

Intergenerational Dialogue between Youth and Asian and Arab Parliamentarians for Achieving Sustainable Development

Introduction

On 18 November 2021, an intergenerational dialogue was held among young people, who participated in APDA's Global Young Leaders Course (GYLC), and Asian and Arab parliamentarians. These young people gave presentations on three themes which combine technology and sustainable development, followed by active interaction with parliamentarians.

This virtual meeting was organized by the Asian Population and Development Association (APDA) and the Forum of Arab Parliamentarians on Population and Development (FAPPD). The meeting was supported by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and Japan Trust Fund (JTF).

Opening Address

Dr. Osamu Kusumoto, Executive Director/Secretary General of APDA

Dr. Kusumoto said the focus on youth should include technology and investment to enable them to become future leaders. The APDA's GYLC outcomes were the basis for the dialogue between the youth groups and parliamentarians from Arab and Asian countries. All the students presenting their projects participated in the course implemented by Dr. Hanna Yoon, communication consultant of APDA. He thanked UNFPA and Dr. Yoon for making the meeting possible.

Address by Organizer

Hon. Yoko Kamikawa, Chair of JPFP, Former Minister of Justice, Japan

Hon. Kamikawa thanked the participants for attending the intergenerational dialogue for achieving sustainable development. She reminded the delegates that COP26 had emphasized that population increases and the expansion of economic activities were putting pressure on the environment. Therefore, it was important to consider what society was best suited to the future of humankind and find ways to create such a society. It would be crucial to develop a knowledge base towards finding solutions.

Youth play a decisive role in achieving sustainable development – and to enable talented young people to come up with innovative ideas, they needed to come into contact with distinguished scientists and experts as early as possible. This vision was enabled by the APDA's GYLC, in which the participants learned about the SDGs from leading scientists and experts and then actively considered how to resolve them. For the students, it was a rare opportunity to understand that issues of politics, policies and international relations that make headline news are, in fact, their issues.

Address by UNFPA

Dr. Luay Shabaneh, Regional Director of UNFPA Arab States Regional Office

Dr. Shabaneh thanked the organizer, APDA, and said he was happy to be associated with this initiative. He said the project was timely as one of the six outputs in the UNFPA's strategic plan was dedicated to young people. The organization would be working with young parliamentarians and having them as advocates for youth issues in the following year.

UNFPA had a youth summit planned for January 2022, and in February, a forum focusing on technology and innovation is expected to take place. The programme to promote peace and security and focus on life skills for young people and adolescents will be extended. UNFPA could not do this alone, so partnerships were important.

Outline of GYLC

Dr. Hanna Yoon, Coordinator of GYLC

Dr. Yoon noted that partnerships and learning across the regions were a crucial component of the course. When developing the course, she considered what qualities a young person would need to be a leader. These qualities included thought diversity, unique ideas, perspectives, leadership through teamwork, and problem-solving ability. The learners were able to interact with and learn from the experts and parliamentarians.

Presentation Group A:

Poverty: Helping Minorities with Smart Agriculture

The team noted that poverty resulted from people not having the economic means to secure food despite plenty of food in the world. They believed that finding a way for social minorities to become self-sustaining would be a solution.

Solution 1: Smart agricultural system.

This was a system that would utilize resources effectively and without contributing to climate change. For example, currently, nitrogen-based fertilizers produce greenhouse gases and overload waterways with dangerous pollutions. About 70% of the world's drinking water is used for agriculture despite half the world's population facing severe water shortages. Agricultural production also needs to expand by approximately 70% by 2050 to feed a global population of 10 billion people.

A smart agricultural system based on aquaponics (raising fish and plants simultaneously) will combine technology with agriculture to produce a lot of food in a small space in an eco-friendly and sustainable manner. The system will be one that children living with disabilities will be able to use. Students with disabilities will use their experience to educate others.

Solution 2: Governmental action

The government could empower rural and small-scale farmers by creating a digital platform that shares agricultural technology and information. The group was inspired by the Nigerian government and the European Union's agricultural policies to develop this idea but took it a step further. With their ease with technology, the group believed that youth could develop and systemize sharing technology and information. This will be a mutual sharing system for

farmers and others. The development of the system will be an effective use of public funding. Inspired by India's agricultural reform, the group believed that open and barrier-free trade would benefit farmers.

Solution 3: Role of the youth

To resolve issues of lack of labor, the group suggested developing a volunteer system for youth and students, who will, in return for their efforts, receive a certificate from the government. Fundraising will also be crucial, and revenues could be generated through the creation of an NGO and by collaborating with IT companies for revenue to develop the technologies.

Another avenue for revenue was selling agricultural products like strawberries, jams, and pies. The group referred to PxD Precision Development, an NGO that specializes in low-cost smart technology for farmers.

Presentation Group B:

Environment: Digitally Mapping Out Trash Cans to Reduce Public Littering

The group noted that by 2015 humans had produced 6.3 billion metric tons of plastic, of which only 9% was recyclable. Littering was a major problem, with research indicating that 75% of people admitted to littering in the past five years. It also resulted in costs to the economy, with taxpayers spending nearly \$11 billion cleaning up litter across the U.S. Littering occurs for various reasons; people notice litter, so add to it, laziness and the lack of public trash cans also contribute. They wanted to focus on the youth because people aged 12 to 24 are the biggest litterers.

The idea is to create an app based on a school. The starting point will be to plot existing trash cans and then look at the dynamics by asking whether there were sufficient trash cans, problematic recycling, and possible improvements. Students could access the app on their smartphones. The group said Google maps inspired them with their street view, as had platforms like Pokémon Go and the COVID-19 map, which mapped incidences of the disease.

The app will combine three essential elements: floor plans, individuals who will create the data points, and, finally, users. The app will start at the school level and then expand to three or four main cities. The ultimate goal is to grow the application's audience and get sponsorships and support from companies, governments, and NGOs.

The second goal is the reduction of littering, raising awareness and importance of the environment. The app is targeted to youth – where 89% have at least one smartphone. They also open up to a potential viral marketing opportunity. It could gain popularity like the Red Sea Trash subreddit and Instagram's Mother Earth campaign. The app will initially target schools and spread from there to cities with Seoul, New York, and Delhi as main targets because they are highly populated and concerned about the environment.

The platform will include a points system with individual and personal incentives. The group also came up with an innovative idea for a food bank for feeding people in need, reducing

food waste at Korean schools. The Korean school cafeteria system enables students to order their meals using a food chart. The app will allow students to exclude food that they do not want to eat. This fresh food will be distributed via the food bank.

Presentation Group C:

Ageing: Overcoming Social Isolation of the Elderly through the Use of Technology

The group presented some solutions using technology to connect the older population to services they may need. Many older adults often are isolated, and youth and government can improve the quality of their life. For example, during COVID-19, the government devised a package to help people but was not accessed by many older persons because applications were online. The technology could also assist put health information in one place – like Australia’s My Health Record.

Because older persons are not tech-savvy, the group suggested that an AI device voice-activated device be developed. The group was inspired by Alexa, Google Home, and Genie, smart solutions that use speech recognition. There will be adaptations, for example, for those who are mute, and it will recognize sign language, which will be projected through a sensor on the device.

The device could routinely check the older person’s health status, enabling a regular checkup without physically going to a doctor. Additional functions like yoga will be adapted to the health status, and these can be linked to TV, smartphones, tablets, etc. Youth will design and encode the device and test its capabilities. They can also help the elderly set it up, and their participation is rewarded with a certificate.

While the government will lead the programme, youth will be involved in its rollout. About 50 young people will be involved in the tech, service departments, and as volunteers. Some will be involved in coding and programming, and the elderly will receive support for using the AI device from the volunteers. Risk to the elderly, including deception or violence, will be managed by the services department, which will monitor the service levels. While an online survey may be more convenient, older persons already have difficulty with technology, so call services will be more convenient and viable. Volunteers with bad feedback will be yellow-carded, and the group will incorporate a three-strike rule.

Wi-Fi connections will be via partnerships and crowdfunding. Crowdfunding on multiple platforms will be a means to develop and test the system in a selected area. Another solution will be to collaborate and work with big companies, which will mean sufficient funding and a chance to work with high-level professionals in AI technology.

The third source of financing will be to participate in a start-up pitch idea competition. And this will allow us to pitch our idea in front of several potential future investors at a time or help us raise funding for our solution. This could also be good exposure for the project.

About 50 older people will be in the pilot study, exposing any weaknesses and fixing them before expanding to all elderly in South Korea – then to countries like Japan, Italy, and

Germany with aging populations. Teaming up with UN youth volunteers worldwide was mooted.

Discussion and Q&A

Moderator: Dr. Hanna Yoon, Coordinator of GYLC

Hon. Dr. Rida A Shibli, MP Jordan said he was proud of the young people and their creativity and wanted to collaborate with the Arab region.

Hon. Fatima Al Kohaji, MP Bahrain, said she was impressed with the students. She wondered how else to reward the youth for participating in the projects – apart from giving certificates. She suggested, as the ideas were all technology-based that there could be some sponsorship by big companies. She was keen to participate in the youth development programme.

Hon. Touria Faraj Maroc, MP Morocco, wanted to know if the youth groups had considered a partnership with other groups in the Arab world. There was a programme to eliminate poverty in Morocco, so she was particularly interested in the food bank.

Ms. Khadija Mosleh, Morocco, who is a lecturer at universities, said she was an expert in reproductive health rights. She said the youth presentations gave her confidence in the future, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. She observed that older persons were being discriminated against, and she praised the students' creative solutions. She also called for more collaboration.

Ms. Erin Lee explained that the food from the food bank would be fresh and given to homeless people, the elderly, or children in need.

Mr. Sungjoon Cho suggested that internship opportunities for those who participate diligently will help stimulate interest in the projects. He also said the UN should create an agenda for international collaboration in the projects.

Ms. Seungeun Lee said more youth would participate if they were made aware that they could make a difference if they participated and that their voice mattered.

Ms. Chaeun Shin said they would love to collaborate with other youth and actively seek them out in the future.

Hon. Touria Faraj Maroc, MP Morocco said she could assist with collaboration.

Hon. Dr. Souhail Alouini, former MP Tunisia, offered to play a role with collaboration between the regions and suggested internships in the Arab region.

Mr. DongJun Lee responded that he believed collaboration via the United Nations would be the first step to making the world better. It will also be good to collaborate with NGOs which are experts in these technologies.

Ms. Minchae Kang said their smart agricultural system would be more meaningful with international collaboration.

Dr. Hanna Yoon said while the students welcomed the idea of working together, it was difficult as they were still at school. She suggested the Parliamentarians could help facilitate collaborative efforts.

Mr. Sungjoon Cho suggested that there could be a way to collaborate through an online forum called Round Square. This allowed schools around the world to communicate. Already schools in the Arab region were connected on Round Square, so this could be the start.

Hon. Fatima Al Kohaji, MP Bahrain, noted that people were now living in a global village and so there were shared problems that could be solved with international collaboration.

Closing

Hon. Rida Shibli, MP Jordan, observed that it was essential to look at education and transform education to keep up with the latest technology, research, exchange ideas, and turn start-ups into businesses. As someone in agriculture, he was impressed with the smart agriculture concept.

He said they would like to have the youth from the region involved in internships, workshops, and conferences work together to solve the shared problems. He would like to see projects with solar energy and nanotechnology and use these technologies to enhance business in the region.

Mr. Manmohan Sharma, Executive Secretary of IAPPD. India, had some advice for the students surveying older people suggesting there should be safeguards.

Hon. Mariany Yit, former MP Malaysia, said she liked the presentations. Like the Girl Guides, the students should become pioneers and trainers to younger students. She asked for the Parliamentarians to support these projects because all three – food, agriculture, and pollution – were relevant in society.

Dr. Osamu Kusumoto expressed his heartfelt thanks to all involved in the project, especially Dr. Yoon, UNFPA, and the students.