



INFORMAL SUMMARY

United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

Youth Forum 2016

Youth Taking Action to Implement the 2030 Agenda

1-2 February 2016

United Nations Headquarters, New York

The **2016 Youth Forum of the Economic and Social Council**, convened in New York from 1-2 February 2016, came at a timely moment as the world has to come together to turn the bold dreams and ground-breaking ambition of the 2030 Agenda into tangible results for the benefit of all. The **Youth will play a leading role in implementing the Agenda** and its ambitious goals, the Sustainable Development Goals. As a people centred endeavour, the SDGs will be measured by their successes in advancing the well-being of all and ensuring that *no one is left behind*. As the discussions at the Youth Forum amply highlighted, Youth will be crucial in translating this vision into reality. The Forum set new records in attendance of youth representatives, ministers and senior officials.

“The challenges we face may seem overwhelming and out of reach for us to solve. But that is not true. Each and every one of us can be an agent of change, no matter our age or means. “

H.E. Mr. Oh Joon, President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council

Given the need to turn the commitments into action, the 2016 ECOSOC Youth Forum sought ways in which the world’s **Youth can take action to implement the 2030 agenda**. Key priority and focus areas of the Forum were education, youth employment and entrepreneurship, climate change, poverty, inequalities and youth empowerment in urban areas, health, peaceful and inclusive societies, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, each of which was explored in comprehensive breakout sessions. Additional sessions were held on key regional priorities for youth development as well as on promoting innovative partnerships involving youth in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Opening session

H.E. Mr. Oh Joon, President of ECOSOC opened the Forum by showing a short film of young people delivering a message entitled “dear world”, highlighting that what happens around the globe impacts their life and how their actions may change the world for the better. Welcoming the youth. The President of ECOSOC called on them to be advocates, ambassadors and catalysts for change. He pointed out that the success of the sustainable development goals will depend on the degree to which youth will become a driving force for the implementation of the 2030 agenda.

The **Deputy Secretary-General, Mr. Jan Eliasson** highlighted the interdependent character of the Sustainable Development Goals and the importance of addressing them as mutually-enforcing goals. He urged the international community to see the youth not as objects, but as subjects and drivers of change that should not be side-lined from political processes. He stressed the importance of Security Council resolution 2250, which for the first time recognizes the role of young people as peacebuilders.

Mr. Guy Ryder, Director General of the ILO, launched the new “**Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth**”, a UN system wide effort to promote youth employment across the world and thereby to tackle one of the biggest challenges of our time (see below). He urged leaders of the world to deliver on their commitments and warned that empty promises would not satisfy the youth.

Mr. Ahmad Alhendawi, United Nations Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth pointed to a non-exclusive list of the “most frequently made mistakes” with regards to youth development, including seeing youth as the future, when they are in fact the present; trying to work for, instead of with youth; believing young people need support, rather than investment; considering the youth lazy, instead of listening to their voices and recognizing their calls; as well as arguing young women and girls should just be given the same amount of attention as young men and boys, when in fact they are facing more obstacles and remain among the most marginalized groups.

In her keynote address, writer and activist **Ms. Samar Mezghanni**, shared her personal experience as a child and girl in a rapidly changing society. She criticized the fact that power is often “reserved for men with white hair”. Rather power should be derived “from the accumulation of action” taken to achieve sustainable development. She inspired the audience to write their own stories of a better world.

Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth

The Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth, which has been endorsed by the UN's Chief Executives Board for Coordination, is the first ever comprehensive UN system-wide effort to promote youth employment and assist Member States in targeting a crucial goal of the 2030 Agenda. Its main aim is to scale up action at the country-level and to increase impact through effective, innovative and evidence-based interventions.

The Global Initiative has four key areas of action:

- Strategic Alliance Building – a robust set of strategic multi-stakeholder alliances is being built to advocate, ensure policy convergence, stimulate innovative thinking and mobilize resources for more and better investments in youth employment. The Alliance will be comprised of governments, private sector, social partners, youth representatives, civil society, foundations, academia and other key organizations;
- Regional and country level action – the Global Initiative will scale-up action at regional and country-levels and ensure ownership and coherence with national development priorities. UN Country Teams will engage with a diverse set of national and local partners in the areas of green jobs for youth, quality apprenticeships, digital skills and the building of “tech-hubs”, support for young people in the rural economy, facilitating the transition from the informal to the formal economy and youth entrepreneurship;
- Knowledge base of effective policies - a global Knowledge Facility will be developed to capture, analyse and widely share best practices and innovation, enhance capacity development and facilitate peer learning about what works to improve labour market outcomes for young women and men, and;
- Innovative and sustainable funding modalities and resource mobilization - The Global Initiative will advocate for high level commitment of local and international actors to increase resources through present and future funding facilities in an inclusive and transparent manner.

Highlights of the discussions held in plenary

Three interactive plenary sessions, moderated by Mr. Ahmad Alhendawi, Ms. Noëlla Richard, Youth policy specialist at UNDP, and Mr. Lloyd Russel, from the major group on children and youth, were held with participation from a wide range of actors: Ministers of Youth, young Parliamentarians, senior officials from Ministries and national youth institutions, a wide range of youth representatives and representatives of youth led or youth focussed organizations, business sector representatives and officials from the United Nations and other international and regional organizations.

Participants highlighted **key challenges** to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, namely safety; global humanitarian crises and the outflow of refugees; poor economic and social conditions and their impact on youth and radicalization; marginalization (especially social, geographic, legal and economic marginalization of young women, more so in the case of indigenous women); quality education and health care, and availability of resources for the youth.

The discussions were solution-oriented and led to recommendations with regards to policy, action and partnerships, with a particular emphasis being put on finding innovative ways and providing adequate space for the **participation of youth in decision-making processes** at all levels. Several speakers highlighted in this regard the importance of creating or reinforcing formal frameworks that can make young people stakeholders rather than mere targets in policy-making. A certain number of policy areas were highlighted for urgent action, namely gender, employment, education, technologies and climate change. To adequately capture progress in these areas, participants underlined the need to collect disaggregated data.

In addition to action by youth, **actions for youth** were emphasized, especially providing youth with adequate education and skills to develop their potential, access jobs or start companies and become employers. The question of youth was identified as a truly integrative one, which should not be the sole prerogative of ministers of youth but should concern all actors in their respective fields. Promoting youth as actors requires not only the creation of truly multi-stakeholder partnerships, in which the United Nations is called to play an active role, but also using youth organizations as efficient intermediaries and mediators between policy-makers and young people.

In addition to policy-making, youth must be **involved in the monitoring of the SDGs** so as to guarantee accountability and ownership. This implies making the SDGs accessible to youth by simplifying the language, making the communication more effective and translating the goals into projects and programmes. In terms of follow-up action, it was stressed that the key lesson from five years of holding the ECOSOC Youth Forum is that the international community must move beyond calls to action into implementation. The next youth forum should therefore be a review of such efforts. Indicators should also be developed to help track progress with regard to the SDGs in general and those affecting the youth in particular. A call was made for regional and sub-regional youth forum meetings that would allow the discussion to be more focused on local specificities in implementation.

The following key messages regarding youth engagement came out of the discussions:

- The young are a diverse group of individuals that speak with many different voices. Political processes must be participatory and inclusive for all of these voices to be heard, with special attention given to marginalized groups.
- The “youth bulge” should not be considered as a problem as young people are the problem-solvers of tomorrow as much as today. The success of the 2030 Agenda will depend on their action, dreams and leading roles in politics, business, academia and civil society.
- Youth entrepreneurship will be a key element in achieving youth employment and economic growth and driving forward sustainable development by means of technology and innovation.
- Violent extremism continues to be a major threat, especially as long as young people are marginalized and facing a world of inequality, conflict and a lack of economic opportunities and political participation.

- Honest and responsive governments are a key priority for the youth who are already taking responsibility as young parliamentarians and political leaders all over the world. Governments need to be made responsible to stay true to their commitments.
- “How” we act matters more than “what” we do and young people can take responsibility and change the world for the better in diverse roles in politics, business, civil society and academia.

Specific analysis and recommendations to enhance partnerships involving youth

- The youth of today is the generation that is most connected in the history of humankind. Leveraging this unique knowledge and technological expertise will be key to harnessing effective partnerships; young people are a permanent partner, not just a fashion trend; youth participation through partnerships and policy is therefore here to stay.
- Insufficient funding is a key constraint to youth partnerships. There are many creative young people with big ideas who lack resources to implement them. National initiatives such as the creation of Youth Councils were presented as ways to bridge the gap, by providing a feedback loop that informs the Government of the kind of support needed.
- There can be a woeful lack of representation of youth in key international processes that matter most to youth, such as the UNFCCC and other mechanisms to combat climate change. While the way forward is for young people to demand for increased participation through their governments, there should also be more opportunities to partner with private sector organisations to provide more opportunities for the youth to be engaged.
- Partnerships are key to allowing young people to engage more broadly in development efforts. Central to this is the issue of leadership in both the public and private sector. Good leaders at all levels, including young leaders, are needed to achieve peace and transform the world. Youth should benefit from appropriate training to gain leadership skills.
- Special efforts should be made to ensure that partnerships must be intergenerational and diverse so that lessons are learned that cross all ages and ethnicities.
- Partnerships should include a strong outreach and communication component. The greatest challenge lies with a 2030 horizon. If the story is not told from today, real impact will not be achieved. If the vision and principles of the Sustainable Development Agenda are not amply shared, then no success can be expected. Only if all are aware of what is imagined for the future and what the stakes are for all of humanity, can true progress be achieved.

Key messages from thematic breakout sessions

Peaceful and Inclusive Societies

Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals was broadly considered as a commitment to young people. It must be used as a tool to include young people in tackling the most pressing social, economic, and environmental problems facing societies. With its call for accountability, transparency, and inclusion, it is an opportunity to acknowledge that young people's experiences and initiatives are needed to achieve the 2030 Agenda. Governments must open up and create formal mechanisms for meaningful youth participation in decision-making at all levels. Young people must be viewed as capable and equal partners in collective decision-making. Governments and all stakeholders must be ready to listen when young people bring their particular skills, local knowledge, and experience into decision-making arenas.

The youth needs an enabling environment for participation. Young people and youth-led organizations need to have their own spaces of independent operation and action, and they need stakeholders to protect and value this space, and support their activities. In order to achieve inclusive participation, young people's organizations should be supported by adequate resources. The creation of youth networks should be encouraged at all levels and spaces and platforms for discussion, organization and partnership should be created. In this vein, participants proposed that a global youth platform should be set up to track progress on the 2030 Agenda.

Education

A challenge ahead is to make education and training more relevant not only to the labor market and individual needs, but also to the realities of the twenty first century globalized world. As a solution to this, using the potential of ICTs and mobile learning in adopting approaches to job creation and training was underlined. Access to quality education and lifelong learning for all were considered crucial in order to effectively tackle inequalities.

Considerable attention was dedicated to the need to improve the relevance of education and training to the work force demands. The expanded role for the youth to play in making sure their concerns are heard was stressed. Partnerships make education and training systems more effective, including in identifying what skills are needed. The need to collaborate in anticipating the needs brings governments, private sector, youth organisations and international players on board together to chart the way towards inclusive economies and full employment and decent work. Education for global citizenship has a critical role to play in equipping young people with the knowledge, skills, attitude and behaviours they need to be engaged and to become empathetic citizens. In this regard, the role of education in the promotion of peace, human rights, equality, tolerance, diversity and sustainable development goals was highlighted.

Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship

Discussions focused on strategic partnerships and the role and contribution of young people. High importance was attached by speakers to the need to promote partnerships between and dialogue among governments, education providers, the private sector, business associations, trade unions and youth representatives including on policy making, curriculum development, innovation, labour market integration and quality employment. In order to create opportunities for the Youth, mentorship programmes should be developed with a focus on financial literacy, interview skills and

other specific expertise needed. Space should also be created for social entrepreneurship and for the creation of incubators of innovative practices, with a focus on social issues.

Given the importance of communication, young people need to be directly involved in advocacy efforts, including through social media campaigns, and use existing youth advocacy networks at country and regional levels. Youth advocates should also be truly involved in policy making.

Climate change

Recommendations that emerged from the session highlighted the need to expand youth participation at UN climate change conferences, by providing financial support to enable greater youth attendance at the annual Conferences of the Parties and smaller UN climate meetings, especially for youth from developing countries and by ensuring that official Youth Delegates are part of delegations of all countries.

Governments should also provide in a systemic and globally coordinated manner the institutional and technological means for youth engagement in local climate action and SDGs implementation, including public awareness raising, resource mobilization, capacity building and knowledge management. Information and communication technology tools should be developed to map, document, evaluate and incentivize youth led climate action in a globally coordinated way. Music, social media, celebrities' engagement and broadcast media partnerships should also be used for local and global resource mobilization in support of youth led multistakeholder climate action.

Poverty, inequalities and youth empowerment in urban contexts

At this session, different ways of engaging the youth in decision making processes were explored so that policies effectively target urban prosperity for young people. Enabling access to affordable housing, free mobility, green spaces and safe public spaces were especially highlighted in that context. Furthermore, the need to reach out to marginalized young people and specifically target them in decision-making was underlined. The collection of data on crime and violence in urban areas was considered as a basis to creating for meaningful policy interventions.

Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls

The need to act simultaneously on various fronts – increasing the leadership of women, promoting their economic empowerment and ending violence against them - was stressed at the breakout session. This was needed not only to reach SDG 5 but also to promote all other Goals whose success depends on progress in this area. The active participation of men and boys was strongly encouraged in order to accelerate social change, build role models and challenge gender norms. The need to create safe spaces and platforms for women to support each other when it comes to experiencing gender-based violence was particularly highlighted. Young women should also receive more support both by men and other women to be entrepreneurs, receive education on technology and ICTs and feel empowered to shape political decision-making at the highest level. For this to happen, the importance of using media as a tool for a positive change in gender norms was highlighted.

Health

A call was made for increased action on health education and a better access to health services for both young women and men. Health systems should adapt their response to the specific biological, emotional and social needs of adolescents. These policy interventions should go hand in hand with an in depth reflection on how young people themselves could contribute to making these changes

happen and how much public space should be given to them for such efforts.

Key messages from breakout sessions on regional priorities

Asia and the Pacific

The Agenda 2030 is of particular importance to the Asia and Pacific region that face challenges including lack of adequate access to education, employment opportunities, health care and the impact of climate change, extreme weather events and disasters often experienced in small island Pacific States. The agenda offers a long-term framework for concerted action to build resilience of local disenfranchised communities, finance the adaptation and mitigation to climate change in these regions and give an all-inclusive comprehensive reform response including young people as key partners in the process.

Some key challenges were identified; ad hoc youth engagement, lack of incentives and access to finance for youth led work, lack of skills development and unemployment. The key issue young people highlighted was the lack of incentives and recognition of their valuable contribution to national development work. The participants highlighted the dire need to translate SDG's into a comprehensible format for grassroots youth to understand and translate into projects; the funding of youth development work including financial allocation to support youth led research and climate adaptation projects; the recognition of institutional youth led initiatives and their inclusion in all levels of decision making; and empowerment of national youth councils with enforcement provisions to hold governments accountable.

Africa

In Sub-Saharan Africa, as speakers highlighted, there is no lack of political commitments made for empowering young people but these commitments are often not matched by sufficient action or investment. Africa is a rich continent but too many youth are poor, fuelling youth migration as well as conflict and violence. In this vein, peace and security was highlighted as essential, noting that they are prerequisites for development and can only be ensured if youth are at the table during peace negotiations.

Combatting poverty will require strong capacity investment into education and training. Both the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, set by the African Union, call for human-driven development, which requires investment in human capital, particularly through education, training and mentorship. Success in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda will also crucially require addressing youth unemployment and underemployment. Participants called for education to be more closely aligned to the skills-demands of the labour market and emphasized the importance of supporting youth entrepreneurship through training, start-up capital and affordable loans.

There was a strong call for the establishment and strengthening of formal structures and intergenerational dialogue to engage youth in decision making. Participants called upon youth to hold governments accountable, but also called upon governments to create the necessary space for

youth to do so. Volunteering with government and non-governmental entities was stated as a way that can provide African youth with both opportunities and exposure.

In order to truly empower the young, there is the need to change perceptions and mindsets. Governments should not see youth as threats or as lacking in value. Youth are the ones who will implement the continent's long term development vision and, as such, have to be engaged today. Youths' views of themselves are also critical: Youth must see themselves as agents of change.

Latin America and the Caribbean

In the region, there is a particular need to bridge the gap between the type of education that is received in formal education systems and the type of training needed to secure a high quality job in the labour market. **The role of education in promoting gender equality among** young men and women in the region was a central theme of this discussion as was the need to address sexual and reproductive health rights in order to promote gender equality.

There is also a need to make youth more aware of the SDGs, using social media as an avenue to reach more youth. An interesting initiative is the publication of comics on the SDGs in a local language to disseminate information about the goals. It also crucial to make full use of the existing instruments to promote youth participation, such as the Iberoamerican Convention on the Rights of Young People and the World Programme of Action on Youth (WPAY), including by translating them in the national legislation.

Europe and North America

The relevance of the SDGs for the region is paramount given the universality of the 2030 Agenda and the problems encountered in the region such as rising inequalities, lack of funding and infrastructure and the need to tackle important social and environmental issues. The Agenda provides an opportunity to address challenges in an integrated manner; it can help bridge differences between heterogeneous groups of young people, bringing them together for the same causes.

Four main challenges for young people in Europe and North America were discussed: youth participation, risk of marginalisation, access to rights and quality jobs. When asked to indicate which was the most important, a large majority of participants identified. Young people are often portrayed as disengaged from politics. Solutions to address these issues include fostering the inclusion of the 2030 Agenda in school curricula to help young people feel part of a global community and increase interest in global trends and national politics; there should also be increased investment in youth and funding for youth organisations and youth led solutions.

Middle East and Northern Africa

The MENA region faces seemingly insurmountable challenges resulting from insecurities and armed conflicts, and their humanitarian consequences. Against this backdrop, the region is witnessing significant hurdles for youth in terms of employment, civic engagement, health, and education, inter

alia. Yet, across the MENA region, young women and men are driving innovation, creative solutions to address some of the humanitarian crises and development challenges.

Participants highlighted that policy makers need to pay special attention to employment and entrepreneurship in the MENA region through creating opportunities for development, personal realisation and improved self-esteem and confidence. Helping young people transform their creative ideas into successful business plans by removing the barriers to entrepreneurship has many potential benefits, including direct and indirect job creation and the development of human capital and new skills.

Closing session

Mr. Wu Hongbo, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, highlighted the importance of taking ownership of the SDGs. From employment to peacebuilding, from volunteerism to electoral participation, from digital activism to sport, youth engagement in every aspect of life is critical to sustainable development. The Success of the SDGs will be measured by the depth and breadth of positive change brought to the lives of the worlds' most vulnerable and marginalized. It will be measured by the levels of equity, equality and inclusion across our societies, by the strength of social, political and cultural institutions, and it will be framed by shared prosperity. He highlighted that whether or not humanity will succeed will be a testament to how well everybody has worked together in developing and implementing the development agendas from the local to the global levels.

Ms. Helen Clark, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, explored the question of how young people can be partners in the implementation of Agenda 2030. Agendas are mere words on paper unless action follows. A critical part of the action will be the participation and engagement of young people. As a key requirement for youth engagement, Ms Clark highlighted the importance of inclusive societies, societies in which youth have the space and the right to contribute to development and engage in political and civic affairs. That will enable youth to engage directly in making the SDGs relevant to their societies, and ensure that the areas most critical for youth development are addressed. Ms. Clark also emphasised the imperative of gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women. No society will reach its potential if half the population has less than equal rights and opportunities.

Mr. Ahmad Alhendawi, the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, highlighted that it was time to move away from words and unleash the power of young people. He stressed the importance of engaging youth in the SDG implementation without delay, as dictated by the demographic realities of the world we live in. He recalled that the ECOSOC Youth Forum has transformed over the years, bringing more Ministers of Youth and other important stakeholders together with young people and stressed that its role should be further asserted in the follow-up and review processes of the Agenda. The pace of action should also further quicken. To that end, Member States should increase the number of Youth delegates, particularly from the Global South. He also called on Member States to create favourable conditions for youth development, participation, employment and entrepreneurship. He noted that while there is no youth goal in the SDG framework, youth issues are cross-cutting throughout different goals and targets, and must be pursued together. As the youth-development related goals and targets are interdependent, they provide an excellent

opportunity to measure the progress made in the area of youth development. The Envoy underscored the need for such an integrated and comprehensive approach in order to reflect the centrality of addressing youth needs and rights as a key to ensuring sustainable development. The increased interest of young people to take action in support of the SDGs is a promising trend, which should be supported and encouraged by all means.

The President of ECOSOC, His Excellency Ambassador Oh Joon, underlined that the challenges the youth is facing are real. Unemployment, poverty, climate change, inequality are issues that need to be addressed through a cross-cutting approach. He emphasised that solutions exist and there is a need for an inspiring commitment by all stakeholders to drive the Agenda 2030 forward. In partnership with other stakeholders, young people should be fully engaged in the process of implementing the Agenda 2030.

Emphasising that youth need to be front and center in the push to implement the 2030 Agenda, the President stated that young people will play an important role in communicating around and advocating for the Sustainable Development Goals so that people all over the world know about them. This is a prerequisite to ensure that nobody is left behind. Young people will also play an important role in holding the UN system and governments accountable, to stay true to their promises and commitments. They will play an important role in driving forward their own solutions to the challenges of our time, as young entrepreneurs, professionals or politicians. For this to happen, political institutions – from the UN to the local level – need to be inclusive, open and participatory, so that the youth does not only have a seat, but also a strong voice in our world.