

Engaging Youth in Building Peaceful and Inclusive Societies

(Subtheme 1: Meaningful Youth Inclusion in Public Affairs, including in Electoral Processes)

2-min Intervention

In Singapore, partnership with youth is key as government does not have all the answers and our youth must own our future. The partnership is at 2 levels – policy and ground-up.

For policy, Singapore has four youth policy panels – (1) life hacks; (2) job hacks; (3) tech hacks; and (4) green hacks. These are not just consultative, but an effort to give policy shaping rights to youth. The process is youth-led, but government guided.

For ground-up, we have the Youth Action Challenge that allows youth to initiate projects, supported by government. Youths can mobilise their peers to create impact for society. I now invite two Singapore youths to share their experiences.

I am a youth delegate from Singapore, co-directing FiTree, an environmental group grounded in Islamic principles. At its core, the climate action movement compels us to reconnect with our shared humanity to ensure the continued existence of human civilisation. And there's no better way to do it than through the engagement of youths, the new hope for our future.

Hi, I'm Chloe. I run 32 Pages to help less resourced children build up motivation, resilience and learning through story-based social emotional learning. So I say I help children, but I feel like children help me most of the time because working with children has taught me how to navigate fears. Fears regarding learning. And I think three years of dealing with children tantrums and their big feelings, I've learned that our biggest breakthroughs didn't come because we had the best literacy program, (but) because we listened to the community needs.

Thank you.

Regional Breakout Session on Asia and the Pacific: Youth Perspectives on Regional Development – Challenges, Priorities and Actions for Realizing the SDGs & the Decade of Action

7-min Keynote Speech

Thank you for the kind words and good morning, friends. It's good to see all of you. We will have to acknowledge that we are facing the reality of not meeting the aspirational goals in 2030. But rather than see it from a lens of non-fulfillment and despair, I urge that we choose to build on what has been done and learn from what is working and what has not worked and go on from there with a hard-nosed sense of realism. And yet still holding out a flame of hope that will somehow, sometime get there. So, what have you learnt that can be applied – there are three things in my mind.

The first one is bloc action held together by collective accountability. So collective accountability is what we do here when we gather at the United Nations, but it's very hard to do collective action that is effective in the same manner. And we've learned that acting in blocs or regions can be faster and more effective because it allows for context. We can prioritise the SDGs in the context of the bloc and take action that is customised to the cultures and norms on the ground. For the action to be relevant and impactful to local stakeholders, the ability to contextualise and customise is key. And this is something we can learn from the for-profit businesses, who we know have to customise for our target audiences. Therefore, countries of the Asia Pacific coming together to tackle relevant SDGs of primary concern to us and co-sharing solutions or resources for cultures and civilisations that have more mutual commonalities and understanding is an important strike towards effective action. One example is the UNDP partnership with Asia-Pac and including Singapore for the Youth Co:Lab. Selected Youth Action Challenge teams from Singapore and other teams from the region are featured and supported at the UNDP Youth Co:Lab. This initiative is also supported by private corporations like Citibank. And some of our Singapore youth projects have sustained themselves and scaled four years on. So, this is a multi-sectoral partnership between youth, government, private and regional organisations, but all working together for bloc action. And so this is a data point that bloc action can make and sustain impact.

The second point is structuring for legitimacy and scale. So, a thousand flowers can bloom but if there is no system to pollinate, to protect, and harvest the fruit, there will be no lasting and effective outcome. Building systems and structures are hard to do and sometimes we are too lazy to do it. But the stability and continuity that a structured system affords will allow stakeholders to find their roles, not duplicate but better coordinate action, create impact in the areas they are well positioned for, and channel resources with greater intentionality. So, structure also brings mandate and permissions so that actors can take action with confidence. Take green financing, it is not simply about getting enough money, we need economy wide transition strategies and structure for transition finance to support the correct money flows. And so, for example, green financing in Asia Pacific to replace coal-fired plants in Asia between energy sources is important because the world will not get to net zero by 2050 if we do not do so. Because Asia accounts for 50% of global greenhouse gas emissions, of which a third is from coal-fired plants. So again, this is a bloc specific problem that if tackled properly, can lead to a significant global outcome. The Monetary Authority of Singapore has been working on a green finance structure to achieve a just transition out of coal-fired plants in Asia by getting credibility, incentives, and partnerships correct. So they developed the Singapore Asia taxonomy to define transition activities across eight sectors and this taxonomy enables financing to flow to climate friendly transition activities, while minimising risk of greenwashing. And the next step is to enable the taxonomy to facilitate cross-border financial flows to support green and transition projects in other geographies. So, the Monetary Authority has been working with international partners to develop contextualised pathways and even

practical guidance on sector specific transition. And they're looking at incentives to improve the economic viability of the projects so that private financing can be mobilised to support the coal phase out.

So other than block action and structure, the third insight is to pay attention to process and behavioural insights. My friends, this endeavour is about convincing people, shifting behaviors and mindsets for the longer term. This is a behavioural change movement augmented by solutions and technology. So, people and communities need to own the SDGs and change their patterns of behaviour either by choice or even by some level of coercion in their homes, villages, communities, cities, and not just the people in this building or in this room. And because this is a behavioural change – influencers, role models, and disciple makers are key, and our efforts can be enhanced if we educate and empower the influences of everyday people. This requires patient training and time, and we will need strategic patience or keep the user experience in mind because the process is just as important as the outcome, and the process when well done builds relationships and trust. And when that happens, then change can begin.

In conclusion, my point is all this can work – bloc action, hard-nosed discipline to create structure for scale and impact, and strategic patience for the process to enable lasting change. So now is not the time to waver or bemoan what could have been, now is the time to persevere and press on, and demonstrate with equal mettle, not just a call to action but concrete action alongside governments and civil society.

Thank you.