

South Asia

Regional findings from the 2024 Listening to Leaders Survey

Leaders in government, the private sector, civil society, media, and universities in South Asia (SA) share their views on priorities and progress, as well as the agenda-setting influence and helpfulness in implementation of the development partners with whom they work.

198

South Asian leaders responded to our 2024 Listening to Leaders (LTL) Survey

Education

The top development goal for South Asia leaders

WorldBank

Development partner with the largest footprint across the region

India

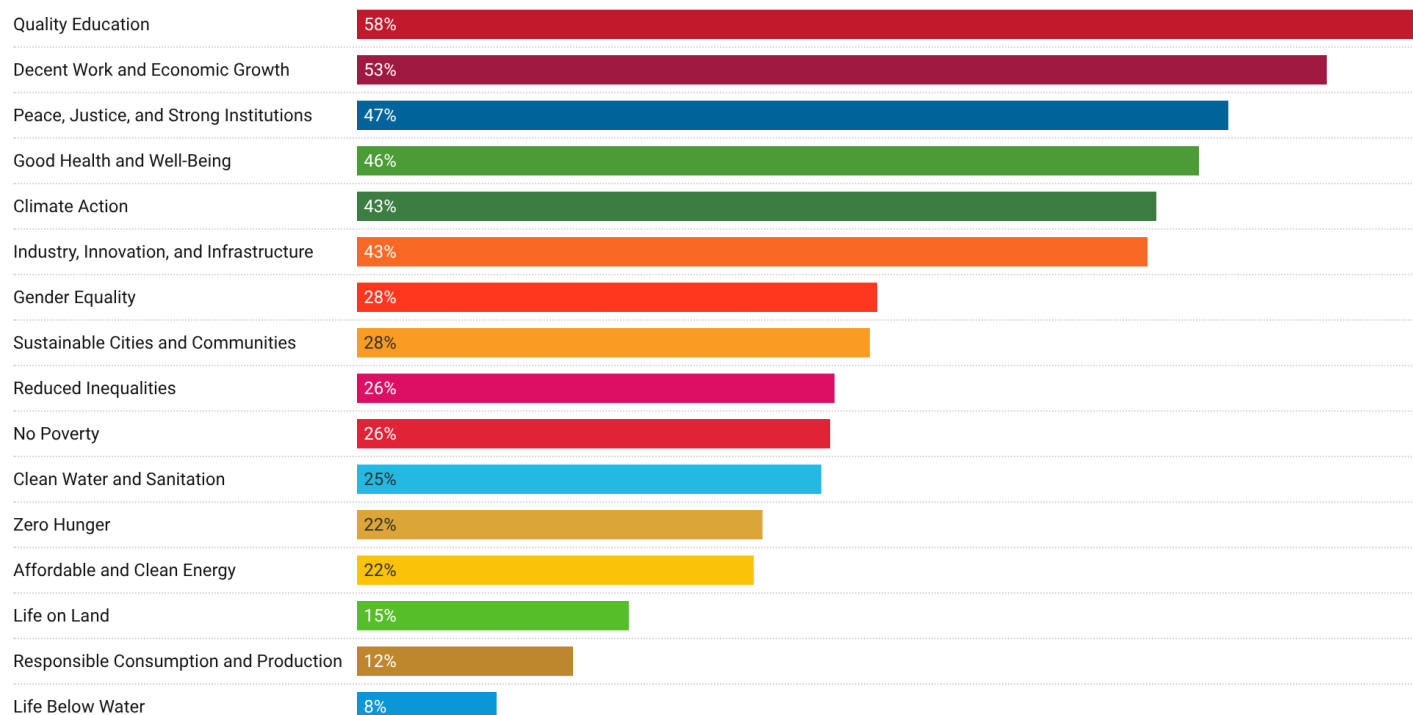
Most influential development partner across the region

WHO

Most helpful development partner across the region

SDG Priorities

Percentage of respondents



What leaders want

Leader priorities and the Global Goals

When asked to identify their top six development priorities of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), SA respondents were most likely to identify Quality Education (58%), Decent Work (53%), and Strong Institutions (47%). But these priorities aren't the same around the world. Of all regions in the world, SA leaders were more likely to identify Gender Equality (28%) and Sustainable Cities (28%), as a priority. They were also the least likely to identify Life on Land (15%) and Affordable and Clean Energy (22%) as priorities.

Partner Rankings

Respondents indicated how helpful and influential they found the partners they worked with

Influence		Helpfulness		Footprint	
Development Partner	Percent of Respondents	Development Partner	Percent of Respondents	Development Partner	Percent of Respondents
1. IND	97.1%	1. WHO	91.7%	1. WB	63.2%
2. WHO	86.7%	2. WB	86.6%	2. UNDP	52.3%
3. WB	83%	3. JPN	85.5%	3. ADB	51.2%
4. IMF	78.3%	4. ADB	85.4%	4. UNICEF	37.3%
5. JPN	76.9%	5. IND	85.2%	5. WHO	36.4%
6. USA	76.8%	6. UNESCO	84.4%	6. FAO	35.6%
7. UNEP	76.4%	7. EU	84.2%	7. USA	34.8%
8. UNFPA	76.2%	8. FAO	84.1%	8. IMF	34%
9. ADB	74.6%	9. UNICEF	83.5%	9. JPN	31.5%
10. EU	72.8%	10. ILO	82.7%	10. WFP	27.1%

Influence, Helpfulness and Footprint

Three survey metrics that provide insights on the perceived regional impact of partners

Footprint reflects the percentage of leaders who worked with a given partner. Influence is a measure of the partner's impact on policy decisions that leaders make. Helpfulness indicates whether or not leaders found a partner's assistance to be useful in project implementation. Notably, the average partner was considered more helpful than influential.

Sources

Custer, S., Horigoshi, A., Boer, B., and K. Marshall. (2025). *Listening to Leaders 2025: Development cooperation over a decade of disruption*. Williamsburg, VA: AidData at William & Mary.

Horigoshi, A., Custer, S., Marshall, K., and B. Burgess. (2025). *Prioritizing Agenda 2030: How do Global South leaders navigate trade-offs and assess relevance?* Analytical Brief. Williamsburg, VA: AidData at William & Mary. September 2025.

About AidData

AidData (<https://aiddata.org/>) is a research lab at William & Mary's Global Research Institute in Williamsburg, Virginia, USA. AidData helps governments and organizations make better-informed decisions on the reach, influence, and outcomes of overseas investments. We use rigorous methods, cutting-edge tools, and granular data to answer the question: who is doing what, where, for whom, and to what effect? The Listening to Leaders project surveys global leaders every 2–3 years, gathering insights on priorities,

experiences with development partners, and more across sectors like government, NGOs, civil society, and academia

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