



– BACKGROUND NOTE –

**Youth ECOSOC 2013  
on**

**Shaping tomorrow's innovators:  
Leveraging science, technology, innovation and culture for today's youth  
27 March 2013**

**Background**

The number of young people in the world has never been higher, with those between the age 15-24 representing 1.2 billion or 18 percent of the world's population. As a group, young people are among those most affected by the economic, social and environmental challenges facing the world today. Their willingness to take the lead in transforming their societies and their hunger for jobs, education and desire to engage in civic life and shape the debate on world issues has put a growing spotlight on global youth issues. The international community now increasingly sees young people as potential partners in designing effective responses to development challenges, advancing the sustainable development agenda and achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). At the beginning of his second term in January 2012, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon prioritized working with and for young people as one of the top objectives of his 5-year Action Agenda. Three initiatives were announced: the appointment of a Special Advisor to the Secretary-General on Youth; the development of a United Nations System Wide Action Plan on Youth; and the development of a United Nations Volunteer Youth Corps.

In July 2013, Member States, policy-makers, civil society organizations, representatives of academia and the private sector will meet in Geneva during the high-level segment of the substantive session of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to address the theme of the Annual Ministerial Review (AMR) on “Science, technology and innovation, and the potential of culture, for promoting sustainable development and achieving the MDGs”.

To bring the voice of youth into the discussion, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), in collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), International Telecommunication Union (ITU), United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), and with the support of “New York Tech Meet Up” will organize an ECOSOC Youth Forum on “Shaping tomorrow's innovators: Leveraging science, technology, innovation and culture for today's youth” The Forum will build on youth participation initiatives of UN system partners.

The engagement of young people in formulating global development policies is key in shaping the present and futures of their countries. In this context, it is important to recognize the role and potential of youth in





supporting development and sustainability, particularly through science, technology, innovation (STI) and culture. It is also important to consider how investments in these areas can affect youth development prospects and their capacity to engage constructively in, and contribute to, their societies. STI and culture have the power to transform society, and improve economic competitiveness and resilience. They propel and sustain development efforts by generating knowledge and technological and social innovations that meet the demands of society (improving access to clean water and safe food, protection from pandemics such as malaria and HIV, and satisfying basic energy needs) in line with internationally agreed development goals. Engaging young people on how STI and culture can facilitate change and address societal problems provides an opportunity for them to explore a number of issues that directly affect them as innovators.

### **Objectives**

- 1. To provide a platform for youth to engage in dialogue with various stakeholders to explore possible ways and means for promoting global and sustainable development building upon the potential of Science, Technology, Innovation (STI), and culture.**
- 2. To enhance the vision of youth as actors for development and problem-solvers.** The Forum aims to bring increased attention to the potential of young men and women to innovate within the areas of science, technology, and culture for sustainable development, emphasizing the need for young people's engagement in addressing global challenges. Reinforce that youth are engines of growth and human development rather than a problem to be addressed.
- 3. To exchange experiences, ideas and good practices from various sectors and countries,** which have enhanced the productive capacities of young men and women in the fields of STI generating positive social, economic and/or environmental outcomes, as well as the role of youth using culture for sustainable development.
- 4. To create a platform for youth to discuss the important role of Science, Technology and Culture in the post-2015 UN development agenda.** In terms of inclusive economic development, partnerships to strengthen the scientific and engineering capabilities of developing countries, together with global and regional coordination to foster research, product development, and technology access, transfer and adaptation, will be crucial for enabling transformative development.<sup>1</sup>
- 5. To propose a list of actions and recommendations for governments, the international community, civil society, the private sector, and youth** to effectively address the barriers that exist for youth, including the differential experience and impact for young women, in science, technology and culture. Identify challenges, existing gaps, and critical areas that require special attention, and identify appropriate actions to be taken by various stakeholders.

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<sup>1</sup> UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN development Agenda, "Realizing the Future We Want for All", [http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/UNTTreport\\_10July.pdf](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/UNTTreport_10July.pdf) (Page 30)





Key recommendations and messages will be reported to the plenary and during a thematic panel discussion at the High-level Segment of ECOSOC in July 2013.

### **Target audience**

The primary target audience is young men and women (15-24 years old) and young adults (25-40 years old) who will participate as well as youth representatives from Member States. Representatives of Youth Networks and Organizations, students and young entrepreneurs with a scientific and/or technology background as well as youth-led NGOs, representatives of the private sector, the academic community, and civil society engaged in STI and culture will also be invited to participate.

Leading universities around the world could be invited to participate in person or via video links.

### **Format**

The ECOSOC Youth Forum 2013 will be a one-day event, featuring opening and closing plenary sessions, three dialogues sessions (two in the morning and one in the afternoon).

The **dialogue sessions** will be spearheaded by moderators who will introduce their sessions with 2 short “Face to Face” presentations by young people, including technology/social entrepreneurs using a TED-like format, followed by an interactive discussion at the policy-level with the audience. Recommended actions for each dialogue sessions will be presented in the closing plenary.

- Dialogue session 1 will focus on **“STI: Creating opportunity for girls and young women”**. The solution of future sustainable development challenges depends on mobilizing the full power of science. Although there are encouraging signs, women are under-represented in science whether in basic scientific research or at higher decision-making levels. This session will explore the ways in which STI can promote and facilitate gender equity.
- Dialogue session 2 will focus on **“Youth: An engine for creative economy”** This session will focus on how the creative economy is not only one of the most rapidly growing sectors of the world economy but also a highly transformative one in terms of generating innovation, income, jobs and export earnings. Reflecting on the role of culture to achieve socially, economically and ecologically sustainable development, and addressing conflict resolution, urban violence, democracy, and dialogue as well as employment, are among the key issues to reflect on in relation to culture, youth and sustainable development. The potential of culture, as a driver and enabler of a human-centered development, should equally be recognized and promoted by the young generations.
- Dialogue session 3 will focus on **“Creating Buzz: Using Social Media to Make Ideas Happen”**. The increasingly digitized essence of culture has opened up the world both geographically and





socially providing new opportunities for engagement, resistance and innovation by fostering access to knowledge. With over 350 million active Facebook users and over 20 million unique visitors on Twitter, online social networks hold a wealth of potential for innovating, mobilizing and engaging youth around the globe, opening up new forms of communication and dissemination. These applications can enable individuals and organizations to conduct far-reaching education and advocacy campaigns, mobilize constituents, empower those in need and spread business ideas. This session will examine and highlight ways in which social media tools can be used in productive, action-oriented ways by youth to communicate, mobilize and promote innovative ideas and achieving specific goals for global and sustainable development.

### **Concluding session**

Concluding the day, key messages and recommendations for each dialogue session will be presented in plenary by moderators and their youth reporters. The plenary session, chaired by the President of ECOSOC will feature a keynote speaker who will conclude the session.

### **Outcome**

The key outcomes of the Youth ECOSOC 2013 will be to provide a “youth voice” to issues central to the theme of the 2013 AMR, and help strengthen youth engagement in support of efforts in that field. A summary of the event’s outcome will be prepared for the President of the Council which captures “key messages and recommendations” from the dialogues and working sessions, to be reported back to the Council’s high-level segment during its 2013 substantive session in July.