BUILDING PATHWAYS TO EMPOWERMENT

CONFERENCE ON YOUNG PEOPLE’S RIGHTS TO CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN EAST ASIA AND PACIFIC

28–29 October 2021
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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1. Barriers and opportunities for meaningful engagement of adolescents with disabilities
2. Reducing discrimination and the role of LGBTQI community in promoting social change
3. Strengthening voice and choice of girls and women
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child enshrines participation as a fundamental human right. As reinforced by the United Nations Secretary-General at the launch of the 2030 Youth Strategy, meaningful participation and engagement of young people is pivotal to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 2030 Agenda recognizes that “children and young women and men are critical agents of change and will find in the new Goals a platform to channel their infinite capacities for activism into the creation of a better world”.

It is a human rights, social and economic imperative for policymakers, decision-makers and multilateral organizations to address adolescents’ and young people’s participation and civic engagement through a structured perspective and design avenues for sustainable participation in public spheres. Civic engagement is defined as individual or collective actions in which young people participate to improve the well-being of communities or society in general.

There are 1.2 billion adolescents aged 10–19 in the world today. Approximately 300 million of them live in East Asia and the Pacific. The region has never been younger. But young people’s meaningful engagement and participation in social development remains a challenge in East Asia and the Pacific.

UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office and World Vision International, Asia Pacific Regional Office co-hosted the first regional conference “Building Pathways to Empowerment Conference on Young People’s Rights to Civic Engagement in East Asia and Pacific” centred on empowerment of adolescents and young people through meaningful engagement and participation. The conference on 28–29 October was designed and developed with and for young people from across the East Asia and Pacific region. More than 50 speakers and 500 participants from 22 countries gathered online to focus on issues of voice, choice and inclusion. The conference featured students, young innovators, youth activists, academics, legal experts, human rights experts, government officials, representatives from United Nations agencies, international organizations, civil society and the private sector who shared experiences, best practices, evidence and trends analyses supporting young people’s right to participation through civic engagement.

The goal was to create increased opportunities and mechanisms for young people’s civic engagement and mobilize commitment and action on young people’s civic engagement through partnerships and investments.

Discussion themes focused on barriers to young people’s participation, reflecting on the right to meaningful participation in practice, especially in situations when it impacts on rights to protection. In particular, the agenda drew attention to the rights of marginalized groups of adolescents and young people such as those with disabilities, young girls, LGBTIQ and ethnic minority groups.
THEMES THAT EMERGED

The interest, expertise and initiative among young people in the region on issues affecting their lives and on those related to inclusive social development and economic growth is impressive. Adolescents and young people have been effectively mobilizing themselves, making use of technology, engaging with others across their communities and countries, and creating social goods to bring about positive changes in society. Through their activism, public engagement, and volunteering work they have shown governments a clear intent to improve both their individual circumstances and the broader society. They engage for a variety of reasons: as a way of belonging, self-actualization and to learn.

The conference highlighted the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on adolescents and young people, as some of the mitigating measures such as prolonged school closures and restricted movements resulted in further limiting of civic spaces for engagement.

Participants highlighted the importance of investing in education and skills for young people, particularly in areas such as remote learning, digital literacy, and entrepreneurship. The transition through adolescence was recognized as a period of huge opportunity, through which young people could be supported in understanding their rights and claiming the same from those accountable. Barriers to engagement encompass lack of education, information, awareness, and platforms. Schools and formal learning structures were identified as legitimate spaces to encourage dialogue and embed systems, practices, and equipment to increase literacy skills, build inter-personal communication skills, and enhance self-confidence.

The importance of digital platforms and social media in the lives of adolescents and young people was another theme that emerged. In this region, adolescents and young people spend several hours online, and in some cases, they have succeeded in using such platforms effectively. However, the digital divide remains a stark reality, with digital technology favouring those who have resources and access. Discussions pointed out that young girls, those with disabilities, and young people living in remote areas have not necessarily benefitted from digital technology and are unable to use such platforms effectively to make their voices heard. The risks associated with online engagement, such as misinformation propagated via social media platforms, hate speech, and bullying were also highlighted as areas of concern. Young participants pointed towards the need for governments, private sector organizations and the broader society to be better at providing an enabling environment that is also a protective space, striking a balance between ensuring protection while enhancing participation.

Young people learn extensively from each other through peer-to-peer engagements. Discussions throughout the conference showcased examples of how diverse platforms have been utilised to create collaborations, share ideas, influence positive behaviour, and mobilize peer networks to take action on matters such as public health emergencies, mental health, and climate change among others. Finally, the conference reinforced the fact that governments must prioritize engagement with adolescents and young people, by creating structures and platforms to amplify their voices, engaging them in designing programmes and policies, and ensuring their ideas were given due consideration. As one of the participants highlighted: “We can act better when we act together.”
Recommendations for going forward elaborated on the needs for investment in safe spaces for participation; investments in learning, skills and capacity-building initiatives; promotion of youth-led volunteerism; protection of human rights, especially the right to be protected from violence or crime; and incentivizing young people’s engagement.

Launched at the General Assembly 2018 September session.

Additionally, in the resolution 68/130 (2014), the UN General Assembly urged “Member States and entities of the United Nations System, in consultation with youth-led organizations, to explore avenues to promote full, effective, structured and sustainable participation of young people and youth-led organizations in decision-making processes.”

This resolution is reinforced by the Human Rights Council Resolution 32/L.1.


INTRODUCTION

Many themes and crystalized strands of the new normal emerged through this first jointly hosted conference on meaningful participation with and for children and youth, each one a powerful guide. But among them, one idea particularly resonated with young people and with the purpose of the gathering: Young people are no longer the future, they are the present. They have ideas, suggestions, solutions and wisdom that are needed today for helping countries and the planet find recovered, sustainable, fair and inclusive paths into the future. They are a force not to be underestimated. And for this two-day conference, they were, as they should be in many other spaces, an equal partner.

UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office and World Vision International, Asia Pacific Regional Office co-hosted the first regional conference (28–29 October) centred on empowerment of young people through meaningful engagement and participation. It was designed and developed with young people from across the Asia–Pacific region. More than 50 speakers and 500 participants from 22 countries gathered online to focus on issues of voice, choice and inclusion. The point was to discuss what is working vis a vis meaningful participation and engagement of young people, what needs to change, and what can be more effectively to promote their voice and action.

Approximately 300 million adolescents live in East Asia and the Pacific. The region has never been younger. According to CIVICUS data, only 9 of the 39 countries in the region—representing less than 2 per cent of the population—have a civic space. Young girls and boys must be empowered as equal partners in constructing the future of their nations. Young people’s meaningful engagement and participation in social development is a right and is critically important for the present and the future. Grounded in Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, participation is a right that all ratifying governments (all but two in the world) have committed to upholding. It is a precondition to the enjoyment of other rights. And yet, young people’s civic engagement remains a nuanced challenge and, in some countries, their civic space is under threat.

The conference provided a platform for the safe expression of views and exchange of ideas on the topic of meaningful participation and empowerment. It also enabled networks and organizations led by young people to build bridges and ties. Through the panels, presentations and participant discussions, the conference explored the environment needed to support young people’s civic engagement, partnerships to expand civic engagement and empowerment and civic engagement at scale, looking at volunteerism, the internet, social media and the challenges of engagement.

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5 United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division
CIVICUS Monitor: https://monitor.civicus.org/
Session 1: OPENING

Welcome Remarks
Marcoluigi Corsi
UNICEF East Asia and Pacific
Regional Director, a.i.

Engagement of young people in ASEAN context
H.E. Ekkaphab Phanthavong
Deputy Secretary General, ASEAN
Socio Cultural Community

Access to rights and the SDGs for children and young people
Agatha Lydia Nathania
ASEAN Youth Organization

Perspectives on different aspects of empowerment of adolescents and young people
Mikiko Otani
Chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child

Keynote speeches on young people’s participation and civic engagement
Dr Bernadine Brady
National University of Ireland, Galway

Professor Philippa Collin
Western Sydney University
A United Nations officer, a regional leader, a young activist, a human rights lawyer and two academic researchers set the dynamic tone for the first joint UNICEF and World Vision conference on the real change needed to more realistically engage young people in dialogues and solutions on all matters affecting their lives.

The speakers applauded the egalitarian involvement of young people as equals in setting the agenda and designing the conference. But they also acknowledged that the voices of youth have been sidelined for too long in discussions. And this has to change, Ms Mikiko Otani remarked.

Ms Otani drew attention to recent high-level developments that promote that change: In 2020, Member States made 12 critical commitments in the Declaration of Commemoration of the 70th Anniversary of the United Nations that includes listening to and working with youth. The Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, she also pointed out, enshrines participation as a fundamental human right. As reinforced by the United Nations Secretary-General at the launch of the 2030 Youth Strategy, meaningful participation and engagement of young people is pivotal to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. And in his report, Our Common Agenda, the Secretary-General pledged solidarity with younger generations.

In opening the two-day conference, Mr Corsi made clear that young people have proven to be an involved and essential part of the population of East Asia and the Pacific. He emphasized the need for people in government, organizations and communities to recognize the capacity of young people and create opportunities for them to express their concerns so that they can more meaningfully participate in matters affecting their life and to support their governments, communities and organizations with their ideas and solutions.

As the ASEAN Deputy Secretary General, H.E. Phanthavong talked about how the unprecedented disruptions and difficult times due to the COVID-19 pandemic have had an immense impact on children and young people. ASEAN has responded with a framework, adopted in 2020, to guide the region to better cooperation with youth and to create a fairer ecosystem for young people. H.E. Phanthavong cited several platforms at the ASEAN level to hear from what young people are doing in their communities, what can be done further to reduce gaps between young people’s needs and expectations and emerging policy and practices, and advance cooperation between partners.

“Most of our participants are high school and university students. They are very passionate, and they have this willingness to learn and to network with like-minded young people to share their experiences, to hear the other realities and also to collaborate with the other young people. This is the reason why we have pledged, because we want to create a platform to hear the voices of these young people and how we can discuss together how we can do something about it and how we can take action.”

Agatha Lydia Nathania
ASEAN Youth Organization
It is essential to understand “who are the adolescents and young people” of today’s societies, Ms Nathania said. They are facing many wide-ranging challenges, such as financial difficulties, discrimination, hate speech, child marriage, education, exploitation and the COVID-19 pandemic. But more and more adolescents and young people are voicing out and engaging with social, economic, environment and human rights issues and now they must be engaged to be part of the solutions. Citing Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, she said that empowering young people also requires continually introducing their right to express their opinions, even at the early stage of adolescence. Channels to hear their voices need to be made available and sustained and they must link to policy-making processes. She believes that more dialogue and collaboration among government officials, youth organizations and schools will ensure meaningful participation and long-lasting participation.

Echoing Ms Nathania’s comment on understanding the young generation, Dr Brady said that there is plenty of evidence countering the sense that young people are disengaged. Rather, they engage differently in society these days. Dr Brady, who researches civic and political engagement, touched on definitions of engagement and moving away from “old-fashioned views” of citizenship and political engagement to more dynamic and creative forms of citizenship. Technology and social media are hugely important to this process. Among the many strategies around capacity-building she has found is citizenship education in schools and service learning in universities, whereby young people undertake projects and have hands-on experience and targeted training projects.

“*Young people…are major components of every society but have been excluded from decision-making. They have not been recognized, and it is time to involve children and young people as a key partner in decision-making processes and activities for implementation of the 2030 Agenda [for Sustainable Development].*”

Mikiko Otani
Chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child

Access does not necessarily equal influence, warned Ms Collin. Young people are structurally disadvantaged in many intersecting ways, including through disability, gender and class, that affect how they participate and are heard in local, national and international contexts. Building bridges to cross the data gaps need to involve young people as researchers. While young people’s rights to participation is recognized and even valued, many organizations, communities and officials lack the skills and tools to enact change. This is partly due to a focus on young people and what they need and not on what organizations and institutions require to change their practices. Building bridges across the gaps require investing digital partnerships and filling data gaps by involving young people as researchers. Building a global community of students, researchers, educators and scholars to act on development challenges is one of the many directions we should be heading into.

One theme throughout the session was that the engagement of adolescents is about empowering them to take control of their own lives. It is about creating structures and platforms for participation and investing in their capacity to be productive and empowered members of the community in both political and non-political processes. This includes...
There are concerns that the future of democracy could be in jeopardy if young people do not learn to participate and become socialized into the working society.

Dr Bernadine Brady
National University of Ireland, Galway

access to information, freedom of expression, freedom of association and peaceful assembly in political and non-political processes.

Another common theme that was reiterated was that even though decisions by leaders, private sector organizations and other entities have made a huge impact on the future of children and adolescents, the opportunity for them to be heard and to engage with others affecting their life remains delicate. Increasingly, when children and young people have spoken out on issues affecting their rights, their fundamental rights have been taken away, they have been left without support, and exposed to harm and abuse. It is incumbent, Mr Corsi stressed, to ensure that children and adolescents are protected from violence at all times, including times of civic unrest or armed conflict.

Transforming and translating some of these concepts for the most marginalized and vulnerable groups, reiterated Ms Collin, revolves around information and learning. Peer-to-peer learning and teaching in local communities was cited as an example where young people have often taken a lead in several communities.

As for what it takes to engage with governments and partners, Ms Nathania stressed persistence and creative activity. If one door is closed, her group leans towards collaborative projects with other organizations that may have a pathway to decision-makers. Ms Otani highlighted the landmark legal work in which young human rights defenders took on the issue of climate change. The Committee on the Rights of the Child held a hearing for the case and heard directly from child activists. The outcome was not encouraging but demonstrated that children can act as defenders of not only their human rights but also on broader topics such as environmental issues and its impact on their lives. Above all, it showed the importance of children having access to justice at national and international levels.

...children can act as defenders of not only their human rights but also on broader topics such as environmental issues and its impact on their lives.
Session 2:

RIGHT TO SAFE AND MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION IN POLICY AND PRACTICE

GLOBAL AND REGIONAL LAWS AND POLICIES, CONCEPTS OF RIGHT TO PROTECTION AND PARTICIPATION, AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY AND LEGAL EMPOWERMENT.

SPEAKERS

Unpacking adolescents’ and young peoples’ rights to participation in decision-making

Professor Laura Lundy
Queen’s University of Belfast

Key perspectives on participation of young people in the ASEAN context

Sarah Elago
ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights

Youth-led best practices on claiming rights to participation through civic engagement

Qyira Yusri
Co-Founder and Education Director, UNDI 18

UNICEF’s engagement on right to safe and meaningful participation and the legal empowerment framework

Lucio Valerio Sarandrea
Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF EAPRO
Looking at how to ensure the meaningful and safe participation of young people, the speakers discussed participation from different angles: the framework that can guide thinking about adolescents’ participation, civic engagement and the ways in which young people are engaging, especially in the COVID-19 context.

Best practices, youth-led participation and the legal empowerment of marginalized adolescents and young people were the primary themes. Ms Miller noted that meaningful participation of children and young people is a right in and of itself and a precondition for the enjoyment of other rights.

“Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child…says that governments shall ensure that every child is capable of forming their own views and has the right to express them freely in every matter affecting them.”

**Professor Laura Lundy**
Queen’s University of Belfast

Professor Lundy discussed a simple yet innovative framework for supporting effective civic engagement, called the Lundy model of child participation, which looks at space, voice, audience and influence. Space, she said, must be actively created, be safe and inclusive. Participation, or voice, must be voluntary and include choice in the mode of expression because young people communicate in different ways. With regard to influence, it is important to be realistic, transparent and provide participants with feedback. To ensure that children and adolescents come into processes with views that are informed, child-friendly documentation is crucial. Processes should be inclusive and include young people who are seldom heard.

The protection of young people, and in particular adolescents, participating on the front-line of human rights, justice, peace and climate, both online and offline is urgent and essential, Ms Elago said. Young people are on the receiving end of threats and harassment just for performing their mandates as student councils or public speakers. The internet and social
media have been weaponized to discredit or silence voices, but young people are now pushing for policy reforms and urging CEOs to make the internet and social media safer for children, young people, and women. Ms Elago urged ASEAN blueprints to be more than ideas on paper.

Young people have taken up dynamic roles in COVID-19 relief initiatives, Ms Elago pointed out. She talked about their dynamism and potential in building back better. The pandemic had demonstrated the relevance of decision-making and of government interventions, and there was renewed interest among young people to be engaged and contribute. Ms Yusri noted that young people are using both online and offline spaces to speak up. Online, they are launching petitions and social media pages to raise awareness and educate the public. Offline, they have gone onto the streets to demonstrate, with care for the pandemic and carefully following best protocols. The crisis has been transformative for youth.

A common theme reinforced by several speakers was the power of political action and representation. Ms Yusri outlined youth-led work in both the political and legal spheres. Ms Elago emphasized the right to be seen, to be heard and to hold power.

The speakers also discussed legal empowerment and judicial activism. Ms Yusri outlined the experience of the UNDI 18 grass-roots movement in advocating for the adoption and implementation of policies focused on increasing meaningful youth participation, including by reducing the age of voter registration and political participation. When the Government announced a delay to implementation, Ms Yusri and peers took to the courts to challenge it. Twenty-four people aged 18–21 sued the Government for their right to vote, on behalf of 1.2 million young people in Malaysia, and won. This judicial activism was a reversal to the previous trend of young people being disenfranchised by the law.

To ensure that rights are not simply written on paper but rather are put into practice, it is important to focus on legal empowerment, and ensure that young people have legal advice, whether this comes from lawyers, social workers, teachers or others, Mr Sarandrea said. The law needs to benefit everyone. Although the focus previously was on top-down approaches to law and legal empowerment to protect children through the enactment of new laws and new legislations, legal empowerment looks at the way to achieve possession of rights as being a bottom-up process. UNICEF is committed to supporting children and their representatives, the stakeholders, to use the law and benefit from the law.
Several speakers cited the situation in which adolescents and young people had their views solicited and then saw nothing change. When young people raise their voices or make their case and get no result, the gap between them and the State grows, with damage to social cohesion—a core of democratic stability, Mr Sarandrea said. Professor Lundy said that child and youth participants should be given feedback with a ‘four-F framework’: fast, full, child-friendly and followed-up. Such feedback is the critical juncture for transparency and accountability and lies at the centre of a human-rights based framework.
Session 3:

ROLE OF EDUCATION IN PROMOTING MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT OF ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE

HOW ACCESS TO LEARNING, INCREASED KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTISE OF DEMOCRATIC POLICIES IN SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS CAN FOSTER CIVIC AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT.

SPEAKERS

Professor Lucas Walsh
Monash University

Dr Cathy Waite
Monash University

Yen Esmerald
E Net Philippines

Earl Joshua Santos
Youth-Led Action Research Catalyst

Jose de Jesus
Civil Society Education Partnership, Timor-Leste
This insightful discussion looked at the positive and negative influences of schools in promoting young people’s civic and political engagement.

Professor Walsh and Dr Waite provided a comprehensive overview on how schools offer opportunities and skills for civic and political engagement. Teachers have a powerful role in education. They inspire and link learning in schools to wider settings and issues of importance to young people. Fostering learning in young people elicits powerful responses—it is a powerful catalyst for participation in wider society. But teachers can also be controlling and sometimes disregard or diminish students’ displays of political attachments in school spaces. They can sometimes diminish the significance of events that are taking place online by writing them off or, as Ms Waite has found, even banning discussion. The very structure of the classroom represents a challenge, however: Teachers are in a position of physical authority while students sit in rows where they are surveyed, assessed and regulated. Thus, in their very structure, schools can unintentionally reproduce passive constraining experiences of citizenship.

A second challenge relates to the curriculum, which is often a reflection of limited frameworks and national constraints. Investing in quality education will reflect better engagement and empowerment of children and adolescents, which includes development of participation, openness to ideas without discrimination or restriction on youth to express themselves on the challenges presented in society.

“Schools are particularly important because they are one of the first places in which many children and young people will first experience belonging and exclusion and thus are enablers of civic and political engagement.”

Professor Lucas Walsh
Monash University
Another theme explored during the session was the importance of what takes place outside of the school, often being as important as what occurs within it. Professor Walsh and Dr Waite discussed volunteering, club membership and even online activity that contributes to a cause as ‘incubators of active citizenship’, particularly due to the influence of peers, which evidence consistently shows is greater than parents and school.

The global pandemic crisis exposed challenges and lessons in current education systems, including the strain of providing civic engagement for adolescents in schools. With the digital divide challenging the provision of quality education and meaningful participation in these pandemic times, it is necessary to explore the limits of education. The recovery paths will need strong investment in the new normal. This includes investing in inclusive and accessible education to promote participation in nation-building. A pathway to empowerment is quality education as well as for youth to understand their right to civic rights. It is the duty of partners of a State to create the broadest of alliances of youth groups.

In the Philippines, for example, the Youth-led Action Research Group, or YAR, emerged during the first lockdown period of the COVID-19 pandemic originally to mobilize volunteer groups of high school students to collect and distribute food and hygiene kits. As Ms Esmerald and Mr Santos explained, YAR started with small group discussions on youth rights, fake news and how to deal with it and psychosocial support for one another in response to the anxiety and fear the pandemic situation was cultivating. It evolved into a forum of collective action to respond to immediate needs and long-term demands on the government, especially in education and the provision of computer and connectivity, with multisector support across the region. YAR works with youth- and school-led organizations to lobby governments and provides empowering tools to counter all forms of exclusion and discrimination and thus enable active and meaningful participation in governance and peacebuilding.

“If we all help each other and contribute our knowledge, skills and talents, we are capable of changing our situations through our collectivity.”

Earl Joshua Santos
Youth-Led Action Research Catalyst

Poll: What kind of support would benefit students in school to participate in civic engagement?

- Inclusive environment: 26%
- Engaging skill building activities: 21%
- Mentoring and Guidance: 42%
- Safe spaces and infrastructure support: 11%
“Here we also raising voices for the right [of marginalized youth] to quality education, the active engagement that we conducted with various stakeholders and partners, both virtual and face to face, at the local, municipal, national, regional and global levels.”

Jose de Jesus
Civil Society Education Partnership, Timor-Leste

Another initiative that was cited was the Civil Society Education Partnership in Timor-Leste that began in 2020, focusing on marginalized youth. As Mr de Jesus explained, the forum concentrates on strengthening civil engagement processes with other civil society organizations to provide capacity-building training for empowering marginalized youth members to conduct research, monitoring and advocacy on education in thirteen municipalities. The youth forum members then present their findings and analysis in the form of youth-led action research reports to high-level government members.

Speakers reiterated the importance of empowering marginalized young people across the region to speak out. Initiatives encouraging young people to participate in platforms such as policy forums, community-based action groups and other such structures create pathways for empowerment by promoting young peoples’ communication, interpersonal and leadership skills.
Session 4:

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND VOLUNTEERISM AS PATHWAYS TO SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT - BUILDING RESILIENCE, PROMOTING PEACE-BUILDING

HOW YOUNG PEOPLE ACQUIRE SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT THROUGH VOLUNTEERISM AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, SHOWCASING THE WORK OF ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN EAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC REGION.

PANELLISTS

Raylin (Lily) Satidtananasam
Climate Change Activist, Thailand

Maria Theresa Llorente
Elected Youth Official, Philippines

Muhammad Anwar Bin Mohd Nor
Advisor of International Islamic University Malaysia Student Union

Roy Wasi
Young Leader, World Vision, Solomon Islands, Solomon Islands
The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes children and young women and men as critical agents of change.

The Sustainable Development Goals provide a platform to channel their infinite capacity into the creation of a better world. Volunteer groups are explicitly mentioned as stakeholders who can present evidence to high-level political forums and other review processes.

Research from the United Nations Volunteer Programme showed that notwithstanding the challenges of COVID 19 across the world, adolescents’ and young peoples’ desire to participate in civic affairs and work with others on innovative solutions to local problems has increased. Young people reported a high degree of engagement in volunteerism across different communities and societies, often eager to contribute their time and even assets. The analysis also revealed that many young people in the region do not want to call themselves volunteers for different reasons, including a negative connotation. They prefer to identify as activists, interns, paid employees or social entrepreneurs. The term volunteer, volunteerism and voluntary activities refer to a range of activities undertaken of free will for the general public good and when monetary reward is not a principle motivating factor.

Not all people perceive civic engagement as volunteering. The five categories of volunteering—mutual aid, service, campaigning, participation and leisure—should be framed as different dimensions of volunteering. Often volunteers see themselves as leaders, decision-makers, social entrepreneurs, planners and evaluators, Ms Asadova said, and volunteering should be considered an evolving social behaviour and not a static participation avenue.

According to Ms Asadova, adolescents and young people are turning crisis into opportunities for collective action through volunteering and giving. She drew on the experiences of the panellists as aspiring innovators and participants or instigators of social impact projects to highlight challenges to volunteering and how they recommend mobilizing other young people to advocate on issues that matter to them.
As the speakers detailed, volunteerism provided entry points for adolescence and young people to determine their own priorities, agendas and engage with young people. Volunteering thus can be a catalyst, particularly for adolescents and young people to participate in political activism or to create their own spaces for their voices. It is also a way through which adolescents and young people are passionately seeking social transformations, far beyond delivering social services.

For example, Ms Satidtanasarn, now 14, is considered the Thai Greta Thunberg who led a movement that she started six years earlier that succeeded in the ban of single-use plastic in Thailand, and she advocates for eco-education to be taught in school. Her crusade required her to seek out government officials and supermarket retailers. Her biggest challenge then was being taken seriously as a person bent on changing the world. It took time to overcome those attitudes, with many meetings over the years to establish equal footing and an equal solution towards creating a better future. Her solution to this challenge was empathy and compassion: We all live on the same planet and we all have equal responsibility to take care of it. How can other adolescents be motivated to become active, civic activists and volunteers? The work of Greta Thunberg, the influence of a socially involved mother and being part of many organizations that support her and push her towards goals are all inspirations. Her activism erupted through the knowledge of the issues surrounding the environment. It was evident to her that both adolescents and adults can be changemakers. Education and information are major driving factors to civic engagement, she stressed.

In Malaysia, Mr Nor leads many community projects through his university and membership in several non-government organizations, like Hospitals Foundry. He participates at the ASEAN level through the Student Volunteers Foundation under the Ministry of Higher Education and is currently leading (since 2016) a mental health empowerment project. Volunteering, he said, is a responsibility to others. It is like a rental cost for the days we are living in this world. We only borrow this world for a while, and future generations will be replacing us eventually. It provides a sense of belonging and being part of the community. It is an inclusive and empowering journey, an inspiring investment. Our abilities should be complementary to those of others. We need others and others need us. Volunteering brings a sense of belonging and community. It offers many advantages and leads to a happiness that money cannot buy. What does it take to create and sustain platforms and spaces and communities of empowered young people? Mr Nor first credited the people who worked with him and said it starts with the first step. Know yourself, identify the needs. Finding your passion and empowering others and learning from others and embracing volunteering as a collective action.
Ms Llorente described how she moved from volunteering in the Philippines to running for and winning elected office. Her motivation began in elementary school through seeing how the work of volunteers resolved community issues. In high school and college her volunteerism expanded through youth groups when she saw the power that emerged from being surrounded by people with similar goals and sentiments for making change. Volunteerism is a way of knowing place in the community: are you going to be a person who helps other people. Her volunteer work helped her now in her work as a catalyst for change and a nation-builder. Barriers that people face in volunteering can include lack of funds and general attitudes towards young people as inexperienced. In government, barriers include a lack of fellow young leaders and a ‘superiority complex’ among older people in government and a stigma about being young alongside them. In her role, she works to provide volunteering programmes and projects that will enable and ensure active meaningful and holistic participation in society of all youth in nation-building.

In the Solomon Islands, Mr Wasi, 16 years old, is a young advocate for climate change. He is part of a youth group developing ideas to improve the community. He mentors other young people on environmental issues and organizes life skills and first aid training. It is a great opportunity for him to learn from other youth and address climate change. He has watched how the rising sea level, coast erosion, salinization and extreme weather patterns have impacted food security and homes and how it affects women and children differently. Scarcity of food creates stress in families that affects decision-making and leads to violence. He recognizes how all young people need proper training to be empowered and to become effective advocates and influence national policy-makers. For future planning, there needs to be more awareness and advocacy on climate change.

“We need proper training in order to empower and raise awareness and become effective advocates in communities to take action against the impact of climate change in our country. Our voices need to influence national level policymakers, influence our leaders to contribute to climate change.”

Roy Wasi
Young Leader, World Vision, Solomon Islands, Solomon Islands

“When it comes to youth volunteer groups...I saw that when you are surrounded by people who have the same goal, who have the same sentiment for making change, you will be more powerful.”

Theresa Llorente
Elected Youth Official, Philippines
Session 5:

DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT - PUSHING THE POSSIBILITIES OF MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION AND EXPLORING OPPORTUNITIES ONLINE

HOW TECHNOLOGICAL PROGRESS IN THE REGION PRESENTS RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPAND DIGITAL CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE.

PANELISTS

Vu An
Youth Advisory Group, Viet Nam

Saw Wai Moe
Volunteer, U-Report Myanmar

Alya Sabira
Founder of State of Youth, Sukabumi, Indonesia
Social media offers a huge opportunity to provide a critical platform for civic engagement and participation and to make connections for young people beyond their immediate community.

Although it is a fantastic opportunity, the panellists emphasized the provision of access to all young people and to bridging the digital divide so everyone really can participate. With the opportunity comes big risks that cannot be ignored. Not all children or young people experience these risks the same, and online risks are inextricably linked with offline risks. Going forward it is important to remember that the situation does not call for eliminating risks. Rather, managing risks is part of adolescent growth and development. The risks need to be mitigated in a way that prioritizes participation. Adults need to be role models and create communities in which positive interaction is prioritized—not negative interaction. They need to work with young people to set the standards.

A common theme throughout the responses is not to underestimate young people: They are tech savvy beyond the comprehension of adults, who are largely late to the game. Young people are active participants leading the way in this digital era. There needs to be a comprehensive package of support for young people in terms of digital literacy and understanding but yet builds a framework around them that enables and facilitates participation and creates digital trust. Digital engagement, unfortunately, entails a massive level of misinformation, sexism and certain dangers on the internet. Different sectors have different roles, and one sector cannot do this alone. It will take young people, families, societies, government and the private sector working together to create a safe space where young people can have meaningful engagement. The job of a whole-society approach is to facilitate and ensure safe participation so that the online world is a space that can be capitalized on safely by young people to really effectively and meaningfully participate.
Another broad theme was that social media is not to be underestimated. Social media is a platform for positive engagement and participation, but it is also powerful in the spread of misinformation.

In Viet Nam, the Youth Advisory Group has worked the past three years with policymakers to provide recommendations through digital engagement on a Youth Law that was adopted in 2020. Mr An, who is the Secretary of the Group, underscored the vitality and imperative of Zoom, Facebook and Microsoft for gathering ideas and opinions of young people from around the countries on the proposed policies. These opinions are gathered and turned into recommendations for the policymakers, with some success in the inclusion in the final law. In Viet Nam, around 63 per cent of the population has a smartphone and most social activities are on Facebook. These activities and online participation through Facebook help young people connect with each other and work together for better change for the community. Many community groups have appeals on Facebook to protect the environment and national heritage. There are other groups where people carry out civic education through online courses. They can learn about human rights, universal values and issues that are not taught in school. Many groups of young people raise public awareness around gender diversity, student rights and so on. Young people in Viet Nam are learning how to be responsible citizens, and they want to use social media to discuss public issues. However, misinformation remains a big concern for young people. People who are not educated in school about misinformation, disinformation or cyber bullying have often become victims.

Mr Moe defined digital engagement as what is impactful and what leads to change. As of 2021, he pointed out, Myanmar has 30 million social media users—63 per cent of the population. This includes 27 million Facebook users and 1.4 on Instagram. Urban areas have more digital access. While he had started using social media only to update friends and family, he realized the impact of social media when he started volunteering with U-Report, a social media platform created by UNICEF. One opinion may not have a significant impact, but opinions combined can support a change. Many people, he said, use U-Report as a digital engagement platform to express their opinions and talk about issues. These views are collected, amplified and delivered to the decision-makers, he said. Social media enabled U-Report’s work with Parliament members on budget inputs. Previously, young people’s voices were not heard in Parliament. But now elected members are interested in hearing how young people perceive the budget and what they think of current spending plans. In response, Mr. Moe and his group formulated questions and asked young people how they feel about public services and the level of investment. Their responses urged more funding in the public sector to fulfil the needs of people. What made the difference was having decision-makers with the intention and interest to listen to young people.

“Many groups of young people raise public awareness around gender diversity, student rights and so on. I think that is how young people talk to the country, the government, the stakeholders and these are the issues we care about and we want to change. We want to use social media to discuss public issues.”

Vu An
Youth Advisory Group, Viet Nam

“Misinformation is an important issue when you use the internet and online.”

Saw Wai Moe
Volunteer, U-Report Myanmar
Tackling misinformation has become an important issue, Mr Moe agreed. There was a heightened level of effort to reduce misinformation among the population in Myanmar as the general election approached, Mr Moe said. When the pandemic was first starting to spread, a considerable amount of misinformation surfaced in relation to COVID-19 and as much as possible he helped to alert Facebook users to posts and information that were inaccurate. Social media companies, such as Facebook, could invest further in tackling misinformation.

In Indonesia, most young people use Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and also U-Report Indonesia, which is a new trend for the country, Ms Sabira pointed out. One person sharing news of an event, a comment or even a ‘like’ can go viral in no time. Young people also participate in social campaigns through social media. They participate in webinars on issues they care about and convey their messages to the government through the use of platforms such as U-Report. Although some people believe that the internet is not safe for women, women can access the internet and social media. However, girls have less access to Internet than boys and face obstacles, largely due to online gender-based violence. They often receive offensive comments or are told they should not speak out on their opinions. There is a stigma associated with girls using social media. Digital engagement and engaging in society are human rights. It is the right for girls and for women to speak out. But the internet at present does not provide a safe space for girls—a more positive space needs to be created.

The internet, the moderator summed up, is really a double-edge sword: There are good things like being able to connect with like-minded people, organize and act upon issues you care about in your community. But there are also negative and harmful aspects like misinformation and abuse on the internet. And thus, more investment is needed from governments and duty-bearers to work towards building safer and more inclusive digital platforms and ensure that young people have adequate information on using the Internet responsibly.

“When a girl speaks out, many people commenting you should not speak about it.”

Alya Sabira
Founder of State of Youth
Sukabumi, Indonesia
Session 5: **FIRESIDE CHAT**

**Moderator**

Rachel Harvey  
Child Protection Regional Advisor, UNICEF EAPRO

**Panelists**

- **Professor Amanda Third**  
  Western Sydney University

- **Philip Ling**  
  Head of Sustainability, Digi Telecommunications

- **Sandra Cortesi**  
  Fellow, Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society, Harvard University  
  and Director of Youth and Media
Although the COVID-19 pandemic has driven people to spend more time online, the phenomenon of the internet and social media for years has been a universal connecting and engaging medium. It is an impactful avenue for young people to advocate on issues and express their passions, whether within their country or globally. Social media has been a critical channel to gather views of a large number of young people quickly on key issues.

The digital divide was there long before the pandemic, but the pandemic exacerbated the reality. There were dangers and online crimes involving girls and boys before the pandemic that made it an unsafe space. And in some countries, young people are being punished for using the online space to advocate. These realities are preventing some young people from engaging online in a specific space.

Throughout the day’s sessions, there were recurring themes of, one, the need for meaningful listening when young people share their voices for the impact to be as big as possible. Two, young people have to be supported to be safe online and they need to be supported to capitalize on the opportunity that social media encapsulates. The double-edged sword cannot be avoided.

Ms Cortesi noted that while indeed many young people use the space as a group to either insult or advocate, on individual levels many of them are engaging in activities that help them gain financial, social and cultural capital. Some young people use Facebook and other platforms to make money and support their families. Other young people gain social capital as they expand their community and networks. This building of networks can be to advocate for something or to find mentors or friends beyond the physical community, or to gain cultural capital by advocating for issues and gain a certain standing within the community. Overall, the roles and responsibilities of adults are to continue to support young people to have access to devices and the resources they truly need to connect online. Adults can support them in acquiring more skills and feeling more agency over their engagement. That is the basic expectation to be worked on. There have been many references to girls and rural communities.

“We need to think about how to involve young people. I do not mean in programmes or events but all levels of strategy and decision-making. It is crucial moving forward. We must make choices with young people and not about young people.”

Professor Amanda Third
Western Sydney University
And while it is critical to ensure platforms for young people to share their views, some people feel a fear of speaking out online. This region has seen digital platforms being used to advocate, protest and engage in big movements in children’s lives and communities. Ms Third addressed whether the risks can be mitigated without infringing on young people’s rights to engage. In recent consultations conducted in 28 countries on how States interpret the Convention on the Rights of the Child for the digital age, young people reported highly valuing the freedom of expression and participation rights. It was a universal finding and echoed the sentiments from young people in the prior sessions who expressed fear of how expressing their views online could expose them to high levels of criticism, not just by other young people but by parents and other adults. This is a universal concern for young people that must be addressed. The fear of victimization is a deterrent to participating in online spaces.

Although it is easy to say that adults need to educate young people better about how they should be online and about respectful relationships, what is often not acknowledged is that the majority of young people understand how to behave online. They understand that expressing their views means to be respectful of others. Young people need to be given more credit and not underestimated. Rather, adults need to think harder about how they role model appropriate behaviours towards other people offline as well as online.

Ms Third noted that all the possibilities of digital participation for young people’s civic engagement have yet to be realized. Allowing that balancing the risks and advantages is an operative term, she concurred with Ms Cortesi that while we need to watch out for the risks, it is vital to open up the opportunities.

The session highlighted how in addition to individual identities, digital media helps to imagine ourselves as collective identities. There is a possibility these days for adolescents and young people to think of themselves as a global constituency. Connecting online lets them imagine themselves as part of a global audience. Never have young people had the possibility to think of themselves as a group able to take action in this way. For example, the Friday for the Future movement allows young people around the world to identify with each other.

Indeed, the internet provides an endless stream of information. And it is easy to slip into echo chambers or dark holes full of misinformation. Is it possible to ensure safe access to a diverse range of information that informs opinion? What is the role of the government and the role of private sector companies that deal in digital media? In a survey with tech savvy young people, Mr Ling found that despite their extensive experience, they too grappled with the challenges of misinformation and know how to differentiate what is real and fake. There are ‘infodemics’, like a pandemic, he said. It is an ongoing challenge for both government
and the private sector. Going forward, one of the ways to resolve the tech-based information problem is tech itself. Tech companies are realizing there is digital trust and once it is lost, it is hard to rebuild. But young people can lead the way. Along with digital citizenship and safety, new digital skills are needed. There is room for young people to help look for solutions. And young people must always recognize that there are groups of young people who are vulnerable. While advocating solutions, young people need to look out for their peers in vulnerable communities. When this is done, it will have a huge positive change in the way tech functions.
Session 6:

**CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE FOR AND BY CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

YOUNG CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS AND LEADERS’ KEY INSIGHTS ON CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN THE REGION TOWARDS ADVANCING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND FINDINGS FROM THE UNICEF REGIONAL REPORT ON STATE OF LEGAL EMPOWERMENT TO ADVANCE CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE FOR CHILDREN IN EAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC REGION

**PRESENTERS**

- **Erin Eckhoff**
  Senior Associate on the International Law Team, King and Wood Mallesons

- **Louise Mabulo**
  UNEP Young Champion of the Earth and Founder of The Cacao Project

- **Nick Horton**
  Solicitor, King & Wood Mallesons

- **Celine Ng**
  Project VOCAL, EcoKnights

- **Patti Moore**
  Senior Legal Expert Consultant on Children’s Rights to a Healthy Environment, UNEP and UNICEF East Asia and Pacific

- **Aidil Iman**
  Malaysian Youth Delegation and MyHutan initiative

- **Amin-Erdene Lkhamsuren**
  Project Officer, Scout Association of Mongolia

**PANELLISTS**

Moderator

**Lameya Alam**
Regional Dialogue and the Fellowship Programme Coordinator of Youth Empowerment in Climate Action Platform, United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF is working with King & Wood Mallesons to develop a regional legal empowerment strategy to support climate and environmental justice for children in East Asia and the Pacific.

Their research to date illuminates five observations with relevance to advancing climate and environmental justice: (i) Due to technology, it has never been easier to become involved in the global, national or local social movements, such as climate justice. An example of this is the “Bye Bye Plastic Bags” campaign that two teenage sisters started in Bali, Indonesia, using social media and an online petition to create a movement that has now expanded to more than 50 countries. (ii) Lawyers and other people with legal knowledge and skills are taking on powerful roles in helping children access justice on climate and environmental issues. For example, Earth Justice, an international law firm that is also a non-profit organization, filed a complaint to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child that involved prominent youth activists including Greta Thunberg and activists from the Marshall Islands. (iii) Youth can support and empower each other. A good example is Klima Action Malaysia, which is youth-led action justice with members who are overwhelmingly under the age of 25 and female. They run climate workshops for schools, universities and communities, even during the lockdown periods, and have created accessible educational material, such as podcasts on the climate crisis. (iv) Adults do not need a law degree to empower youth—anyone can do it. An example of this is the role of litigation guardians, people who help children to bring legal
proceedings, such as suing another person, because children do not have the legal capacity under national laws to do so. Finally, (v) governments can be an important champion of children's interests around climate change and climate justice. An example of this is the campaign in the Pacific Islands to seek an Advisory Opinion from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) around the obligations of States with present and future generations negatively affected by climate change.

Ms Moore outlined current work related to children's rights to a healthy environment in South-East Asia on which UNICEF, the United Nations Environment Programme and the UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner have been collaborating with children, youth and adults. One third of the population in the ASEAN region are young people, and this means that one third are particularly vulnerable to environmental harm. Recognition of environmental rights within the children's rights framework has accelerated in recent years, as demonstrated by a review in the children's rights framework, although experts working in the two areas still often did not overlap. The new “Principles and Policy Guidance on Children's Rights to a Safe, Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment in the ASEAN Region” outlines nine general principles and twenty-eight specific principles for realizing children's rights to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment. The policy guidance is targeted at five stakeholder groups: states, civil society, businesses, media and children and it was developed through a consultative process with experts in the fields of child rights and environmental issues, including children and youth from across the region that were part of this Conference.
PANEL DISCUSSIONS

The challenges for young people in their climate justice or activism work range from the public’s lack of understanding to people’s preoccupation with survival and recovery rather than adaptability to the lack of political support, as the panel of four dynamic youth activists explained.

Ms Mabulo described the Cacao Project she started in her hometown in the Philippines to partner with farmers and communities to build better and more resilient smart food systems through restorative farming techniques. The mission involves empowering young people to be part of the solutions and to reconcile the gap between traditional perspectives and the knowledge of elders. Her enterprise works with elders and community members to make climate action more equitable, realistic and accessible for all. Youth, she said, will carry the torch but the elders must help them “preserve that light and carry on for the next generations.”

“I’m really taking an active role in shaping my community and my future as entrepreneur and a climate activist. This is a right that must be accessible and equitable to all youth, especially in the most vulnerable regions of Asia and specifically where we are disproportionately affected by the climate crisis. To do that not only do we need to take the lead, we also need to work hand-in-hand for intergenerational collaboration.”

Louise Mabulo
UNEP Young Champion of the Earth and Founder of The Cacao Project

Ms Mabulo and Ms Ng strongly urged accountability and continuity when mobilizing young people on environmental issues. For example, a council or accountability group should keep meaningful track of processes through progress reports that reflect tackling adaptable, constantly changing ecosystems and landscapes and digital platforms and even youth patterns and behaviours.

Ms Ng suggested the need for a constant tracking of principles and accessible approaches to sharing knowledge. She is a member of EcoKnights Malaysia, an impact-driven organization that started in 2005 to empower sustainable living. Calling herself a ‘vocalist’, Ms Ng explained the Project for Voice and Climate Action Leaders, or VOCAL. The programme launched a national youth conference on climate change and unfairness. It was followed by a series of youth monologues on digital efficacy, climate resilience and how to empower youth to take ownership in decision-making processes. Reinforcing the legal justice work of the earlier speakers, she encouraged stronger institutions with the capacity to legally address the climate impact affecting children and youth and in targeted regions. And include different narratives when it comes to decision-making, she said.

As part of a youth-led non-government organization, Mr Iman mobilizes climate literacy and helps Malaysians navigate government policies. Through the MyHutan initiative, under UNDI 18, him and his peers push for sustainable financing for forests conservation in Malaysia. Recent work centred on the implementation of ecological fiscal transfers to enhance the relationship between the federal and state governments.

“Another particular challenge that I face personally is the anxiety and the guilt and the pressure that I face regarding the climate change anxiety that I face. …I’m wondering if they are already burdened by physical health emergencies, will the accessible health care systems want to listen to my problems about climate?”

Celine Ng
Project VOCAL, EcoKnights
The panellists called for accountability and continuity as part of mobilization on environmental issues. For example, Ms Ng emphasized the need for information sharing, and Ms Mabulo stressed the importance of consistency, given the constantly changing landscapes and digital platforms and even youth patterns and behaviours. Ms Ng suggested the need for a constant tracking of principles and accessible approaches to sharing knowledge. She also insisted that information must be available, including by addressing linguistic barriers. It’s important to have an effective government structure and management teams that hear the voices of youth, indigenous communities and vulnerable people. A stronger legal framework would also help. There is no one solution, she said. It is important to have holistic approach to solve and address the issues.

Challenges to civic engagement ranged from educational to infrastructural and political. As part of the youth-led non-governmental Malaysian Youth delegation, Mr Iman mobilizes climate literacy and helping Malaysians navigate government policies. In addition, he works with MyHutan, focusing on forest sustainability and biodiversity protection and whose recent work centred on implementation of ecological fiscal transfers to enhance the relationship between the federal and state governments. He emphasized that protection of biodiversity is part of climate action, an area that MyHutan had been working on. Youth face political challenges in Malaysia, he said. Climate change is rarely discussed in Parliament or only raised during big plans. Committee members in Parliament are creating caucuses on COVID-19, innovation and women but not special environmental caucuses. A lot of young people are starting to confront members of the Parliament, including via social media.

“We’re seeing more crackdown on activists. … It is really Lakhmapure disappointing to see these kinds of reactions that the government has on activists despite Lawan protests being a protest specifically on failed governance. But it does translate into climate action. If this government does not uphold human rights, it cannot uphold climate change and the rights it pledges when it comes to children and young people.”

**Aidil Iman**
Malaysian Youth Delegation and MyHutan initiative
Ms Lkhamsuren works with the Mongolian Scout Association focusing primarily on an awareness-raising initiative called Youth for Climate Change and Clean Air Network, (YouCAN), which was introduced through the Scouts in 2019 to educate young people on air pollution and climate issues to raise awareness of climate change and clean air among youth. YouCAN helps youth to participate in solving the issues, including the mapping of different areas. Student trainers teach about climate change and air pollution. The group organizes many online events and campaigns, including online training. Infrastructure is part of the challenge to young people’s civic engagement but so is the inability to take part in decision-making processes.

Both she and Ms Mabulo encouragement work with elders as motivation for greater civic engagement of young people. Ms Lkhamsuren believes that volunteers work genuinely to make a difference in their communities and they work from the heart. Organizations of elders of youth can reach places where others cannot reach. They should work together, she said.

Ms Ng believes education is the basis for social change. On climate issues, she finds that challenges go back to how to properly communicate environmental issues to people who do not understand because without understanding, there is no interest in action. Ms Mabulo sees a current lack of interest because so many people are struggling with pandemic-related damage and loss. Climate issues are less of a priority. System transitions, she said, would be more of help than individual actions in some instances.
Session 7:

PARALLEL INTERACTIVE SESSIONS - PROMOTING EQUITY AND INCLUSION THROUGH MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT

1. BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT OF ADOLESCENTS WITH DISABILITIES

2. REDUCING DISCRIMINATION AND THE ROLE OF LGBTQI COMMUNITY IN PROMOTING SOCIAL CHANGE

3. STRENGTHENING VOICE AND CHOICE OF GIRLS AND WOMEN
Session 7:

1. BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT OF ADOLESCENTS WITH DISABILITIES

GAPS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

PANELLISTS

Kevin Paul Palaca
Assistant Director for Hospital Operations and Patient Support Service, Executive Assistant to the CEO and President

Đ. NG THUY Linh
Youth advocate, Viet Nam

Thitiphorn Prawatsrichai
Lead youth advocate, Leonard Cheshire EAPRO
Full participation of young people with disabilities should be a cornerstone of any society.

Despite considerable effort to make them active members and leaders, adolescents and young people with disabilities remain left behind, especially those in the most marginalized communities. Young people and adolescents with disabilities and those with diverse sexual identities and orientation have vital insights and ideas for addressing the challenges that they face. The speakers cited the need for systematic platforms where adolescents and young people with disabilities can represent themselves and engage in any decisions that affect them.

Panel members spoke of their own experience of exclusion and loneliness as children, and how it affected their self-esteem. In Vietnam, Ms Dang was told to mind her manners and stay quiet when she spoke out that her disability was just something she was born with and not because her mother was old or because she was paying a price for a previous life transgression. Ms Prawatsrichai, a manager of musicians in Thailand, needed the use of a wheelchair after a car accident. A former customer asked her to assemble a group of musicians for a special party at his home. When Ms Prawatsrichai arrived with the group, she was refused entry because the customer thought the wheelchair would turn the “gorgeous party” ugly.

Mr Palaca described the loneliness he had felt as a child, and how this changed when eventually was embraced by a church organization, which gave him the confidence to eventually want to give back. With the Leonard Cheshire Disability Philippines Foundation for Youth, he has travelled locally and internationally for trainings and seminars and to meet with government officials to promote inclusive communities. The organization also helped him with a scholarship to obtain a college degree.

“...the first step to get over the self-doubts and fears of being a young person with disability is to embrace, be embraced and be accepted for who we are and what we are.”

Kevin Paul Palaca
Assistant Director for Hospital Operations and Patient Support Service, Executive Assistant to the CEO and President
All three panellists agreed that attitudinal barriers, both their own and society’s, outweigh the many barriers they confront, from the physical barriers to the systematic barriers to the digital barriers. Learning to embrace yourself and being embraced with whatever disability is the first step to inclusion. Inspiring others and pushing for the normalization of inclusion defines their civic engagement.

Participants also highlighted that United Nations agencies and non-government organizations first and foremost promote acceptance of people with disabilities. Then they must work towards creating a barrier-free and inclusive environment for adolescence and youth with disabilities by involving them in every way people without disabilities are involved. Their voices and concerns must be heard and that they are integral to programme planning, implementation and evaluation. Of particular necessity is more inclusive education systems and accessible platforms where adolescents and young people with disabilities can represent themselves and engage in all issues that affect them.

Civic engagement means leaving no one behind, panellists affirmed. As a young disability advocate, Ms Dang works to “mobilize” disability knowledge to empower children with a disability. She provides legal assistance to people with disabilities as her way of pushing for a more equal society. She also engages in research to promote sustainable development through dialogue, policy and positive change. Civic engagement, she added, involves different participation in terms of political and non-political processes. Disability rights organizations have a role in building and empowering youth leadership and establishing networks of youth in a transnational framework. But it is also essential to let youth be involved in civic engagement practice to inform families, schools, government leaders and communities. And most importantly, she said, is the imperative to listen to youth and give them the chance to lead the change.

“I think disability rights organizations have a role in building and empowering the youth leadership and establishing a network of youth in transnational framework.”

NG THỦY Linh
Youth advocate, Viet Nam

She also expressed that government leaders must ensure that communities are empowered to participate and make a change in the ongoing structure for equity and social justice. This requires more opportunity to assess the civic engagement, legal reform that leads to meaningful participation and inclusive and sustainable communities and having mechanisms for following up with recommendations from this conference. She suggested building a digital platform for checking on the progress of recommendation implementation and a disability representative. She also recommended changing the gap between different groups, especially migrant groups and youth living in remote areas and youths with intellectual disabilities and others. This can begin with literacy and skills and making materials accessible to people with cognitive disabilities.
“From my perspective, the main barrier is the attitude. ... the attitude of the people with disability and the second one is attitudes of people in society towards people with disability. The attitude of a person with disability to oneself is important. If a person does not love and respect oneself, it will be difficult to do anything to produce valuable results.”

Thitiphorn Prawatsrichai
Lead youth advocate, Leonard Cheshire EAPRO

Mr Palaca stressed the importance of acceptance and that includes the education system. Despite reforms that require more government school budgeting for accessibility, it typically falls short of what is needed. Because school is where children first feel democracy and community, it is important that children with disabilities are in mainstream schools and learn together. Also important is that children who are not disabled learn from children with disabilities and learn with other capacities and learn that they are equal and that everyone has the same rights.
Session 7:

2. REDUCING DISCRIMINATION AND THE ROLE OF LGBTQI COMMUNITY IN PROMOTING SOCIAL CHANGE

NON-DISCRIMINATION AND EQUITABLE PARTICIPATION OPPORTUNITIES FOR LGBTQI ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE

PANELLISTS

Alex Bernal
Philippines

Taufiq
Indonesia

Kalisito Biaukula
Fiji
For LGBTQI persons, the journey to activism typically begins with self-discovery, which typically occurs in spaces struggling against hate, discrimination, stigma, self-stigma, bullying, religious conservatism and suppression.

One of the panellists had not yet come out publicly and remained anonymous in the session. The session made clear that what people witness or experience cultivates engagement to work for societal acceptance.

Kalisito Biaukula talked about feeling different from an early age. He was raised by an openly transgender woman in Fiji. Coming to terms with their sexual orientation in high school was rough and challenging due to feelings of gender dysphoria. Kalisito manages Youth Versus Country in Fiji, taking to activism due to personal struggles with discrimination and homophobia. Although Fiji in 2013 included LGBTIQ in its Constitution in reference to ending discrimination, Mr Biaukula says hatred, hate crimes, homophobia and transphobia remain major issues for young people. HIV is on the rise among young people aged 15–24, in large part because sex and sexuality are taboo topics in the heavily Christian environment. Many of them do not know their status due to the lack of user-friendly health clinics and now, due to the pandemic situation, downsizing of HIV and STI services. Compulsory sexual education in schools is needed.

“Up to this day many of us young LGBT are still closeted and afraid, especially expressing ourselves with our family, friends, peers and in the community. We are worried because we don’t want to be discriminated against, stigmatized, hated, bullied and removed from our belongingness.”

Alex Bernal
Philippines

The other two young panellists emerged in their sexuality in high school and university times. Alex Bernal is the founder and president of the Youth for YOUth to promote human rights, empowerment and inclusivity among young people, especially the young gay population in the province. The injustices they experienced and witness fuels the work. In Indonesia, Taufiq, who has not yet publicly come out and did not want to appear on screen, has been an activist for inclusion and human rights for three years.

In an environment of intolerance, stigma, discrimination and thus confusion, mental health is a major issue for young people who worry that their sexual orientation will separate them from their belongingness with family. Even for advocates pushing to end gender-based violence, this is a pressing personal challenge due to the many frustrations of working in communities that are unwilling to move forward towards common acceptance of one another’s identity and personality.

All these challenges constrain LGBTIQ adolescents and youth to have a voice, be heard and feel empowered. And without spaces to connect, partner and engage, many young members from the LGBTIQ groups are not aware of what others are working on, Taufiq said. And in this environment, it is important to bring others into the conversation. Collaboration with LGBTIQ young people and other stakeholders, such as UNICEF or even faith-based organizations, is a necessity towards achieving meaningful engagement. But Mr Biaukula cautioned that collaboration should not be tokenism. It must be a collaboration that can lead to actual change.

“We need to always continue to create conditions for accepting gender diversity and sexuality – not just tolerate but accepting. When we say tolerate, you can be here but you can’t be part of us. [To] be accepting, you can be here and we can be a unity.”

Taufiq
Indonesia

“In order to have inclusion we need to emphasize more on collaboration with young people, but make sure that collaboration is not a tick of a box or is seen as tokenism but that it is collaboration where there is actual change.”

Kalisito Biaukula
Fiji
Session 7:

3. STRENGTHENING VOICE AND CHOICE OF GIRLS AND WOMEN

PROVIDING EVIDENCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INCREASING GIRLS’ AND YOUNG WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION, AGENCY AND DECISION-MAKING

PANELLISTS

Faye Simanjuntak
Rumah Faye Foundation

Gustika Jusuf-Hatta
Co-Founder and Co-Director of Girl, Peace, and Security

Amandina Maria
Helena da Silva
Girls Out Loud

Huang Tianrong
China Youth Network
Empowerment and safeguarding of girls were recurring themes through the work of the four panellists speaking on the strengthening girls’ voice and participation.

Ms Simanjuntak started her foundation in 2013 in Indonesia to eradicate child sexual abuse, trafficking and exploitation through prevention, rescue and rehabilitation. She opened a safe house in 2016 for victims of trafficking and her foundation has assisted in the recovery of more than 140 girls. For her work, she was singled out in Forbes magazine of Indonesia’s 30 under 30 list in 2020. Although she has no personal experience in these issues, she understood that to find a solution for any issue, the most vulnerable population had to be engaged. With anti-trafficking work, trainings and outreach typically focused on adults, including teachers, parents or law enforcement. Recognizing the importance of that focus, she also believed that if children aren’t aware of what human trafficking is, what their rights are and what they can do to prevent from the abuse happening to them, the crime would continue. She started the foundation based on conviction that solutions required empowering grass-roots organizations and empowering children who have the experience and who have the knowledge of what they’ve gone through and using that to create frameworks and curriculums that are best adjusted to the communities that they inhabit. For any long-term change to evolve, the populations themselves have to want something different.

“I believe that of the way that we have to find solutions is through empowering grass-roots organizations and through empowering children who have the experience, who have the knowledge of what they’ve gone through, and using that to create frameworks and curriculums that are best adjusted to the communities that they inhabit.”

Faye Simanjuntak
Rumah Faye Foundation

“So, at one point in my life I actually said, ‘What’s the point of feminism’. But I grew up, and I realized that the world is just unfair, and I realized why we need to, you know, let girls and young women really speak up.”

Gustika Jusuf-Hatta
Co-Founder and Co-Director of Girl, Peace, and Security
“Don’t be afraid to speak loudly because your voice is not for you. It’s for all [women] and men in the world. Therefore, let’s embrace each other and help other girls to be brave and to get the rights that they deserve. Together, we can change the world.”

Amandina Maria Helena da Silva
Girls Out Loud

Ms Jusuf-Hatta is a researcher with the Indonesian Human Rights Monitor and co-director of an initiative she started called Girl Peace and Security to empower young women and girls through the creative learning of feminist security studies. Women and girls were not included on conversations on security, which is a public good. Women’s representation in Indonesia, such as the Parliament, has proven largely ceremonial. Despite a threshold of 30 per cent for women, it is not used. Cultural limitations keep girls from dreaming of pursuing certain fields, such as in the security sector. Despairing for a while, she questioned the point of feminism. Then got on with it after realizing that the world is unfair and someone needs to help girls and young women speak up.

Ms da Silva is a student of midwifery at a university in Timor-Leste working on gender-based violence issues. Through Girls Out Loud, she is working to create safe spaces for girls and young women in communities and online to empower them to fight for the right to ask questions on reproductive health, human rights, gender equality, digital literacy, literacy and so on.

Through the China Youth Network, which is a volunteer organization, Ms Huang advocates for sexual and reproductive health and rights for young people. She is completing her postgraduate studies in health communication. Her motivation stems from the ridicule she endured when at age 20 she still believed that saliva caused pregnancy (a deduction she made watching romantic dramas and people who kissed ended up pregnant). In her second year at college she found a peer education events and heard young women speaking about sexuality and love comfortably. She works to better inform young girls who possibly think as she did at age 20.

Ms Simanjuntak found the question on challenges that girls face unfair, which resonated with other panellists. Admitting her own privileged background and despite her own encounters of sexism, she pointed out the stark contrast between how she is treated as a girl and how the girls she works with have been treated. She recalled a girl who was sold for sexual exploitation so the family could better educate her brother. Gender is a driving force for the issues that the girls she works with face. Access to support would be a core challenge, admitted. But no matter what, all girls face different sets of challenges.

Agreeing with Ms Simanjuntak, Ms Jusuf-Hatta remarked that challenges are unique to each individual. When talking about youth, whether it’s girls or boys, it is hard to put them in one category, even in policymaking. In this digital era, she admitted, young women and girls experience considerable scrutiny from communities and society when they go online.

Gender-based violence, Ms da Silva said, is common in communities and online. Through her work with Girls Out Loud, she advocates for digital literacy on hate speech and misinformation.

Ms Huang also uses an online platform called Ginger to spread proper information on sexual reproductive health. In the past year, it has received more than 700 questions from young people. The China Youth Network empowers youth volunteers through care education and training courses. The programme has expanded to more than 100 universities, reaching nearly 2 million adolescents. Improving girls’ knowledge about sexual and reproductive health, she said, helps raise girls’ personal awareness on loving and protecting.
Rather than focus on girls in terms of a message to governments and organizations, Ms Jusuf-Hatta noted that for every young person in general who speaks up, it is not for applause as the youngest person to have ever done something. But as a collective group, young people want their voices not to just be ceremonial but to translate into policies. She cited events meant for young people that were not youth-friendly (waiting hours to listen to old people talk about what young people should do instead of them listening to what young people want). And young people are not a homogenous group. Nodding to Ms Simanjuntak, she noted they are people of varying backgrounds, different upbringings, different education and religions. Expecting youth to have one voice is short-sighted. In her nine years of tackling youth issues, she has noticed that young people who listen to the policy-makers are the ones who get rewarded. At the same time, young people who speak out should not be reprimanded. Governments should truly safeguard young people’s voices.

Ms Jusuf-Hatta echoed an issue with tokenism. The United Nations should have a mechanism to ensure that young people’s voices actually get through, she said. As a youth delegate many times, she felt tokenized, a decoration.

Following on from the issue of safeguarding, Ms da Silva said governments as well as civil society must invest in digital literacy to young people ensure that they understand using the internet. And they must create safe spaces for young women and young men to explore through social media. She also believes that young women need to break through their fear of speaking up and learn to speak loudly. Because your voice is not for you—it’s for all women and men in the world.

“I think the government and the society have to build a safe environment as it is very essential – if you feel safe, you can make a change, you can actually make your effort to do what you want to do.”

Huang Tianrong
China Youth Network
CLOSING SESSION

SPEAKERS

Monprariya Lobnongbua
Mentor, UNICEF Thailand Young People Advisory Board

Teresa Ferrari
Regional Director, East Asia, World Vision International

Shigeru Aoyagi
Director, Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, UNESCO Bangkok

VOTE OF THANKS

Myo-Zin Nyunt
Deputy Regional Director, UNICEF East Asia and Pacific
The various speakers concluded that with civic space for adolescents and young people under threat in many countries, this group is struggling to be recognized.

An essential takeaway from the conference is the clarity on how stakeholders, young and old activists, academics, government officials, civil society officers and development partners must band together to ensure that the right to meaningful participation of young people is not only protected and supported but enabled. And meaningful participation must include a diversity of geography, gender, disability, religion and ethnicity.

In initiating the conclusions to the conference, Mr Gass emphasized how such participation is a fundamental right that more than ever now requires follow-through action. He stressed how civic engagement is essential for building empowered young people as well as inclusive resilient societies.

Ms Ferrari remarked on what she found to be “an amazingly insightful” conference, noting its timeliness given how the civic space for adolescents and youth is under threat in many countries. Young people are struggling to be recognized. The stocktaking of diverse perspectives on what is working, what needs to change and how it can be more effective is not just for future engagement but for better dealing with issues confronting societies today.
In his closing remarks, Mr. Nyunt reinforced a key message that repeatedly emerged through the conference: Adolescents and young people require access to information, services, and platforms that enhance the understanding of their rights and what they are entitled to. Barriers to engagement encompass lack of education, lack of tools and lack of platforms. It also involves a bias that adolescents and youth face because they are not seen as experts, particularly in this region where existing social norms restrict the voice and choice of young people. The conference demonstrated the negative impact such biases have on the lives of young people. The time has come to stop treating adolescents and young adults as tokens and see them as equal partners and influencers who must be engaged in decision-making processes, particularly on issues affecting their lives.

The past two years have confronted the world with many challenges, not only through school closings that affected millions of young people worldwide but also social isolation, reduced access to health care, increased mental health issues and employment security. Adolescent and youth-led action and advocacy can provide access to solutions that could not be reached without working with young people.

“Creating meaningful youth participation is the duty of all parties that play an important role as a policy decision maker. Both NGO, UN and government should cooperate and make commitments. To be reliable and trust the youth in taking responsibility for problem-solving and listening to the voices of the young people with empathy and cooperating with youth who face the end result of the actions of the previous generation”

Monprariya Lobnongbua
Mentor, UNICEF Thailand Young People Advisory Board
To move towards meaningful transformative roles of adolescents and young people, duty bearers must be willing to unlearn and also relearn from young people and to display genuine willingness to engage.

In presenting the recommendations to the audience, Ms. Monprariya Lobnongbua relayed additional thoughts that various young people wanted to express. In talking about how young people are no longer the future, that they are the present, for instance, she mentioned the role of the United Nations and other international organizations to promote and defend the freedom of speech and assembly, even during political uncertainties or humanitarian crises. She reiterated that the young participants hoped that the emerging recommendations would guide organizations to develop concrete actions to promote meaningful participation for all young people in different countries.

“We hope to take recommendations into consideration and commit to promoting meaningful and inclusive youth participation.”

Shigeru Aoyagi
Director, Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, UNESCO Bangkok
CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS FORMULATED BY YOUNG PEOPLE

PARTICIPANTS
Country level adolescent and youth representatives

RECOMMENDATIONS
1. Invest in safe spaces for young people
2. Invest in learning, skills and capacity-building initiatives
3. Promote volunteerism led by young people
4. Promote human rights, especially children’s right to be free from violence or crime, as well as preventing youth mental health problems caused by the government’s misunderstanding
5. Incentivize young people’s engagement
The conference dedicated a session facilitated by a young person, Ms. Lobnongbua to develop key recommendations for follow up and action by governments, development partners and duty-bearers.

The participants drafting the recommendations included the young speakers, moderators, youth activists and volunteers, and young innovators. In addition, the session allowed all young participants online to provide their inputs and shape the final set of recommendations.

This resulted in a set of key recommendations capturing the shared challenges, solutions, and lessons learnt during the conference on meaningful engagement and empowerment of young people. These recommendations are significant as young people have voiced their opinions, practising their right to participation and the right to be heard. It is thus hoped that these recommendations will be considered and followed through with true commitment to promoting meaningful and inclusive participation of adolescents and young people throughout the East Asia and Pacific region.
RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Invest in safe spaces for young people

- Develop policies that encourage youth and the general public to raise their voices for their rights, without violence and discrimination regardless of gender, age or ethnicity.
- Create meaningful participation where youth can create new things freely and create a safe space for hearing opinions.
- Invest in intersectional, intergenerational and human rights-based approach to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of young people in all our diversities across the region.
- Collaborate with activists and youth-led organizations with diverse groups, such as LGBTIQ, and advocate for equality of voices from diverse groups.

2 Invest in learning, skills and capacity-building initiatives

- Promote empathetic communication in adults to understand and listen to the voices and problems of different groups of people.
- Enhance life skills for young people in both the education system and lifelong learning to enable graduates to work effectively and lead a quality life, such as self-confidence, leadership skills and career preparation programme.
- Promote youth-led action research for increased learning and engagement of young people.
- Develop technology in the context of youth participation and work to promote social cooperation.
- Target education systems and schools to build up capacities of young people and make it a safe space for young people to engage.
- Incorporate comprehensive sexuality education in school curriculum

3 Promote volunteerism led by young people

- Promote volunteering opportunities to develop skills and become change-makers in society, and create the collaboration and partnership framework for youth in the international aspect, also maximize innovations to social issues.
- Reduce the challenges of youth volunteering. Adults or government should accept and cooperate with youth and develop ways to collaborate with policy decision-makers to create change, promote the Sustainable Development Goals and bring the world together as an alliance.
- Give government and the private sector budgets for youth participation, including youth-led organizations, mentoring and collaborating with international organizations, such as UNICEF and the United Nations Development Programme, to raise awareness and promote projects focused on youth capacity development.
4 Promote human rights, especially children’s right to be free from violence or crime, as well as preventing youth mental health problems caused by the government’s misunderstanding

- Promote positive social norms and gender equality to ensure inclusive participation by creating empathetic communication in everyday life.
- Tackle harmful social norms in society that prevent young girls from exercising their voice.
- Decrease hierarchy culture which discriminate youth voice.
- Encourage discussions around taboo topics, opening up safe space for discussion and improvement. Reduce discrimination and stigma against marginalized groups, such as young people with disabilities, LGBTIQ communities, young people from ethnic minorities and young girls in some communities.
- Let youth and people in society learn human rights.
- Invest in positive role models for young girls to break gender stereotypes.

5 Incentivize young people’s engagement

- Recognize the efforts of the youth to be in the labour sector. Do not treat youth like a kid next door. Treat youth like your partner. Share with them what your obstacle is, they can help and collaborate with you. Also provide accessible education in extension to this.
- Encourage the involvement of young people in improving community training and conveying ideas for environmental welfare. And recognize the role of young people in public health emergencies.
- Allocate state budget for youth engagement activities give young people more chance to give a contribution in any kind of platform in helping the others.
- Allocate financial contributions to promote economic empowerment of young people when they support governments during public health emergencies, during natural disasters, or for community outreach work.
- Invest in non-financial incentives (transport, scholarship, training opportunities) for families to encourage adolescents and young peoples’ participation.
ANNEX | AGENDA

BUILDING PATHWAYS TO EMPOWERMENT

CONFERENCE ON YOUNG PEOPLE’S RIGHTS TO CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN EAST ASIA AND PACIFIC

28–29 October 2021
# Session 1: Opening

**Moderator:**
Roshni Basu, Regional Advisor, ADAP, UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>09:05</td>
<td>Welcome remarks</td>
<td>Marcoluigi Corsi, UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Director, a.i.</td>
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<tr>
<td>09:15</td>
<td>Engagement of young people in ASEAN context</td>
<td>H.E. Ekkaphab Phanthavong, Deputy Secretary General, ASEAN Socio Cultural Community</td>
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<td>09:20</td>
<td>Perspectives on different aspects of empowerment of adolescents and young people</td>
<td>Agatha Lydia Nathania, ASEAN Youth Organization</td>
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<td>09:30</td>
<td>Access to rights and the SDGs for children and young people</td>
<td>Mikiko Otani, Chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child</td>
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<td>09:40</td>
<td>Keynote speeches on young people's participation and civic engagement</td>
<td>Dr Bernadine Brady, National University of Ireland, Galway</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:10</td>
<td>Comments from the floor</td>
<td>Professor Philippa Collin, Western Sydney University</td>
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# Session 2: Right to Safe and Meaningful Participation in Policy and Practice

**Moderator:**
Lesley Miller, Deputy Representative, UNICEF Viet Nam

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<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>10:35</td>
<td>Unpacking adolescents’ and young peoples’ rights to participation in decision making</td>
<td>Professor Laura Lundy, Queen’s University of Belfast</td>
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<td>10:45</td>
<td>Key perspectives on participation of young people in the ASEAN context</td>
<td>Sarah Elago, ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights</td>
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<td>10:55</td>
<td>Youth-led best practices on claiming rights to participation through civic engagement</td>
<td>Qyira Yusri, Co-Founder and Education Director, UNDI 18</td>
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<td>11:05</td>
<td>UNICEF’s engagement on right to safe and meaningful participation and the legal empowerment framework</td>
<td>Lucio Valerio Sarandrea, Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF EAPRO</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:15</td>
<td>Interactive discussion</td>
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### Session 3: Role of Education in Promoting Meaningful Participation and Empowerment of Adolescents and Young People

**Moderator:** Ellenor Joyce G. Bartolome, E-Net Youth Constituency

- Professor Lucas Walsh, Monash University & Dr Cathy Waite, Monash University
- Yen Esmerald, E Net Philippines
- Earl Joshua Santos, Youth-Led Action Research Catalyst
- Jose de Jesus, CSEP, Timor-Leste

### Session 4: Civic engagement and volunteerism as pathways to social empowerment – Building resilience, promoting peacebuilding

**Moderator:** Emiliya Asadova, Programme Analyst, UNV

- Raylin (Lily) Satidanasarn, Climate Change Activist, Thailand
- Muhammad Anwar Bin Mohd Nor, Advisor of International Islamic University Malaysia Student Union
- Maria Theresa Llorente, Elected Youth Official, Philippines
- Roy Wasi, Young Leader, World Vision, Solomon Islands
Session 5: Digital Engagement – Pushing the possibilities of meaningful participation and exploring opportunities online

This session will reflect on how technological progress in the region presents risks and opportunities to expand digital civic engagement amongst young people.

**Moderator:**
Audrey Pe, Founder and Executive Director, WiTech

Vu An,
Youth Advisory Group, Viet Nam

Saw Wai Moe,
Volunteer, U-Report Myanmar

Alya Sabira,
Founder of State of Youth Sukabumi, Indonesia

**Fireside chat moderator:**
Rachel Harvey,
Child Protection Regional Advisor, UNICEF EAPRO

Professor Amanda Third,
Western Sydney University

Philip Ling,
Head of Sustainability, Digi Telecommunications

Sandra Cortesi,
Fellow, Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society, Harvard University and Director of Youth and Media

END OF DAY 1
DAY 2: FRIDAY 29 OCTOBER

Session 6: Climate and Environmental Justice for and by children and young people

This session will showcase young climate and environmental activists and leaders’ key insights on climate and environmental justice in the region towards advancing Sustainable Development Goals. It will then validate key findings from UNICEF's regional report on 'State of Legal Empowerment to Advance Climate and Environmental Justice for Children in East Asia and the Pacific region'.

Moderator:
Lameya Alam,
Consultant, Regional Dialogue and the Fellowship Programme

Erin Eckhoff,
Senior Associate,
Nick Horton,
Solicitor, King & Wood Mallesons
Patti Moore,
Senior Legal Expert Consultant on Children’s Rights to a Healthy Environment
Louise Mabulo,
UNEP Young Champion of the Earth and Founder of The Cacao Project
Celine Ng,
Project VOCAL, EcoKnights
Aidil Iman,
Malaysian Youth Delegation and MyHutan initiative
Amin-Erdene Lkhamsuren,
Project Officer, Scout Association of Mongolia (SAM)

Session 7: Parallel Interactive Sessions – Promoting Equity and Inclusion through Meaningful Engagement

1. Barriers and opportunities for meaningful engagement of adolescents with disabilities

The session will focus on gaps and equitable opportunities for meaningful engagement and civic participation of young people with disabilities.

Moderator:
Lieve Sabbe,
Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF

Đ.NG THŪY Linh,
Youth advocate, Viet Nam
Thitiphorn Prawatsrichai,
Lead youth advocate, Leonard Cheshire EAPRO
10:00—11:00

Session 7:
Parallel Interactive Sessions – Promoting Equity and Inclusion through Meaningful Engagement

**2. Reducing discrimination and the role of LGBTQI community in promoting social change**
The session will focus on non-discrimination and equitable participation opportunities for LGBTQI adolescents and young people

**Moderator:**
Abigail Amon, Youth Voices Count (YVC)

Alex Bernal, Philippines

Taufiq, Indonesia

Kalisito Biaukula, Fiji

10:00—11:00

Session 7:
Parallel Interactive Sessions – Promoting Equity and Inclusion through Meaningful Engagement

**3. Strengthening voice and choice of girls and women**
This session will focus on providing evidence and recommendations for increasing girls’ and young women’s participation, agency, and decision-making

**Moderator:**
Ness Angela Presbitero, Children and Youth Representative, World Vision International

Faye Simanjuntak, Rumah Faye Foundation

Gustika Jusuf-Hatta, Co-Founder and Co-Director of Girl, Peace, and Security

Amandina Maria Helena da Silva, Girls Out Loud

Huang Tianrong, China Youth Network

COFFEE BREAK
11:15—12:15 Session 8: Formulation of Recommendations by Young People

This session will examine the gaps, challenges and needs highlighted throughout the conference and develop key recommendations towards empowering young people through meaningful participation.

**Moderator:**
Monprariya Lobnongbua,
Mentor, UNICEF Thailand Young People Advisory Board

Country-level network representatives

12:30—13:15 Session 9: Closing session

**Moderator:**
Robert Gass,
Deputy Representative, UNICEF Indonesia

**12:30**
Video Highlights from the conference

Monprariya Lobnongbua,
Mentor, UNICEF Thailand Young People Advisory Board

**12:35**
Presentation of recommendations by youth networks

Teresa Ferrari,
Regional Director, East Asia, World Vision International

**12:45**
Key takeaways from the conference

Shigeru Aoyagi,
Director, Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, UNESCO Bangkok

**13:05**
Vote of thanks

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