

#YOUTH2030

7th Economic and Social Council Youth Forum

INFORMAL SUMMARY

The role of youth in building sustainable and resilient urban and rural communities

30-31 January 2018

Trusteeship Council Chamber

United Nations Headquarters, New York

The ECOSOC Youth Forum took place from 30th to 31st January 2018 and was chaired by H.E. Mrs. Marie Chatardová (Czech Republic), the President of the Economic and Social Council. This year's theme discussed the role of youth in building sustainable and resilient urban and rural communities. The sessions addressed priorities, experiences, challenges and innovations in the areas of water and sanitation (SDG 6), energy (SDG7), cities (SDG11), sustainable consumption and production (SDG12), deforestation and biodiversity (SDG15) and the use of science technology for innovation in facilitating youth engagement (SDG17) that will be reviewed in the high-level political forum (HLPF) in July 2018. The discussion also covered cross-cutting issues such as peacebuilding and gender equality.

The discussion went beyond the conference room and continued both in the SDG Media Zone and on social media with the hashtag #YOUTH2030. The engagement of young people over social media contributed to the discussion held in the conference rooms. The outcomes of the Forum will be an integral contribution to the high-level political forum (HLPF), held under the auspices of ECOSOC, and the High-Level Segment of ECOSOC in July 2018.

The following key messages emerged from the discussion at the Forum:

- ✓ Holistic approaches need to be devised by communities and stakeholders at all levels to achieve the SDGs as powerful and relevant framework for action.



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- ✓ The voices of young people can be amplified at the global level if they are included as youth delegates at the UN during the review of implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the High-Level Political Forum, where they can continue the process of holding their Governments accountable, including through vigorous shadow reporting.
- ✓ Structured and institutionalized avenues should be created for youth, including young women and girls, indigenous youth and those living with disabilities, to participate and lead in all levels of policy-making and processes that affect them, including in the design of national strategies and plans.
- ✓ Ministries responsible for the youth portfolio must act on their responsibility to ensure that the needs of young people are prioritized, including through collaboration with other line Ministries and adequate budgetary commitments and partnerships with all stakeholders.
- ✓ Many young people lack access to essential services, including sustainable energy, water and sanitation, and many are vulnerable to natural disasters and biodiversity loss. This has social, health and economic consequences that impact them; thus, fostering resilience in these areas is an indispensable for any sustainable development plan.
- ✓ Initiatives to effectively increase the eco-efficiency of consumption, reducing pollution and minimizing waste should be supported financially and through capacity-building building on the innovative ideas, expertise, and commitment to the 2030 Agenda of young people.
- ✓ Urban and rural areas should assimilate and collaborate with youth to achieve a peaceful, resilient and sustainable future. They need to be more inclusive, particularly of young women and men, promote safety, and optimal use of available resources and facilities.
- ✓ It is crucial to invest in continuous scientific and technological innovation to improve accessible tools across language barriers to tackle the development challenges and to empower young people, while paying attention to the most vulnerable in societies.
- ✓ It is crucial to address the persistent challenges of unemployment and underemployment, and to reimagine education systems to improve access to technology and innovation, considering regional specificities.



- ✓ Resources must be channeled from all sources – public, private, philanthropic and Official Development Assistance - to promote direct investment in the priority issues that affect young people.

The following detailed summary highlights key the different sessions of the Youth Forum, including the thematic and regional breakout sessions.

I. PLENARY SESSION

The role of youth in building sustainable and resilient urban and rural communities

Speakers highlighted the unique role of the ECOSOC Youth Forum as a very important global space bringing together young people and youth ministers around key concerns of young people and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Speakers underscored that the implementation of the SDGs needs to take root at the country and local community levels, where it matters most. Speakers highlighted national experiences in fostering youth engagement and SDG implementation, including through institutional structures and national development frameworks, entrepreneurship and technological innovations.

II. THEMATIC BREAKOUT SESSIONS

SDG 6: Ensure access to water and sanitation for all

Participants highlighted the interlinkages between SDG 6 with other SDGs, as factors that hinder young women and girls' education including the burden to fetch water from long distances as well as the pervasiveness of taboos around menstrual and personal hygiene. As a result, many young people lacked access to water and sanitation, and many are affected by and vulnerable to natural disasters and biodiversity loss. This has important social, health and economic consequences that impact them directly. As such, fostering resilience is an indispensable and cross-cutting component of any development plan that ensures the protection of the environment, ecosystems and biodiversity. The challenges of achieving SDG 6 while being inclusive of youth involvement and local action are tied to financing, capacity-building and awareness-raising. Some solutions discussed included: a stronger focus on social entrepreneurship, the use of knowledge-sharing platforms, and a stronger integration of water knowledge in educational curricula. **The adoption of conscious consumerism and challenging “business-as-usual” were identified as critical to creating momentum for businesses to adopt a triple bottom line for people, planet and profit.**



SDG 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

With SDG7, the UN recognized for the first time, that energy is a critical area of action for the achievement of sustainable development. However, within the indicator framework for SDG7, youth and children are still not well represented. Participants highlighted that energy systems are going through a tremendous and unstoppable transformation that will inevitably bring about disruptions. Therefore, it is imperative to ensure and facilitate youth participation in the energy policy-making process at the national and global level. **It is crucial to invest in modern energy that employs sustainable energy tools, renewable energy technologies, and in enabling and supportive policy frameworks. Innovative business models and methods and structured spaces should be created to enable the youth to actively engage in promoting the production and use of renewable energy.**

SDG 11: Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Cities are laboratories of sustainable development and illustrate the interlinkages among the SDGs, including decent work, gender equality, and peacebuilding. In the area of employment and decent work, the mismatch of skills and employment opportunities continues to be a key challenge. Solutions should be rooted at the local level to mend information, entrepreneurship and policy systems gaps, utilizing public-private partnerships, and youth advocacy. Gender-sensitive urban planning is also crucial.

Appropriate infrastructure investments, inclusion strategies and education can play a key role in preventing violent extremism, promoting cultural diversity and ultimately contributing to peacebuilding. At the same time, there should be better balance between urban and rural development to ensure that rural-urban migration is orderly and promote sustainable development.

Participants agreed that a systematic inclusion of youth voices in local governance is often missing. **Youth should be empowered to engage in policy-making processes on an equal footing at all levels, including through volunteerism, education and physical and technological spaces for participation.**

SDG 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

The efforts of youth-led civil society and social entrepreneurial entities to develop sustainable lifestyles and introduce the right mix of incentives, especially financial, and regulations would benefit from an accessible, holistic, and systematic education that covers formal, informal, and non-formal approaches. Moreover, inclusive, equitable, resilient bridge-building between rural and urban communities should be prioritized to develop sustainable consumption and production through the promotion of human-centered technology and knowledge-sharing. **Participants called upon Member States to develop trade and industrial policies based on good practices and**



youth-led entrepreneurial initiatives, promoting an identity shift from consumers to producers to better consider sustainable patterns across the entire supply chain.

SDG 15: Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss, and the related processes

Education is a crucial tool to increase action towards SDG 15, especially to raise awareness about the massive underfunding of projects. There is the need to strengthen youth engagement and access to related job opportunities. More funding sources need to be opened to youth entrepreneurs, with the understanding that possible failures stemming from the inherent risk of creative ventures can be fruitful as a learning process. There was deep concern with lack of progress in implementing the SDG15 and Aichi biodiversity targets. **The voices of Indigenous People and Local Communities need to be included, as they are key stewards of biodiversity. Participants sounded the alarm about the need to urgent action to step up the rate of implementation.**

SDG 17: The use of science, technology and innovations in facilitating youth engagement, development and resilience

Quality and affordable access to science, technology and innovation needs to be ensured for everyone, across regions, gender, urban/rural contexts, and including marginalized groups. Fostering education and skills development is important for making young people’s skills relevant and capable of addressing the demands of the labor market. It is also crucial to create partnerships that involve young people, governments, civil society and the private sector, for example, through quality apprenticeships and leveraging big data in the public interest. **Participants called for partnerships that engage young people, co-creating and identifying common principles governing the use of science, technology and innovation, and taking into consideration ethical and sustainability aspects. The efforts of social entrepreneurs to bridge this funding gap, although insufficient, are laudable.**

III. REGIONAL BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Africa

Young people can play a key role in combatting corruption as, thanks to their demographic weight, they can hold government and society accountable. First, it is necessary that appropriate structures and strategies are put in place so that young people are engaged meaningfully in governance and societal reform. Second, young people need to take responsibility and engage in fostering societal



change through volunteering and other innovative methods of social action. These youth-led efforts must be recognized, supported and scaled up in a transparent and inclusive way.

Corruption was considered part of a broader challenge rooted in the trust deficit between citizens and state institutions. Solutions include early education and commitments by individuals to adopt a ‘hard-working mindset’ instead of a ‘corruption’ mindset and to raise awareness among their peers. Participants in New York and at UN ECA, connected via video link, committed to lead by example and to empower others to achieve the ‘Africa we want’. It was recommended to adopt a triangle of actions to curb corruption: create space for youth to participate, adopt a sound, evidence-based methodology to strengthen the anti-corruption capacity at the local and national level, and empower young people to hold public authorities accountable.

Arab states

One of the greatest challenges identified was the general lack of hope felt by the young generation and their mistrust and disconnection to governments. Young people experience high rates of unemployment, skills mismatch between education and the labor market, unequal access to resources, and a lack of avenues to engage with the government. These factors contribute to youth refraining from meaningful social engagement and experiencing high rates of depression. When no hope for the future is envisioned, populations become restless. Governments, the UN, the private sector and civil society must collaborate to build avenues of meaningful engagement.

The dialogue with youth must be redefined, and young people empowered to engage meaningfully with the government and society. Social entrepreneurship should be promoted and the quality and quantity of university education and skills training should be improved to increase youth employment and engagement in society. Jobs, regulations and support for public-private partnerships must be improved. Education programs aimed at instilling a sense of hope in the youth should be implemented, incorporating examples of successful young entrepreneurs and UN perspectives.

Asia and the Pacific

Although youth participation is increasing, youth remains under-represented in decision-making, especially in governmental annual budgets and the distribution of national resources. A top-down mechanism, potentially supported by an UN-led document, needs to provide accountability mechanisms and ensure youth empowerment and engagement in national decision-making processes, acknowledging the challenges of geographical, demographical and political diversity.



While it is important to adopt integrated approaches, locally grown youth-led initiatives have proven their effectiveness in targeting specific SDGs. Examples showed that locally grown projects have been successfully scaled-up with the support of UN agencies and the use of social media. More international platforms were needed to share experiences and connect young leaders, as well as increased collaboration with private sector and academic institutions. Government-funded programs calling for sustainable development actors to step up and inviting young leaders to create innovative solutions have been proposed, but initiative should also be taken by all sides and stakeholders.

Europe, North America and other States

Most governments do not facilitate youth participation in the policy-making process, which is indispensable for youth to hold governments accountable. Concrete avenues to enable youth participation should be built, including education, lowering the voting age, and establishing youth liaison mechanisms at the local level, and for the voluntary national reviews (VNRs) of the HLPF. These should be implemented ensuring adequate financing, and including youth from rural, minority, and indigenous groups.

Although young people have great interest in issues related to sustainable development, not all are familiar with the 2030 Agenda. Awareness raising should frame the SDGs as approachable and relevant, so that more young people can engage in advocacy. Youth-led projects at the community level are very effective, and should be scaled-up when possible, while also top-down efforts should ensure the alignment of policies, goals and strategies in order to avoid overlaps, duplication and waste of financial resources. Governments and other organizations should facilitate the exchange of knowledge and best practices between youth initiatives.

Latin America and the Caribbean

All stakeholders, in particular the public sector, must ensure that young people can fulfil their potential by ensuring the availability of employment opportunities, supporting entrepreneurship programmes, and reducing poverty and inequality. Education systems should widen access to higher education, should include soft skills and creativity, and increase the teaching of STEMs. These elements are key to keep up with the “Fourth Industrial Revolution” and to reduce drugs and crime among youth, which continues to pose a fundamental challenge. Moreover, policy needs to ensure the urban-rural gap is not exacerbated by technological advances, and that the rights of all groups are safeguarded, including indigenous people, LGBT groups and women. There is need to strengthen awareness of the SDGs at all levels, as well as the sharing of lessons learned and best



practices, and more cross-sectoral alliances that include government, private sector and civil society to foster the engagement of young people should be created. In light of the recent natural disasters in the Caribbean, more should be done to alleviate the suffering of young people exposed to natural disasters. Young people can be part of the solution and can support the building of resilient societies.

IV. PLENARY SESSION

Means of Implementation & Financing Youth Development

Discussing the *Voluntary National Reviews*, meaningful engagement with youth was highlighted as a priority in national plans by many speakers. The following themes were discussed:

Participation

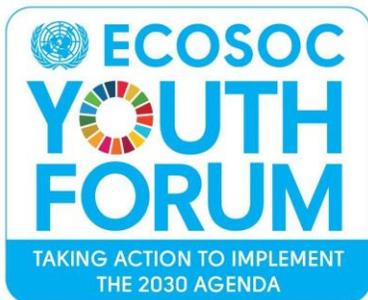
Speakers highlighted the importance of strategic plans with long-term view to include youth in the decision-making at national, regional and global levels, by increasing their presence and their ability to influence directions, co-create plans, and propose solutions. National solutions for increasing youth ownership of policy and implementation include youth collaborating in the VNRs, lowering the minimum voting age, involving youth in committees and public hearings, and increasing the number of young people at the ministerial level. Participants urged both young people and people in power to speak out for and increase participation of youth in decision-making and that governments can count on the support of the UN system.

Employment

Many countries' national policies aim at identifying talent and developing it. Increasing employability of young people and instigating job creation in the private sector are both crucial tools to young people's empowerment. Initiatives to train young people in leadership, technical and other relevant skills can help them to find meaningful employment and empower them to take bold steps to be an integral and transformative part of their societies.

Data and Accountability

Development interventions need to be inclusive and young people need to be an integral and active part of their monitoring and implementation. Transparent processes and strategies to involve young people in holding governments accountable are necessary, for instance through roundtables with government and shadow reports. Moreover, increasing the currently fragmented quality and quantity of data on youth, and involving youth initiatives on the ground in their generation, is an



important step towards understanding youth's needs. This is crucial to develop policies that are informed and inclusive of all youth, including rural populations, indigenous people and people with disability.

Leaving no one behind

Young people are held back by the lack of access to education and services, including mental and physical healthcare, and the threat of climate change aggravates this situation. Youth unemployment will also be affected by the incremental use of artificial intelligence and automation. It is necessary to be mindful of the position of vulnerable groups, including those affected by war, conflict and disability, and to ensure that they are included in decision making and that all relationships are based on justice. Some countries also highlighted the need to support quality of living and social protection for the young.

Partnerships

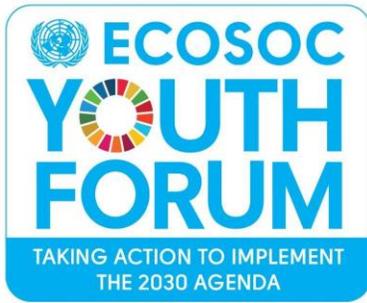
Collaborating across sectors, including youth, national and external development partners, the private sector and the UN system, was highlighted as a powerful way to increase the efficacy of development efforts targeted at achieving the SDGs for youth. Underfunding of national youth projects and youth-led organizations was identified as the biggest challenge, which should be addressed as was agreed in the Addis Ababa Agenda for Action. Supporting the achievements of youth-led organizations is crucial, as young people are the experts of their generation, and they can help find innovative solutions for climate change, sustainable development and human rights.

Commitments: Stakeholders' pledges of commitment to building resilient and sustainable communities

Representatives from government delegations, youth organizations and the UN system committed their support to implementing the SDGs and making youth a priority. They highlighted their concrete national and individual plans as well as their vision of the future.

Pledges included:

- Mexico's commitment to organize an international conference on the actions of youth towards the 2030 agenda and to compiling a national publication to share good practices from around the world on the role of youth in the 2030 Agenda;
- Singapore's announcement to host the 2018 UNLEASH global innovation lab, an annual program fully dedicated to the SDGs that supports selected bright young entrepreneurs in



implementing their ideas and projects aimed at creating a better and more sustainable world;

- Panama's announcement of a Global Youth Day to be hosted with His Holiness Pope Francis in 2019;
- Saudi Arabia's continued commitment to their Vision 2030, the country's national commitment to future projects on the 2030 Agenda, with special reference to the key role of young people, and the crucial role women are taking in public and private sector, and the country's plans to invest heavily in solar energy.
- UN-HABITAT's undertaking to the launch of a Global Network of Urban Youth Councils, which, supported by the municipality of Istanbul, will focus on building capacity in youth centers and creating opportunities to exchange knowledge and to ensure that young people are meaningfully engaged in urban decision making.
- Renowned singer and actor, Special Advocate for Education for UNICEF, Mr. Wang Yuan's commitment to join another UNICEF mission and to use his social media influence to promote quality education for children;
- Social activist, Ms. Evelina Cabrera's announcement that she will further her efforts to educate young women about the SDGs and to empower them to overcome obstacles, play football, access healthcare and support victims of gender violence;
- UNFPA's commitment to continue to work towards empowering them to make decisions about their future, in particular their reproductive rights and health;
- Film director Richard Curtis' commitment to continue to encourage young people to be confident in their ideas and projects, and in reaching out to politicians to work towards the SDGs.
- Former Miss World 2006 Taťána Gregor Brzobohatá's, commitment to continue to support grassroot action in the Czech Republic, where she collaborates with many NGOs and initiatives aimed at helping the elderly, and would support efforts of young people to give back to their communities;



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- Sixteen youth-led organizations announcement of their commitment to disavow single-use plastic from all events, and called upon the UN system to lead by example by raising the ambition and faithfully implementing Greening the Blue and UN Green Network, and upon Member States to embrace inclusive and innovative ideas to achieve sustainable consumption and production.
- The Major Group on Children and Youth's (MGCY) commitment to incorporate the outcomes of the ECOSOC Youth Forum in their submission to the HLPF, and to publish youth-led papers and use them as inputs to the Global Sustainable Development Report;
- The MGCY and ICMYO's commitment to galvanize young people in the deliverables of the sustainable agenda and empower them to make a difference.

Concluding Session

A strong appreciation was expressed by young people for the space provided by the ECOSOC Youth Forum, welcoming also the virtual participation that allowed youth from across the world who could not travel to New York. The Forum was recognized as an important venue for dialogue among young people, Member States and the ECOSOC system that should be maintained and nurtured. Government representatives were urged to use a “whole of government” approach in supporting young people. Young people were similarly encouraged to put into practice the recommendations made at the Forum and to hold their Governments accountable. All participants acknowledged the need to build on the success of the ECOSOC Youth Forum in giving voice and meaningful participation of young people in building sustainable and resilient societies and contributing to a shared future for all.