

A MOVEMENT BUILT TOGETHER

Youth Co:Lab's Ten Years in the Making

2017-2026 · Report Snapshot

Asia-Pacific is home to over **60% of the world's youth population**, roughly 660-750 million individuals aged 15-24. Yet youth unemployment runs at **10-20%** across the region, and around one-quarter of young people remain outside employment, education, or training (NEET). Founded in 2017 as a co-led initiative of **UNDP** and the **Citi Foundation**, Youth Co:Lab has spent a decade working to change this through policy advocacy, ecosystem-building, and direct support for young innovators across 30 countries and territories.

IMPACT AT A GLANCE: 10 YEARS IN NUMBERS

~400,000 Youth & stakeholders reached	48,000+ Youth entrepreneurs supported	~4,000 Youth-led enterprises launched/strengthened	700+ Ecosystem partnerships mobilized	30+ Countries & territories covered	100+ ESO strengthened to deliver inclusive services
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HOW YOUTH CO:LAB WORKS: A THREE-STREAM APPROACH

Youth Co:Lab operates across three interconnected streams, recognizing that sustainable change requires action at every level of the ecosystem:

 UPSTREAM Policy & Governance Partnering with governments to embed youth entrepreneurship in national development strategies and cross-ministry coordination mechanisms.	 MIDSTREAM Ecosystem & ESOs Strengthening Entrepreneur Support Organizations with inclusive practices, capacity tools, and regional learning networks.	 DOWNSTREAM Youth Entrepreneurs Directly supporting young people, including young women, persons with disabilities, and Indigenous youth, through mentorship, micro-grants, and targeted acceleration.
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STORIES OF CHANGE: FROM MARGINS TO MAINSTREAM

Indonesia First National Youth Entrepreneurship Strategy Youth Co:Lab convened cross-sector actors whose inputs shaped Indonesia's landmark national policy, later localized into youth innovation funds in provinces including West Java and Aceh.	Philippines AI4GOV: Civic Tech at Scale A youth-built AI solution was adopted by the National Department of Health, demonstrating how youth innovation can move from idea to government infrastructure.	Pakistan DeafTawk: Digital Inclusion in Action Co-founded by entrepreneurs with disabilities, DeafTawk now serves 95,000+ users across 6 countries in 6 sign languages, earning the Zero Project Global Award and US\$1.5M in annual revenue.
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"Accessibility is not a privilege; it's a right. Everyone deserves to communicate freely, access opportunities, and live with dignity. [Youth Co:Lab] was a launching pad for us. It gave us recognition and helped us connect with a global network."
— Ali Shabbar, Co-Founder, DeafTawk (Pakistan)



WHAT CHANGED IN 10 YEARS

The regional landscape has shifted across seven dimensions:

- **Policy & regulation:** from permission to orchestration, governments moved from passive observers to active ecosystem architects.
- **Finance:** from family capital to layered capital, blended finance instruments now complement early-stage grants.
- **Human capital:** entrepreneurship moved from extracurricular to embedded in curricula and national skills agendas.
- **Business support:** from training delivery to ecosystem enablement, with ESOs taking on coordination and quality roles.
- **Markets:** from local reach to hybrid reach, youth ventures increasingly access regional and digital markets.
- **Technology:** from digital access to digital advantage where AI, femtech, and green tech are now youth-led domains.
- **Inclusion:** targeted outreach to young women, persons with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ youth, and Indigenous communities has moved from add-on to design principle.

PERSISTENT GAPS

- Women founders still face structural exclusion in finance with only 21% of femtech companies in Southeast Asia having secured external funding.
- 66% of Asia-Pacific employment remains informal; rural and non-tech youth ventures are largely invisible in official data.
- Longitudinal tracking of venture survival rates remains absent at a regional scale.

LOOKING AHEAD: 2026 AND BEYOND

Youth Co:Lab is scaling into the Youth Moonshot, a bold regional commitment to empower every young person in Asia-Pacific. Key priorities toward 2030:

- Expand to all 24 UNDP country offices in Asia-Pacific under a whole-of-region approach.
- Deepen youth-led climate action and green entrepreneurship, placing young people at the centre of the green transition.
- Strengthen digital and AI literacy, innovation, and ethical tech ecosystems.
- Advance youth civic engagement, governance participation, and leadership.
- Unlock catalytic finance for youth-led ventures with a focus on gender-responsive and inclusion-first instruments.
- Strengthen alumni as peer-led ecosystems and mentors for the next generation.
- Embed evidence generation and strategic intelligence as core programme infrastructure.

YOUTH MOONSHOT GOALS

🎯 **7 million** empowered youth by 2030 (1 in 100 young people in Asia-Pacific)

🌐 **35 million** people indirectly benefited

🤝 Scale from current partners to **10,000** partners by 2030

💰 **USD 250 million** in youth-focused investments to be mobilized

KEY LESSONS FROM A DECADE OF PRACTICE

01

Ecosystems, not programmes

Sustainable change requires aligning policy, finance, and support infrastructure, not isolated interventions.

02

Inclusion by design

Opening doors is not enough. Structural barriers in finance, data, and networks must be actively dismantled.

03

Youth as co-architects

Young people must be co-designers of solutions, not just beneficiaries, from programme design to policy tables.

04

Measure what matters

Survival rates, gender-disaggregated finance data, and informal-sector reach must become standard metrics.