives, including reducing education inequities, informality and working poverty, and to enhance access to social protection, the following actions are proposed:

- Improve access to and quality of education
- Make decent jobs a top priority
- Strengthen and broaden social protection

In the 21st century, 60 per cent of the world's conflicts are located in the Asia-Pacific region, in which youth continue to participate in and be affected by. Moreover, violence against women and girls across the region disrupts lives and threatens security. Hence there is an immediate need to address existing shortfalls for promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. In addition, the feeling of being marginalized from existing structures is becoming more common, increasing the appeal of extreme political or identity-based ideologies, particularly where violence provides a means of being heard.

Engaging youth as active citizens is integral to promoting and preserving peaceful and prosperous societies. Accordingly, since in the region many youth distrust the political process, there is a need for greater efforts to foster the faith of youth in political systems and promote full and meaningful participation in improving governance and building democratic institutions. This requires dismantling existing barriers to political participation, not least, prejudicial sociocultural perceptions and practices. In this regard, there is a role for public leaders, politicians and policymakers across political parties, and civil society organizations to engage with youth.

Encouragingly, positive examples of this exist in the region. The growing prevalence of youth spearheading mass protests for social change and mobilizing millions of people through social media only attests to the importance of this issue. Instances of youth in the region being active proponents of peace show that civic engagement can yield results; this needs to be further promoted as both a right and a means to sustainable development, and is one of the guiding principles of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

To foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies for all youth in Asia and the Pacific, the following actions are proposed:

- Engage youth as active citizens
- Address exclusion and unrest
- End violence and discrimination against women and girls

# PARTNERSHIP

Strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, requires partnership channels with youth to be formed and, where they exist, reinforced. Through collaboration, youth can directly benefit, including by the building of their capacity from the exchange of knowledge and skills, the creation of safe places to experiment and the promotion of mutual learning. In this regards, information and communications technology (ICT) channels and networks are being widely utilized by youth across the region for a host of reasons, including, learning, social mobilization, accessing government services, contributing to debates and advocacy.

As a means for dialogue, networking and information exchange, ICTs are a channel through which youth can voice their needs, concerns and priorities to policymakers, business and civil society leaders, and members of their societies generally. Given that approximately 45 per cent of internet users globally are below the age of 25, youth are evidently embracing ICTs. Furthermore, ICTs provide a means through which particular groups of youth can counter their social vulnerability, marginalization or exclusion. Accordingly, increasing the access of youth to ICTs, and thus maximizing their potential, implies that the “digital divide” needs to shrink. This is imperative for facilitating partnerships with regards to youth.

To secure harmony, mobilize necessary means and ensure that all youth in Asia and the Pacific can fully participate on equal terms with others, the following actions are proposed:

- Enhance multi-stakeholder collaboration
- Promote integrated urban and rural development
- Reduce the digital divide

# INTRODUCTION

1.1 Transforming our world:  
the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Page 19

1.2 Youth 'transforming our world' Page 20



**A**t the 70th anniversary of the foundation of the United Nations, the global community adopted an ambitious agenda for sustainable development. Between 2015 and 2030, countries across the globe aim to achieve 17 Goals that encompass the social, economic and environmental domains of sustainable development.

‘Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’<sup>4</sup> is grounded in, inter alia, the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the international human rights treaties; critical to the realization of the Goals is inclusiveness, in terms of both process and outcomes. Youth are one of the (heterogeneous) groups explicitly identified in the 2030 Agenda, for whom collective efforts are required so that they are empowered, their needs addressed and they are active citizens, shaping and contributing to the evolution of their communities and countries.

Recognizing the centrality of youth to sustainable development, this report explores the situation, needs, potential and challenges of youth in the Asia-Pacific region. This Chapter initiates the report with a summary of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a definition of “youth” and an outline of their proportional presence in the region.

## 11 Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Through adoption of the 2030 Agenda, countries globally affirmed the shared vision “of a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination”. In seeking “to build a better future for all people”, this global vision is to be achieved through realization of 17 integrated and indivisible Goals (and 169 associated Targets), related to matters of people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership, or the ‘five Ps’.

More specifically, the 17 Goals address issues of poverty, hunger and food security, health and well-being, education, gender equality and women’s empowerment, water and sanitation, economic growth, decent work, infrastructure, human settlements, consumption and production, climate change and the natural environment and inclusive societies.

Furthermore, in partnership, the means of implementing the 2030 Agenda encompass capacity-building, technology transfer, financing, trade and good governance.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations, “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (A/RES/70/1), 70th Session of the General Assembly, New York, 21 October 2015.

## 1.2 Youth 'transforming our world'

In seeking to 'transform our world', Governments globally have recognized that “[p]eople who are vulnerable must be empowered. Those whose needs are reflected in the 2030 Agenda include all children, youth...”<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, realization of the vision, and enactment of the principles, of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development demands comprehensive (and contextual) understanding of the situation, needs and interests of youth<sup>6</sup> and their substantive engagement in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of measures and initiatives across the integrated social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Complexity, rather than uniformity, must define responsiveness and engagement because “youth” are not a homogenous entity. Youth are a population group defined by age. Great variance exists among persons aged 15 to 24 years, within and between countries in Asia and the Pacific, and beyond.<sup>7</sup> The diversity of youth is reflected in such other common demographic variables as sex, gender, sexuality, dis/ability, education, employment, income, fertility, health, civil status, citizenship, ethnicity, religion, language and geographic location.

The significance of youth for countries globally is reflected in statistics. Numerically, of the global population of 7.3 billion persons, 4.4 billion live in Asia and 39 million in Oceania.<sup>8</sup> Within the 60 per cent of the global population that inhabits the Asia-Pacific region, persons aged 15 to 24 years constitute approximately 16 per cent (Figure 1).<sup>9</sup>

In all four subregions, the youth population share is projected to decline over the next 15 years, with a notable drop in many subregions.<sup>10</sup> These dramatic changes will pose significant challenges for the region in terms of, for example, labour shortages, economic growth patterns and provision of social services. It is therefore critical to harness youth’s richness and potential, their abilities and possibilities, in partnership, for the planet, prosperity and peace for youth themselves and for all persons.

5 Ibid.

6 For the purposes of this publication, and in accordance with the United Nations Secretary-General's Report to the General Assembly A/36/215 of 1981 and A/40/256 of 1985, “youth” refers to persons aged 15 to 24 years.

7 For the purposes of this publication, “Asia and the Pacific” encompasses four of the five ESCAP subregions, namely: (a) East and North-East Asia – China, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Hong Kong (China), Japan, Macao (China), Mongolia, Republic of Korea; (b) Pacific – American Samoa, Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Northern Mariana Islands, Republic of Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu; (c) South-East Asia – Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Viet Nam; and (d) South and South-West Asia – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Turkey. The ESCAP subregion not encompassed by “Asia and the Pacific” in this report is North and Central Asia (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Republic of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan). The reason for this is that many of the members of the Thematic Working Group on Youth which worked on this report do not include this subregion in their definitions of Asia and the Pacific. It should be further noted that in the report strict adherence to the ESCAP subregions has not always been possible, especially when the data are from agencies dealing with differing subregional definitions.

8 The Department of Economic and Social Affairs categorization of countries by region can be viewed here: [http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/General/Files/Definition\\_of\\_Regions.pdf](http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/General/Files/Definition_of_Regions.pdf)

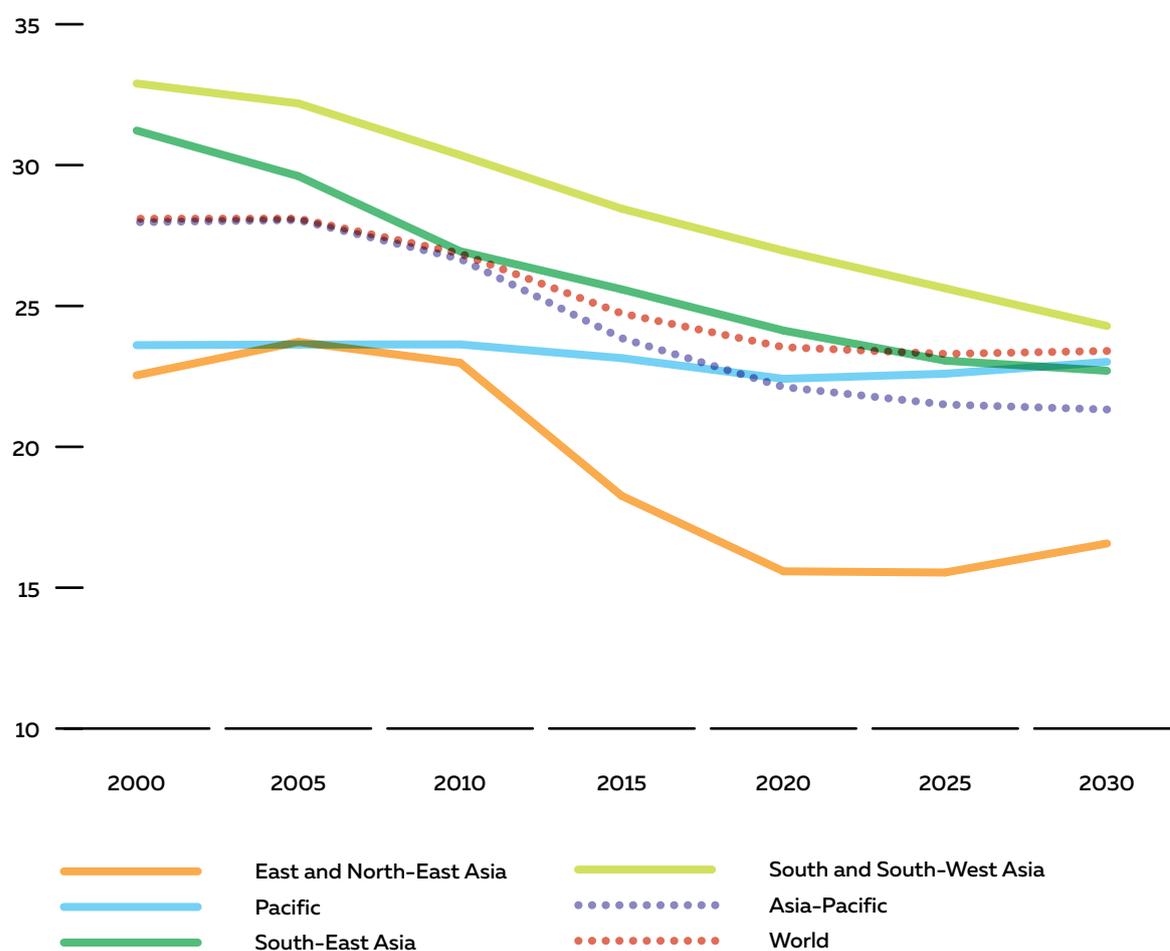
9 Source: United Nations Population Division (2015), *World Population Projections, the 2015 Revision*, New York: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (available from: <http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/>).

10 Ibid.

In the following chapters, this report addresses, in greater detail, the status and relevance of youth in relation to implementation of the ‘five Ps’ of the 2030 Agenda. When considering what is known about youth, it is important to be cognizant that data which encompass the spectrum of the different elements of the lives of youth in the Asia-Pacific region are scarce and, when available, are often not uniformly disaggregated, even for key variables, such as sex, age, disability, geographic location and economic status.

FIGURE 1

## Youth share (%) of the population aged 15 to 64 years, by subregion, from 2000 to 2030



Source: United Nations Population Division (2015), *World Population Projections, the 2015 Revision*, New York: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (available from: <http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/>).

# PEOPLE

2.1 Poverty Page 23

2.2 Hunger and food security Page 28

2.3 Health and well-being Page 30



We are determined to end poverty and hunger, in all their forms and dimensions, and to ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment.

PREAMBLE, TRANSFORMING OUR  
WORLD: THE 2030 AGENDA FOR  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



**W**ithin the domain of ‘people’ as explicated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, this Chapter addresses the issues of poverty, hunger and food security, and health and well-being, as they apply to youth in the Asia-Pacific region.

## 2.1 Poverty

Despite Asia and the Pacific being famed as the “engine of global economic growth”, poverty remains a reality for millions of people across the region, to which youth are particularly vulnerable. Assuming that extreme poverty among youth in the region simply corresponds to their population share of the total number of people living in extreme poverty, around 85 million youth would be living in such a state.<sup>11</sup> However, as seen throughout this report, young people account for a disproportionate share of those with limited access to basic services, such as health care and other elements of social protection, and in vulnerable and informal employment, thus the actual figure is likely to be considerably higher.

For youth, poverty is experienced in multiple ways; from hunger and under-nutrition to restricted, if any, access to social services. In households living in extreme poverty, families often

11 World Bank, “PovcalNet, Regional aggregation using 2011 PPP and \$1.9/day poverty line” (available from: <http://iresearch.worldbank.org/PovcalNet/index.htm?1>), applied to the population estimates of United Nations Population Division (2015), *World Population Projections, the 2015 Revision*, New York: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (available from: <http://esa.un.org/undp/wpp/>).

cannot afford to keep youth in school, thus they often forgo education for employment, and end up compromising their future opportunities. As such, poverty experienced during youth can have health, educational, livelihood and participatory implications across the life-course of an individual and, where chronic, can be transmitted across generations.

The first of the Millennium Development Goals addressed the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, with the target of halving – between 1990 and 2015 – the proportion of people whose daily consumption was less than USD 1.25.<sup>12</sup> Still, almost half a billion people in developing countries of the region continue to live just above the extreme poverty line and are highly vulnerable to falling into poverty. Accordingly, the first Goal of the 2030 Agenda entails “ending poverty in all its forms everywhere”.<sup>13</sup>

While the overall share of persons living in poverty has been on a downward trend over the last two decades, youth have consistently fared worse than their adult counterparts. In the absence of robust age-disaggregated poverty estimates for the region, working poverty estimates provide an alternative and indicative measure for relative poverty trends between youth and adults since the turn of the millennium. Progress in addressing working poverty is also important to gauge improvements with regards to decent work. Expanding decent work opportunities, as discussed under the section on employment, is imperative to help stem the intergenerational flow of poverty.

Working poverty rates are consistently higher among youth than they are among adults.<sup>14</sup> In 2014, 14.2 per cent of employed youth in Asia and the Pacific<sup>15</sup> were deemed to be living in extreme poverty, compared with 9.9 per cent of adults. This means that, as of 2014, approximately 38 million youth in the region were deemed working poor, subsisting on USD 1.25 per day, despite being in employment.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, among the youth working poor living in extreme poverty, 32.5 per cent were female youth; a reduction from 41.1 per cent in 2000.<sup>17</sup>

Regional trends often mask the considerable variations that exist by subregion. As of 2014, working poverty among youth at the extreme poverty threshold was estimated at 21.6 per cent in South Asia, more than twice the rate of South-East Asia and the Pacific, at 11.1 per cent, and almost three times that of East Asia, at 7.7 per cent (Figure 2).<sup>18</sup> By comparison, in 2014, 17.7 per cent of working adults in South Asia were living on USD 1.25 per day.

Within subregions, there is even greater variability in terms of working poverty rates among female and male youth (and adults). As shown in Figure 3, higher rates of working poverty among female youth relative to males were recorded in Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia,

12 1.25 USD (2005 PPP) are used from here on, as per the measure used for the Millennium Development Goals.

13 United Nations, “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (A/RES/70/1), 70th Session of the General Assembly, New York, 21 October 2015.

14 Source: ILO, *Key Indicators of the Labour Market* (KILM), 8th Edition, Table 18b: Employment by economic class (by sex and age-group).

15 In this instance, Asia-Pacific refers to the countries in East Asia, South Asia and South-East Asia and the Pacific, with the exception of Australia, Japan and New Zealand, as well as the Pacific Island countries for which data are not available.

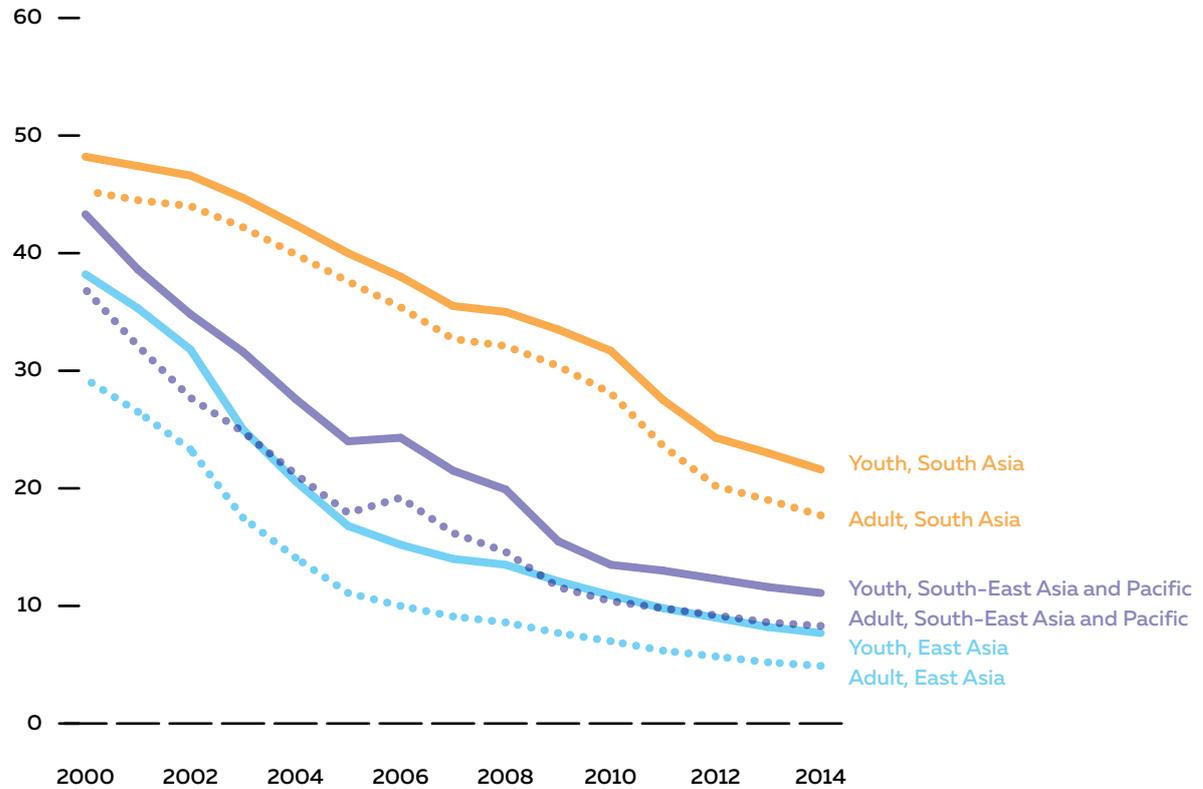
16 Source: ILO, *Key Indicators of the Labour Market* (KILM), 8th Edition, Table 18b: Employment by economic class (by sex and age-group).

17 Steven Kapsos and Evangelia Bourmpoula, “Employment and Economic class in the Developing world” ILO Research Paper No.6, June 2013; Update based on ILO – Trends Econometric Models, November 2014.

18 Ibid.

FIGURE 2

## Share (%) of the employed population subsisting on USD 1.25 per day, by subregion, for youth and adults, from 2000 to 2014



**Source** Kapsos, S. and E. Bourmpoula (2013). *Employment and Economic Class in the Developing World*. ILO Research Paper No 6; Update based on ILO – Trends Econometric Models, November 2014.

Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, working poverty rates were higher among male youth in a number of countries, such as Bhutan, China, Fiji and the Philippines.

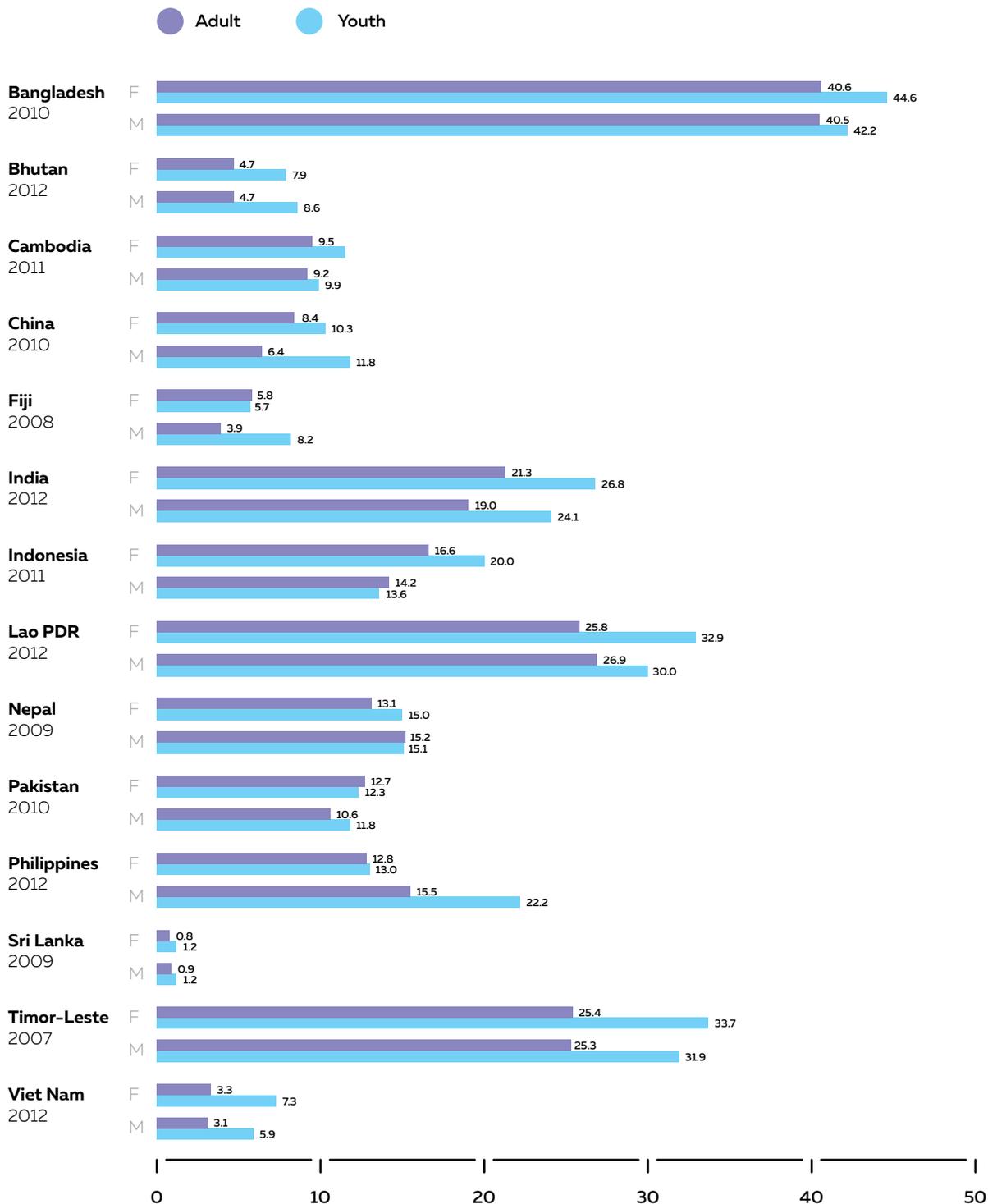
Specific attention to urban poverty in the region shows increasing rates. For example, between 1993 and 2002, the number of poor people who lived on, or less than, USD 1 per day fell by 150 million in rural areas, but rose by 50 million in the urban areas of East Asia.<sup>20</sup> In this context, rural to urban migration may have contributed to a displacement of those classed as poor from the former to the latter areas.

19 Ibid.

20 UN-Habitat, *State of the World’s Cities 2012/2013* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

FIGURE 3

## Share (%) of the employed population subsisting on USD 1.25 per day, for youth and adults, in selected countries



Source: ILO Key Indicators of the Labour Market (KILM), 8th edition.

The impact of poverty on youth is very sizable. Empirical evidence from across the region suggests that persons of lower economic status have, for example, both reduced educational attainment and access to decent jobs.<sup>21</sup> In the Pacific, especially in countries where population growth is high, household poverty has been linked to increased risk of adolescents dropping out of school, in turn negatively impacting their employment opportunities.<sup>22</sup>

Migrant youth are often more susceptible to certain risks related to poverty than other youth, including falling ill without access to health-care services; moreover, young migrants can become subject to exploitation, abuse, exclusion, adverse health issues and trafficking. Being away from their family and other networks of home communities can have adverse repercussions on young migrants. Frequently the legal status of young migrants remains precarious, which further exposes them to many risks throughout the migration cycle: from pre-departure, during travel/in transit, stay at destination and eventual return. Many of them, especially those working in informal sectors, are excluded from social protection measures. Young female migrants are particularly at risk of exploitation in various forms, including that related to domestic work, which remains a dominant form of employment for many female migrants.<sup>23</sup> The situation of children born to migrant parents is another concern, as many continue to face increasing economic and other difficulties.<sup>24</sup> On a positive note, young migrants often return home with new skills and knowledge or else help prop up local economies and alleviate poverty through remittances. In this regard, mechanisms for fairly handling remittances should prevent the hard-earned gains of migrant youth from being exploited.

As poverty is multi-dimensional in nature, when looking for solutions it is important to consider more than traditional measures based on consumption and income to accurately understand and respond to the situation of youth in the region. Young women's and men's experiences of poverty are influenced by, for example, structural issues, such as discrimination on the basis of sex or disability, and access to education, health services, potable water, sanitation and capital. Understanding the vulnerabilities associated with key life transitions, notably from childhood to adulthood, is also critical in addressing poverty and exclusion among youth. The failure to understand, engage and empower youth can contribute to the perpetuation of inequalities or the provocation of social unrest, which in turn undermine peace and security and sustainable development, as well as inhibit realization of the first Sustainable Development Goal, being "to end poverty in all its forms everywhere".

21 Phu Huynh and Steven Kapsos, *Economic class and labour market inclusion: Poor and middle class workers in developing Asia and the Pacific*, ILO Asia-Pacific Working Paper Series (Bangkok: ILO, 2013).

22 Will Parks with David Abbott, *Protecting Pacific Island children and women during economic and food crises: Working Edition One for advocacy, debate and guidance* (Suva: UNICEF, UNDP, 2009).

23 UNIFEM, *Legal Protection for Migrant Domestic Workers in Asia and the Arab States* (Bangkok: UNIFEM, 2007).

24 United Nations, *World Youth Report Youth Employment: Youth Perspectives on the Pursuit of Decent Work in Changing Times* (New York: United Nations, 2013); Global Migration Group, *Migration and Youth Challenges and Opportunities* (New York: Global Migration Group, 2014).

## 2.2 Hunger and food security

Goal 2 of the 2030 Agenda will be attained when, globally, hunger has been eradicated, food security achieved and nutrition improved for all persons. The vision is directly relevant to youth in Asia and the Pacific, given that hunger, food scarcity and poor nutrition in childhood and adolescence have both immediate life impacts and chronic consequences on the health and capacities of such individuals when they become adults.

Age-disaggregated data on hunger, food security and nutrition are limited, thereby necessitating extrapolation from information pertaining to either children or adults to the situation of youth in the region. Reflective of population size, Asia and the Pacific is the region with the highest number of undernourished people globally.<sup>25</sup> According to FAO, there has been slow progress in reducing the incidence of hunger, though in East and South-East Asia there has been more rapid progress, with the World Food Summit hunger target already achieved (having reduced by half the number of hungry people).<sup>26</sup> In South Asia, of the 400 million people who were hungry following the 2008 global economic crisis, those most affected included children who, as adolescents, developed impaired health due to stunting, wasting and being underweight as children.<sup>27</sup>

Some of the main indicators related to hunger determine the incidence of being wasted, stunted and underweight. Data on wasting and stunting among persons under age 5 in Asia and the Pacific are sparse, especially in the Pacific. For wasting, there has been only a gradual improvement over the years, as in the case for global figures. With regard to stunting, the Asia-Pacific rate is 27.8 per cent, just marginally above the global rate of 27.6 per cent. The former figure, though, has fallen more rapidly than the latter, showing greater progress in Asia and the Pacific. This is particularly so in East and North-East Asia, where the rate is 8.1 per cent, down from around 20.0 per cent in the early 2000s. At such low levels, the prospects are relatively good for youth of the future in this subregion. South-East Asia also shows large variations. The average for the subregion is 30.1, with a modest decline over the years. In South and South-West Asia, the aggregate figure is 39.1 per cent and shows an even more modest decrease. Thus for this subregion major efforts are needed to ensure a far greater proportion of youth than in the present, or even the coming decade, grow up healthy and able to meaningfully contribute to sustainable development.

Addressing hunger requires an integrated approach that is linked to achieving food security<sup>28</sup> and promoting sustainable agriculture. Youth who are predisposed to innovation and risk-taking can play a key role in strengthening smallholder agriculture; yet they encounter obstacles in accessing land, credit and new technologies relative to their older peers. Migration of youth from rural to urban areas further compounds the failure to grasp the potential of many youth in advancing food security and sustainable agriculture. In China, for example, 270 million rural labourers— 35 per

25 FAO, IFAD and WFP, *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2014: Strengthening the Enabling Environment for Food Security and Nutrition* (Rome: FAO, 2014).

26 Ibid.

27 UNICEF, *A Matter of Magnitude: the Impact of the Economic Crisis on Women and Children in South Asia* (Kathmandu: UNICEF, 2009).

28 As defined in the Declaration of the World Summit on Food Security (2009): "Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. The four pillars of food security are availability, access, utilization and stability" (available from: [www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/wsfs/Summit/Docs/Final\\_Declaration/WSFS09\\_Declaration.pdf](http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/wsfs/Summit/Docs/Final_Declaration/WSFS09_Declaration.pdf)).

cent of the total employed labour force—migrated to urban areas in 2013, with about 60 per cent of them aged below 40. A survey covering 10 provinces in China indicated that, as of 2010, the average age of farmers was 57. Another survey found that almost no adult farmer interviewed held the expectation that their children would be engaged in farming.<sup>29</sup> Despite the challenges faced, promising initiatives exist, such as the Community Supported Agriculture Programme (see Box 1).

Engaging youth in sustainable agriculture requires greater attention to a range of factors including education and training opportunities for capacity building, along with heightened investment in technology and increased access to microfinance.<sup>30</sup> Such investments can provide pathways out of poverty and, through the appropriate development of vocational and technical skills, may enhance opportunities for youth in both farm and non-farm sectors.<sup>31</sup> For example, in India, the Bharatiya Yuva Shakti Trust provides support, including microfinance, to underprivileged youth in launching their own businesses. Another example is the Grameen Village Pay Phone programme in Bangladesh, where the provision of low-cost technology, including cellular phones and computers with internet access, has resulted in youth in rural areas establishing and managing small kiosks.<sup>32</sup>

- 29 Courtney Paisley, "Involving Young People in Agricultural Development: why it's critical for the sustainability of the sector", *Palaywija Newsletter*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (2014).
- 30 FAO, "Workshop implementation", available from: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/008/ae933e/ae933e04.htm>
- 31 David Suttie and Rosemary Vargas-Lundius, *Youth: Investing in Young People for Sustainable and Equitable Development* (Rome: IFAD, 2014).
- 32 IFAD, "Agriculture – Pathways to Prosperity in Asia and the Pacific", available from: [www.ifad.org/pub/apr/pathways.pdf](http://www.ifad.org/pub/apr/pathways.pdf)

BOX 1

## Addressing food security in China through community-supported agriculture

**In China, concerns regarding food security and nutrition include issues related to food safety, efficient use of land and an unbalanced distribution of rural to urban populations.** To combat their hunger, many youth in rural areas abandon the cultivation of land and move to urban settings.

To counter the depletion of youth residing in rural areas, the Community Supported Agriculture Programme encourages young farmers to return to the land. The Programme is comprised of 500 initiatives across China that offer young farmers insurance against fluctuating prices associated with inclement weather, unpredictable harvests and natural disasters. The Programme also assists farmers by providing training in sustainable agricultural methods with a focus on long-term interests, including doing away with pesticides and fertilizers.

Shared Harvest is a Supported Agriculture initiative in suburban Beijing, which was launched in mid-2012, and acts as a cooperative selling weekly boxes of vegetables. The young farmers are tasked with disseminating health and sustainable living ideas to their consumers, and developing good relationships with them, while the aim is that of increasing consumption of organic products.<sup>a</sup>

- a Committee on World Food Security, "Building Knowledge, Skills and Talent Development of Youth to Further Food Security and Nutrition," Case Study Template, FAO, 15 October 2015.

## Zero budget natural farming: Indian youth and food security

**In Mysore District, Karnataka, youth have been able to increase food security for themselves and their communities by reducing farming production costs, while concurrently reducing the price at which products are offered in the market.** Their system has been called the “zero budget natural farming method”, in contrast to the “chemical farming method”. Over a period of five years, the conversion from chemical farming to zero budget natural farming involves not only ending usage of chemical fertilizers and pesticides but solely utilizing native seeds and natural fertilizers. By applying the zero budget natural farming method, the youth involved have been able to reduce costs and increase profit. Costs have fallen by reducing expenses related to buying hybrid seeds and chemical fertilizers. At the same time, the new system has yielded harvests three times greater than those of farmers in neighbouring areas who follow the chemical farming method, thus contributing to greater food security, the preservation of natural biodiversity and a reduction in health risks.<sup>a</sup>

a By-PaccheNanjundaswamy, “Zero Budget Natural Farming Method is a Genuine Solution to Build Knowledge, Skills and Talent Development of Youth to Further Food Security and Nutrition”, FAO Case Study, 2015.

## 2.3 Health and well-being

The third goal of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is to “ensure healthy lives and promote well-being of all at all ages”, with related targets addressing maternal and child mortality, communicable and non-communicable diseases, behaviour and health, sexual and reproductive health-care services, universal health-care coverage and environmental pollutants. Understanding these globally prioritized health areas for youth in Asia and the Pacific is critical for their well-being and for people of ‘all ages’.

A WHO study<sup>33</sup> revealed that, globally, unipolar depressive disorders, alcohol-use disorders, iron deficiency anaemia, back and neck pain, and anxiety disorders rank as the top five causes of years lost to disability for persons aged 15 to 19 years. There is variation across regions and between female and male adolescents. For example, alcohol-use disorders are the top cause of years lost to disability among males aged 10 to 19 years in the Western Pacific region.<sup>34</sup>

An estimated 620,000 youth aged 15–24 years are living with HIV in Asia and the Pacific, with females making up 47 percent of the figure.<sup>35</sup> Nearly one-third of new infections in the region occur in persons in

33 WHO, “Health for the World’s Adolescents: a Second Change in the Second Decade”, available from: <http://apps.who.int/adolescent/second-decade/section3/page3/morbidity.html>

34 The 37 countries that comprise the Western Pacific region, as defined by the WHO, are American Samoa, Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam, Hong Kong China, Japan, Kiribati, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Macao China, Malaysia, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Mongolia, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Pitcairn Islands, Republic of Korea, Samoa, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Viet Nam and Wallis and Futuna (see [www.wpro.who.int/countries/en/](http://www.wpro.who.int/countries/en/)).

35 UNAIDS, *HIV in Asia and the Pacific* (Geneva: UNAIDS, 2013).

this age group.<sup>36</sup> The HIV epidemic in the region is concentrated among high-risk groups: people who inject drugs; men who have sex with other men; transgender persons; and sex workers and their clients. According to 2008 data from the Global Commission on AIDS in Africa, 95 per cent of all new infections among youth in the region occur among these key populations. The age at which youth enter into high-risk behaviours related to HIV transmission varies by country and socioeconomic context, yet in some countries these behaviours begin early in adolescence. Social stigma and institutional discrimination further hinder efforts to meet the health needs of the at-risk populations.

## Sexual and reproductive health

Youth's sexual and reproductive health and behaviour have implications for immediate and long-term health and well-being. For female youth, the probability of giving birth between the ages of 15 and 19 years varies according to the country in which they live and whether they are situated in rural or urban settings. Fertility rates are higher among female adolescents in rural areas than in urban areas, and in three of the countries of South and South-West Asia (Bangladesh, India and Nepal), than in neighbouring countries and those of South-East Asia (Figure 4).<sup>37</sup> Female adolescents in low- and middle-income countries are also more likely to become pregnant than their counterparts in high-income countries. In Bangladesh, for example, Demographic and Health Surveys between 2011 and 2013 indicate that 24.4 per cent of female teenagers were mothers, reducing to 12.1 per cent in Nepal, 7.7 in the Philippines and 7.0 per cent in Indonesia.<sup>38</sup>

Higher fertility rates are closely linked to lower education levels. For example, fertility rates among adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 years who have completed secondary school are lower than for those who have only completed primary school (Figure 5).<sup>39</sup>

Not all girls aged 15 to 19 years in Asia and the Pacific who become pregnant can be guaranteed access to ante-natal care. In Bangladesh, for example, only about half of all 15–19 year-old pregnant girls can expect at least one ante-natal visit, while all 15–19 year old pregnant girls in the Maldives and Mongolia can be assured of such a health-care service.<sup>40</sup>

Adolescent pregnancy puts young women at risk of haemorrhaging, spontaneous abortion, unsafe abortions and premature labour, as well as negatively impacting education, employment and civic engagement opportunities. Moreover, girls aged 15 years are significantly more likely to die giving birth, than are women aged 20 years.<sup>41</sup> Alongside economic factors, sociocultural values and harmful practices are implicated in adolescent childbearing.

36 UNAIDS 2014 HIV estimates (July 2015).

37 Source: Global Health Observatory Data Repository, <http://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.imr.asfr1>

38 USAID, "STATcompiler The DHS Program BETA", available from: <http://beta.statcompiler.com/>

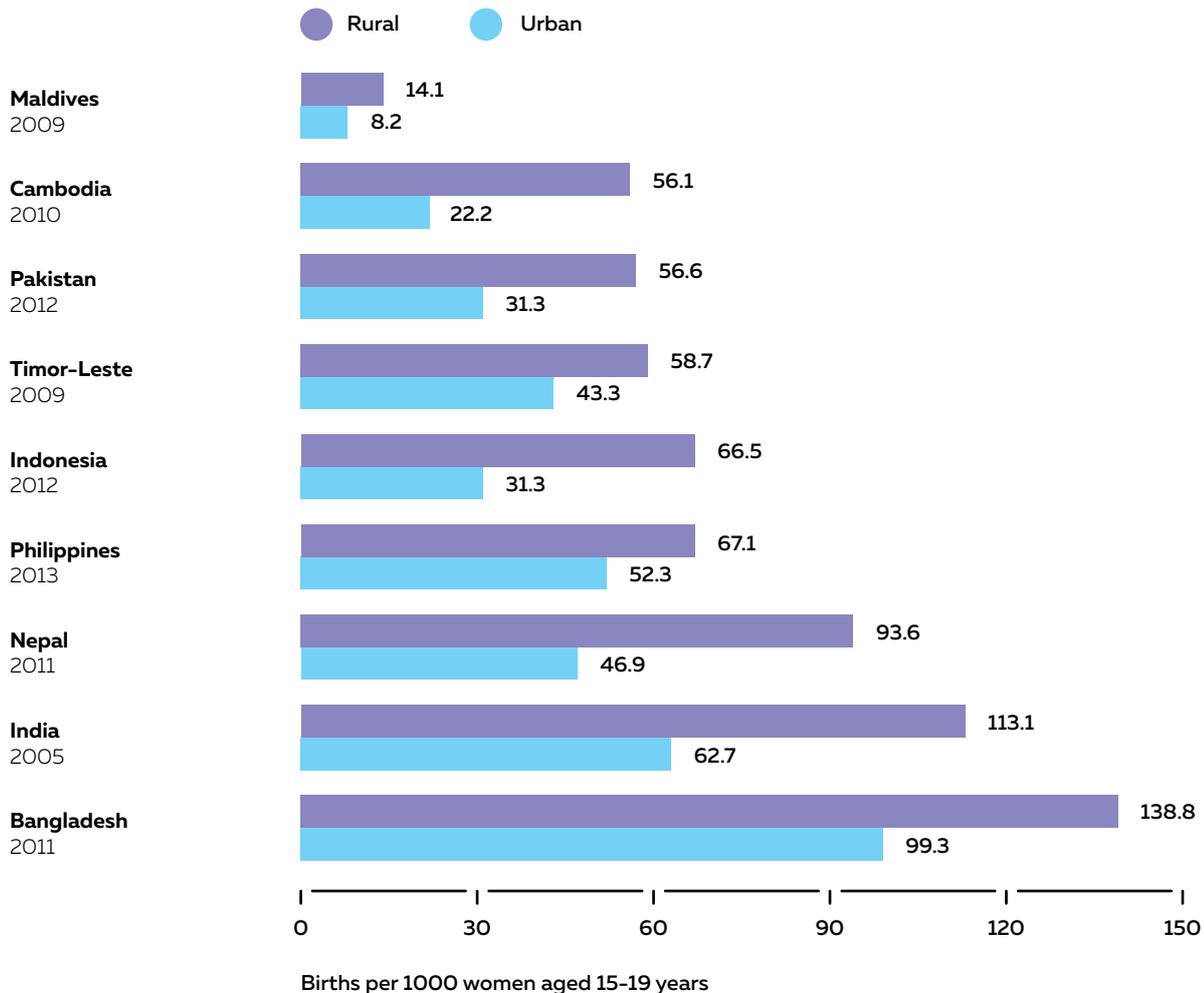
39 Source: Global Health Observatory Data Repository, <http://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.imr.asfr1>

40 Source: Global Health Observatory Data Repository, <http://apps.who.int/gho/data/view.main.321>

41 UNFPA, *The Power of 1.8 Billion: Adolescents, Youth and the Transformation of the Future* (New York: UNFPA, 2014).

FIGURE 4

## Fertility rates for females aged 15 to 19 years, in urban and rural settings, in selected countries



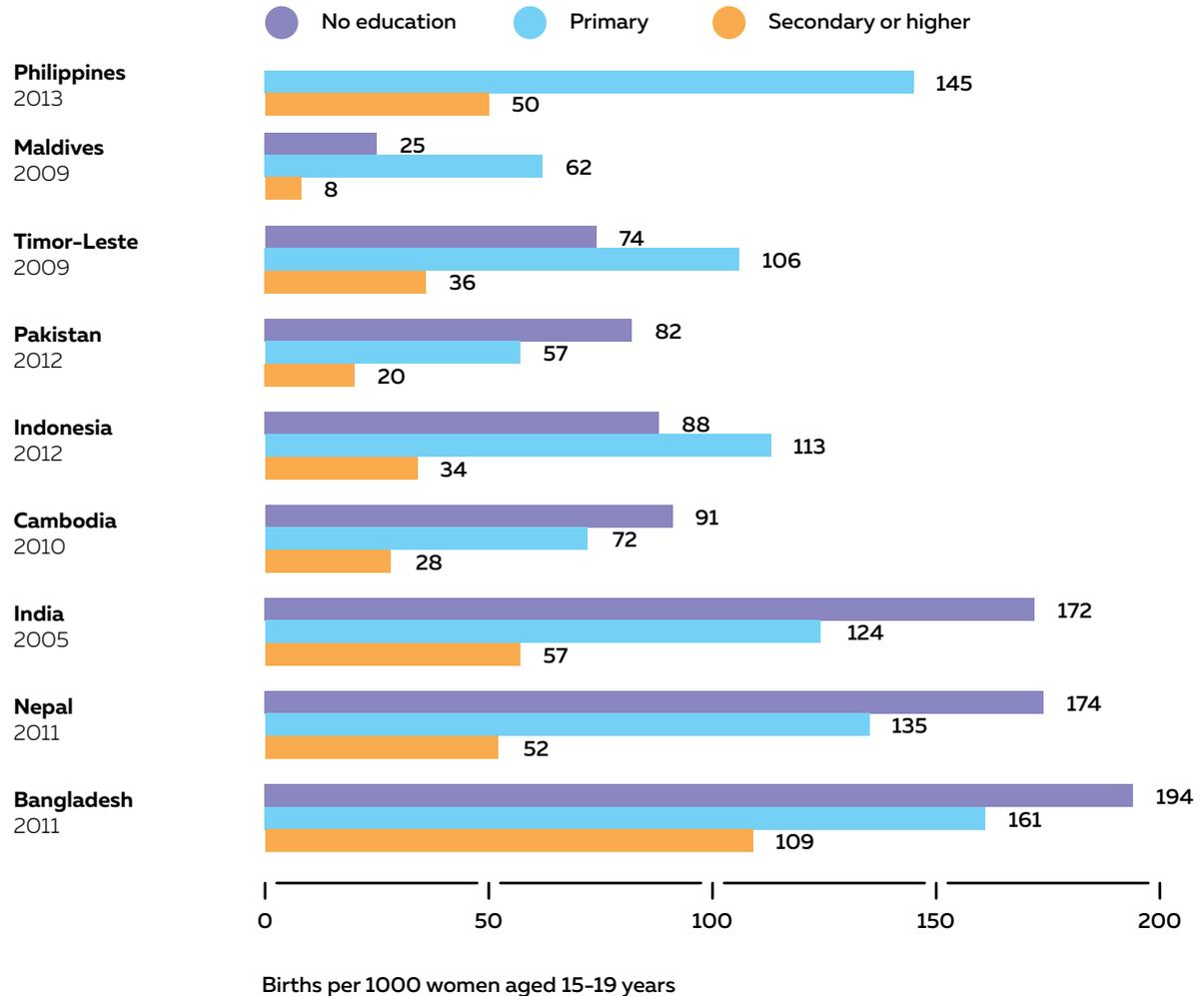
Source Global Health Observatory Data Repository, <http://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.imr.asfr1>

One means of reducing adolescent childbearing is through addressing the unmet need for contraception. Generally, while many unmarried women aged 15–24 years reportedly do not wish to become pregnant, the vast majority are unable to access family planning; with this unmet need being higher for female youth in rural than in urban areas. In terms of contraceptive use, for example, 65 per cent of 15–24 year-old females in South and South-East Asia do not use any method of contraception. As educational attainment increases, however, the unmet need for family planning among girls and women in South and South-East Asia declines.<sup>42</sup> Factors accounting for minority use of contraception include limited knowledge, physical and financial barriers, prohibitive legislation, and social, cultural and religious beliefs.

42 Kerry MacQuarrie “Unmet Need for Family Planning among Young Women: Levels and Trends”, DHS Comparative Reports, No. 34 (2014).

FIGURE 5

## Fertility rates for females aged 15 to 19 years, by level of education, in selected countries



Source: Global Health Observatory Data Repository, <http://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.imr.asfr1>

The introduction of comprehensive sexuality education programmes into school curricula is one means, adopted by some countries in the Asia-Pacific region, of promoting the sexual and reproductive health of female and male youth. While all schools in Japan and Singapore provide life skills-based HIV education, only 0.14 per cent of schools in Bangladesh do so. Furthermore, as sexuality education programmes are primarily provided through secondary schools, adolescents who are not enrolled are likely to be excluded from such awareness and skills-raising instruction. Youth engagement in the development and delivery of sexual and reproductive health education programmes is one means of addressing existing gaps in this area of health education.

## Behaviour and health

The health of youth in the region also depends on their dietary choices, behaviour regarding traffic, and use (or abuse) of alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs.

The nutritional status of youth, as for all persons, is affected by the availability, accessibility and adequacy of food. The Global School-based Student Health Survey revealed that the majority of younger adolescents do not eat the recommended daily five or more servings of fruit and vegetables.<sup>43</sup> Related occurrences of vitamin A deficiency, iodine deficiency disorders and anaemia contribute to delayed growth, stunted height, delayed or retarded intellectual development and increased risks in childbirth. For example, anaemia is common in the Philippines and the Solomon Islands, while goitre is prevalent (15.5 per cent) among women aged 15 to 24 years in Viet Nam. Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus and being overweight are two further consequences of restricted access to nutritionally healthy foods and of dietary choices. High rates of obesity are reported in several Pacific Island countries, including Nauru, the Solomon Islands and Tuvalu, where, as of 2006, the proportion of obesity among 15 to 19 year-old girls was 51, 29 and 53 per cent, respectively.<sup>44</sup>

Road traffic accidents are the leading cause of death among 15 to 29 year-old persons, and male youth account for 77 per cent of all road fatalities. At 18.5 deaths per 100,000 persons, the incidence of road traffic deaths in South-East Asia and in the Western Pacific mirrors the global rate of 18 per 100,000 persons. There is, however, variance by country income category, with the highest road fatality rates in middle-income countries (20.1) and the lowest rates in high-income countries (8.7). A major reason for the high numbers in South-East Asia is the lack of comprehensive legislation and/or enforcement mechanisms related to the five key risk factors for road traffic injuries, namely speeding, drink-driving, obligatory use of motorcycle helmets, compulsory seatbelts and child restraints.<sup>45</sup>

A further behaviour, with negative impacts on the health of youth, is the use of drugs, particularly alcohol and illicit substances. Adolescent males consume more alcohol than do female adolescents. At the subregional level, female and male adolescents aged 15 to 19 years in East and North-East Asia consume alcohol at higher rates than do their counterparts in the other three subregions. The lowest rate of alcohol consumption in this age group is in South-East Asia (Figure 6).<sup>46</sup>

In Australia, per year, youth consume 10.6 litres of pure alcohol.<sup>47</sup> In Pakistan and Indonesia, by contrast, the alcohol consumption by youth is 0.1 litres, per year, while in the Maldives it is 0.2 litres and 0.7 litres in Afghanistan. When the data are disaggregated by sex, significant differences emerge between 15 and 19 year-old females and males. In Turkey, for instance, adolescent males consume 25.6 litres of pure alcohol each year, compared to 3.6 litres by female adolescents. The

43 WHO, "Global School-based Student Health Survey", available from: [www.who.int/chp/gshs/en/](http://www.who.int/chp/gshs/en/)

44 WHO, *Adolescent Girls and Young Women in the Western Pacific Region. 10 Key Health Challenges* (WHO: Manila, 2011).

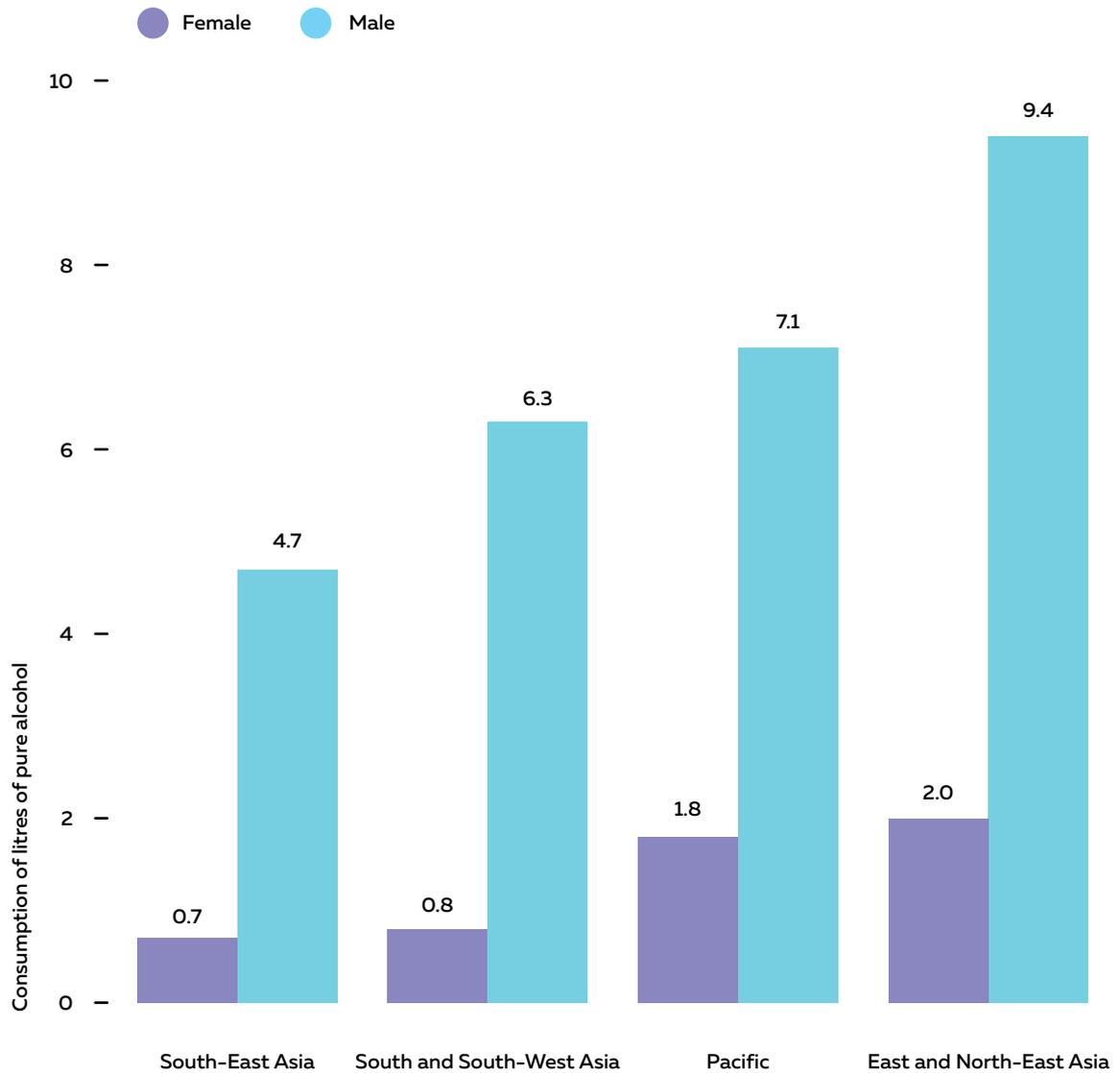
45 WHO, *Global Status Report on Road Safety 2013: Supporting a Decade of Action* (Geneva: WHO, 2013).

46 Source: Global Health Observatory Data Repository, <http://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.main.A1208?lang=en>

47 Source: Global Health Observatory Data Repository, <http://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.main.A1208?lang=en>

FIGURE 6

## Annual consumption of alcohol (litres) by females and males aged 15 to 19 years, by subregion (2010)



Source: Global Health Observatory (GHO), Youth and alcohol

sex-based difference is smaller in other countries, including Australia, where annual alcohol consumption by 15–19 year-old males and females is 14.7 and 6.2 litres respectively.

While tobacco and alcohol use are markedly more prevalent,<sup>48</sup> the use of illicit substances—from cannabis and cocaine, to amphetamines, opioids and ecstasy—is impairing the health, and contributing to the death, of youth in the Asia-Pacific region. It also contributes to economic productivity losses and criminal activity. The morbidity (such as hepatitis B and C, and HIV) and mortality effects of illicit drugs are notably of greater consequence for male than female youth. Examples of lower rates of illicit drug use by females are those of India and Indonesia, at one-tenth that of males. It is predicted, however, that the use of illicit drugs by females will increase as gender-based inequalities in countries decrease. Females are, nevertheless, more likely than their male counterparts to use tranquilizers and sedatives. While noting that “illicit drug use is largely a youth phenomenon in most countries” and that “prevalence rates gradually increase through the teens and peak among persons aged 18–25”,<sup>49</sup> UNODC has postulated that this age-related occurrence is reflective “of the lower propensity of adults to transgress laws and social norms”.<sup>50</sup>

## Violence against female youth

While young women, relative to young men, are a minority of armed combatants, as discussed under the section on promoting peace, they are the majority of survivors and victims of inter-personal violence. Under Goal 5 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the global community has committed to the elimination of “all forms of violence against women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation” and of “all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation”.<sup>51</sup> Given that violence against women and girls is a regional pandemic, these two targets are applicable to every country in Asia and the Pacific.

Adolescent girls and young women, relative to female children and older women, are particularly vulnerable to physical violence, sexual violence and harmful practices, often resulting in disability and death.<sup>52</sup> The violence young women experience (and fight against) is a violation of fundamental human rights; of their personal integrity; of their physical, sexual and emotional development; and of their future prospects. In Papua New Guinea, among women who reported being raped in 2008, nearly 50 per cent were under the age of 15 years.<sup>53</sup> Early and forced marriage—which is particularly prevalent in countries of South and South-West Asia, and then at lower rates in countries of the Pacific (Figure 7)<sup>54</sup>—is, for example, associated with negative

48 Globally, tobacco use is 10 times, and alcohol 8 times, more widespread, than is use of illegal drugs.

49 UNODC, *World Drug Report 2012* (Vienna: UNODC, 2012).

50 Ibid.

51 United Nations, “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (A/RES/70/1), 70th Session of the General Assembly, New York, 21 October 2015.

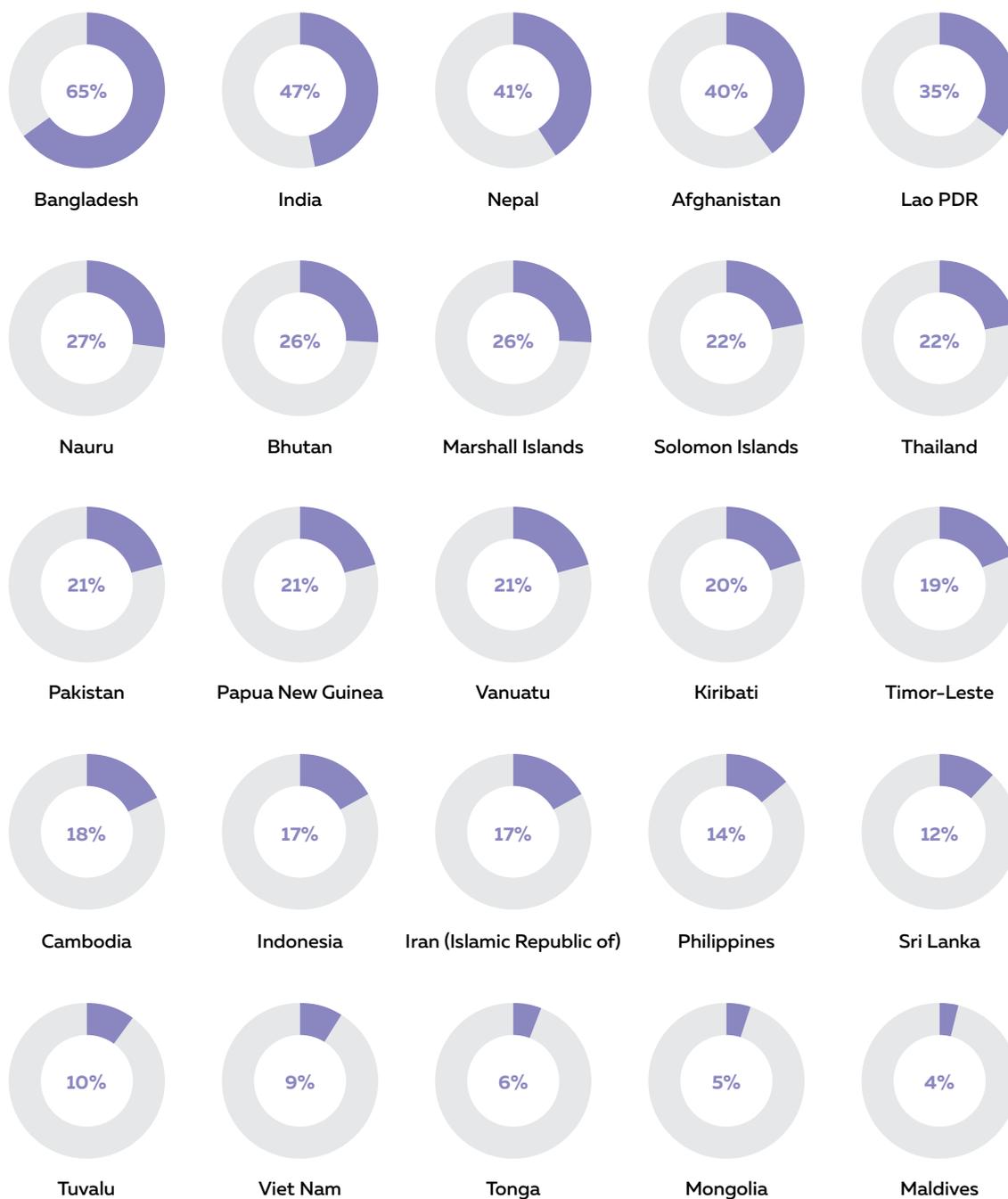
52 See for example, Plan International, “Girls Not Brides” campaign: [www.girlsnotbrides.org/why-is-child-marriage-a-form-of-violence-against-women-and-girls/](http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/why-is-child-marriage-a-form-of-violence-against-women-and-girls/)

53 Child Fund Alliance, *Stop Violence Against Women and Children in Papua New Guinea* (Surry Hills: Child Fund Alliance, 2013).

54 Source: UNICEF global databases, 2014. Based on DHS, MICS and other national household surveys (available from: <http://data.unicef.org/>).

FIGURE 7

## Share (%) of women aged 20 to 24 years who married before 18 years of age, in selected countries, latest year



Source UNICEF global databases, 2014. Based on DHS, MICS and other national household surveys.

consequences for the formal education and health of girls, with subsequent impacts on their employment, economic well-being and engagement in the public domain. Moreover, the greater the age difference between girls and their husbands, the more likely they are to experience intimate partner violence. Child brides often suffer emotional pressure from their families, and husbands or in-laws can limit their ability to make decisions about their own lives and bodies. Forced sexual initiation and early pregnancy often have long lasting effects on the mental health of child brides for years after.<sup>55</sup> Approximately half of all girls globally who are married before the age of 18 years reside in South Asia.<sup>56</sup>

Adolescent girls may not be in a position to resist marriage where they, for example, lack information, experience, self-assertiveness and the physical capacity to assertively react, and have been inculcated in the belief that the role of a female centres on marriage and family. Similar factors may also prevent girls from being able to avert female genital mutilation.

A study of violence against women in six countries<sup>57</sup> in the region found that 30 to 57 per cent of men surveyed reported ever having perpetrated physical and/or sexual violence against their intimate partners. In terms of sexual violence, of the 10 and 62 per cent of surveyed men who confessed to acts of rape across the six countries, half of them raped a woman for the first time when they were teenagers. Moreover, the men perpetrating violence against women reported experiencing emotional, physical and/or sexual abuse as children (prior to 18 years of age).<sup>58</sup> High rates of sexual violence against female high-school students have been documented in American Samoa, Palau and the Northern Mariana Islands: 26, 19 and 18 per cent of young women reported having experienced forced sex, in each of the three respective territories.<sup>59</sup> In Papua New Guinea, among women who reported being raped in 2008, nearly 50 per cent were under the age of 15 years.<sup>60, 61</sup>

The unequal distribution of power between males and females and the concomitant lack of respect of human rights for women and girls presents young women with a formidable barrier to, individually and collectively, combat the violence in their lives. Power and patriarchy, which generate prescribed gender roles and are linked to the failure to value females, are at the root of violence. Other factors that place girls and women at risk include armed conflict, lack of education and access to information, poverty and livelihood dependency, and the abuse of drugs and alcohol.

55 Source: UNICEF global databases, 2014. Based on DHS, MICS and other national household surveys (available from: <http://data.unicef.org/>).

56 Mgone CS, Lupiwa T, Yeka W, "High prevalence of Neisseria gonorrhoea and multiple sexually transmitted diseases among rural women in the Eastern Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea, detected by polymerase chain reaction". *Sexually Transmitted Diseases*, Vol. 29 (2002).

57 The six countries that comprised the study were Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and Sri Lanka.

58 Emma Fulu, Warner Xuan, et al., *Why do Some Men Use Violence Against Women and How Can we Prevent It? Quantitative Findings from the United Nations Multi-Country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific* (Bangkok: UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women, UNV, 2013).

59 Ibid.

60 Child Fund Alliance, *Stop Violence Against Women and Children in Papua New Guinea* (Surry Hills: Child Fund Alliance, 2013).

61 Partners for Prevention – on behalf of UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women and UNV – coordinated the UN Multi-country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific (covering Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and Sri Lanka) to generate knowledge on how masculinities relate to men's perceptions and perpetration of gender-based violence, in order to prevent violence. Nearly half of those men interviewed reported using physical and/or sexual violence against a female partner, ranging from 26 to 80 per cent across the sites. Nearly a quarter of men interviewed reported perpetrating rape against a woman or girl, ranging from 10 to 62 per cent across the sites. The report further explores prevalence of different types of violence and the factors that drive men's use of violence. It makes recommendations on how to use the data to more effectively prevent violence against women in Asia and the Pacific. See [www.partners4prevention.org/about-prevention/research/men-and-violence-study](http://www.partners4prevention.org/about-prevention/research/men-and-violence-study). UNFPA has carried out research on prevalence of partner and non-partner violence against women in the Pacific. See: [http://countryoffice.unfpa.org/pacific/2013/07/31/7502/violence\\_against\\_women\\_vaw\\_in\\_the\\_pacific/](http://countryoffice.unfpa.org/pacific/2013/07/31/7502/violence_against_women_vaw_in_the_pacific/)

Thus, while responses aimed at eliminating violence from the lives of young women must fundamentally address power (empower female youth), interventions must also embrace:

- Awareness-raising, education and training of young women and men
- Employment generation and livelihood support
- Behaviour development that promotes sociocultural norms and practices grounded in rights for all
- The construction of safe physical spaces for young women
- Law enforcement that puts an end to impunity and provides justice
- Provision of comprehensive health and psychosocial care
- Broad mobilization of communities, so that girls and young women are valued and respected

## **Youth and mental health**

The mental health of young people has not been well quantified or researched, yet it has a major impact on their quality of life and life expectancy. The “World Mental Health Survey” found that numerous mental disorders start during childhood or adolescence, although diagnosis and treatment may be delayed for years. Half of all lifetime mental disorders appear to start by the age of 14. Many adolescents who participated in the survey considered mental health to be the most important health problem faced by adolescents. It is even more important to pay attention to mental health issues among adolescents owing to its co-morbidity with drug dependence. However, young people may fail to seek professional help for mental health problems for fear of being belittled, shunned or even ostracized in communities where stigma continues to be attached to mental health issues and drugs.

Suicide is closely related to mental well-being and the leading cause of death for 15-24-year-old females and the second leading cause for males in the same age group in Asia and the Pacific. The crude suicide rate for the region is around 19.3 deaths per 100,000 people, compared with a global estimate of 14.0 per 100,000. In the Philippines, 16.8 per cent of female students aged 13–15 had planned to commit suicide, while more than 44 per cent reported feeling despondent or hopeless at times. One of every six deaths among adolescent females in South-East Asia is due to suicide. Overall, young men have higher suicide rates than young women. While global rates for males and females aged 20–24 years are 17.8 and 10.2 per 100,000 respectively, South Asia has significantly higher rates, reaching 28.1 for males and 25.1 for females. Sri Lanka has the third highest suicide rates for all ages in the world, and young men aged 20–24 have rates of 40.9 per 100,000.

# PLANET

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We are determined to protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations.

**PREAMBLE, TRANSFORMING OUR WORLD: THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**



**W**ithin the domain of ‘planet’ as explicated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, this Chapter addresses the issues of urbanization; sanitation; and climate change, natural disasters and resource use, as they apply to youth in the Asia-Pacific region.

### 3.1 Urbanization

Urbanization, or the growth of towns into cities and the enlargement of cities associated with increased human occupancy, is increasingly common globally and of tangible consequence to the state of the planet. Through the 2030 Agenda, Governments globally have recognized the significance of urbanization and the necessity of making “cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” (Goal 11) and of the need to “build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation” (Goal 9).

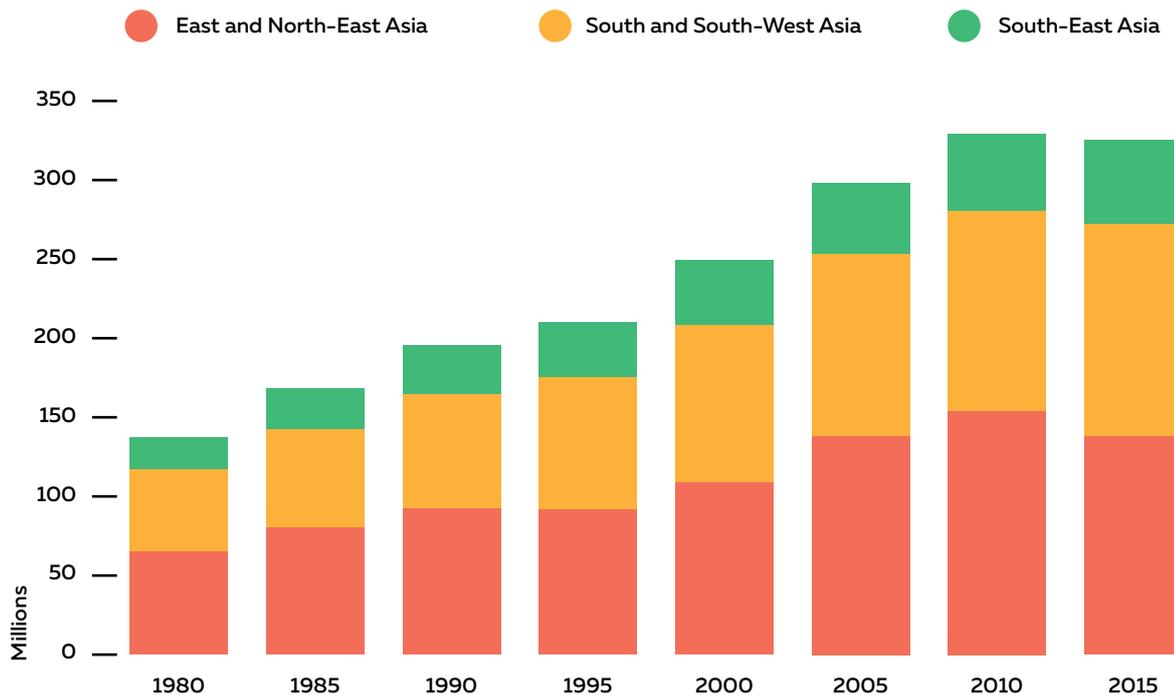
Much of urbanization in the Asia-Pacific region has been rapid and unplanned, with provision of infrastructure and basic services (including health care, housing and education) being inadequate relative to the demand of expanding populations.

While globally, there is a trend towards urbanization, with a predicted increase to two-thirds of the world’s population inhabiting urban settings by 2050, as of 2014, 47.5 per cent of the population in Asia lived in urban areas, increasing to an anticipated 56 per cent by mid-century. Shares of urbanized populations are higher in Oceania, at 70.8 per cent. However, 16 of the world’s 28 megacities<sup>62</sup> are located in Asia, including Beijing, Delhi, Mumbai, Osaka, Shanghai and Tokyo.

62 A megacity is defined as a city with more than 10 million inhabitants.

FIGURE 8

## Urban youth in Asia in millions, by subregion, 1980–2015



Source Estimates based on URPAS 2014, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division.

Reflecting the diversity of the region, three of the least urbanized countries—Nepal, Papua New Guinea and Sri Lanka—are also located in Asia and the Pacific. Other dimensions of trends include increasing urban populations in some countries, such as China and India, with declining urban populations in others, including Japan.<sup>63</sup> Figure 8 shows that the urban youth population across the region has continued to increase, the only exception being the last five years in East and North-East Asia.

As an example, Phnom Penh is a growing city which, over time, has become more youthful. Between 1998 and 2008, the city’s population just over doubled, while the population aged in their 20s tripled, increasing from 107,000 to 372,000 persons, and as a proportion of the city’s population the percentage of those in this age group grew from 17 to 30 per cent.<sup>64</sup> Similarly, in Indonesia, the 2010 census indicated that youth were over-represented in urban areas, relative to the national average of 49.8 per cent. A total of 54 per cent of young women and men aged 20 to 24 years were living in urban areas, compared to 45 per cent of the adult population.<sup>65</sup>

63 UN DESA, *World Urbanization Prospects: the 2014 Revision* (New York: United Nations, 2014).

64 Government of Cambodia, Ministry of Planning, *Migration in Cambodia: Report of the Cambodian Rural Urban Migration Project* (Phnom Penh: Government of Cambodia, 2012).

65 Ariane Utomo, Horst Posselt, Sri Moertiningsih Adioetomo, “Youth in Indonesia”, UNFPA Youth Monograph Series No. 2 (2014).

## Promoting urban youth employment: A case of Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea

Port Moresby – Papua New Guinea’s capital and largest urban centre – is a youthful city, with persons aged 15 to 29 years comprising about 35 per cent of the population. The combination of rapid population growth and urbanization has created significant pressures with regard to generating employment opportunities. Youth face three key challenges to obtain work:

- A lack of equity in and access to formal education institutions
- A lack of equity in and access to the labour market
- Increasing involvement in urban crime and violence

To address such challenges, the Urban Youth Employment Project was established, with a view to providing urban youth in Port Moresby with income from temporary employment opportunities and to increasing employability through provision of life skills training and public works job placements. On-the-job training and market-oriented work experience were provided, along with support in trade, and industrial and commerce-related employment. This led to, among others, the competencies of youth in basic bookkeeping, data entry, business practices, and information technology being developed. By March 2013, half of the 250 participating youths who had graduated from the pre-employment training initiatives had been placed in on-the-job training with public and private employers in the National Capital District.<sup>a</sup>

a World Bank, “Papua New Guinea: Urban Youth Employment Project”, available from: [www.worldbank.org/en/results/2013/08/12/papua-new-guinea-urban-youth-employment-project](http://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2013/08/12/papua-new-guinea-urban-youth-employment-project)

Given the prevalence of slums and informal settlements, it will be critical to address urbanization and poverty as integral to the realization of the right to development and the vision of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This would entail, for example, improving:

- Access of young pregnant women living in slum areas to ante-natal care<sup>66</sup>
- Access to decent and affordable housing, with secure tenure, such as initiated in the Philippines for youth in informal communities<sup>67</sup>
- Self-reported well-being among young, in turn requiring action to counter the reported sense of disenfranchisement<sup>68</sup>

66 UN-Habitat, *The State of Urban Youth 2012/2013* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

67 UN-Habitat, *Innovative Urban Tenure in the Philippines: Challenges, Approaches and Institutionalization* (Nairobi: UN-Habitat, 2012).

68 UN-Habitat, *The State of Urban Youth 2012/2013* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

Accordingly, new responses are required — by governments and other key stakeholders, including the private sector — for incorporating the priority needs and issues of youth in government policies and city planning measures, in ways that create inclusive access to services and raise living standards.<sup>69</sup>

Rights-based approaches to development also demand youth participation and the enforcement of equality of opportunity and outcome. Youth are a key population group contributing to, benefiting from and struggling with urbanization. It is, accordingly, critical that young women and men are involved in managing urbanization for sustainable and beneficial outcomes for themselves, in the present and in the future, and for subsequent generations.

Youth-led organizations often lead the way in the development of their local communities. UN-Habitat's Urban Youth Fund has supported over 300 youth-led agencies in 63 countries and 172 cities to undertake urban-focused youth development projects. These projects range from Fresh & Local, an urban farming initiative based in Mumbai, India, which works on urban interventions through urban farming and gardening to build communities, create jobs and empower city dwellers with the tools and knowledge to make better eating choices; to Transparency Maldives, which promotes access to information and organizes civic participation projects as well as offers legal advice to facilitate meaningful policy engagement of young people in the Maldives.

## 3.2 Sanitation

In adopting the 2030 Agenda, Governments globally committed to ensuring the “availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all” (Goal 6).<sup>70</sup> In Asia and the Pacific this will require educating, mobilizing and engaging youth, particularly in rural areas, where, as of 2014, 46 per cent of the population had access to improved sanitation, compared with 75 per cent of persons living in urban areas.<sup>71</sup>

The significance of this issue across Asia is evident from the 1.7 billion people who still do not have access to clean water and sanitation.<sup>72</sup> Clean water is a fundamental resource without which health would be compromised and youth would not be able to live productive lives. In this regard, various approaches to ensure sustainability of supplies of clean water are required. This applies to both urban areas, in particular slum dwellings, and rural ones. Technology can play a role, especially concerning recycling water, with the possibility of enhanced efficiency in the way water is harvested, treated and used.

Another concern is that in 780 million people still practice open defecation, and some 80 per cent of wastewater is discharged without being treated into waterways across Asia.<sup>73</sup> In some countries in the region, the majority of persons aged 15 to 24 years do not have access to sanitation (Figure 9).<sup>74</sup>

69 Ibid.

70 United Nations, “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (A/RES/70/1), 70th Session of the General Assembly, New York, 21 October 2015.

71 UN ESCAP, *Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific 2014* (Bangkok: ESCAP, 2014).

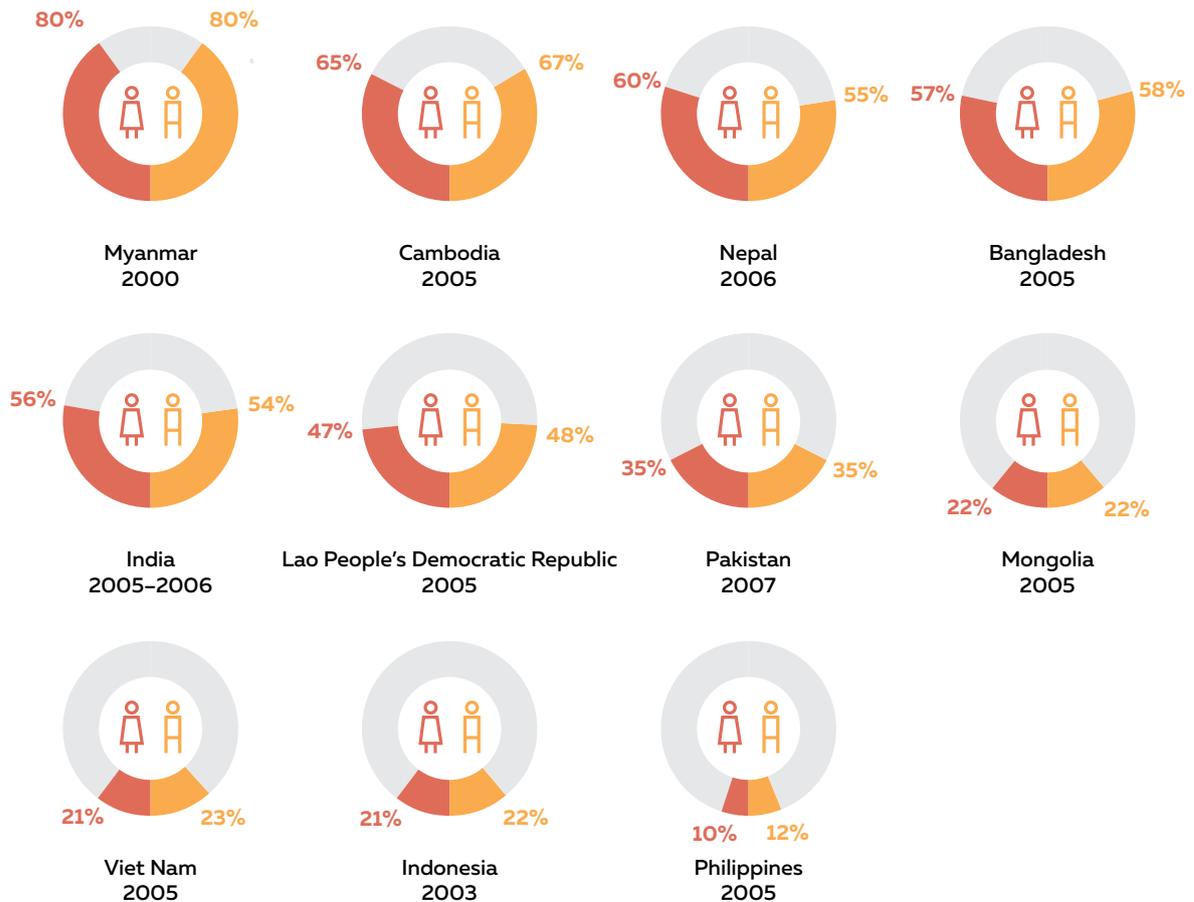
72 Civil Society Team, “Youth Creativity and Leadership on Tap to Solve Asia’s Water Problems”, Asian Development Blog, available at: <http://blogs.adb.org/blog/youth-creativity-and-leadership-tap-solve-asia-s-water-problems>

73 Ibid.

74 UN DESA, *World Youth Report: Youth and Climate Change* (New York: United Nations 2010). Country data are for years 2003 to 2007.

FIGURE 9

## Share (%) of youth deprived of sanitation by sex, in selected countries



**Source** United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2010). *World Youth Report: Youth and Climate Change*, New York: United Nations (available from: <http://undesadspd.org/WorldYouthReport/2010.aspx>).

Youth, especially girls and young women, face significant sanitation challenges. There is, for example, a reported lack of menstrual hygiene management and hygiene promotion in school and community-based programmes in South Asian countries. As a consequence, female youth do not have access to facilities to wash and change their menstrual cloths and, for some, they have to resort to finding secretive, dark places to hide their used cloths.<sup>75</sup> Hygienic and properly constructed latrine facilities not only ensure that water sources are not contaminated by faecal matter, they can provide young women with secure spaces that do not place them at risk of harassment or assault. Research in India indicates that investments in sanitation in schools, such as latrine construction, can increase enrolment of all students.<sup>76</sup>

75 Maria Fernandes and Thérèse Mahon, *Menstrual hygiene in South Asia: A neglected issue for WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) programmes* (London: WaterAid, 2010).

76 Anjali Adukia, *Sanitation and Education* (New Haven: Harvard University, 2014).

Encouragingly, many Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WaSH) initiatives in South Asia and other parts of the Asia-Pacific region actively engage young women and men. Their innovative spirit, uptake of new knowledge and savvy understanding of technology and media combine to make them constructive contributors to the realization of the sixth SDG. In Indonesia, for example, where 55 million people practice open defecation—second to only India in world ranking—campaigns involving youth utilize social media. TinjuTinja, for instance, engages youth role models to raise awareness and promote urban youth as advocates against open defecation.<sup>77</sup>

### 3.3 Climate change, natural disasters and resource use

Alongside urbanization, the regional (and global) landscape is changing in response to climate change and natural disasters. Acknowledging the significance of environmental changes, Governments globally have committed to “[t]ake urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts”, which will include:

- Strengthening “resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries”
- Promoting “mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in least developed countries and small island developing States, including focusing on women, youth and local and marginalized communities”<sup>78</sup>

The immediate relevance of natural disasters to the lives of youth in Asia and the Pacific is evident in the estimate that approximately 60 per cent of the world’s countries that have been most affected by extreme weather events in the past two decades are in Asia and the Pacific.<sup>79</sup> In addition, 52 per cent of cities in the Asia-Pacific region are located in the Low Elevation Coastal Zones, thereby being exposed to the adverse impacts of climate change and rises in sea levels. The cities include Bangkok, Guangzhou, Haikou, Ho Chi Minh City, Jakarta, Manila, Mumbai, Seoul, Shanghai and Osaka.

The direct impacts of climate change on the lives of youth are evident in the increased efforts to collect water. In arid areas of the Asia-Pacific region, such as in Mongolia, the quantity of surface water has declined, by as much as 20 per cent, since the 1970s.<sup>80</sup> Associated with this is an increase in the number of hours (often female) youth spend daily in collecting water for their families; this in turn detracts from their participation in other activities, such as education and productive work.

77 Aidan Cronin, “Raising awareness on open defecation in Indonesia”, available from: <http://www.communityledtotalsanitation.org/blog/raising-awareness-open-defecation-indonesia>

78 United Nations, “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (A/RES/70/1), 70th Session of the General Assembly, New York, 21 October 2015.

79 David Eckstein and Sönke Kreft, *Global Climate Risk Index 2014* (Bonn: German Watch, 2013).

80 Dagvadorj, D. et al., *Mongolia: Assessment report on climate change 2009* (Ulaanbaatar: Mongolian Ministry of Environment, Nature and Tourism, 2009).



A further documented consequence of climate change is an increase in tropical diseases, such as dengue fever.<sup>81</sup> Between 2000 and 2012, deaths resulting from dengue fever among persons aged 15 to 29 years increased by 150 per cent in the Western Pacific region.<sup>82</sup>

An adverse predication associated with climate change is that it will exacerbate existing social and economic inequalities within and between countries, directly affecting the lives and opportunities of youth, as well as placing greater strains on water sources, agricultural land, coastal areas and marine ecosystems.

Youth across the region are also confronted with the impacts of natural disasters. In 2013, worldwide, close to 25,000 people died, and 100 million were affected by natural disasters, encompassing droughts, extreme temperatures, storms, earthquakes, floods, wildfires and volcanic eruptions, with an estimated economic cost of USD 119 billion.

Asia and the Pacific is the world's most disaster prone region. The impact is great, with the region being home to 85 per cent of all people killed and 87 per cent of people affected globally, along with over 49 per cent of global economic losses.<sup>83</sup> The region experienced more than 40 per cent of the 3,979 disasters that occurred globally between 2005 and 2014. Over the same period, about 500,000 people lost their lives, around 1.4 billion people were affected, and economic damage amounted to USD 523 billion.<sup>84</sup> Going back further in time, since the 1970s, the majority of disasters in Asia and the Pacific have been relatively small scale, causing fewer than 100 fatalities, yet cumulatively have affected 2.2 billion, a figure which is probably and underestimate, since no standardized methodology for gathering data exists and many disasters remain unreported.<sup>85</sup>

81 WHO, *Quantitative risk assessment of the effects of climate change on selected causes of death, 2030s and 2050s* (Geneva: WHO, 2014).

82 WHO, "Global Health Observatory Data Repository", available from: <http://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.main.CODRATE?lang=en>

83 Asian Disaster Reduction Center, *Natural Disaster Data Book 2013: an Analytical Overview* (Bangkok: ADRC, 2013).

84 ESCAP, *Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2015* (Bangkok: ESCAP, 2015).

85 Ibid.

A further indication of the magnitude of natural disasters in Asia and the Pacific is manifested by the 17,000 youth drowning each year in Bangladesh largely as a result of frequent flooding.<sup>86</sup> In response to this tragedy, UNICEF Bangladesh's SwimSafe programme teaches youth how to swim and so increase their ability to survive natural disasters such as flooding.

Young women and men play an important role in reducing risks, and responding and fostering resilience to natural disasters. In this respect, the recently adopted Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction recognizes that “[c]hildren and youth are agents of change and should be given the space and modalities to contribute to disaster risk reduction”, and that a “gender, age, disability and cultural perspective should be integrated in all policies and practices, and women and youth leadership should be promoted”.<sup>87</sup> Such commitments are reinforced in Goal 11 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.<sup>88</sup> Projections also indicate that by 2030, losses caused by disasters in Asia and the Pacific could total USD 160 billion every year.<sup>89</sup> Preparing the youth of today to work so that the impacts of future disasters are mitigated requires decisive action.

Changing climates and natural environments will inevitably impact the lives and prospects of youth. Therefore, equipping youth with, and engaging them in the generation of, evidence-based knowledge on climate change and environmental matters is critical to the formulation and implementation of effective long-term strategies for sustainable development. Participation is also critical, as has been recognized in the Pacific. The Pacific Islands are particularly vulnerable to natural disasters. In recent years, youth have come together in such forums as the “Pre-Pacific Platform for Disaster Risk Management Youth Stakeholder Workshop”, to address the role of youth in the post-2015 framework on disaster risk reduction.<sup>90</sup> Similarly, around 50 Māori and Pacific Island youth met in Auckland in December 2012 for the “Power Shift Pacific: Looking Beyond Disaster — Youth Forum”.<sup>91</sup>

The generation and application of knowledge about the planet must also encompass the use and management of natural resources, including water, energy, the oceans and terrestrial ecosystems (as captured in the Sustainable Development Goals 6, 7, 12, 14 and 15). Youth should play key roles in decision-making about natural resources and consumption patterns.

Youth contribute greatly to the regional consumption of natural resources. Their purchasing power<sup>92</sup> has increased along with the region's rapid economic development. As of 2012, the purchasing power of persons aged 12 to 19 years in Asia and the Pacific amounted to USD 819 billion, constituting more than half of the global purchasing power for this age group. Of this

86 United Nations Joint Framework Initiative on Children, Youth and Climate Change, *Youth in Action on Climate Change: Inspirations from Around the World* (Bonn: United Nations, 2013).

87 United Nations, “Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030” (A/RES/69/283), 69th Session of the General Assembly, New York, 23 June 2015.

88 United Nations, “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (A/RES/70/1), 70th Session of the General Assembly, New York, 21 October 2015.

89 ESCAP, *Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2015* (Bangkok: ESCAP, 2015).

90 Pacific Platform for Disaster Risk Management, *Pre Pacific Platform for Disaster Risk Management Youth Stakeholder Workshop: Summary of Key Findings from Youth Stakeholders on Post 2015 Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction* (Suva: Pacific Platform for Disaster Risk Management, 2014).

91 New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO, “Pacific and Maori Youth Converge to Talk Disaster Resilience”, available from: <http://www.unesco.org.nz/news-/media-releases-/271-pacific-and-mori-youth-converge-to-talk-disaster-resilience>

92 Purchasing Power refers to the financial ability to buy (purchase) goods and services.

amount, USD 326 billion was associated with adolescents in China and 108 billion in India (reflective of, inter alia, national population sizes).<sup>93</sup> Increasing economic wealth is associated with the purchase of energy-intensive vehicles, electronic gadgets, clothing and long-distance travel. The challenges posed by resource-intensive consumption are evident in Asia being the fastest-growing meat consuming region,<sup>94</sup> whose per capita consumption has grown 15 times since 1961. Yet, surveys of the environmental perceptions of youth indicate that sustainability concerns rarely influence their unsustainable consumption decisions.<sup>95</sup>

In 2012, at the Rio+20 Summit, Governments outlined their vision for the world in “The Future We Want”, central to which is the commitment “that sustainable development must be inclusive and people-centred, benefiting and involving all people, including youth and children”.<sup>96</sup> This commitment was a reiteration of the principle declared 20 years earlier at the Rio Summit.<sup>97</sup>

In this space, youth, as individuals and collectively, have conceived, developed, implemented and participated in a range of environmental initiatives, from local to global levels, most recently at the 2015

93 TRU Insights as part of The Future Company – cited by Christina Sommer, Vice President, Global Insights, MasterCard.

94 For example, the production of beef requires six times more water than that of beans per gram of protein produced. See: Mekonnen MM and Hoekstra A.Y. (2012). “A Global Assessment of the Water Footprint of Farm Animal Products”, *Ecosystems*, Vol. 15, pp. 401–415, <http://waterfootprint.org/media/downloads/Mekonnen-Hoekstra-2012-WaterFootprintFarmAnimalProducts.pdf>.

95 For example, see: Bentley, M, J. Fien and C. Neil (2004). *Sustainable Consumption: Young Australians as Agents of Change*. Canberra: National Youth Affairs Research Scheme.

96 United Nations, “The Future We Want” (A/RES/66/288), 66th Session of the General Assembly, New York, 11 September 2012.

97 UNEP, “Principal 21 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development”, available from: <http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?documentid=78&articleid=1163>

## Youth disaster risk reduction action in the Philippines

**Approximately 42,000 youth councils – Sangguniang Kabataan – operate in villages across the Philippines.<sup>a</sup> Through the youth councils, youth aged 15 to 21 years are able to participate in public governance processes, including managing 10 per cent of their villages’ annual budgets.<sup>b</sup>**

In 2010, the Philippines Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act formally encouraged youth to engage in disaster risk reduction (DRR) and response activities, including creating rapid response groups, identifying high-risk areas and aiding in the spread of disaster preparation awareness.<sup>c</sup> The Workshop on Integrating Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaption into Local Development Planning is one example of an initiative undertaken by the youth councils.<sup>d</sup> Many of the youth councils’ presidents are trained in basic DRR; knowledge and skills which they share with other members of their communities.

In addition to the youth councils, the Red Cross Youth also plays an important role in the Philippines in educating youth about DRR, strengthening disaster awareness and prevention and contributing to community-based disaster management.<sup>e</sup>

a Glenn Fernandez and Rajib Shaw, “Youth Council Participation in Disaster Risk Reduction in Infanta and Makati, Philippines: A Policy Review”, *International Journal of Disaster Risk Science*, Vol 4, No. 3 (2013).

b Ibid.

c Rajib Shaw (Ed.), *Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction* (Bingley: Emerald Insight, 2012).

d Ian Davis (Ed.), *Disaster Risk Management in Asia and the Pacific* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

e Koichi Shiwaku, Rajib Shaw, Yukiko Takeuchi, *Disaster Education* (Bingley: Emerald Insight, 2011).

## Youth working to reduce energy consumption in China

**The All China Environment Federation, in collaboration with the UNDP, launched an energy saving project aimed at reducing carbon emissions.** Capitalizing on young talent, the project recruited 15 volunteers from eight universities in China. The students set out to find ways to reduce energy consumption by analysing consumption patterns in Wangjing community. The population of Wangjing is approximately 30,000, across 10,000 households, with whom the students interacted. Following participation in awareness-raising sessions on how to save energy and reduce carbon emissions, carbon dioxide emissions in Wangjing were recorded as having declined by 50 tons over a five month period. Documenting their experience in Wangjing, the All China Environment Federation submitted its report – *The Studies on the Incentives of Energy Conservation and Carbon Reduction in Communities in Beijing* – to the relevant government authorities to promote wider implementation of its initiative.<sup>a</sup>

a United Nations Joint Framework Initiative on Children, Youth and Climate Change, *Youth in Action on Climate Change: Inspirations from Around the World* (Bonn: United Nations, 2013).

Climate Change Conference.<sup>98</sup> Specific examples of youth activism include YOUNGO,<sup>99</sup> which is the official constituency of youth non-governmental organizations to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and Tunza,<sup>100</sup> linked to UNEP. A subsidiary entity of Tunza globally is the Tunza Asia Pacific Youth Network, which embraces young women and men in the Youth Environment Networks of Central Asia, North-East Asia, the Pacific, South Asia and South-East Asia.<sup>101</sup>

The members of Tunza, and of other collective entities, are active in raising awareness, sharing knowledge, building capacity, and influencing agendas around environmental protection and sustainable use of natural resources. Reflective of such actions is the 2011 Asia Pacific Youth Declaration on Climate Change and Sustainable Development,<sup>102</sup> for which the primary purpose was for youth in the region to influence global negotiations that took place at the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.

98 Twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

99 UNFCCC, "YOUNGO (UNFCCC observer constituency of youth non-governmental organizations)", available from: [https://unfccc.int/cc\\_inet/cc\\_inet/youth\\_portal/items/6795.php](https://unfccc.int/cc_inet/cc_inet/youth_portal/items/6795.php)

100 UNEP, "UNEP Tunza: Children & Youth" available from: [www.unep.org/tunza/](http://www.unep.org/tunza/)

101 UNEP, "UNEP – Regional Office for Asia Pacific – The Tunza Asia Pacific Youth Networks", available from: [www.unep.org/roap/Outreach/Youth/About/TheTunzaAsiaPacificYouthNetworks/tabid/6796/Default.aspx](http://www.unep.org/roap/Outreach/Youth/About/TheTunzaAsiaPacificYouthNetworks/tabid/6796/Default.aspx)

102 ICIMOD, "Asia Pacific Youth Declaration on Climate Change and Sustainable Development", available from: [www.icimod.org/resource/4480](http://www.icimod.org/resource/4480)



Further examples of youth activism and influence include:

- Youth delegations from countries in the Asia-Pacific region, such as from India, New Zealand and Thailand, to the 2014 Pacific Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction; the 2014 Climate Change Conference held in Lima, Peru<sup>103</sup> and the 2015 United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction held in Sendai, Japan.<sup>104</sup>
- Youth involvement in the regional negotiations of the 2014 Pacific Platform on Disaster Risk Management<sup>105</sup>
- The Children’s Charter: an Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction for children, by children<sup>106</sup>
- The Colombo Declaration on Youth<sup>107</sup>
- The mobile phone gaming app “Sai Fah: The Flood Fighter”,<sup>108</sup> that is designed to educate Thai children and youth about floods through simulated real-life scenarios

There are also examples of youth assuming leading roles in disaster response. For instance, in Kamaishi City, Japan, which was hit by the 2011 tsunami, the survival rate among school children was 99.8 per cent, attributed to well-established and rigorous tsunami disaster training and education, including hazard mapping. Junior high school students contributed to the evacuation of, and subsequent assistance to, both younger children and older persons.

103 Twentieth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

104 WCDRR, “Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction”, available from: <http://www.wcdrr.org/>

105 Pacific Disaster Net, “Youth Statement to the 6th Pacific Platform on Disaster Risk Management (6PPDRM)”, Delivered on 2–4 June 2014, Suva, Fiji.

106 Prevention Web, “Children’s Charter an action plan for disaster risk reduction for children by children”, available from: [www.preventionweb.net/files/globalplatform/childrencharter.pdf](http://www.preventionweb.net/files/globalplatform/childrencharter.pdf)

107 Youth Policy, “Colombo Declaration on Youth”, available from: [www.youthpolicy.org/library/documents/colombo-declaration-on-youth/](http://www.youthpolicy.org/library/documents/colombo-declaration-on-youth/)

108 Google Play, “Sai Fah – The Flood Fighter”, available from: <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.opendream.floodfighter&hl=en>

# PROSPERITY

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We are determined to ensure that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that economic, social and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature.

**PREAMBLE, TRANSFORMING OUR  
WORLD: THE 2030 AGENDA FOR  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**



**W**ithin the domain of ‘prosperity’ as explicated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, this Chapter addresses the issues of education, employment and social protection, as they apply to youth in the Asia-Pacific region.

## 4.1 Education

The fourth Goal of the 2030 Agenda is to “[e]nsure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”.<sup>109</sup> Issues of access, inclusion, quality and relevance are all applicable to the needs and interests of youth across the Asia-Pacific region – from the acquisition of life skills to employment prospects and civic engagement.

If all youth are to have access to educational institutions and to be included in the content and functioning of educational systems, there needs to be appreciation for, accommodation of and accountability to the diversity that characterizes youth within and between countries in the region.

<sup>109</sup> United Nations, “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (A/RES/70/1), 70th Session of the General Assembly, New York, 21 October 2015.

Accordingly, current structures and practices that discriminate against, for example, females, persons with disabilities, persons of low economic status and persons in rural and remote areas, need to be recognized and rescinded, accompanied by the provision of facilities and procedures that promote access and inclusion.

Encouragingly, and notwithstanding the few exceptions of Afghanistan, Nauru, Pakistan and Papua New Guinea, universal gross primary education enrolment has been achieved across the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>110</sup> Primary school education is, clearly, a prerequisite for youth to engage in formal education at the secondary level and in vocational training.

Inequities in education emerge, however, at the secondary level, with varied access and outcomes related to national and household income, sex, dis/ability and geographic location (among other variables).

Geographically, across Asia and the Pacific, net secondary school enrolment rates range from a low of 38 per cent in Pakistan, to more than 90 per cent in such countries as New Zealand and the Republic of Korea. In the region, and for countries for which data are available, of the student's enrolled in secondary schools, approximately half are female and half male. The exceptions are Afghanistan and Pakistan, where significantly fewer girls, than boys, are enrolled in secondary schools, and Bhutan, Mongolia, Palau, Philippines and Tuvalu, where fewer boys are enrolled than girls (Figure 10).<sup>111</sup>

Youth in different parts of the region can expect to attend secondary school for varying amounts of time. For example, teenage girls in Afghanistan are likely to complete little more than two years of secondary schooling, though their counterparts in Brunei Darussalam reach an average of seven years. Male youth in Lao People's Democratic Republic complete an average of 3.5 years of secondary schooling, while teenage boys in Sri Lanka attend secondary school for an average of 7.6 years. Thus a positive relationship exists between years of secondary schooling and country income category.<sup>112, 113</sup>

Moreover, students in the high-income East and North-East Asian countries, where the quality of education tends to be higher, rank as the world's top performers in international reading, mathematics, science and problem solving examinations. The performance of students in Australia and New Zealand, also high-income countries, is on par with international averages. On the other hand, students in the upper-middle income countries of South-East Asia, such as Malaysia and Thailand, perform just below the international average, with the performance of

110 In Afghanistan and in Pakistan, universal gross primary school enrolment has yet to be achieved for girls. In Nauru and in Papua New Guinea, universal gross primary enrolment has yet to be achieved for girls and boys (source: <http://data.unicef.org/education/overview.html>, which provides data for years 2009 to 2011).

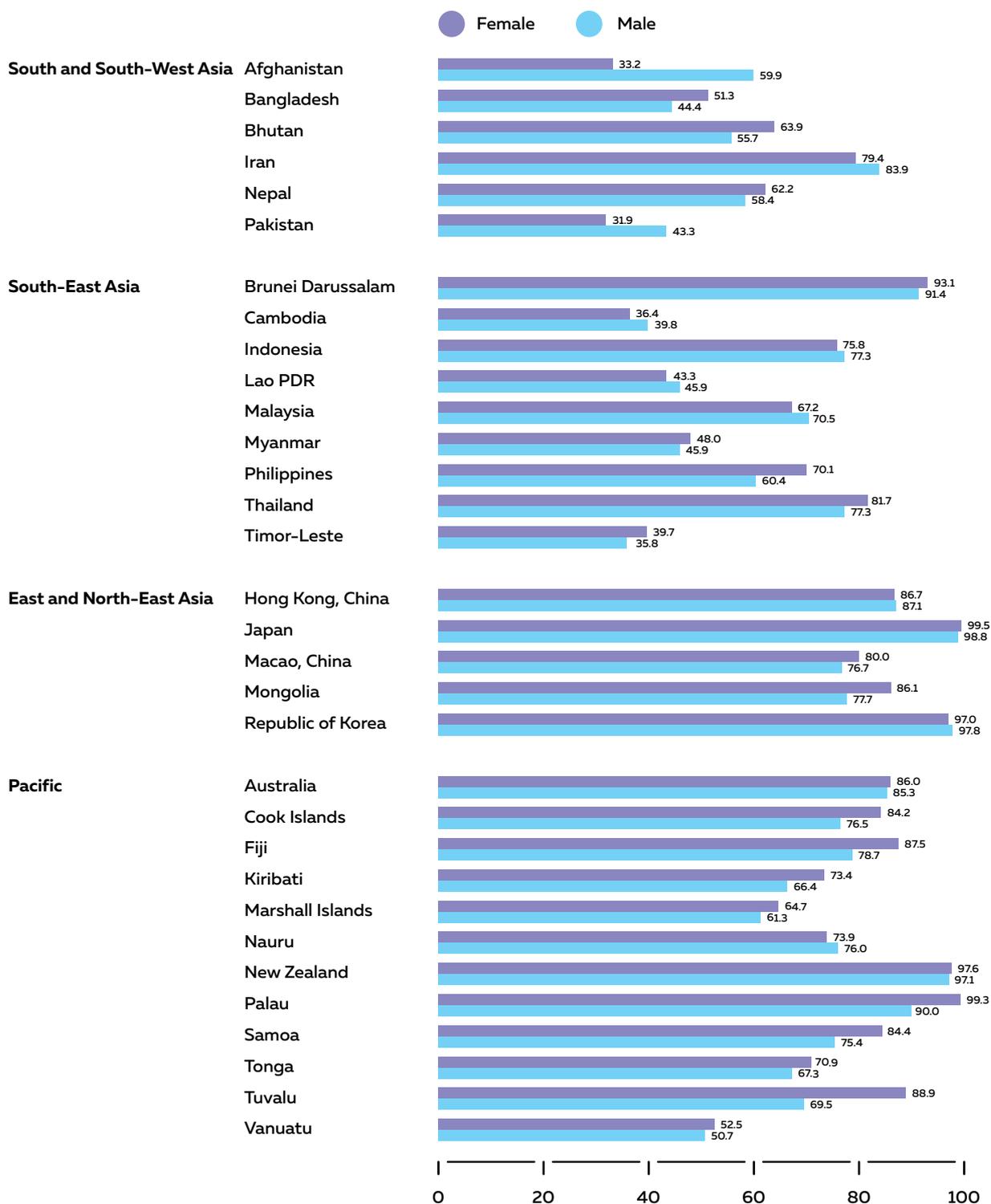
111 Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, [www.uis.unesco.org/datacentre/pages/default.aspx](http://www.uis.unesco.org/datacentre/pages/default.aspx)

112 The World Bank categorization of countries by income – low, lower-middle, upper-middle and high – available from: <http://data.worldbank.org/about/country-and-lending-groups>

113 Countries in the Asia-Pacific region where girls complete more months/years of secondary schooling than boys include Bangladesh, Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, New Zealand, Samoa, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Tuvalu. Countries in the Asia-Pacific region where boys complete more years of secondary schooling than do girls include Afghanistan, Australia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea and Tajikistan (source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, [www.uis.unesco.org/datacentre/pages/default.aspx](http://www.uis.unesco.org/datacentre/pages/default.aspx), accessed 22 September 2015).

FIGURE 10

## Net secondary school enrolment rates (%), by sex, in selected countries, latest year



Source UNESCO Institute for Statistics, <http://data.uis.unesco.org/>

their counterparts in the neighbouring lower-middle income countries of Indonesia and the Philippines significantly below the international benchmark.<sup>114</sup>

In high-income countries, youth are also more likely to enrol in tertiary education than are their peers in low-income countries (Figure 11).<sup>115</sup>

The gender parity indices for tertiary education enrolments for countries in the Asia-Pacific region reveal that more women than men are enrolled in some countries, while in other countries the enrolment rates are higher for men than for women.<sup>116</sup> The increasing prevalence of women enrolled in tertiary education institutions suggests a weakening of discriminatory gender roles.

As well as the educational disparities between countries in the Asia-Pacific region, unequal access exists among youth within countries. For instance, youth living in rural and remote areas have fewer educational options than do those living in urban areas. Additionally, in rural and remote areas school infrastructure is poorer and the schools are more understaffed than those in urban settings.

Youth access to education is further influenced by family income, language, ethnicity, religion and caste. Despite several thousand different ethnic groups recorded as populating the Asia-Pacific region, formal educational instruction occurs in approximately only 50 languages. Combined with discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, religion and/or caste, youth (and children) whose mother tongue is not recognized in the formal education system are thus relatively disadvantaged, with negative implications for educational outcomes. In India, for example, and notwithstanding legislation that prohibits discriminatory practices, Dalit children are denied access to formal education or encounter prejudicial treatment, for which the consequence is a school drop-out rate of 16 percentage points higher than the national average.<sup>117</sup>

For some youth in the region who have never been enrolled in school or have dropped out, non-formal education programmes offer one means of gaining the knowledge and qualifications that improve their life skills, their eligibility for “higher” education and their income-generating prospects. In Cambodia, for example, non-formal education has equivalent status as formal education, as constitutionally-enshrined. In the Republic of Korea, non-formal education is recognized in the Lifelong Education Act of 2007. Yet, across the region formal education outranks non-formal education in terms of national budget allocations, with implications for access and quality. In the Philippines, for instance, 1 per cent of the education budget is demarcated for non-formal education.

114 See: OECD Programme for International Student Assessment ([www.oecd.org/pisa/](http://www.oecd.org/pisa/)); Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (<https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pirls/>); and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (<http://timssandpirls.bc.edu/>).

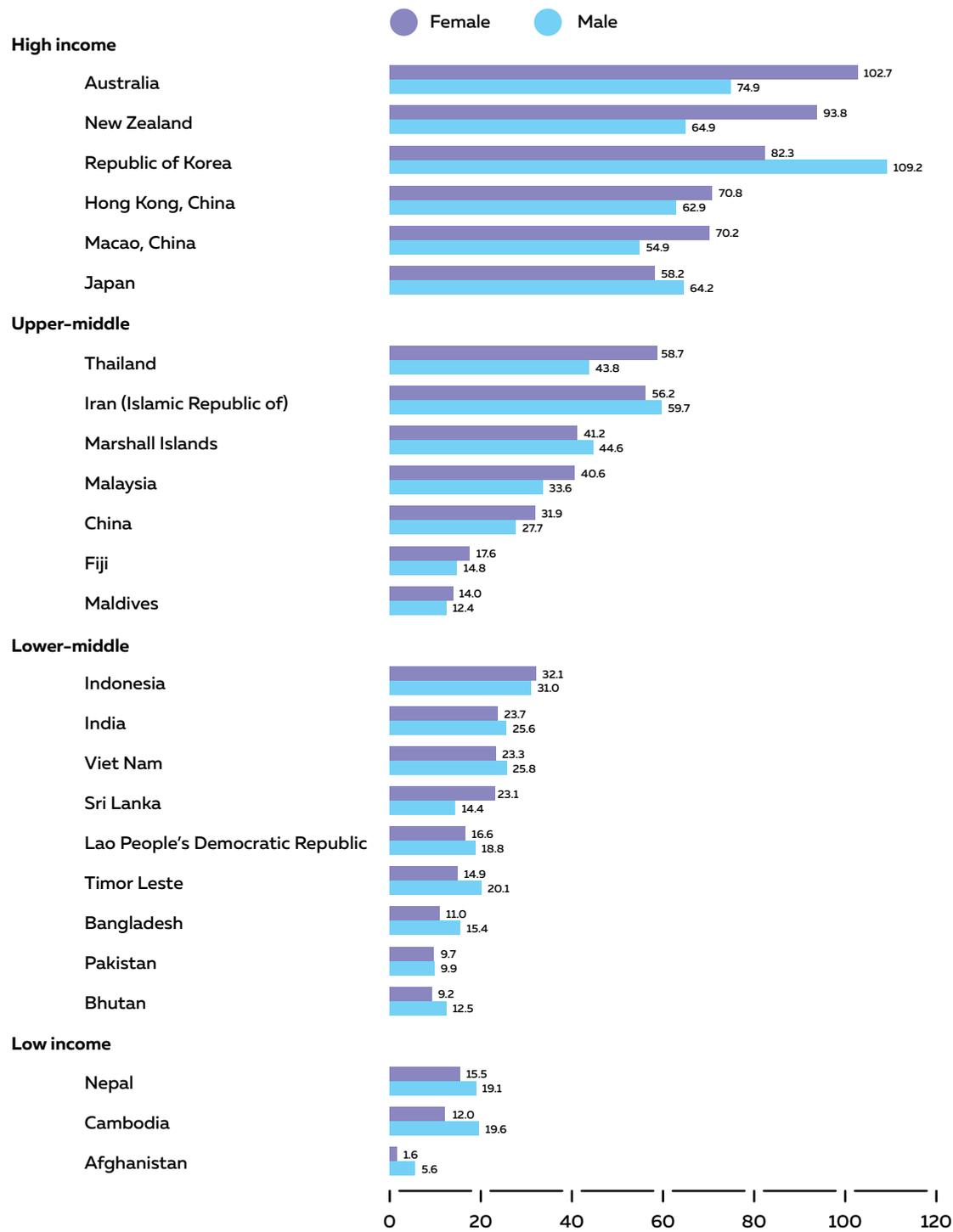
115 Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, [www.uis.unesco.org/datacentre/pages/default.aspx](http://www.uis.unesco.org/datacentre/pages/default.aspx) (accessed 8 October 2015). Country data are for the years 2005 to 2014.

116 Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, [www.uis.unesco.org/datacentre/pages/default.aspx](http://www.uis.unesco.org/datacentre/pages/default.aspx)

117 Navsarjan Trust, The International Dalit Solidarity Network, “Dalit Children in India: Victims of Caste Discrimination”, Briefing Note, available from: [http://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/user\\_folder/pdf/New\\_files/India/Dalit\\_children\\_in\\_India\\_-\\_victims\\_of\\_caste\\_discrimination.pdf](http://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/user_folder/pdf/New_files/India/Dalit_children_in_India_-_victims_of_caste_discrimination.pdf)

FIGURE 11

## Gross tertiary enrolment rates (%), for females and males, in selected countries, latest year



Source UNESCO Institute for Statistics, <http://data.uis.unesco.org/>

## Young women open schools in Pakistan

**In Pakistan, most of the cotton picking work is done by women, many of whom bring their children with them to the fields.** The health of the cotton pickers and their children is put at risk by the wide use of pesticides in the cotton fields.

In response to this problem, in 2006 the World Wide Fund for Nature established 42 Women Open Schools in the provinces of Southern Punjab and Northern Sindh. The Women Open Schools initiative is supported by local communities, farmers' organizations, teachers and government representatives. In the open schools, women are trained in matters of pesticide risk reduction, health, hygiene and income generation. In addition, literate women aged 18 to 22 years are trained as Female Field Facilitators and manage the Women Open Schools, as well as encourage other women to participate.

The initiative has resulted in increased use of protective gear among young women cotton pickers, with an associated reduction in pesticide poisoning by 66 per cent. Family well-being has also reportedly increased, with women no longer taking their children with them to the fields.

Following the success of the Women Open Schools, Family Schools have been established in over 100 villages in Southern Punjab and in Northern Sindh, with activities developed especially for young women.<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> FAO, Youth and Agriculture: *Key Challenges and Concrete Solutions* (Rome: FAO, 2015).

Further enhancing the educational prospects and outcomes for all youth in the region thus requires addressing existing challenges and barriers that include:

- Economic poverty
- Discriminatory sociocultural norms and practices, including those related to early marriage, pregnancy and household chores
- Insufficient infrastructure, from school buildings and dormitories to toilet facilities and potable water, accessible to persons of all abilities
- Unsafe and/or unsanitary school environments
- A shortage of trained teachers of both sexes
- A lack of transportation services

Attending to the quality of education, and promoting safe and supportive physical, social and emotional learning environments, are needed to enhance educational outcomes. Other vital needs include ensuring access for all youth, with attention to those from indigenous and minority groups, those with disabilities, those who are pregnant, those who are mothers and those who reside in rural and remote areas. In addition, greater emphasis should be placed on eliminating “subject streaming”, countering sociocultural norms and values that result in premature termination of the education of girls in particular, and equipping schools and other educational institutions with necessary facilities and resources. Strengthening human and other resource capacity is another priority. This includes ensuring that teachers have tertiary qualifications and complete pre-service training; gathering, analysing and disseminating disaggregated data on the various aspects of education; allocating resources equitably; and engaging students in policymaking and programme delivery.

## 4.2 Employment

Under Goal 8 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development — which addresses “sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all” — the global community has committed to achieving two targets that explicitly address youth. For Target 8.5, countries will, “[b]y 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value”. Ten years earlier, in 2020, countries will have, according to Target 8.6, “substantially reduce[d] the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training”.<sup>118</sup>

These two targets seem achievable in Asia and the Pacific, where regional employment rates have been rising. Such a positive outcome is countered, however, by slowing rates of economic growth in such countries as China, India and Indonesia, alongside persistent rates of vulnerable employment and “jobless growth” in other countries. Moreover, unemployment rates for youth are higher than those for adults. Regionally, in 2014, the youth unemployment rate was 10.9 per cent<sup>119</sup> — equivalent to 33 million young women and men — and youth were up to six times more likely to be unemployed than were adults.<sup>120</sup>

Realizing the global targets on youth employment and decent work,<sup>121</sup> as well as those adopted at the national level,<sup>122</sup> requires active governance with coherent macroeconomic and employment policies as well as with labour market policies in relation to such key areas as vocational training, career guidance, work experience measures, entrepreneurship and youth rights at work. This is particularly important as the pace of structural transformation accelerates and skills matching becomes increasingly common. Hence public employment services, active labour market policies and cash transfers will need to be developed further in the region, as discussed under the section on social protection.

### Youth labour force participation

Today, and for the duration of the new global development agenda, youth constitute a substantial proportion of the working-age (15–64 years) population across the Asia-Pacific region. On average, almost one in four persons of working age is a youth, with the exception of East and North-East Asia, where youth constitute slightly more than 18 per cent of the working age population.<sup>123</sup> As of 2014, however, their labour force participation rates have been significantly lower than those for adults (Figure 12).<sup>124</sup> This is partly a concern and it is partly a victory. It is a concern when

118 United Nations, “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (A/RES/70/1), 70th Session of the General Assembly, New York, 21 October 2015.

119 At the subregional level, the youth unemployment rate in South-East Asia was 13.6 per cent, in South Asia it was 9.9 per cent and in East Asia it was 10.6 per cent according to estimates for 2014, ILO, *Global Employment Trends for Youth* (Geneva: ILO, 2015).

120 ILO, *Global Employment Trends for Youth* (Geneva: ILO, 2015).

121 For elaboration of the concept of “decent work”, see the website of the ILO: [www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm)

122 Examples of national-level commitments to youth employment include (a) the Afghanistan National Youth Policy of 2014; (b) the Philippine’s National Action Plan on Youth Employment and Migration of 2013; (c) the Samoa National Action Plan on Youth Employment of 2015; and (d) Sri Lanka’s National Action Plan for Youth Employment of 2015.

123 United Nations Population Division, *World Population Projections, the 2015 Revision*, available from: <http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/>

124 ILO, *Global Employment Trends for Youth* (Geneva: ILO, 2015).

it highlights the fact that youth are systematically the “last in and the first out” on the labour market; and it is a victory when it reflects higher educational enrolment rates in the region.

Of separate concern is the gender differential, particularly in South Asia, where young women are significantly less represented in the labour market than are young men (22.6 per cent, compared to 55.2 per cent).<sup>125</sup>

As can be seen, while youth constitute approximately one quarter of the working age population and are, to a large extent, participating in the labour force, they are significantly more likely to be unemployed than are adults. The youth unemployment rate in South-East Asia and the Pacific, at 13.6 per cent in 2014, was nearly 6 times the adult rate in the same period (see Figure 13). The ratios were slightly lower for East Asia and South Asia, at three and four times as high, respectively.<sup>126</sup>

Moreover, for youth that do find work, there is a distinct shortage of decent work opportunities. Across the Asia-Pacific region, in 2014, the working poverty rate for youth at the USD 2 a day threshold, ranged from 13 per cent in East Asia to over 50 per cent in South Asia,<sup>127</sup> attesting to the lack of productive employment opportunities. This is also reflected by high shares of workers in vulnerable employment—that is the own-account workers and unpaid family workers—who typically do not benefit from securities enjoyed by regular-salaried employees. In Bangladesh and Cambodia, for instance, these workers account for 43.1 and 60.6 per cent of all employed youth, respectively.<sup>128</sup> All of which translates into more youth working in the informal sector, characterized by decent work deficits and relatively higher risks of exploitation.

In seeking productive employment opportunities and decent work, one option selected by female and male youth in the region is migration from a rural to urban area or from their home to another country. Migration is a significant phenomenon—numerically, economically, socially and politically—directly and indirectly impacting the lives of young women and men across Asia and the Pacific. In 2013, for example, approximately 40 million of the world’s international migrants were in this region, of which a quarter were persons less than 29 years of age; 48 per cent were females, and they moved both South to North and South to South.<sup>129</sup> International migrant youth’s contributions to development are already significant considering, for example, the scale of total remittances—which amount to an estimated USD 224 billion in Asia and the Pacific.<sup>130</sup>

Migration can be a positive experience for youth themselves and for both the “origin” and “destination” countries.<sup>131</sup> However, migrating youth can be at risk of exploitation, abuse, social

125 Estimates for 2014. ILO, *Global Employment Trends for Youth* (Geneva: ILO, 2015).

126 ILO, *Global Employment Trends for Youth* (Geneva: ILO, 2015).

127 Evangelia Bourmpoula and Steven Kapsos, “Employment and Economic Class in the Developing World”, ILO, Research Paper No. 6 (2013); Update based on ILO – Trends Econometric Models, November 2014.

128 Youth measured here as 15–29. ILO, *Global Employment Trends for Youth* (Geneva: ILO, 2015).

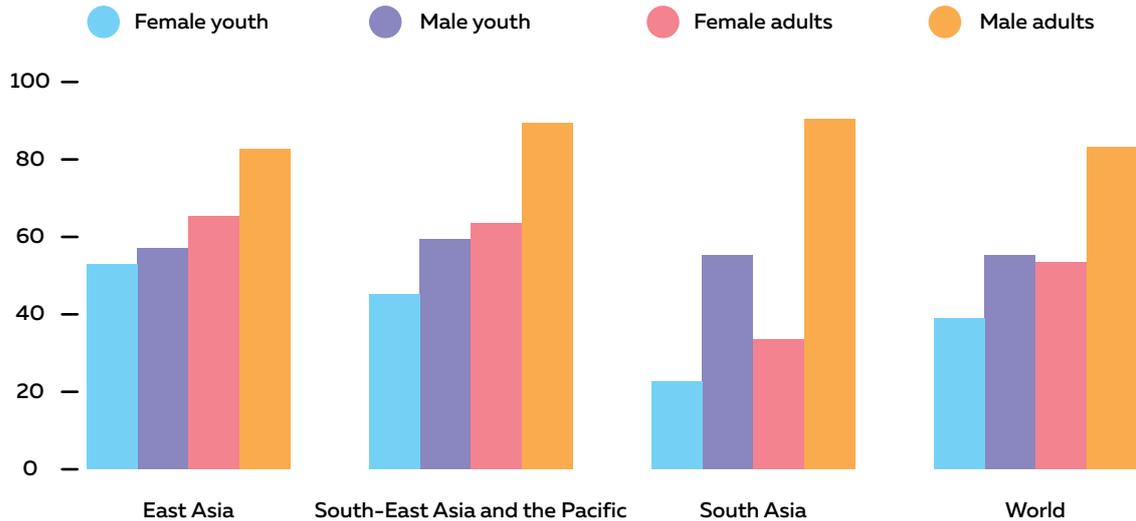
129 IOM, *World Migration Report 2013: Migrant Well-Being and Development* (Geneva: IOM, 2014).

130 Some 6 out of the world’s top 10 remitting countries are located in the Asia-Pacific region: Bangladesh, China, India, Pakistan, the Philippines and Viet Nam. The share of remittances factors significantly in the GDP of countries like Nepal, Tonga and Samoa (29, 24 and 20 per cent respectively). World Bank, Migration and Development Brief 24, 13 April 2015, available from: <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPROSPECTS/Resources/334934-1288990760745/MigrationandDevelopmentBrief24.pdf>

131 East Asia Forum, Graeme Hugo, “International Migration in Asia’s Demographic Transition”, available from: <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2013/05/27/international-migration-in-asias-demographic-transition/>

FIGURE 12

## Labour force participation rates (%) for youth and adults, by sex and subregion, 2014

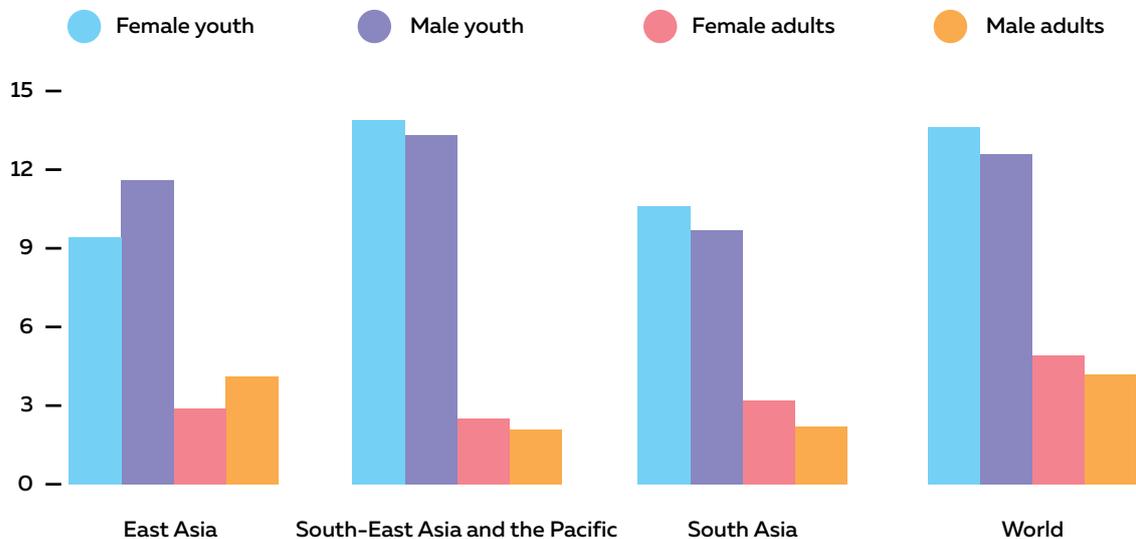


Source ILO (2015). *Global Employment Trends for Youth*, Geneva: ILO.

Note In this instance, Asia-Pacific subregions exclude Australia, Japan, New Zealand and the Pacific Island countries for which data are not available.

FIGURE 13

## Unemployment rates (%) for youth and adults, by sex and subregion, 2014



Source ILO (2015). *Global Employment Trends for Youth*, Geneva: ILO.

Note In this instance, Asia-Pacific subregions exclude Australia, Japan, New Zealand and the Pacific Island countries for which data are not available.

exclusion, adverse (physical and mental) health issues, human trafficking and death, with variability in risk between genders. Female youth, for example, are particularly vulnerable to human trafficking for sexual exploitation, while male youth may be susceptible to forced labour, such as in the fishing industry. The risks encountered by migrant youth are related, in part, to precarious legal status, physical distance from family and social networks, and exclusion from social protection measures.

Another key factor contributing to low youth labour force participation is young women and men who are not in education or working. The NEET — not in employment, education or training — represent a significant concern for their respective countries, not least because of detachment from the labour market and society. At the country level, the share of the youth population categorized as NEET was as high as 44 per cent in Samoa and around one in four in countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines.<sup>132</sup>

Meanwhile, youth in Asia and the Pacific often experience difficulties in their school-to-work transitions. A recent ILO study finds that unemployment for higher — particular tertiary — educated youth in the region is largely demand-driven, despite supply-driven elements such as elevated expectations of wages and working conditions.<sup>133</sup> This is reflected by the fact that unemployment rates among youth with a secondary or higher education are often more than double those of youth with solely a primary education.<sup>134</sup> Such findings can be because those with lower levels of educational attainment are more likely to create their own job or to accept lower wages. As such, despite often making faster transitions to employment with shorter spells in unemployment, the less educated are less likely to find stable and satisfactory employment after their school-to-work transition and are instead more prone to vulnerable employment, informality and working poverty.

“Skills mismatch” is a growing challenge. With enhanced access to education, young people are too often trained for skills that are less in demand, hence impacting negatively on the productivity of many businesses and thereby posing opportunity costs to the economies of their countries. Moreover, for many countries in the region, agriculture is the predominant employer of youth and is characterized by low levels of education (see Figure 14).<sup>135</sup> Most available jobs are manual and technical in nature, and many need access to work experience mechanisms, even when — as is often the case in developing countries — these are mostly found in informal apprenticeships.

While university graduates are interested in pursuing high-earning jobs in knowledge-based sectors, they are increasingly facing labour markets that are predominately concentrated on low-wage, export-driven manufacturing and heavy-industrial construction. In China, for instance, the rapidly rising number of young graduates looking for work reached 7.49 million in 2015. While the preference of some job seekers is employment with large and prestigious conglomerates, micro-, small and medium-enterprises remain the principal avenues for job creation. Some, such as the Japanese young “freeters”, rather opt for a series of part-time jobs, bouncing from

132 ILO, *Key Indicators of the Labour Market*, 8th Edition (ILO, Geneva: ILO, 2015).

133 ILO, “Work4Youth”, available from: [www.ilo.org/employment/areas/youth-employment/work-for-youth/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/employment/areas/youth-employment/work-for-youth/lang--en/index.htm)

134 Anita Staneva and Theo Sparreboom, Is education the solution to decent work for youth in developing countries? Identifying qualifications mismatch from 28 school-to-work transition surveys, *Work 4 Youth Publication Series*, No. 23 (Geneva: ILO, 2014).

135 ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (2015). *Asia-Pacific Labour Market Updates*, October 2015.

## Sri Lankan community development and livelihood improvement

**In 2009, Sri Lanka emerged from almost 30 years of armed conflict with a relatively youthful population and increased optimism regarding the prospects of future economic growth and poverty reduction in the country.** Some of the most pressing immediate challenges were managing transition arrangements for approximately 300,000 internally displaced persons and a fragile macro-economic environment exacerbated by the 2007–2008 global financial crisis. Unemployment rates in the country reflected similar disparities in other parts of Asia and the Pacific, and were higher in the rural sector, for youth generally and for young women in particular.

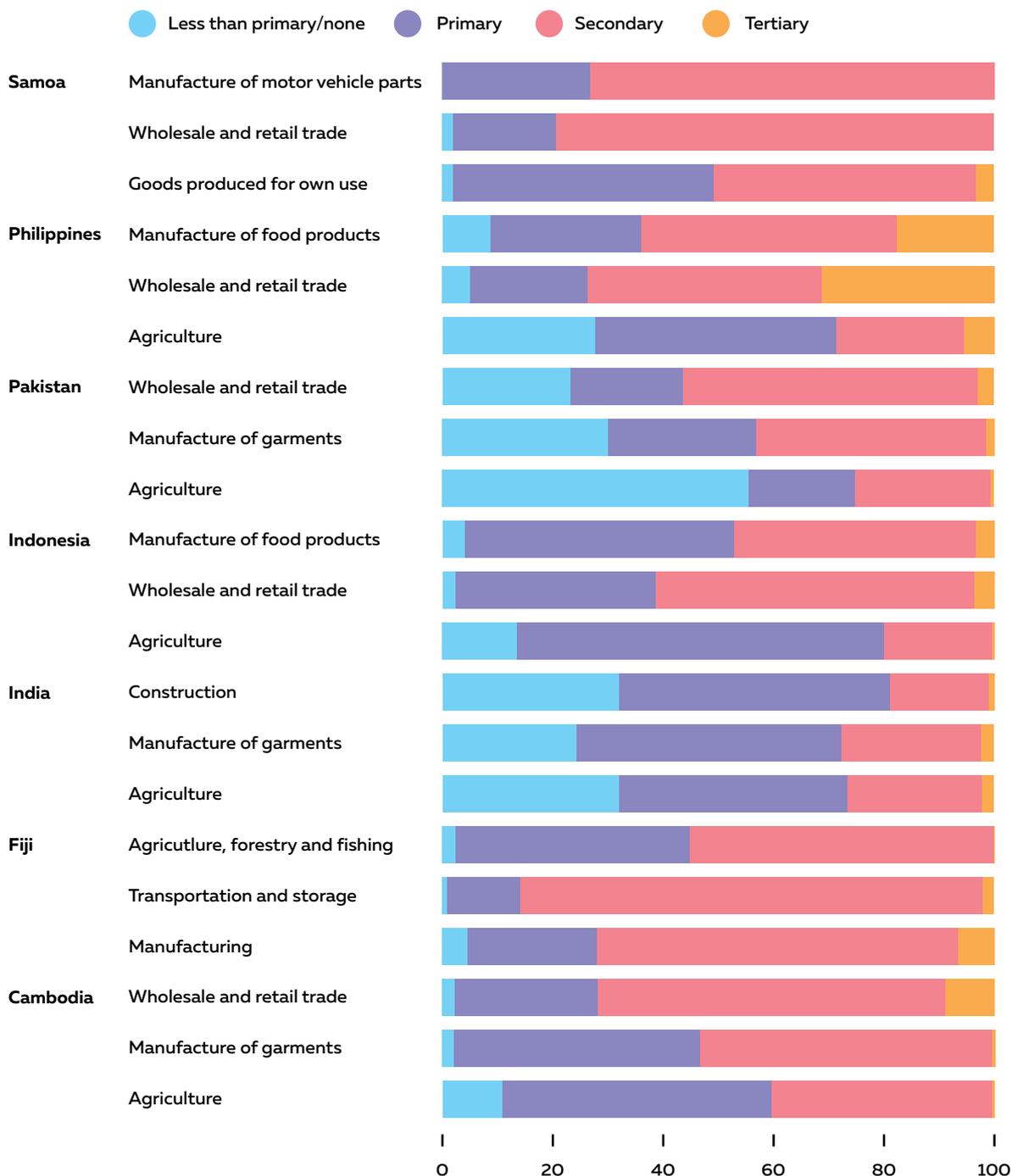
The World Bank undertook a project aimed at enhancing incomes and the quality of life of poor households, with an emphasis on empowering persons (particularly women and youth) living in poverty, developing and strengthening institutions, improving access to basic infrastructure and social services, and providing support for productive activities.

Work was undertaken to enhance access to affordable credit to take up income generating activities, productive and social infrastructure for market access and social empowerment, skills development loans for youth for increased employment opportunities, and one-time grants for the most vulnerable to initiate productive activities and encourage participation in savings and credit groups. Linkages were made to skill and youth development programmes within villages, such as poverty reduction initiatives under the Ministry of Economic Development, including a scheme whereby approximately 28,500 youth accessed skill development loans. Other youth development programmes include career guidance, job fairs and youth camps. In addressing poverty, village youth development programmes aim to adhere to inclusion principles. Females, persons with disabilities and vulnerable youth feature significantly in youth development activities.<sup>a</sup>

a The World Bank, "Implementation Completion and Results Report on a Credit in the Amount of SDR 50.4 Million (USD 75.0 million equivalent) to the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka for a Second Community Development and Livelihood Improvement Project", Report No. ICR00003319, Sri Lanka, 27 July 2015.

FIGURE 14

## Distribution of employment by level of educational attainment (%), in selected countries and industries, latest year



**Source** ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (2015). Asia-Pacific Labour Market Updates, October 2015

**Note** The selected leading industries for each country are identified as major industries for youth employment. In terms of total youth employment per country, they collectively range from 46.1 per cent (Samoa) to 75.4 per cent (India). Youth defined as ages 15–24. Industry of employment according to the International Standard Industrial Classification of all Economic Activities. Tertiary education in Indonesia and the Philippines refers to post-secondary and above.

one employer to another in the hope of ultimately obtaining a relatively high-paid or high-status position with a large firm.

As a result of labour shortages for technical occupations, governments across the region are investing in their vocational training policies and programmes. The Institute of Technology in Singapore, for example, has promoted positive perceptions of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) among youth. Cambodia and Lao People's Democratic Republic both provide incentives for youth to enrol in TVET programmes, through provision of vouchers and exemptions from entrance examinations. Indonesia introduced the National Professional Qualifications Framework for skills accreditation and recognition, including for skills obtained outside the formal system. Several other countries have National Qualifications Frameworks,<sup>136</sup> including Malaysia, the Republic of Korea and Sri Lanka. An innovative example of addressing the work-skills mismatch is Street Academy, which is a crowd-sourcing platform that facilitates the sharing of skills among community members established by a young Japanese entrepreneur. Through Street Academy, enterprising young persons can teach lessons in various subjects to participants who sign up for a small fee, thereby spreading knowledge and skills.<sup>137</sup>

Work-based training programmes that help prepare youth for their future careers are also popular. Among such programmes, apprenticeships are beneficial where they concretely address skills mismatches and equip youth with skills that strengthen their employability, while meeting the needs of employers. Indonesia, for example, aims to annually provide apprenticeship programmes of five-month duration. Any training needed beyond five months requires enterprises to meet additional costs, up to a maximum of one year. So as to keep a healthy ratio of skilled labour to trainees, apprentices may not represent more than 30 per cent of any company's human resources.

In the Philippines, the "Apprenticeship and Employment" Programme, which is a joint endeavour by the Department of Labour and Employment and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, aims to support new entrants to the labour market by helping them acquire basic skills and work experience in order to meet industry needs and requirements. In the Republic of Korea, agricultural degrees remain a minority in the education system, but universities—including the prestigious Seoul National University—offer Agricultural Economics and Rural Development programmes. To help reorient the supply of young graduates to the rural sector, the Government passed the 2009 Act on Fostering and Supporting Agricultural and Fisheries Enterprises, which targets young people with an entrepreneurial spirit by helping them benefit from low-interest loans for infrastructure, agribusiness consulting services and farming skills training. In Pakistan, in addition to the existing apprenticeship programme, the one-year National Internship Programme (NIP)<sup>138</sup> targets unemployed young graduates, with the aim of enhancing their employability while decreasing their inactivity.

A further means of improving the employment outcomes for youth is through the provision of career counselling. Employment services offer youth support and guidance in selecting viable career paths,

136 A National Qualification Framework is an instrument for the development, classification and recognition of skills, knowledge and competencies along a continuum of agreed levels; typically, from basic to secondary to TVET and higher education.

137 Street Academy, "Street Academy", available from: [www.street-academy.com/](http://www.street-academy.com/)

138 NIP, "National Internship Program", available from: <http://nip.gov.pk/>

## Fostering youth employment on farms in the Republic of Korea

**To help reorient the supply of young graduates to the rural sector, in 1981, the Government of the Republic of Korea launched the “Farm Successor Fostering Program”.** This intends to foster one young farm successor per rural village. Beneficiaries receive soft loans of up to USD 300,000 as well as education and training for up to 6 months. Almost half of the programme quota is assigned to agricultural school graduates and the rest to farmers with less than 10 years of farming experience. Over the years, more than 130,000 young farmers have been supported and almost 90 per cent remain engaged in agriculture. Recipients of the programme account for about 10 per cent of total farm holders, nationwide, at the rate of almost three persons per rural village.<sup>a</sup>

This endeavour was followed by other initiatives meant to encourage youth employment and enterprise development in rural areas, including the 2009 Act on Fostering and Supporting Agricultural and Fisheries Enterprises; and education programmes through the Korea National College of Agriculture & Fishery where students receive in-kind support such as free dormitory accommodation and tuition, special exemption from military service and priority status for the Farm Successor Fostering Program. Upon graduation, students are to farm for six years, or twice the schooling period.

Additional undertakings involve agricultural high schools and colleges which encourage students to pursue agricultural business courses through on-the-job training and learning. In 2011, special programmes for agricultural high schools were offered by 10 high schools for a total 5,184 students, while special programmes for agricultural colleges were provided by 11 universities or colleges for a total of 1,645 students.

a Ma, Sang-jin. “How to Encourage Young Generation to Engage in Farming: Korea’s Case”, Food and Fertilizer Technology Centre of the Asian and Pacific Region, available from: [http://ap.fttc.agnet.org/ap\\_db.php?id=324&print=1](http://ap.fttc.agnet.org/ap_db.php?id=324&print=1)

and are often used in conjunction with vocational training or public employment services.<sup>139</sup> Examples of such services include the National Employment Agency in Cambodia, which provides labour market services, advice and information through job centres located in several provinces, and the Philippine Job Exchange Network (“PhilJobNet”),<sup>140</sup> through which youth can be matched with jobs. In Japan, the “Wakamono Hello Work” programme<sup>141</sup> is a nationwide vocational counselling and jobs referral platform targeted at youth. China, in turn, has established an extensive network of employment service centres to improve employment outcomes for a large youth population which migrates across provinces for better opportunities.

## Youth Entrepreneurship

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) account for over two thirds of all employment in Asia and the Pacific. Across the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, SMEs comprise more than 96 per cent of all enterprises, making up between 50 and 85 per cent of national employment and contributing to between 30 and 53 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>142</sup> A substantial portion of SMEs operate outside of formal economies. In South and South-West Asia, and East and North-East Asia, for instance, 10 per cent of the 300

139 Divald S. *Comparative Analysis of Policies for Youth employment in Asia and the Pacific* (Bangkok: ILO, 2015).

140 Phil-Job Net, “The PHIL-JobNet System (from the 2001 PHIL-JobNet User’s Manual)”, available from: [www.phil-jobnet.dole.gov.ph/About.aspx](http://www.phil-jobnet.dole.gov.ph/About.aspx)

141 Hello World, “Hello World”, available from: [www.helloworld.go.jp/](http://www.helloworld.go.jp/)

142 Association of Southeast Asian Nations, “Small and Medium Enterprises: SME Developments in ASEAN”, available from: [www.asean.org/communities/asean-economic-community/category/small-and-medium-enterprises](http://www.asean.org/communities/asean-economic-community/category/small-and-medium-enterprises)

## My Gakidh Village in Bhutan: Employment for rural youth

**In Bhutan, internal migration from rural to urban areas is a significant phenomenon, with the majority of migrants being youth seeking income-generating opportunities in the country’s cities.** The young rural-to-urban migrants, however, tend to lack employability and entrepreneurial skills and thus are hindered in terms of their livelihoods.

In response to this issue, Bhutan’s Youth Development Fund established the programme “My Gakidh Village” to empower rural youth by means of enhancing their livelihood skills and bringing tourism-related livelihood opportunities to rural areas. In collaboration with other institutions, such as Aide et Action International and the Department of Tourism, the Youth Development Fund provides training programmes to youth in rural areas, through which they obtain eco-tourism knowledge and skills. Participation in the training programmes involves youth identifying their strengths and the ways in which they can foster greater community cohesion. A core group of youth are now mentors in the programme, travelling to rural areas in Bhutan to motivate and to share their knowledge and skills with other youth.<sup>a</sup>

a Bhutan Youth Development Fund, available from: <http://www.bhutanyouth.org/empowerment-for-employment>

million SMEs are categorized as “formal”.<sup>143</sup> Additionally, new enterprises that are established do not guarantee decent work, as evidenced by the lack of fair wages, adequate job security and social protection. Accordingly, surveys of youth report a perceived association of risk and uncertainty with SMEs.

Given that SMEs constitute a substantial source of employment for the region’s youth, strengthening decent work, addressing employment in the informal sector and promoting entrepreneurship are three basic areas for action. Business incubators are popular means of encouraging entrepreneurship in East and North-East Asia. In China they are supported by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security. In Mongolia, business start-ups are part of the National Programme on Promotion of Youth Development, which aims to boost the development of microenterprises. Business incubators have also gained popularity especially in China, India and other countries in East Asia, where over 2,000 of such initiatives have been documented.<sup>144</sup> Together these incubators help empower youth in marginalized communities, develop rural enterprises and facilitate technological improvement for urban start-ups.

For youth to start their own businesses they need access to finance, including savings, loans, insurance and other services. Yet, access to capital for youth remains scarce, providing a key barrier in doing business.<sup>145</sup> Success stories from Asia and the Pacific do, however, show that commitments to improve financial access can have a positive impact on fostering the growth of private enterprises led and managed by youth. This has been demonstrated by the successes of ACLEDA Bank and the AMRET Microfinance Institution in Cambodia; the Grameen Foundation and the BRAC development organization in Bangladesh; and Bank BRI in Indonesia. Such institutions assist youth in setting up their own businesses through microfinance loans and other measures. Several commercial banks, too, have entered the microfinance market, such Bank Danamon in Indonesia, while other regional trends include the growth of Islamic banking and financial cooperatives.

Enhancing the growth of enterprises and their access to finance needs to go hand in hand with ensuring that youth rights at work are respected. The ILO recommendation 204 of June 2015, concerning the transition from the informal to the formal economy, further highlights this need. Yet the gap between enacted policies and the practical application of rights for young people in Asia and the Pacific often remains painfully wide. While organized groups of young workers are sometimes able to claim their rights, others still struggle to have their voices heard and their rights acknowledged. Cases of anti-union discrimination as well as denial of rights to organize and engage in collective bargaining still occur regularly. And while precarious work through informality rises, young people bear the brunt of many policies in place.

143 Peer Stein, Tony Goland, Robert Schiff, “Two Trillion and Counting: Assessing the Credit Gap for Micro, Small and Medium-Size Enterprises in the Developing World”, McKinsey & Company and IFC.

144 IncubationAsia Network, “Business Incubation in Asia”, available from: [www.infodev.org/infodev-files/resource/InfodevDocuments\\_328.pdf](http://www.infodev.org/infodev-files/resource/InfodevDocuments_328.pdf)

145 Divald S. *Comparative Analysis of Policies for Youth employment in Asia and the Pacific* (Bangkok: ILO, 2015).



### 4.3 Social protection

Social protection<sup>146</sup> is anchored in the universal rights of all persons to social security and to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of themselves and their families.<sup>147</sup> In other words, no one should live below a certain income level and everyone should have access to at least basic social services. These rights are prescribed in, for instance, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Social protection is also central to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as evidenced in targets across four of the Goals, namely:

- Target 1.3, under the Goal of ending all forms of poverty, where governments, globally, are required to “[i]mplement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable”
- Target 3.8, under the Goal of ensuring healthy lives and promoting the well-being for all at all ages, which is to “[a]chieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all”
- Target 5.4, in relation to achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, wherein all countries should “[r]ecognize and value unpaid care and domestic work

<sup>146</sup> Social protection is often defined as a comprehensive range of government transfers of income and services (such as health care, education or labour market programmes). These can take the form of contributory-based schemes (social insurance), usually only available to those employed in the formal sector, and non-contributory schemes (social assistance), which are often available through conditional cash transfers, often targeting the poor and vulnerable population groups.

<sup>147</sup> ILO, *World Social Security Report 2010/11: Providing Coverage in Times of Crisis and Beyond* (Geneva: ILO, 2010).

through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate”

- Target 10.4, with respect to reducing inequality within and among countries, which requires countries to “[a]dopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality”

Across the spectrum of rights and development-based commitments, social protection is critical to the lives, well-being and opportunities of youth. This is because social protection can be an effective measure to tackle disparities in income and unequal access to health-care and education, as well as empowering vulnerable populations.

Unfortunately, despite Asia-Pacific’s unprecedented economic growth over past decades, and keeping in mind the higher rates of unemployment among youth than among adults, less than one in ten of the unemployed persons in the region receive any out-of-work benefits or support to help them retain or find a job. Broadening (the lack of) coverage to unemployed and underemployed persons, these measures reach around one-fifth of all potential beneficiaries.<sup>148</sup> In terms of access to health-care services, the Asia-Pacific region has one of the highest shares of out-of-pocket expenditure in the world and the largest number of households subsisting at poverty levels unable to access health-care services.<sup>149, 150</sup>

A key reason for this challenging situation is the high share of people in low-productivity vulnerable jobs, often characterized by low wages, limited job security, hazardous working conditions, and minimal or no social protection against such risks as unemployment, workplace injury, sickness and disability. In this respect, the situation is quantitatively worse for youth, particularly for young women, because of their disproportionately higher shares in vulnerable employment. In India for example, some 85 per cent of youth work in the informal sector, compared to around 55 per cent of adults.<sup>151</sup>

As previously noted, unemployment rates for youth in Asia and the Pacific are lower than in most other regions, but still significantly higher than for adults. Further, estimates suggest as many as 300 million youth are underemployed in Asia-Pacific,<sup>152</sup> many of whom feel underutilized in their positions and likely in occupations that do not match their skill levels and qualifications.<sup>153</sup> A common consequence of the lack of social protection for youth—in particular the lack of unemployment benefits and employment support through active labour market programmes—is acceptance of job offers in the informal sector. Many youth thus end up being underemployed and classified as working poor.

148 ADB, *The Social Protection Index: Assessing Results for Asia and the Pacific* (Manila: ADB, 2013).

149 WHO, “Global Health Observatory Data Repository”, available from: [www.who.int/gho/en](http://www.who.int/gho/en)

150 WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific, *Health in Asia and the Pacific* (Manila: WPRO, 2008).

151 OECD, ILO, “Promoting better labour market outcomes for youth”. Report on youth employment and apprenticeships prepared for the G20 Labour and Employment Ministerial Meeting Melbourne, Australia, 10–11 September 2014.

152 World Economic Forum. Global Agenda Councils – Youth Unemployment Visualization 2013, available from: <http://www.weforum.org/community/global-agenda-councils/youth-unemployment-visualization-2013>

153 ILO, *World Social Security Report 2010/11: Providing Coverage in Times of Crisis and Beyond* (Geneva: ILO, 2010).

It is critical to facilitate youth's transition from school to work, as well as from vulnerable employment to decent jobs. Cash transfers, in terms of unemployment benefits, are important in the sense that they provide unemployed individuals with the financial assistance that allows them to actively look for decent work. The probability of young unemployed women and men finding jobs increases where cash transfers are combined with an activation strategy. Through the 'mutual obligations' approach, youth receive an unemployment benefit and, in return, participate in an active labour market programme that is designed to strengthen their employability which may, for example, entail job counselling, job-search assistance, upgrading of skills, wage subsidies or entrepreneurship programmes. Experiences from countries of the OECD show that well-designed programmes operationalizing the '3Ts'—being timely, targeted and temporary<sup>154</sup>—have proven to be of great importance to youth jobseekers, while also bringing a high return on public investments.

In Beijing, for instance, the non-governmental organization Oxfam partnered with local organizations to implement an urban livelihood project for youth who had migrated from rural areas. The Beijing Migrant Women's Club, for example, worked with Oxfam to provide female migrants with livelihood assistance. With assistance ranging from training to health services and legal support, the project aimed to improve sustainable livelihoods of migrant workers and their living conditions in China.<sup>155</sup>

Despite the demonstrated value of such investments for youth, for communities, for business and for national "productivity", the vast majority of the countries in the Asia-Pacific region are not allocating sufficient resources for social protection purposes. As a result, significant coverage gaps exist and, for persons who receive either a service or benefit, these are usually inadequate. For example, the average allocation of public funds to social protection is 2 per cent of GDP in South Asia and across the Pacific Islands, increasing marginally to 2.6 per cent of GDP in South-East Asia,<sup>156</sup> all of which are below the OECD social expenditure average of 21.6 per cent of GDP.<sup>157</sup> A common justification for the relatively limited social expenditure is lack of fiscal space.

Finding fiscal space for investing in youth, however, is more a matter of political will than budgetary restrictions. In, for example, Bangladesh and Pakistan, energy subsidies accounted for 25 to 50 per cent of total government revenues and in South-East Asia USD 51 billion was spent on energy subsidies in 2012.<sup>158</sup> Such money could be directed to more progressive and sustainable purposes. Encouragingly, countries in the region are re-prioritizing government spending. In 1996, 16 out of 28 countries for which data existed spent more money on social protection than on the military. In 2013, this number had increased to 23 countries.<sup>159</sup>

154 OECD, *Employment Outlook 2009: Tackling the Jobs Crisis* (Paris: OECD, 2009).

155 Oxfam Hong Kong, "Oxfam Work Report: Livelihoods in the Cities of China", available from: [www.oxfam.org.hk/filemgr/1091/report2011Sep-eng.pdf](http://www.oxfam.org.hk/filemgr/1091/report2011Sep-eng.pdf)

156 ADB, *The Social Protection Index: Assessing Results for Asia and the Pacific* (Manila: ADB, 2014).

157 OECD, "OECD.Stat", available from: [https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=SOCX\\_AGG](https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=SOCX_AGG)[https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=SOCX\\_AGG](https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=SOCX_AGG)

158 UN ESCAP, "Sustainable Development Financing: Perspectives from Asia and the Pacific" Background paper prepared for the Asia-Pacific Outreach Meeting on Sustainable Development Financing, Jakarta, 10–11 June.

159 ESCAP, *Time for Equality: the Role of Social Protection in Reducing Inequality in Asia and the Pacific* (Bangkok: ESCAP, 2015).

# PEACE

5.1 Promoting peace

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5.2 Engaged citizens

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We are determined to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence. There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development.

PREAMBLE, TRANSFORMING OUR  
WORLD: THE 2030 AGENDA FOR  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

**W**ithin the domain of ‘peace’ as explicated in the 2030 Agenda, this Chapter addresses the issues of peaceful societies, and active citizenship, as they apply to youth in the Asia-Pacific region.

## 5.1 Promoting peace

Under Goal 16 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, governments globally will “[p]romote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”. Promoting peace will entail, inter alia, reducing and resolving the incidence and prevalence of armed conflict, a patent obstacle to sustainable development.

In recent years, in the Asia-Pacific region, youth have endured, and continue to participate in and be affected by, armed conflicts in Afghanistan, Cambodia, Fiji, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Turkey.<sup>160</sup> In the 21st

160 See, for example, [www.womenpeacesecurity.org/rapid-response/](http://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/rapid-response/) and <http://www.crisisgroup.org/>

century, 60 per cent of the world's conflicts are located in the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>161</sup> Within these, and other deadly conflicts, youth are victims, survivors and perpetrators. Historically, civilian casualties most affected by war are women and children. For instance, worldwide, two million children<sup>162</sup> died as a result of armed conflict and six million were injured or permanently disabled due to landmine explosions and mutilation between 1986 and 1996.<sup>163</sup> Violence against women and girls, as discussed under the section on health and well-being, is often amplified during times of conflict. On the other hand, research in Asia and the Pacific suggests that the costs of non-conflict armed violence may be considerably higher than those of conflict-related armed violence, with the lack of reliable and encompassing surveillance and survey data preventing a more comprehensive accounting of the incidence, risk factors and discrete costs to societies.<sup>164</sup> Figures for the Asia-Pacific region are lacking, yet data at the country level show that costs are not insignificant. The Reserve Bank of Fiji, for instance, calculated the financial cost of violence against women at 7 per cent of the country's GDP in 2002, while in Australia, the annual cost of violence against women and children is USD 11 billion.<sup>165</sup> In Viet Nam, out-of-pocket expenses and lost earnings by women who were subjected to intimate partner violence totalled approximately USD 1.7 billion in 2010, equivalent to 1.4 per cent of the country's GDP and marginally less than the country's expenditure on primary education of 1.5 per cent of GDP.<sup>166</sup>

In Asia and the Pacific, ethnic and subnational conflicts are the most common form of conflict, with many of the armed conflicts lasting for years and decades and thus compromising the lives of several generations of youth.<sup>167</sup> Thousands of boys and girls were recruited as combatants in the conflicts in India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Philippines, Nepal and Sri Lanka.<sup>168</sup> In Myanmar, for example, boys reportedly abducted from their homes and schools were deployed to fight among the groups in opposition to the prevailing authority.<sup>169</sup> In Afghanistan, as many as 8,000 boys, mostly aged between 14 and 18 years, were involved with factional armed groups and militias.<sup>170</sup> The cognitive, emotional and physical development of substantial numbers of youth is thus disrupted, with chronic consequences for the future of the individual women and men, and for their communities.

Empirical evidence implicates a connection between high youth populations and risk of armed conflict and social unrest.<sup>171</sup> In Asia and the Pacific, the incidence of armed conflict has been

- 161 Thomas Parks et al., *The Contested Corners of Asia: Subnational Conflict and International Development Assistance* (San Francisco: Asia Foundation, 2013).
- 162 In this instance, "children" constitutes persons aged up to 18 years.
- 163 UNICEF, *Machel Study 10-Year Strategic Review: Children and Armed Conflict* (New York: UNICEF, 2009).
- 164 Jennifer M. Hazen, "Armed Violence in Asia and the Pacific: An Overview of the Causes, Costs and Consequences", UNDP, Briefing Paper, May 2008.
- 165 UNIFEM, "The Facts: Violence against Women & Millennium Development Goals", available from: [http://www.endvawnow.org/uploads/browser/files/EVAW\\_FactSheet\\_KM\\_2010EN.pdf](http://www.endvawnow.org/uploads/browser/files/EVAW_FactSheet_KM_2010EN.pdf)
- 166 Aoife Callan et al., "Intimate partner violence: economic costs and implications for growth and development", Women's Voice, Agency & Participation Research Series No. 3, World Bank (2013).
- 167 Thomas Parks et al., *The Contested Corners of Asia: Subnational Conflict and International Development Assistance* (San Francisco: Asia Foundation, 2013).
- 168 Child Soldiers International, *Global Report 2004* (London: CSI, 2004).
- 169 Child Soldiers International, *Priority Country Themes* (London: CSI, 2014).
- 170 Child Soldiers International, *Global Report 2004* (London: CSI, 2004).
- 171 Urdal, H. & K. Hoelscher, "Urban Youth Bulges and Social Disorder: An Empirical Study of Asian and Sub-Saharan African Cities" World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 5110, World Bank (2009); Henrik Urdal, "A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence", UN Population Division expert paper (2012).

greater in the countries with relatively high proportions of youth, including Afghanistan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines and Sri Lanka.<sup>172</sup>

Beyond the size of the youth population, few years of formal education, social exclusion and a lack of educational and employment opportunities have been linked with youth engagement in armed conflict. In terms of education, an econometric study of post-1960 civil wars found that conflict is concentrated in countries with low levels of education,<sup>173</sup> while another study associated higher levels of education among young boys with reduced risk of partaking in political violence.<sup>174</sup>

Research suggests that youth unemployment and under-employment contribute to the engagement of primarily young men, and sometimes young women, in armed conflict, as well as to their involvement in criminal activities, particularly where such activities are a source of income, as is the case with the illicit drug trade.<sup>175</sup> Without access to work (or other sources of financial support), youth's transition from childhood to adulthood can be undermined. Poverty and employment in insecure jobs with few career prospects in the informal economies can foster a sense of social exclusion.<sup>176</sup> Poverty and unemployment have, in turn, been documented as doubling the risk of youth engaging in criminal and violent activities in Papua New Guinea.<sup>177</sup> In 2007, in Pakistan — a country with a youth population greater than the regional average, with low levels of educational attainment and with high rates of youth unemployment — the perpetration of the more than 1,000 terrorist attacks was almost exclusively carried out by young males.<sup>178</sup>

Countering the association between low levels of formal education and participation in armed conflict is the link between youth who have completed secondary, vocational and/or tertiary education but who are unable to obtain decent employment and so turn to violent or criminal activities in response to a sense of disaffection with the prevailing social order. In Iran (Islamic Republic of), for instance, where the average time between graduating and finding a job is nearly three years,<sup>179</sup> unemployment among highly educated youth has been linked with political protest and violence.<sup>180</sup>

In addition to education and unemployment, relative exclusion from the mainstream political system can contribute to civic unrest among youth. Young women and men were active participants in the violent insurrections in Sri Lanka during early 1970s and late 1980s, where expressions of violence were a response to dashed aspirations for social and political mobility.<sup>181</sup> Where youth perceive themselves as being marginalized from existing power structures, violence can provide a means of being heard. Moreover, youth may be attracted to the political or identity-based ideologies of armed conflicts. At present, youth are embroiled in armed conflicts in

172 Lyndsay McLean, Hilker Erika Fraser, *Youth exclusion, violence, conflict and fragile states* (London: Social Development Direct, 2009).

173 Paul Collier, *Economic Causes of Civil Conflict and their Implications for Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2006).

174 Henrik Urdal, "A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence", UN Population Division expert paper (2012).

175 UNODC, *Global Study on Homicide* (Vienna: UNODC, 2013).

176 Kabbani & Kothari, "Youth Employment in the MENA Region: A Situational Assessment", Social Protection Discussion Paper No. 0534, World Bank (2005).

177 Lorraine Blank, *Rapid Youth Assessment in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea* (Washington D.C.: World Bank, 2004).

178 Moed Yusuf, *Prospects of Youth Radicalization in Pakistan: Implications for U.S. Policy* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 2008).

179 Lyndsay McLean, Hilker Erika Fraser, *Youth exclusion, violence, conflict and fragile states* (London: Social Development Direct, 2009).

180 Onn Winckler, "The demographic dilemma of the Arab World: the Employment Aspect", *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (2002).

181 Social Policy Analysis Research Centre, *National Youth Survey: Overview Report* (Colombo: University of Colombo, 1999).

such countries as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines.<sup>182</sup>

As well as armed conflict, youth actively participate in popular protests. Between 2006 and 2013, a total of 126 mass protests took place in the Asia-Pacific region. These acts of “civil disobedience”, many of which were spearheaded by young activists using social media, attempted to address grievances such as economic injustice, inadequate representation in political systems and abuse of human rights.<sup>183</sup> Approximately half of the 90 laws in 2012 constraining freedom of association or assembly were proposed or enacted in countries of the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>184</sup>

## 5.2 Engaged citizens

### Voting

Engaging youth as active citizens is integral to promoting and preserving peaceful and prosperous societies. A tangible manifestation of active citizenship is participation in elections for political office. Youth’s initial experiences of citizenship can be formative, particularly when it comes to voting habits; events that take place at age 18 have been found to be about three times as emotionally powerful

BOX 10

## Peace promotion in Timor-Leste: The power of youth

**Timor-Leste is a post-conflict country with a fragile government and over two-thirds of the population under 30.** Educational prospects are low, while youth unemployment is high, and violence in the public arena, at home and in schools creates a high tolerance for such behaviour among youth. In addition, institutional structures for youth work are both weak and poorly connected, and the conditions for non-violent conflict resolution among young people are underdeveloped, with very few measures in place to address issues. In this context, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) established the project Peace Development, Youth Promotion and Fight Against Corruption – Peace Fund in 2008. The objective is to put in place measures for empowering young people to better manage conflict in a non-violent manner. Capacity development and related activities are carried out, including trainings to become role models and develop leadership skills, and promoting discussions with local authorities to broker a peace agreement between rival groups of youths. Over 40,000 young people have been reached by the project’s training programmes, with more than 40 per cent of participants being young women. Over 90 per cent of the 4,000 participants surveyed stated that the initiatives had made a recognizable contribution to the promotion of peace in their communities.<sup>a</sup>

182 Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Conflict and Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Region: A Strategic Net Assessment* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2015).

183 Isabel Ortiz et al., *World Protests 2006–2013* (New York: Initiative for Policy Dialogue and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2013).

184 International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, “Aid barriers and the rise of philanthropic protectionism”, *International Journal of Not-for-Profit Law*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (2015).

a GIZ, “Peace Development, Youth Promotion and Fight Against Corruption – Peace Fund”, available from: <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/23780.html>

as those that occur around the age of 40.<sup>185</sup> The first two elections in the life of voters are therefore thought to be crucial in defining their long-term electoral participation, making the engagement of first-time voters extremely important.

In many Asia-Pacific countries, laws stipulate a minimum eligibility age to run for parliament of 25 years, creating a gap between the legal voting age and the age at which an individual can serve in elected office.<sup>186</sup> The voting age for most countries in the region is 18 years. The legal age for voting is, however, higher in approximately a dozen countries, including Japan, Malaysia, some of the Pacific Island countries, the Republic of Korea and Singapore. In the Republic of Korea, for instance, persons aged under 19 years can neither vote nor participate in election campaigns. This means that youth are prevented from posting messages in support of, or opposition to, electoral candidates on social media.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union advocates for the alignment of the minimum voting age with the minimum age at which candidates can run for office, so as to promote active citizenship and participation in political governance among youth.<sup>187</sup> Accordingly, public leaders, politicians and policymakers, across political parties and civil society organizations, can actively engage youth—particularly the traditionally excluded groups of youth, including young women, youth with disabilities and youth from ethnic minorities—in mainstream politics, foster their faith in the political systems and promote their full and meaningful participation in governance and democratic institutions.

In this respect, Bhutan has established 144 Democracy Clubs in colleges, higher, middle secondary and primary schools across the country. These clubs operate as mini electoral commissions, educating youth on electoral processes.<sup>188</sup> With a similar intention, the Election Commission of India developed the video “Get! Set! Vote!”, along with a series of edutainment materials on voter awareness and education. “Get! Set! Vote!” is designed to educate citizens of all ages about democracy and electoral processes in a fun and interactive manner. The edutainment materials include picture books such as “Proud to be a Voter,” cartoon strips and board games, which are disseminated through educational institutions and related agencies to targeted population groups.

## **Beyond voting**

As well as casting votes for their elected officials, youth today are spearheading mass protests for social change worldwide, starting their own social enterprises and mobilizing millions of people through social media.

185 Andrew Gelman and Yair Ghitza, “The Great Society: Reagan’s Revolution and Generations of Presidential Voting”, Working Paper, Colombia University, June 2014.

186 Political participation data indicate that, in a third of the countries globally, eligibility for national parliament starts at 25 years old, with 1.65 per cent of parliamentarians being aged in their 20s and 11.87 per cent in their 30s. The average age of parliamentarians globally is 53 years (50 years for women parliamentarians), available from: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-political-participation.pdf>

187 Inter-Parliamentary Union, “Reports and Surveys”, available from: [www.ipu.org/english/surveys.htm#e-parl2010](http://www.ipu.org/english/surveys.htm#e-parl2010)

188 Election Commission of Bhutan. “Guidelines for introduction of democracy clubs in schools and educational institutions in Bhutan”, Brochure, Thimphu, Bhutan (2012).

One such young person is Malala Yousafzai, a young Pakistani woman who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014, and, at age, 17 the youngest-ever recipient of the award.<sup>189</sup> Malala demonstrated that youth can be powerful agents of change. The young activist has become a global icon with her fearlessly outspoken stance on behalf of disadvantaged children, adolescents and youth, particularly in relation to girls' lack of access to formal education. Another prominent example of youth civic engagement is Joshua Wong, who became "the face" of the 2015 non-violent protests in demand for improved mechanisms of participatory democracy in Hong Kong.<sup>190</sup>

Notwithstanding such renowned examples, youth in the region whose rights are violated — or are at risk of being violated — do not always have access to platforms through which they can voice their concerns and influence policies and programmes that directly impact their lives; this is reflected in their under-representation in elections, parliaments, public administration, political parties and civil society organizations. Moreover, young women and men living in poverty, or of marginalized and/or oppressed population groups, can develop a sense of disillusionment with political institutions and leadership, feeding a vicious cycle of civic exclusion.<sup>191</sup>

Administered between 2010 and 2013, a survey of the political attitudes among youth in Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Mongolia, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam, indicated a valuing of the outcomes of political processes over underlying normative principles. Importance was, however, assigned to the four manifestations of democracy that were measured, namely social equity, norms and procedures, good governance, and freedom and liberty.<sup>192</sup> The same survey found that youth in the region associate democracy with good governance and the delivery of services, but are disappointed in the overall performance of their public institutions.

Other studies conducted in the Maldives, Mongolia, Sri Lanka and Pakistan have found relatively high levels of distrust, or lack of confidence, among youth with respect to the State, alongside perceptions of corruption. In a 2012 survey conducted in Pakistan, 71 per cent of youth aged 18 to 29 years expressed unfavourable opinions of the elected Government, 67 per cent of the Parliament and 69 per cent of political parties. By contrast, 77 per cent of the surveyed youth reportedly approved of the army and 74 per cent viewed religious organizations favourably, whereas only 29 per cent were in favour of democracy.<sup>193</sup>

Similarly, in Sri Lanka, youth express low levels of trust in public institutions, related to perceptions of corruption and elitism.<sup>194</sup> Among survey respondents, 37 per cent of youth identified corruption as the main barrier to their political participation, while 27 per cent cited politicization, 8 per cent highlighted violence and crime, and 10 per cent named the inability to speak up freely and openly. The surveyed youth also expressed a sense of disillusionment with politics in general, 89 per cent indicating low trust in political parties and 79 per cent expressing

189 Nobel Prize, "Malala Yousafzai – Facts", available from: [www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/2014/yousafzai-facts.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2014/yousafzai-facts.html)

190 Fortune, "World's Greatest Leaders", available from: <http://fortune.com/worlds-greatest-leaders/joshua-wong-10/>

191 Isabel Ortiz et al., *World Protests 2006–2013* (New York: Initiative for Policy Dialogue and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2013).

192 UNDP, *Youth and Democratic Citizenship in East and South-East Asia: Exploring Political Attitudes of East and South-East Asian Youth through the Asian Barometer* (Bangkok: UNDP, 2014).

193 British Council Pakistan, *Next Generation goes to the Ballot Box 2013* (London: British Council, 2013).

194 UNDP, *Youth and Development: Towards a More Inclusive Future* (Colombo: UNDP, 2014).

low trust in provisional councils, compared to 55 per cent of youth surveyed in 2009.<sup>195</sup>

Lack of trust among youth of their public institutions is not isolated to developing countries in the region. A study of youth in Australia revealed a relatively pervasive lack of trust in politicians, associated with perceptions of parliamentarians behaving badly, breaking-promises and lying.<sup>196</sup>

As previously indicated, reservations about political institutions do not, however, mean that young women and men refrain from political engagement. Research suggests that “cause-oriented” forms of political engagement, such as demonstrations, boycotts and direct action, are of greater appeal to youth, than traditional or formal politics. Notwithstanding criticisms of their governance institutions, youth express a belief in their ability to influence political processes.<sup>197</sup>

### **Promoting active citizenship among youth**

Civic participation, as both a right and a means to sustainable development, is one of the guiding principles of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The World Programme of Action for Youth, the Convention of the Rights of the Child and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights<sup>198</sup> provide an internationally agreed, rights-based framework for empowering youth as active

195 Ibid.

196 Australian Electoral Commission, *Youth Electoral Study Report* (Canberra: AEC, 2004).

197 UNDP, *Youth and Democratic Citizenship in East and South-East Asia: Exploring Political Attitudes of East and South-East Asian Youth through the Asian Barometer* (Bangkok: UNDP, 2014).

198 Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

BOX 11

## **Up close with the New Zealand Prime Minister**

### **In New Zealand, the Prime Minister's Youth Advisory Forum was established in 1998.**

The Youth Advisory Forum provides 15 young New Zealanders, aged between 12 and 25, with the opportunity to meet with Cabinet Ministers, including the Prime Minister, three times a year. The Forum was initiated by the Minister of Youth Affairs and received an enthusiastic response, with more than 230 youth applying to be members.

The Forum includes a cross-section of youth from different ethnic groups, a variety of geographical, rural and urban backgrounds, and with different educational, employment and life experiences. The aim of the Forum is to provide a mechanism through which youth can communicate directly and frankly with the Prime Minister about issues that concern them. Members' views can be sought on all matters concerning governance in New Zealand, not solely on issues considered to be relevant to children and youth. During the Forum, members identify the issues for discussion and the Ministers they would like to be present at the next meeting.<sup>a</sup>

a Beehive, “Prime Minister's Youth Advisory Forum”, available from: <http://beehive.govt.nz/release/prime-minister039s-youth-advisory-forum>; Ministry of Youth Development, “Prime Minister's Youth Programme”, available from: [www.myd.govt.nz/young-people/prime-ministers-youth-programme.html](http://www.myd.govt.nz/young-people/prime-ministers-youth-programme.html)

citizens, along with promoting social integration and human development. This is essential for there to be any chance of effectively addressing conflict and violence, with youth in great numbers standing up against such injustice, and also pushing to achieve peaceful societies.

Meaningfully engaging youth in participatory governance and development processes is critical for several reasons. First, sustainable and inclusive democracies require the participation of youth, with their exclusion being a risk for disenfranchisement and social unrest. Second, at local, national as well as at regional levels, the experiences and ideas of youth offer insights and strategies to advance sustainable development.<sup>199</sup> Third, as well as being leaders today, youth are the leaders of the future; thus their engagement in political governance is a strategic means of anticipating and addressing challenges of current and future generations.

Fostering active citizenship among youth requires dismantling existing barriers to their political participation. One such barrier is prejudicial sociocultural perceptions and practices that, for example, stereotype young women and men as insufficiently mature to hold positions of influence; discourage the questioning of authority; or preference individuals from the politically, economically or socially dominant group, whether defined by class, caste, sex, gender, ethnicity, religion, language, dis/ability or other factors. Additional challenges confronting youth in terms of their civic engagement include lack of financial resources and/or access to information.

Sex-based discrimination in the Pacific is evident, for instance, in the complete absence of women in the parliaments of the Federated States of Micronesia, Tonga and Vanuatu, as of 2015.<sup>200</sup> Young women in these countries, as well as the countries where women constitute a distinct minority of parliamentarians,<sup>201</sup> lack the role models and evidence that they, like their male counterparts, have a right and a role to play in the governing of their lives and their countries. While progress has been made in creating leadership opportunities for youth across the Pacific Islands, such as through the revival of National Youth Councils and the Pacific Youth Council Secretariat, it is male youth who have largely benefited.<sup>202</sup>

Robust civic engagement involves informed citizens freely giving voice to their needs and interests, forming associations and advocating for specific policy and programmatic measures in the public realm. It also requires representative structures through which youth can directly engage with decision makers, as well as hold them accountable. In order to constructively engage in political processes, youth must be equipped with basic knowledge and skills — inclusive of matters relating to human rights, gender equality, social justice and environmental sustainability — thus necessitating the provision of civic education to all and the enabling of access to information through multiple modalities. In such diverse countries as China, Malaysia, Mongolia, the Philippines, Singapore

199 UNDP, *Urban Youth in the Pacific: Increasing Resilience and Reducing Risk for Involvement in Crime and Violence* (Suva: UNDP Pacific Centre, 2014).

200 Inter-Parliamentary Union, "Women in National Parliaments Database", available from: [www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm](http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm)

201 Countries in Asia-Pacific where women constitute less than 10 per cent of the national parliamentarians include Bhutan, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Japan, Kiribati, Malaysia, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Myanmar, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Tuvalu. (Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, [www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm](http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm)).

202 World YWCA, *Safe, Respected, Included, Connected, Skilled: a Pacific Young Women's Leadership Strategy 2011–2014* (Geneva: World YWCA, 2011).

and Thailand, civic education is integrated into the curricula of primary and secondary schools, as well as universities and technical colleges.

In recognition of the importance of informed citizens and the active engagement of youth for sustainable development, governments and civil society organizations across the region are embracing the aforementioned challenges. There are such initiatives as the Pacific Youth Forum Against Corruption,<sup>203</sup> which was launched in 2015 and brings together young leaders, aged 18 to 25, from 15 Pacific Island countries to discuss ways to tackle corruption. Also in the Pacific, the Young Women's Leadership Alliance<sup>204</sup> is empowering young women and promoting their active engagement on issues that affect their lives and those of their communities.

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are also being utilized for youth civic engagement, capitalizing on the fact that approximately 45 per cent of the world's Internet users are below the age of 25 years.<sup>205</sup> Mobile telephones, with short message services, crowd sourcing and social media platforms are, for example, being employed to share information and mobilize youth for collective action in response to human rights abuses. An example of utilization of ICT for civic engagement purposes is the Government of India's creation of the online public grievance registration and referral portal, Samadhan. In the Maldives, the Parliament Watch website provides citizens with a means of scrutinizing the actions of their local and national parliamentarians. Citizens can put questions to their representatives, review the voting records of individual parliamentarians and be informed as to the personal income of members of parliament. Additionally, information on election candidates is posted on Parliament Watch. "Data mining"<sup>206</sup> and social media are further tools available to policymakers to engage with, understand, and respond to the needs and interests of youth.

In turn, countries across the Asia-Pacific region have established youth commissions and youth parliaments to support active youth civic participation. In Sri Lanka, for instance, the 335 members of the National Youth Parliament work with the ministries to influence a range of policies and programme initiatives. A Youth Parliament was established in Timor-Leste in 2010, through which 130 adolescents aged 12 to 17 years receive instruction in leadership, citizenship, environmental issues, public speaking and debating, basic planning and organizational management.<sup>207</sup> In the Solomon Islands, the Young Women's Parliamentary Group provides women with a means of advocating their concerns and priorities with national decision makers.

Reinforcing and creating new spaces and opportunities for youth civic engagement and promoting peace, buttressed by comprehensive national policies and regulatory mechanisms, is thus critical to the well-being and empowerment of young women and men, and to the development of countries in the region.

203 ABC, "Pacific youth gather in Fiji for forum against corruption", available from: [www.abc.net.au/news/2015-02-23/pacific-youth-gather-for-anti-corruption-forum-in-fiji/6222210](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-02-23/pacific-youth-gather-for-anti-corruption-forum-in-fiji/6222210)

204 Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development, "Pacific Young Women's Leadership Alliance", available from: [www.pacificwomen.org/projects/pacific-young-womens-leadership-alliance/](http://www.pacificwomen.org/projects/pacific-young-womens-leadership-alliance/)

205 Source: International Telecommunications Union, [www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx](http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx)

206 Data mining is the process of identifying patterns in large data sets ("big data")

207 UNICEF, "Youth Parliament commences in Timor-Leste", available from [www.unicef.org/infobycountry/Timorleste\\_57229.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/Timorleste_57229.html)

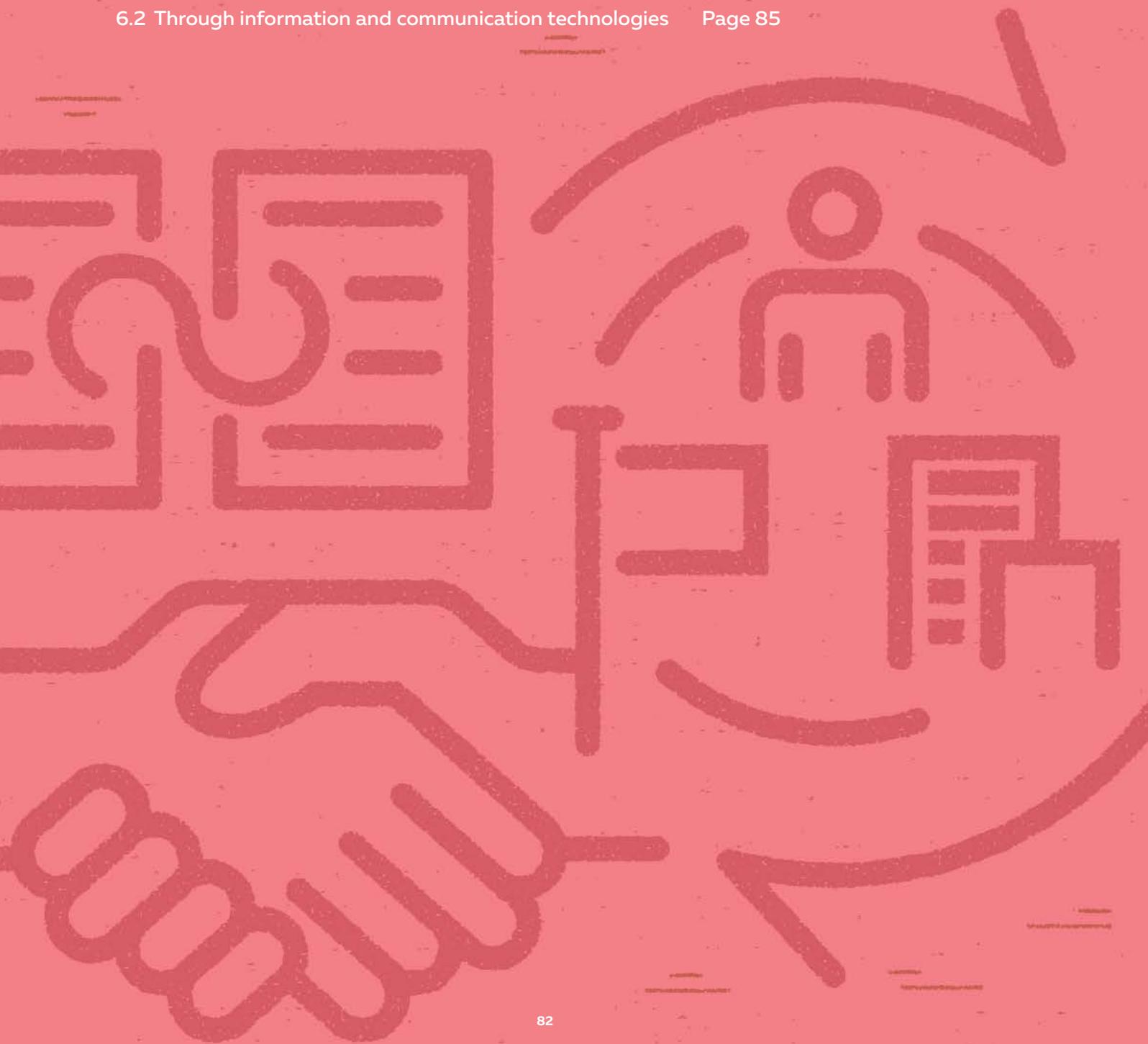
# PARTNERSHIP

6.1 As capacity development

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6.2 Through information and communication technologies

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We are determined to mobilize the means required to implement this Agenda through a revitalized Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity, focused in particular on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable and with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people.

**PREAMBLE, TRANSFORMING OUR  
WORLD: THE 2030 AGENDA FOR  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**



In accordance with the 17th Goal of the 2030 Agenda, Governments globally will “[s]trengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development”.<sup>208</sup> Youth are integral stakeholders in the foreseen multi-stakeholder partnerships that will engage the public and private sectors, workers’ and employers’ organizations, academia and civil society entities to realize the people, planet, prosperity and peace goals through financial, technological capacity, trade and monitoring means. Public-private partnerships are particularly important, and, to a large extent, achievement of the SDGs will depend on scaling these up, as well as the acknowledgement that the private sector knows how to make markets work, manage risks, and engender competitiveness and innovation. Explored in this Chapter is partnership for capacity development and for technology dissemination, in relation to youth.

## 6.1 As capacity development

Developing the capacity of individual youth, of their organizations and of those with whom they partner is a concrete means of investing in the potential of youth, alongside addressing the gaps and challenges delineated in the preceding chapters of this report. That is, through

<sup>208</sup> United Nations, “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (A/RES/70/1), 70th Session of the General Assembly, New York, 21 October 2015.

collaboration — whether, for example, North-South, South-South, between local communities, with public institutions, philanthropic organizations or research bodies — youth can directly benefit from the exchange of knowledge and skills, the creation of safe spaces to experiment and the promotion of mutual learning.

Partnerships can also build capacity in order for youth to remain in agricultural activities. This can promote rural development as well as stem migration from such areas to cities, and counter inequalities between them and cities. In 2008, the Taiwan Council of Agriculture launched a programme under the name “Small Landlords, Large Tenants” that encouraged elderly farmers to lease their lands to adolescent farmers at the beginning of their career. The Council of Agriculture set up a farmland database that serves as a lease and sale platform to interested buyers. The database itself is managed by local farmers’ organizations. With support from the Council of Agriculture, elderly farmers have become included into a retirement system to stimulate them to provide consultancy to their youthful tenants, and to foster intergenerational partnership. Young lessees in return are trained by the Council of Agriculture in marketing and management of their land and supported with low interest loans to improve access and maintenance to equipment and facilities. The programme shows that youth can increase farm size and reduce production costs. By the end of 2010, the programme had matched 8,121 elderly landlords with 703 young tenants, producing a rejuvenating effect. A side-effect of this partnership was on

BOX 12

## Partnerships to develop capacity among Cambodian rural youth

**The Centre for Study and Development in Agriculture (CEDAC)<sup>a</sup> in Cambodia works to develop the capacity of youth to engage in agricultural activities.**

CEDAC is the product of a partnership between the Research and Technological Exchange Group, the humanitarian aid organization CODEGAZ, the Hilfswerk der Evangelische Kirchen Switzerland (HEKS, Swiss Church Aid) and a Japanese private donor. In 2008, CEDAC began implementing a training programme to support out-of-school youth in rural areas of Cambodia in order for them to pursue agriculture-based livelihoods. The training, which engaged experienced farmers and entrepreneurs, provided youth with instruction in ecologically-friendly agricultural practices, farm management, business development, financial management and report writing skills. Between 2011 and 2014, more than 300 participating youth (40 per cent female) established their own agricultural businesses or became community development workers after completing the training and went on to train approximately 2,000 additional youth. The graduates of the CEDAC programme were earning two to three times the income of their peers employed in the clothing and construction sectors.<sup>b</sup>

a CEDAC, “Centre d’Etude et de Developpement Agricole Cambodgien”, available from: [www.cedac.org.kh/?page=&lg=en](http://www.cedac.org.kh/?page=&lg=en)

b FAO, IFAD, CTA (2014), *Youth and Agriculture: Key Challenges and Concrete Solutions* (Rome: FAO, 2014).

gender relations, as barriers to land acquisition (namely by inheritance rights) for females were removed within this project.<sup>209</sup>

Developing the capacity of youth requires knowledge that goes beyond overall primary education, as emphasized by the Millennium Development Goals. To strengthen current and coming generations of young adults for inclusive and participatory socioeconomic integration, Timor-Leste set out on a National Education Strategic Plan between 2011 and 2030. After the country's struggle for independence it was left with grave problems in providing education. In order to reform the education sector, the country needed partnerships to generate a financial and advisory foundation. Joining the Global Partnership for Education in 2005, Timor-Leste attracted various partners, including from Australia and Europe, and began supporting current teachers, and later a bachelor's degree programme to train primary teachers.<sup>210</sup> Subsequently, the Plan expanded into strategies and activities in secondary, higher and recurrent education.<sup>211</sup> Up until 2015, the Plan had received grants through partnerships to further strengthen the educational sector in terms of capacity building in management and strategic planning.

Public-private partnership (PPP) is a largely untapped source for financing and developing the capacity of youth. Such partnerships can also support regulatory frameworks for a country's social and economic development. PPPs can be directed to address urgent concerns like the ensuring a functional and all-inclusive education system, which itself can generate capital for further areas of concern—like qualified labour—and can mitigate pressure for migration out of the country and the risk of social exclusion and unrest.

## 6.2 Through information and communication technologies

Diverse ICTs, such as mobile phones, the Internet, digital information networks and social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, WeChat and Twitter, are being widely utilized by youth across the region for multiple purposes. These include learning, social mobilization, accessing government services, contributing to debates and advocacy.

As a vehicle for dialogue, networking and information exchange, ICTs are a means through which youth can voice their needs, concerns and priorities, to policymakers, business and civil society leaders, and members of their societies generally. Given that approximately 45 per cent of Internet users globally are below the age of 25, youth are evidently embracing ICTs.<sup>212</sup>

An example of the utility of ICTs for youth empowerment is the establishment of the online platform [tamsubantre.org](http://tamsubantre.org) to educate and support Vietnamese youth with respect to reproductive

209 FAO, IFAD, CTA, *Youth and Agriculture: Key Challenges and Concrete Solutions* (Rome: FAO, 2014).

210 Jude Butcher et al., *Timor-Leste: Transforming Education Through Partnership in a Small Post-Conflict State* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2015).

211 Global Partnership for Education, "Timor-Leste", available from: [www.globalpartnership.org/country/timor-leste](http://www.globalpartnership.org/country/timor-leste)

212 International Telecommunication Union, *Measuring the Information Society 2012* (Geneva: ITU, 2012).

health and HIV and AIDS.<sup>213</sup> This was designed and created by youth and staff of the Health Initiative and Population Centre, in cooperation with the Ministry of Information and Communication of Viet Nam, to provide free online counselling, disseminate information and moderate discussions for the target group of persons aged 14 to 25 years.<sup>214</sup> Similarly, the Thai not-for-profit organization “Change Fusion”, in partnership with ThaiHealth and the Women’s Health Advocacy Foundation, developed the mobile phone application “Me Sex”<sup>215</sup> to educate and empower teenagers on sexual well-being.<sup>216</sup>

In recognition of the education potential of modern forms of ICT, the Ministry of Education in Myanmar established a partnership with Russian and Vietnamese mobile telephone companies to set up e-Learning Centres across the country and provide youth with IT-literacy courses. Approximately 34,000 e-Learning Centres had been established by 2009, with courses for students to complete 30 hours of IT training.<sup>217</sup>

Beyond the national level, is the example of “Cultural Classics”. In 2006, a young Pakistani entrepreneur created an online platform for marketing artisan products globally. To date, “Cultural Classics” has partnered with Mind Enterprises (Sweden) and Global Minds (United Arab Emirates) to promote and sell Pakistani handicrafts across Europe and the Middle East, through which income generating opportunities have been created for Pakistani artisans, particularly from rural and under-privileged areas.<sup>218</sup>

Furthermore, ICTs provide a means for particular groups of youth to counter their social vulnerability, marginalization or exclusion. For instance, one avenue whereby the Bangladeshi organization ‘Young Power in Social Action’ works for the empowerment of youth with disabilities is through development of their ICT skills.<sup>219</sup> With the financial support of Microsoft and the World Bank, Young Power in Social Action delivers ICT training to youth with disabilities with the aim of enhancing their employment prospects. Graduates of the programme are, for example, employed as social media specialists and developers of education programmes for other persons with disabilities.<sup>220</sup>

213 GAID Committee of eLeaders for Youth and ICT, *A Digital Shift: Youth and ICT for Development, Best Practices* (New York: GAID Committee of eLeaders for Youth and ICT, 2009).

214 Tam Su Ban Tre, “Tam Su Ban Tre”, available from: [www.tamsubantre.org](http://www.tamsubantre.org)

215 iTunes, “Me Sex”, available from: <https://itunes.apple.com/th/app/me-sex/id598921066?l=th&mt=8>

216 Change Fusion, “ICT Plan for the Thai Health Promotion Foundation”, available from: <http://changeofusion.org/ict-plan-for-the-thai-health-promotion-foundation/?lang=en>

217 UNESCO, *ICT in Education Policies Infrastructure and ODA Status in Selected ASEAN Countries* (Bangkok: UNESCO, 2013).

218 Diplo Internet Governance Community, “Interview: Jamil Goheer, Pakistan”, available from: [www.diplointernetgovernance.org/profiles/blogs/interview-jamil-goheer](http://www.diplointernetgovernance.org/profiles/blogs/interview-jamil-goheer)

219 YPSA, “Empowering Youth with Disabilities through market driven ICT skills”, available from: <http://ypsa.org/empowering-youth-with-disabilities-through-market-driven-ict-skills/>

220 Vashkar Battacharjee, “Empowering Youth with Disabilities in Bangladesh: Providing ICT Skills”, available from: <http://blogs.worldbank.org/development/empowering-youth-disabilities-bangladesh-providing-ict-skills-0>

The value of ICT for the empowerment of youth is also evident in “big data”, garnered from, for example, mobile phone call records, satellite datasets and social media. Policymakers can utilize “big data” to inform the development of policies addressing the diverse needs and interests of youth, to provide services, to implement targeted programmes and to monitor the efficacy of government initiatives. One of the aims of the data2x<sup>221</sup> initiative, for example, is to explore the potential of “big data” in closing the inequality gap between women and men, and girls and boys.<sup>222</sup>

If the potential of ICT is to be maximized for all youth, and countries, in the region, the “digital divide” needs to shrink and more youth need to be switched on. The Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway is one initiative being undertaken to increase the availability and affordability of broadband Internet to all persons, regardless of age, sex, ability and other demographic and socioeconomic variables.<sup>223</sup>

The way in which ICT is applied will determine the extent to which sustainable development can be promoted; youth need to have the opportunity to develop partnerships across the region (and beyond) which ensure that the right choices are made and the right actions are taken.

221 Data2X, “Data2X”, available from: <http://data2x.org/>

222 Data2X, “Overview of Current Data2X Projects January 2015”, available from: <http://data2x.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Big-Data-Projects.pdf>

223 ESCAP, “Asia Pacific Information Super Highway”, available from: [www.unescap.org/our-work/ict-disaster-risk-reduction/asia-pacific-information-superhighway/about](http://www.unescap.org/our-work/ict-disaster-risk-reduction/asia-pacific-information-superhighway/about)

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



In the context of the newly adopted 2030 Agenda, with the associated Goals for sustainable development, this Chapter offers select summary conclusions regarding the situation, concerns and challenges for youth in the Asia-Pacific region. Recommendations, as areas for priority action, are also proffered.

## 7.1 Conclusions

Youth today are, on average, healthier, better educated, better connected and politically more engaged than any previous generation has ever been. Yet they need better opportunities to fully realize their potential and participate in societies that value their opinion and talent. Hence the onus is less on young people themselves, but on the older generations who are unwilling to let go of power and the ideals and lifestyles that propagate inequity and ecological degradation.

In this context, to successfully implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development every effort must be made to have young people at the forefront of each and every step to change the world. Currently, existing systems are generally not delivering with regard to addressing inequality, protecting rights and preventing further damage to the environment. Youth should have a choice to alter that.

As part of a global trend, populations in more prosperous societies of the region are ageing rapidly, with increased pressure on youth to shoulder future challenges of this development. Less developed nations, on the other hand, are often experiencing youth bulges, which will enable them, if they pursue transformative and forward-looking policies wisely, to draw on hitherto untapped sources of human capital.

Greater efforts by governments, the private sector, civil society and other stakeholders are needed to address shortcomings in education, health care and employment, along with risks associated with disasters, diseases, maltreatment, exploitation and abuse. All too frequently, youth, through no fault of their own, are not able to reap the full benefits of what should be their most productive years, as a result of diminished prospects that bar them from living up to their potential as truly creative members of their communities.

In seeking better lives, youth are setting out to find improved prospects in education and enhanced opportunities in employment. Some of them are striving to climb the socioeconomic ladder where they live; others are migrating to new countries or from rural communities to urban areas with an eye on a better life. As a result, in many places where modest towns once stood, now thriving metropolises sprawl.

Driving such developments have been rapid modernization, booming economies, accelerating rates of upward mobility and population explosions. Yet often progress has not come without costs — be they social, cultural or environmental. This points to the need for greater policy coherence, for more effective governance, and business models that promote inclusion and sustainability rather than the sole motive of profit. The reality is that stark inequalities have persisted; in some

cases they have even got noticeably worse. Hundreds of millions of people—many of whom are, alarmingly, children and adolescents—continue to live in grinding poverty, their lives having been left largely untouched by the unprecedented economic and technological advances of recent decades.

The region is facing daunting challenges. How countries in Asia and the Pacific will address them, individually and collectively, in the coming years will likely have a lasting impact on the lives of young people for decades to come. The purpose of this report has been to highlight these challenges and offer practical solutions to them. The great diversities among countries, peoples and cultures in Asia and the Pacific rule out one-size-fit-all solutions to problems that affect them. Hence broad-based approaches have been presented here, with specificity in certain contexts which might provide useful lessons. Their combined aim is to ensure that all young people can lead productive and fulfilling lives, not only for their own sake but for the sake of the region's future. The conditions to switch youth fully on are required, while their hearts need to be primed to spearhead sustainable development; they need opportunities, they need to lead in promoting inclusion, and a socially and ecologically prosperous future.

## 7.2 Recommendations

The region covers around two-thirds of the global population, with both the largest and smallest countries in the world. Specific and country-tailored recommendations on all areas of sustainable development are thus not feasible.

This publication puts forth broad and complementary approaches that countries in the Asia-Pacific region should consider incorporating to ensure more effective and youth-inclusive implementation of the “five Ps” (people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnerships) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

To promote overarching policy direction in order to support youth development in Asia and the Pacific, the following actions are proposed:

- **Prepare for future demographic implications:** In a region with a youth population of approximately 700 million, the challenges youth are facing must be placed in the context of the demographic changes underway, which are occurring at unprecedented levels. The rapid transition from high fertility rates to generally lower rates, in combination with increasing longevity, means that young people will play an even more important role in shaping the future of the Asia-Pacific region. This trend requires enhanced youth policies and strengthened intergenerational solidarity.
- **Enhance institutional capacity and engender good governance:** For youth to be effective future leaders, their distrust of politics, business operations and civic institutions should be countered. Governments, the private sector and other stakeholders need to address corruption and the inequitable distribution of resources. Transparency and accountability, and related

mechanisms should be promoted, along with an independent judiciary. Learning processes should build the capacity of youth to operate in contexts where sustainable development is not compromised.

- **Promote social dialogue and political commitment:** To ensure that young people become productive, skilled and healthy members of society, countries need to have in place comprehensive policy frameworks, building on strong multi-sectorial commitment. Processes that bring them about should be driven by multi-stakeholder engagement in all stages from design and implementation to evaluation, involving different levels of government, business actors, civil society organizations and—essentially— young people themselves.
- **Strengthen the evidence base for more effective policymaking:** There is a need to better understand what works and what does not. Countries therefore need to collect more and better data on youth, disaggregated by sex and other variables. Such data should, for example, cover areas of income and wealth, geographic location, access to health care and education as well as to capital markets and political participation. There is also a need to better share experiences of successful policies and programmes, both within countries from local to national levels, as well as across countries.

## People

To end poverty and hunger among all youth in Asia and the Pacific in all its forms and dimensions, the following actions are proposed:

- **Ensure that poverty alleviation measures are well-coordinated:** The multidimensionality of poverty requires that all policies that set out to reduce youth poverty, including in-work poverty, should take a holistic approach, involving all government offices responsible for education, health, livelihood and employment. The formulation and implementation of such policies and programmes needs to be closely monitored, coordinated and documented by, for example, the office responsible for youth issues.
- **Encourage actions to increase productivity in the agricultural sector:** Addressing the common nutrition shortage, hunger and food security for large shares of youth in Asia-Pacific necessitates that governments promote sustainable and more productive agricultural sectors. Such policies could, for example, include training and incentives for young people to engage in sustainable farming.
- **Promote the health and well-being of all youth:** Too many girls and young women in Asia and the Pacific are currently experiencing abortions outside the official health-care system. Too many are also forced to marry a man not of their own choice. These situations often have life-long detrimental health, as well as socioeconomic implications. It is critical to support comprehensive sexuality education and expand access to contraception, including through adherence to the global strategy on women and children's health. In addition, efforts to reduce new HIV infections among key populations and to address the mental health concerns of youth require greater investments and more youth-friendly approaches.

- **Ensure integrated and inclusive migration for youth:** Efforts by governments and other key stakeholders should be focussed to reflect the importance of youth and the scale of youth migration in the region. For migration to be an informed choice and not just a necessity, it is essential that migration be mainstreamed into development plans and policies, with explicit attention to youth migration and youth engagement. Considering the multidimensional reality of migration, integrated and inclusive policies engaging youth and all related ministries and stakeholders are needed. Such policies should both support and facilitate opportunities for migrant youth for human development and their contributions to countries of both origin and destination for sustainable development, as well as address youth's specific needs and vulnerabilities.

## Planet

To effectively involve youth in Asia and the Pacific in the protection of planetary degradation and management of its natural resources and urgent action on climate change, the following actions are proposed:

- **Facilitate access to adequate and resilient housing and basic services in urban areas:** In the context of largely rapid and unplanned urbanization in Asia-Pacific, the provision of infrastructure and basic services relative to the expanding populations is insufficient. Slums and informal settlements lack access to affordable and safe housing, as well as basic health-care and education services. As such, stronger commitment is required at national and local levels, while enhancing engagement with youth to identify key areas in need of attention to facilitate action which is centred on sustainability.
- **Expand access to water, sanitation and hygiene, especially in rural areas:** Around a third of the people in the region lack access to clean water and sanitation. This hampers socioeconomic development and puts many youth, especially female youth, at risk. Investments and training on water, sanitation and hygiene need to be expanded, which requires the engagement of diverse stakeholders, in particular specialist organizations.
- **Prepare youth as disaster risk reduction ambassadors:** Given the region's susceptibility to natural disasters and the magnitude of their impact, youth need to be provided with the knowledge, space and tools to contribute and be leaders in disaster risk reduction. This requires training and education, as well as platforms, through workshops and forums, on risk reduction measures and reconstruction responses, so that youth of today can shape future action, with adherence to greater sustainability and prevention of loss of life and damage.
- **Ensure that youth are aware of sustainable consumption:** In a region which is the engine of global economic growth, addressing climate-change requires improved awareness of the need for sustainable consumption patterns and management of natural resources. This necessitates governments to incorporate and prioritize these issues in national curricula and for wider

communities to share knowledge and engage with youth in related decision-making. Such an approach can also enhance knowledge of and employment in green jobs.

## Prosperity

To ensure that all youth in Asia and the Pacific enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives, including reducing education inequities, informality and working poverty, and to enhance access to social protection, the following actions are proposed:

- **Improve access to and quality of education:** Access to quality education varies depending on, among others, household and country income, urban-rural location, ethnicity, gender (dis)ability, and social and cultural norms. Investments are needed in infrastructure, such as school buildings and transport, along with ensuring appropriate training of teachers and providing environments which are safe, inclusive and non-discriminatory. Education curricular also need to correspond to modern and future labour market demands, while adhering to the principles of sustainable development and noting the importance of technical and vocational training.
- **Make decent jobs a top priority:** The abundance of vulnerable and low skilled occupations in the informal sector coincides with the increasing challenge of highly skilled graduates in jobs they are over qualified for or remaining unemployed for extended periods of time. Economic uncertainties contribute to further discouragement, social exclusion and exploitation. Designing inclusive macroeconomic and employment policies is critical to address these challenges and create formal and decent jobs. These policies should be supplemented by career guidance and work experience measures to provide young people with skills and entrepreneurship training.
- **Strengthen and broaden social protection:** Limited access among youth to social protection in Asia and the Pacific is a key reason for persisting poverty and inequality. Therefore governments need to create fiscal space and other conditions necessary for the provision of benefits and services under the Social Protection Floor, including unemployment benefits and basic health-care services. In addition, active labour market programmes should be promoted to facilitate the school-to-work transition and enhance youth employability.

## Peace

To foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies for all youth in Asia and the Pacific, the following actions are proposed:

- **Engage youth as active citizens:** Young women and men from all sociocultural backgrounds and ethnic origins should be adequately represented in political circles. This requires the revision of legislation in terms of age eligibility to participate in and run for office. Other forms of participation need to include platforms such as youth commissions, youth parliaments, democracy clubs as well as online networks organized through social media, and making best use of ICTs.

- **Address exclusion and unrest:** Socioeconomic structures and political systems that exclude youth from effective participation in civic and political processes can increase involvement in criminal activities, social unrest and armed conflicts, as well as terrorist activities. Thus there is a need to counter corruption and engage young people in the creation of systems that promote dialogue, inclusion and peace building. Such approaches can support the development of cohesive societies, economic stability and responsive and accountable political institutions in line with the 2030 Agenda.
- **End violence and discrimination against women and girls:** The social and economic costs of violence against women and girls bear direct threats to the stability of societies within the region. Promoting more peaceful and prosperous development would require comprehensive and responsive policies and legislation, along with multisectoral and evidence-based interventions that address the concerns of women and girls. There is also the need to raise awareness among all parties, especially male youth, and transform gender relations in favour of the equal distribution of power in all its manifestations.

## Partnership

To secure harmony, mobilize necessary means and ensure that all youth in Asia and the Pacific can fully participate on equal terms with others, the following actions are proposed:

- **Enhance multi-stakeholder collaboration:** Sustainable development depends on effective interactions between diverse stakeholders, with young people being an integral part of the process. It is thus important to promote their involvement in decision-making and collaborative circles involving various sectors and actors—among which governments, the private sector and civil society. This needs to materialize into regional and inter-sectoral cooperation as well as private-public partnerships that young women and men can influence and benefit from.
- **Promote integrated urban and rural development:** There is an untapped potential for partnerships in integrated urban and rural development—inland management, human capital development, agriculture, sustainable industries and human settlements development. Understanding and leveraging urban-rural linkages and creating partnerships of government at multiple levels and the private sector can create opportunities for rural youth livelihoods while relieving pressure caused by rural-to-urban migration. Youth need to be involved as critical partners to this effect, and, in doing so, can help enhance collaboration between generations and communities.
- **Reduce the digital divide:** Asia and the Pacific as a region has some of the most advanced ICT societies in the world. At the same time, large variations exist, with parts of the region not even experiencing basic internet coverage. Public-private partnerships that promote affordable and accessible forms of ICT can help foster enterprise creation and consequently provide young people with jobs. ICT should also allow young people to have greater voice, while encouraging dialogue, networking and information exchange. As such, social media can provide effective tools for advocacy and social and political participation, as well as promote youth to be at the heart of sustainable development.



Regional Coordination Mechanism – United Nations Development Group  
Asia-Pacific Thematic Working Group on Youth