

GLOBAL YOUTH LEADERSHIP SUMMIT 2026

DETAILED SUMMARY REPORT

Empowering the next generation of leaders to build a more inclusive, sustainable, and connected world.



ICERT Global Youth Leadership Summit 2026

Introduction

The Global Youth Leadership Summit 2026 was convened by ICERT on August 12, 2026, in the context of a virtual World Youth Day celebration. Centered on the theme “*Empowering Young Changemakers for Innovation, Inclusion, and Sustainable Development*,” the summit brought together a broad participant base and featured moderated discussions with invited speakers and panelists.

With 520 registrations recorded, delegates from countries such as India, Nigeria, Uganda, Malaysia, Afghanistan, Ghana, Indonesia, Kenya, South Korea, and Bangladesh participated in the summit. The program combined formal remarks, a keynote address, an interactive Q&A segment, and a global roundtable panel. Surbhi Chahal served as the moderator, guiding the flow of sessions and facilitating audience engagement across the agenda.

Overview & Theme

The summit was designed as a formal convening to highlight youth leadership in a global context while reflecting the spirit and purpose of the virtual World Youth Day celebration. Hosted under ICERT's convening framework, the sessions were structured to bring together perspectives on contemporary leadership and youth engagement in public life and development-oriented initiatives.

The program was anchored in the central theme, "Empowering Young Changemakers for Innovation, Inclusion, and Sustainable Development." Across the agenda, this theme served as the organizing lens for keynote reflections, moderated exchanges, and the global roundtable format.

Theme Focus

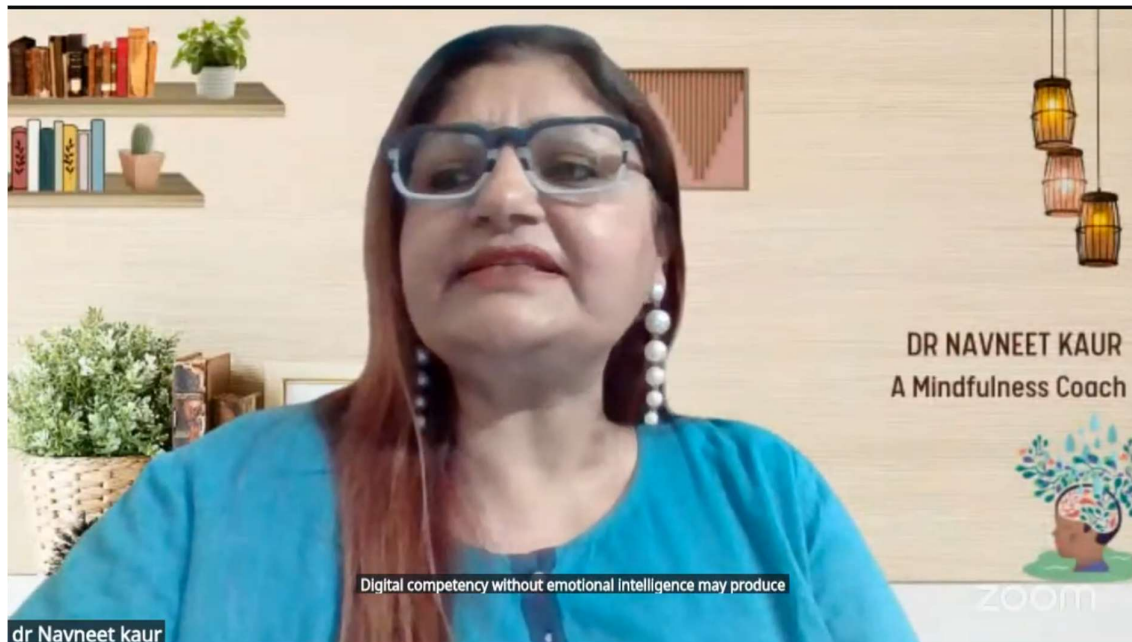
The summit emphasized youth-led change through innovation, inclusion, and sustainable development, positioning young leaders as key stakeholders in shaping forward-looking and equitable outcomes.



Welcome & Patron's Remarks

Dr. Navneet Kaur, Director of the Education and Leadership Advancement Division and Chief Patron of the summit, set the intellectual and emotional foundation. She stressed that educators must continually update themselves

to bridge generational gaps and understand the perspectives of today's young learners. In an era of abundant information, she argued, the critical skill is not knowledge transmission but the cultivation of **inquisitiveness and the right questioning** – a cornerstone of 21st-century learning.



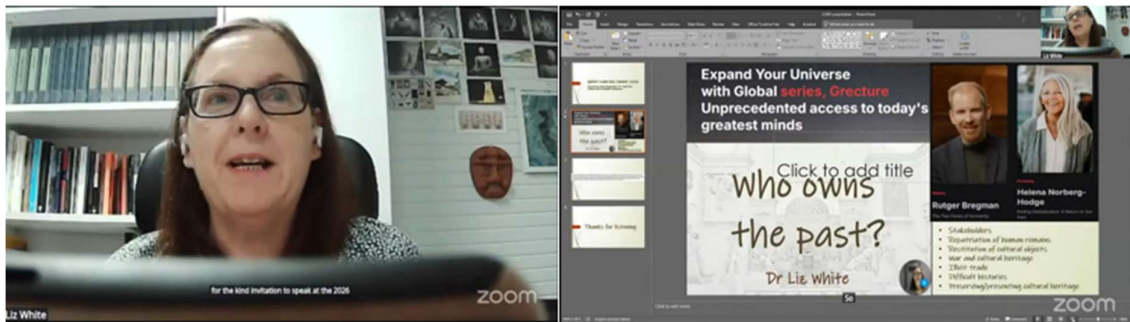
Dr. Kaur emphasized collaboration and perspective-taking, urging educators to genuinely listen to young people and understand their lived experiences. She extended an open invitation for participants to engage with ICERT through projects, research assignments, internships, and volunteering opportunities – "open for everyone" – and closed on a note of mentorship, encouraging participants to keep learning and move forward with confidence.

Keynote Address

Dr. Liz White, Assistant Professor and Academic Coordinator at Andikot College of International Studies, Woosan University, South Korea, delivered a keynote weaving personal narrative, pedagogical philosophy, and practical strategy.

She opened with the story of her doctoral research advocating for the repatriation of indigenous human remains from museums to their communities

— advocating for change as a student despite institutional opposition. Her insight: **individual conviction, joined to a collective movement, catalyzes systemic change**; museums worldwide have since reversed their policies, proving that even those without formal standing can drive meaningful change.



Dr. White argued that students today enter a world of unprecedented complexity — climate change, AI, inequality, conflict, migration, and social exclusion — where jobs are disappearing and the roles of the future do not yet exist, and where **none of these challenges have textbook answers**. She voiced concern about AI being used "instead of a brain," heightening educators' responsibility to ensure students exercise their own cognitive and creative faculties. She reframed **innovation** as improving something for the greater good and acting on it — illustrated by young students who designed a breathing filter that doubles as a phone grip, a device to reduce air-conditioner noise, and a portable IV backpack for hospitals.

Her concrete teaching strategies included: moving from giving answers to posing questions; creating collaboration opportunities and acting as facilitator rather than lecturer; using real-life problems; localizing global issues (reframing the SDGs as local projects); and promoting genuine civic engagement over internet-based essays. She described using video series such as EBS's "Great Minds" and her "Who Owns the Past?" heritage course, where students weigh evidence and form their own opinions on issues with no clear answer. Sharing a student testimonial about finding "answers and some relief" in an unstable world, she closed with a powerful reframing: rather than calling youth "the leaders of tomorrow" — which implies waiting — educators must give students

the **tools today** to make change: knowledge, critical thinking, exposure to different perspectives, real problems, safe spaces to fail, and chances to lead.

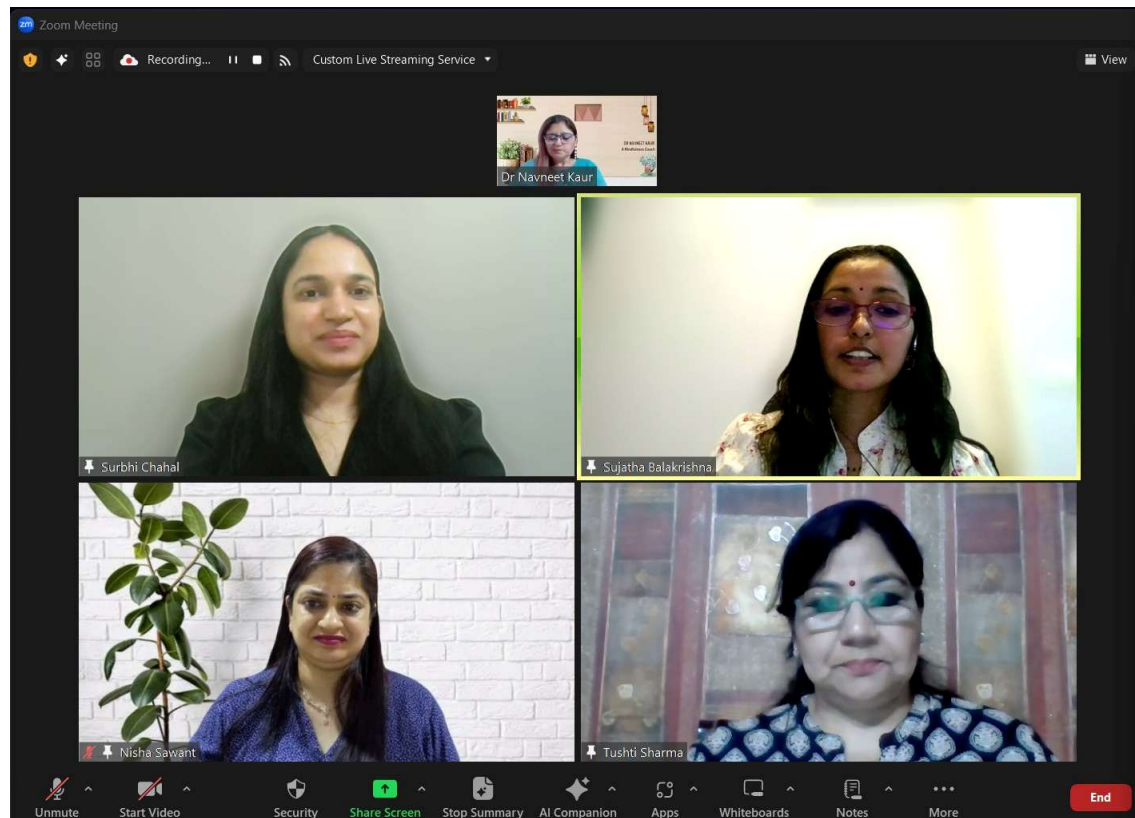
Keynote Q&A Highlights

The audience raised a wide range of questions. On cultivating an attitude of *asking* rather than *answering*, Dr. White recommended guiding students through group work and follow-up questions. On empowering young change-makers in rural African contexts, she advised establishing **local mentorship programs** as a starting point. Further exchanges addressed leadership behaviors for young professionals, meaningful contributions from developing countries, and access to funding and mentorship — with her consistent counsel being confidence, persistence, and seizing opportunities. She also addressed social-media algorithms shaping student thinking, language barriers for international students (using simpler terms and cultural examples), and reaching unwilling students by investing additional time to understand their specific challenges.



Global Roundtable Panel

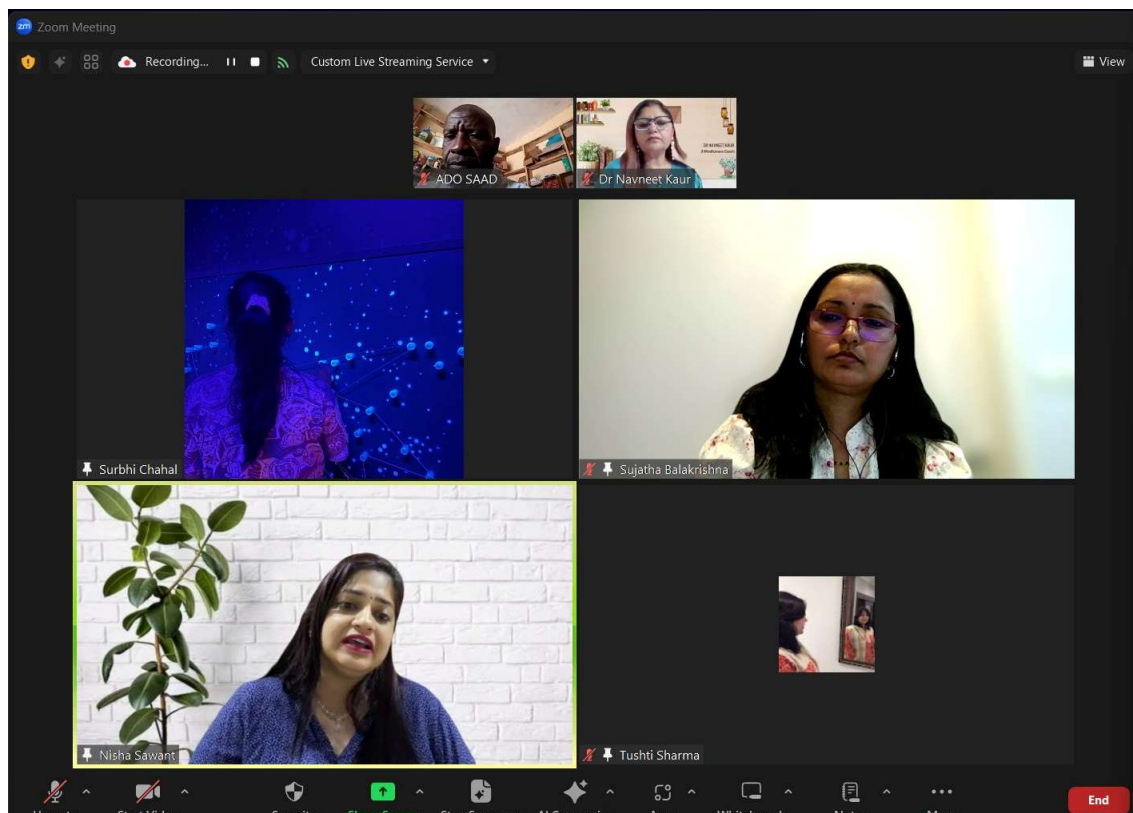
The roundtable — themed *"Innovation & Digital Transformation — Breaking Barriers: Driving Inclusion & Sustainability in a Digital Age,"* titled *"Code, Create, Change: Leveraging Emerging Tech for Social Good"* — was moderated by Surbhi Chahal and featured three panelists.



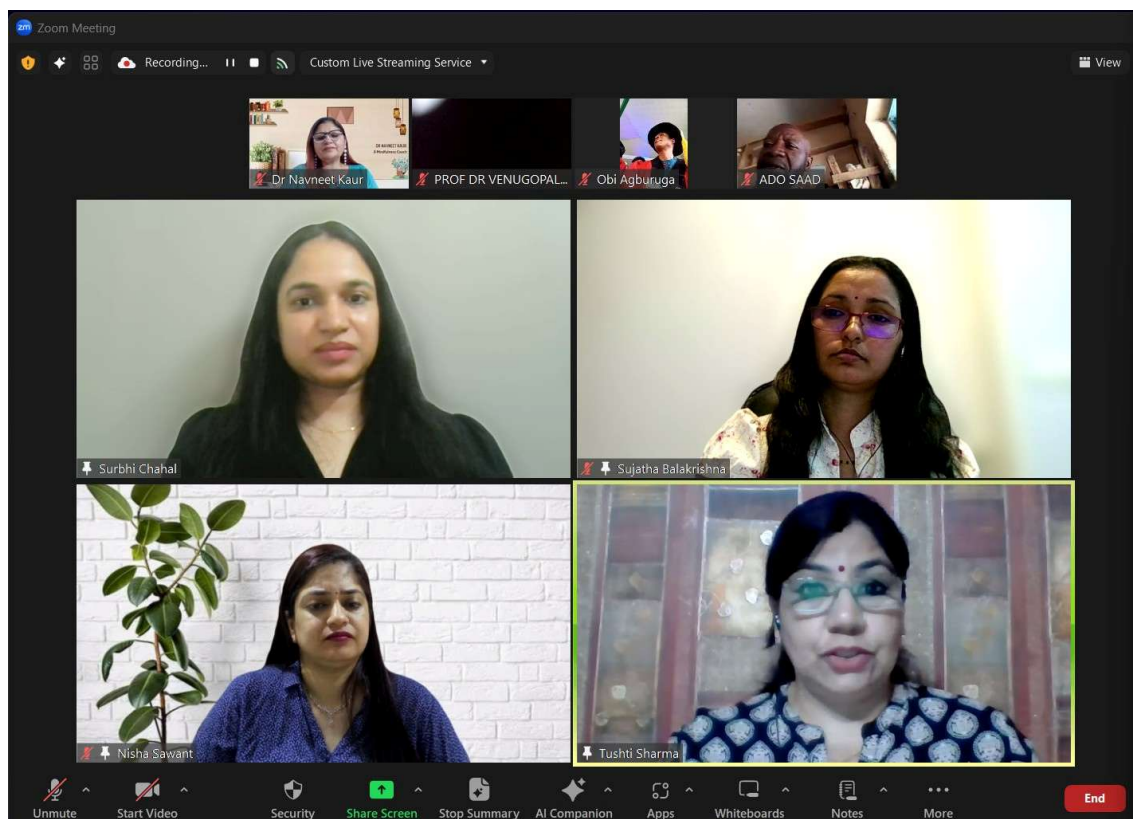
Sujata Balakrishna (Malaysia) focused on embedding technology across disciplines rather than treating it as a standalone subject, with subject-specific applications in AI, data analytics, coding, and app development. She called for assessment to shift from theoretical exercises to **project-based, real-world problem solving**, with students building prototypes, digital platforms, or data dashboards. Central to her argument was reframing **industry and academia as partners** — with industry identifying required skills, supplying real business problems, mentoring students, running workshops, and helping assess not just

technical skills but adaptability, communication, teamwork, and ethical judgment.

Dr. Nisha Sarwan (Goa) emphasized **cross-disciplinary collaboration**, noting that diverse teams combining engineering, commerce, arts, and humanities generate more innovative solutions — and that "Jugaad" (resourceful innovation under constraints) often outperforms conventional classroom learning. Addressing first-generation and semi-urban learners, she argued the primary barriers extend beyond infrastructure to a **lack of mentors, professional exposure, parental support, soft skills, and confidence**. She positioned AI as an equalizer — enabling mock interviews, presentation practice, and study materials — and highlighted improved rural connectivity (5G) as making technology-enabled learning viable. Inclusivity, she stressed, means creating spaces where every voice is heard, not merely amplifying already-capable students.



Prof. Dr. Tushti Sharma (highlighted the critical role of **language, phonetics, values, and communication studies** in keeping innovation ethical and human-centered. As AI takes over writing, translation, and analysis, distinctly human capacities — ethical questioning, empathy, contextual interpretation, and imagining consequences — become more valuable, framed as the difference between "Can we?" and "Should we?" She illustrated algorithmic bias with facial-recognition systems that misidentified darker-skinned faces (roughly 1% error for lighter-skinned men versus 34% for darker-skinned women), showing that the problem lies in **representation and training data**, not code. She also urged moving beyond attention-grabbing content toward **ethical content creation** that fosters genuine connection and drives action, citing youth-led initiatives that link climate change to personal experience.



On **actionable policy shifts for 2030**, the panel converged on: a flexible **hybrid learning ecosystem** (blending university classes, industry micro-credentials, international virtual collaboration, and community projects, with recognition of alternative credentials); a **collaboration framework** across institutions,

industries, disciplines, and borders; **entrepreneurial-mindset development** reframed as recognizing opportunities and creating economic, social, and environmental value; and **ethics integrated across all levels** of the curriculum, with diverse representation in datasets and decision-making.

Policy Recommendations

Emerging from the roundtable, the panel articulated a set of actionable policy recommendations aimed at empowering youth to leverage technology for sustainable development by 2030:

1. Establish a Flexible Hybrid Learning Ecosystem. Support models in which students simultaneously engage with university classes, industry micro-credentials, international virtual collaborations, and community-based projects. This requires policy backing for digital infrastructure, flexible curriculum frameworks, and formal recognition of alternative credentials such as micro-credentials and industry certifications.

2. Mandate a Collaboration Framework. Make collaboration across institutions, industries, disciplines, and borders the norm rather than the exception — spanning both online and offline settings. Multidisciplinary research, joint programs, and student-exchange initiatives should be standard features of the education system.

3. Foster an Entrepreneurial Mindset. Reframe entrepreneurship beyond business creation to include recognizing opportunities, identifying problems, and experimenting with solutions. Innovation should be expected to create economic, social, and environmental value aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals.

4. Integrate Ethics Across All Levels. Embed ethical reasoning throughout the curriculum — not as a standalone module, but as a lens applied to every technical and creative endeavor. Ensure diverse representation in datasets,

development teams, and decision-making processes to guard against algorithmic bias and exclusion.

5. Strengthen Mentorship and Equitable Access. Prioritize local mentorship programs, professional exposure, and soft-skills development — especially for first-generation and semi-urban learners — using AI as an equalizer and leveraging expanded rural connectivity so that opportunity is not determined by background.

6. Champion Inclusivity as a Design Principle. Craft policies that create spaces where every voice is heard, rather than simply amplifying already-capable students, ensuring technology functions as an equalizer rather than a divider.

Collectively, the panel's vision for 2030 is a higher-education ecosystem that transcends university walls — connecting students with industry partners, international peers, and communities through inclusive, collaborative, and ethically grounded technology-enabled learning.

Key Cross-Cutting Themes

Several threads ran through the day: a commitment to **global interconnectedness and inclusion**; a **multidisciplinary approach** spanning education, youth empowerment, sustainability, health, and well-being; the summit's dual function as both a knowledge-sharing forum and an active **mentorship and career-development platform**; the guiding pillars of innovation, inclusion, and sustainable development; and a deliberate effort to **bridge theory and practice** by pairing an academic keynote with a practitioner-focused panel and mentorship dialogue.

Closing, Award Ceremony & Acknowledgements

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The summit featured the presentation of the **Global Youth Icon Award 2026**, honoring outstanding contributions embodying the summit's spirit of innovation, inclusion, and sustainable development. In her closing remarks, moderator Surbhi Chahal expressed deep gratitude to Chief Patron Dr. Navneet Kaur for her visionary leadership; to keynote speaker Dr. Liz White, who joined late into her night from South Korea; and to all panelists, organizers, and delegates from around the world. The summit concluded with a shared commitment to future collaborative initiatives, including offline conferences.

Concluding Takeaway

Takeaway

The Global Youth Leadership Summit 2026, held virtually on August 12, 2026 in the context of World Youth Day, reaffirmed ICERT's focus on supporting youth leadership through the theme "Empowering Young Changemakers for Innovation, Inclusion, and Sustainable Development," engaging a community of 520 registered participants through moderated keynote, Q&A, and roundtable formats.