

## **Asia-Pacific Peace and Development Service Alliance (APPDSA)**

### **South Asia Subregional Consultation on Youth Volunteerism to Promote Participation, Development and Peace**

23-25 March 2015

Trade Tower Business Centre, Thapathali, Kathmandu, Nepal

#### **Kathmandu Call for Action**

##### **Preamble**

We, the young people, youth-led organizations, civil society organizations, government agencies and other development partners, bound by universal principles and common values and aspirations, have gathered in Kathmandu, Nepal on 23 and 24 March 2015, at the South Asia Subregional Consultation on Youth Volunteerism to Promote Participation, Development and Peace in order to review progress of the Asia-Pacific Peace and Development Service Alliance and to enhance collaboration among partners and stakeholders in South Asia and beyond, as well as identify follow-up actions.

##### **A. Environment**

Access to safe drinking water and sanitation are a basic human right; however, without environmental conservation, such access is threatened. In South Asia, the health and safety of marginalized communities has been affected by deteriorating environments, for example the pollution of existing water sources, water scarcity, and climate change that affects the seasonal availability of rainwater.

Youth engagement through the initiatives of youth-led organizations and participation in community and government programmes is a positive way to enact sustainable change with regards to environmental issues, including water management. Such management and action needs to go beyond just sections of rivers, for example, to include entire river systems. The same applies to green spaces in urban areas, where youth service action can create urban environments where all citizens can benefit.

While there are legal implications for environmental degradation, from the individual to the corporate, they are not actively enforced in South Asia, resulting in little accountability and a diminished incentive to engage in environmental conservation. This includes addressing solid waste, pollution, factory runoff and sewage. Youth volunteerism can play a role in such circumstances. Youth can lobby for individual, governmental and corporate accountability through the creation of forums made up of environmental activists, lawyers, scientists, engineers, teachers, students, community members and development partners.

In community development and environmental conservation programmes – such as river clean-ups, waste management, water shed conservation and ecological restoration activities – youth can act as mediators between industry and other entities that have environmental impacts, and local communities that are affected. Youth in South Asia can empower

marginalized communities and assist in sustainable development initiatives by using media, news outlets and community mobilization efforts to address climate change. Youth engagement in the environmental context fosters a sense of self-reliance, responsibility and inclusivity, resulting in greater community ownership.

## **B. Entrepreneurship**

An education based on creative and critical thinking is the key to encouraging and advancing youth in entrepreneurial endeavours. This has been substantiated by youth focused entrepreneurial classes and camps in urban areas supported by universities and the private sector. The results of these camps have been mentor-based relationships with business owners and the creation of youth-led businesses in Nepal. This model could be used throughout South Asia to promote youth entrepreneurship.

In Nepal and other South Asian countries technology is not only a growth sector, it also plays an important role in gathering information to support entrepreneurial pursuits regardless of location. Thus technology enables information to be disseminated to rural areas of the subregion. This information transfer occurs with the exponential growth and use of mobile phones and could be enhanced as the infrastructure for telecom and reliable electricity improves.

Three other important growth sectors are food, water and energy. There are many opportunities for youth entrepreneurs to take advantage of and improve management of these sectors. For example, there have been advances in the use of rainwater harvesting technology by private sector entrepreneurs in order to address water scarcity in the subregion. Renewable energy has also been a very successful tool in making electricity more reliable. Such initiatives, with youth service action, need to spread across the subregion.

A great challenge with entrepreneurship has been the ability to obtain financing. Organizations have been formed by the Government of Nepal as well as the private sector to help promote micro-financing and aid youth in obtaining low interest loans or venture capital assistance if basic requirements are met. Government assistance for entrepreneurial pursuits can also be helpful in providing employment for the large numbers of youth about to enter the South Asian workforce.

There is a need to develop and encourage community-led micro-enterprises and, particularly in rural areas, agro-based cooperatives that pool resources from the community and create sustainable sources of livelihood for community members. This can be particularly effective in areas with potential for eco-tourism and sustainable agriculture.

The youth of South Asia have a great opportunity to change their mindset concerning risk taking and thinking outside of the normal cultural conventions in regards to youth entrepreneurship. Government as well as the private sector can facilitate educational and vocational trainings and programmes based on youth entrepreneurship promotion and increased access to resources such as technology. Incentives can be given to promote working domestically as opposed to seeking employment in developed countries. Through this, youth can realize and maximize the potential in their own country and create a platform for sustainable economic growth.

### **C. Disaster Service**

South Asian countries lose social, environmental and economic resources to natural disasters. With proper training and motivation, youth can play a crucial role in combating these losses by action in their communities before natural disasters strike and in response to them.

Population growth in the subregion makes communities more susceptible to natural disasters, as large numbers of people live in risk-prone areas. Large populations put undue stress on local government, overburdening infrastructure. The role of youth in combating population pressure and its detrimental environmental effects lies in responsible implementation of appropriate family planning techniques. Youth can also have a practical role in the mitigation of the social, economic and environmental consequences of natural disasters.

It has been shown in flood-affected South Asian countries that youth can be successfully trained as first responders. This work has been funded by governments, national and international civil society organizations, and has been successfully implemented in Bangladesh.

In South Asian countries, where governments may have challenges responding rapidly to natural disasters, communities must take on some of the responsibility for disaster risk mitigation. This can be a role which youth volunteers can help fill, teaching their communities pre-preparedness techniques such as storing potable water and retrofitting their homes.

Personal responsibility is important in protecting communities from disasters; however, governments need to provide infrastructure and services to their citizens, for example, properly constructed roads, and utilities and health care. This will mitigate the severity of human and property loss during natural disasters, as well as lessen the likelihood or severity of secondary disasters created by the subsequent break down in infrastructure and loss of utilities such as sanitation, electricity and potable water.

Secondary disasters are very common in South Asia, but their severity can be mitigated when citizens have prepared themselves and their families. In addition, when governments have created functioning infrastructure, they are able to provide for their citizens after a disaster and rebuild in a more efficient and effective manner.

Youth should commit to combating the collective problems that magnify natural disasters in South Asia, such as population pressure, lack of infrastructure and lack of community education and awareness about disaster risk mitigation. Youth can have an essential role through responsible family planning, and working as first responders and community educators.

### **D. Health Service**

Health concerns facing South Asia include environmental factors, basic sanitation and hygiene, access to nutrition, and availability of health services including mental health and reproductive health. These health issues disproportionately affect rural populations and

marginalized ethnic and social groups, and are compounded when taking into account the effects poor health status have on education and economic opportunities for youth.

Collaboration between government, civil society and the private sector can meet the diverse health demands of rural populations. For example all three sectors have successfully mitigated the effects of indoor air pollution on youth and women through improved cook stove initiatives. Further cooperation among the three sectors is needed to promote beneficial lifestyle changes at the local level, with significant impact coming from attention to youth.

While governments have provided infrastructural frameworks for health services in rural areas, they lack the ability to provide sufficient coverage. To address shortfalls, civil society organizations and the private sector should cooperate to provide resources and enhance technical knowledge. Educational programmes for government staff and community volunteers increase capacity to serve populations, especially those in greatest need. Education regarding healthy lifestyles, such as hand washing and respiratory health, disseminated through local grassroots groups has proven effective in improving health status. In South Asia, grassroots groups can take the form of youth clubs, mothers groups and classroom education.

Pursuing a programme of youth as change makers for household health is imperative for achieving grassroots health change. A call to action for including youth as community facilitators on preventive and basic health issues, for example nutrition and menstrual hygiene, will help the region to achieve its health goals.

## **E. Peace Development**

Youth are the hope; hope comes first, and then the change to promote peace in development. The bridge to nonviolence rests in unity in its various forms, including gender identity and the self. When pursuing unity, youth in South Asia are confronted with issues of livelihood, security, life quality, personal development and their presence in decision-making spaces. Furthermore, there is a discord that results from prioritizing political transition over social transition. A part of the need for social transition is the frustration within cultural structures that leaves limited space for youth engagement. Nonviolence and peace education is needed as a sustainable tool for change in the context of the political economy and geopolitical forces.

Youth in South Asia have great potential in peace development due to their access to unique cultural and environmental landscapes, yet youth are often not empowered to change their nation in the face of these challenges. Through tourism, youth can be involved in both preserving nature and cultural exchange in the direction of peace and prosperity. The Bagmati River Festival 2014 is an example of the future of ecotourism, as it incorporated youth in the restoration process of the river. This celebratory event also worked towards unity through bringing together people of different religious and traditional backgrounds in a national setting and in the context of South Asia, as well as countries beyond the subregion.

Youth engagement should be promoted to achieve a more peaceful global community by fostering avenues for their empowerment and service. Before working to change the world, youth should develop self-knowledge and confidence. Within this context, there is the need

to increase the capacity of youth to filter information for practical usage and to enhance the ability to cope with daily challenges. This approach can act as a bridge from youth just being the hope to also being the change to achieve the sustainable development goals.

### **Policy-Enabling Environment**

Governments need to put in place policies and programmes that promote multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder coordinated action, which in turn facilitates youth volunteerism. Partnerships between diverse actors, the promotion of evidence-informed research and more effective use of ICT reinforce this process by contributing to the sharing of knowledge, lessons learnt and good practices on volunteerism and service.

When governments, civil society and other stakeholders create and engender a culture of service, young people see volunteering as a valid avenue to give back to their communities. By working at this community level, youth create the grassroots foundation upon which bigger development programmes can be built.

It is only in partnership with local communities that large scale volunteer organizations can be relevant and supportive to the communities that they aim to help. In addition, these kinds of partnerships become a positive model for other countries setting up national volunteer services. When volunteer organizations from various countries work in partnership, they create an enabling environment for youth by acknowledging youths' local work, while also fulfilling their desire to be global citizens.

Volunteering can be made appealing to youth by stressing it as a way to build skills, in preparation for future employment, and as a way to become more competitive in the global economy. In addition to building specific skills, volunteering can help young people interested in entrepreneurial work gain respect from local businesses, which may be a source of credit in the future. Access to credit also needs to be enhanced by governments and civil society organizations, which, as with volunteer programmes, are inclusive and do not reinforce socioeconomic boundaries.

An enabling environment requires comprehensive planning such as the Nepal Government's Youth Vision 2025, which endeavours to retain skilled citizens in Nepal by creating an environment in which youth can use their talents. Moreover, in the wider context of South Asia, youth policies need to be coordinated to allow for greater collaboration at the subregional level, with active participation of youth-led organizations, civil society organizations, government agencies and other development partners. More than anything, this call for action invites all stakeholders to strive actively to implement programmes on youth volunteerism to bring about real change among communities across the subregion.