



BACKGROUND NOTE

United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)
Youth Forum 2015

Youth Engagement in the Transition from MDGs to SDGs:

What will it take?

2-3 February 2015

United Nations Headquarters, New York

*“Challenge your leaders. You have the prerogative as young people.
The future is yours”*

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

Background

ECOSOC, one of the six main organs of the United Nations established by the United Nations Charter in 1946, is the principal body for coordination, policy review, policy dialogue and recommendations on economic, social and environmental issues, as well as for implementation of the internationally agreed development goals.

In July 2015, Member States, policy makers, civil society organizations, representatives of academia and the private sector will meet in New York during the high-level segment of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to address the theme of the Annual Ministerial Review (AMR) on *“Managing the transition from MDGs to SDGs: what will it take?”* The entire ECOSOC system will consider this theme throughout its work during the 2014-2015 cycle, including the Council’s subsidiary bodies. It will also be the focus of informal events of the Council, including the Partnerships and Youth Fora.

To bring the voice of youth into this discussion, ECOSOC will convene a Youth Forum on 2-3 February 2015 on how to maximize the engagement of young people in the transition from Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Forum, which will precede the 53rd Session of the Commission for Social Development (CSocD) will be organized by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs,^[1] and the Office of the United Nations’ Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, in collaboration with members of the UN Inter-agency Network on Youth Development.

The ECOSOC Youth Forum, which was launched in 2012, provides an annual platform for youth to engage in dialogue with Member States on a range of issues of interest to them.



ECOSOC Youth Forum



Since 2012, the Forum has become a space where young people can contribute to policy discussions at the United Nations through their collective ideas, solutions and innovations. Past Youth Fora have discussed youth employment, science, technology and innovation and the post 2015 development agenda. Regional and global level Youth Fora have also fed into the ECOSOC Youth Forum.

Youth and Development

With 1.8 billion young people aged 10-24 in the world, young people are central to development efforts. Close to 90 percent of the world's youth live in developing countries, where they often make up the largest proportion of the population. Barriers to education, poor living conditions, and lack of decent work— the global youth unemployment rate was estimated at 13.0% in 2014 by ILO – have worked to marginalize many young people and contribute to intergenerational conflict dynamics in many societies. Young women and girls frequently experience additional disadvantage and gender-based discrimination thus limiting their ability to be actors and beneficiaries of development.

The input of young people is essential to devising sustainable and targeted measures to foster more inclusive practices of decision-making and deliberation on sustainable development issues. Strong institutions and effective governance are essential for the transition from the MDGs to the SDGs. Creating space for youth in all their diversity to shape this transition, including through democratic institutions, participation in policy development, decision-making, implementation, as well as monitoring and evaluation, is key to the success of a transformative sustainable development agenda.

The Conferences and Summits of the 1990s, including Environment and Development, Social Development and Population and Development reached a new consensus on the need to put people at the centre of development. These paved the way for the World Programme of Action for Youth (1995), which set out 15 priorities areas to advance youth development and is considered the blueprint for youth development work at both the national and international levels.

The 20th anniversary commemoration of the WPAY coupled with ongoing work towards the development of a post-2015 development agenda and Sustainable Development create a strong opportunity for the ECOSOC Youth Forum to take stock of progress and gains made within the broader development framework of the UN, while focusing on how young people have been and continue to set the agenda and framework for the Sustainable Development Goals.





The findings and lessons learned from other related processes such as the 20-year review of Cairo Programme of Action on Population and Development which took place in 2014 and the upcoming 20th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Programme of Action in 2015, in particular as they relate to young people, including young women and girls, will feed into the preparations of the Youth Forum.

A Youth Lens

Many important gains have been made in the 15 years since the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals, however, significant gaps remain. As the international community gears itself towards the establishment of a development framework beyond 2015, young people's involvement is more crucial than ever.

A child born the same year as the birth of the Millennium Development Goals (2000), will become a youth and celebrate her 15th birthday just as the MDGs expire. Throughout the Forum, discussions will be framed to look at what gains have been made for a child born in this period, and what her prospects as a youth will look like beyond 2015.

While the MDGs did much to improve levels of child survival and children's enrollment in primary education, the numbers of young people – particularly young women and girls - completing secondary level education remain stifflingly low. Success in reducing the rates of infection of HIV and AIDS in children and those over 24 years of age have not been met with the same success rates in the youth cohort. Globally, young women aged 15-24 have HIV infection rates twice as high as young men, and account for 22% of all new HIV infections. As the Forum examines the shift from MDGs to SDGs, it will also examine the impact of development efforts as a child moves into adolescence, youth, and beyond.

In doing so, the Forum will discuss ways in which young people can and are helping to manage the shift from the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and importantly, ways to ensure that the needs and priorities of *all* youth are at the centre of the future development agenda and its implementation. The Forum will highlight persistent gender gaps and ways to overcome those in the new development agenda.

Objectives

1. To provide a platform for young people to engage in a dialogue with Member States on the shift from the MDGs to the SDGs, including the required policy choices, institutional adjustments and the assignment of roles and responsibilities among all partners, including young people;





2. To mark the observance of the 20th anniversary of the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) and to link its implementation to the post-2015 Development Agenda;
3. To focus attention on the importance of gender equality and the special needs of African Youth;
4. To identify recommendations from the Forum that could be included in the outcome documents of the Commission on Social Development and the ECOSOC High-level Segment related to youth priorities in the transition from MDGs to SDGs;
5. To provide a platform to inform Member States and participants of various recent and ongoing events and initiatives of relevance for advancing the youth development agenda at global, regional and national levels.

Thematic Sessions

1. Youth engagement in the transition from MDGs to SDGs

Session background:

Over the past number of years, young people have been actively engaged in shaping the discussions on the development agenda beyond 2015. For example, the inclusion of youth delegates as part of the Delegations of Member States at the United Nations, has allowed young people an avenue for participation and input into intergovernmental discussions pertaining to key development issues.

The Global Youth Call, launched at the 2014 ECOSOC Youth Forum, identified key priority areas, targets and indicators, recommended to form part of the Post-2015 agenda: namely health, governance and participation, education, employment and entrepreneurship and peace and personal security.

The My World Survey provided an interactive online platform for people all over the world, many of them youth, to tell the UN about their key concerns and priority areas for the upcoming Post 2015 development agenda.

The active involvement of the Major Group for Children and Youth in the Open Working Group Process of the Rio+20 and Sustainable Development agenda has proven a valuable





platform for enabling youth voices to be included in UN level discussions and outcome documents, for ongoing consideration in developing the basis of a Post-2015 agenda.

Meanwhile, at the national and regional levels a multitude of efforts and activities have been taking place to draw out input from youth to feed into the development agenda process.

Session objectives:

The Forum will discuss the views, insights and concrete recommendations of young people on what is needed to shift from the MDGs to the SDGs framework. Based on the outcomes of key processes through which young people have been involved, young people will be asked to draw from their lessons learned from the implementation of the MDGs and make recommendations for transitioning to a new agenda with poverty and sustainable development at its core.

They will also be asked to identify new approaches and actions for implementation at national, regional and global levels as well as proposals for ways to strengthen the monitoring, review, accountability and follow-up to the components of the agenda and how they should contribute to these processes.

The outcome of the session will be presented by a youth representative to the Commission on Social Development during the Emerging Issues session.

2. WPAY+20 and the Post-2015 Development Agenda

Session background:

Youth development lies at the heart of overall development. The World Programme of Action for Youth, adopted by the General Assembly in 1995, provides a policy framework and practical guidelines for national action and international support to improve the situation of young people around the world. The WPAY covers fifteen youth priority areas and contains proposals for action in each of these areas (including education, employment, hunger and poverty, health, environment, substance abuse, juvenile justice, leisure-time activities, girls and young women, and the full and effective participation, of youth in the life of society and in decision-making, as well as globalization, information and communication technologies, HIV/AIDS, armed conflict, and intergenerational issues.

Session objectives:

The Forum will commemorate the 20th Anniversaries of the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY). The WPAY remains highly relevant and inspirational, but implementation lags behind the commitments made. This session will seek to highlight current youth-led





processes and generate new ideas on how to revitalize the commitments of Governments and all other stakeholders by looking at ways to link implementation of the WPAY to the post-2015 development agenda. Specific targets related to the WPAY are already being considered as part of the proposed SDGs on education and employment. Ministers of Youth will participate in discussing efforts to enhance implementation of the WPAY and links to the post-2015 development agenda.

3. Youth on the Rise: Youth Participation in Africa

Session background:

By the year 2015, the child born in Africa at the turn of the century and the start of the Millennium Declaration and the launch of the MDGs will turn age 15. Five years later in 2020, these children will be young adults and the average age of 75 per cent of the African population, making Africa the most youthful continent in the world. With many young people on the continent continuing to live in severe poverty, without access to basic education, decent work, and health services, a successful and effective sustainable development agenda is central to youth development in the region.

Yet, African youth have been marginally involved in governance and decision-making, and young women often experience additional gender-based marginalization. Their active engagement is critical if challenges on the continent are to be effectively addressed.

Promoting an inclusive and participatory peacebuilding process is particularly vital to rebuilding peaceful communities, jumpstarting economic development, and supporting democratic governance in countries emerging from conflict, and yet young people are generally left on the margins, unable to contribute and participate in the transformation of their countries.

Session objectives:

The Forum will build on some of the issues raised at the 2014 session on African Youth, including the challenges associated with conflict, peacebuilding and health in the region. It will discuss ways to embed youth participation in local and national governance processes, in particular in those countries emerging from conflict. It will also examine some of the key methods through which African youth have been engaging on Post-2015 development efforts to date, and examine how they continue to play an active role in its implementation and monitoring.

4. Gender equality and youth: Twenty years since the Beijing Platform for Action and onwards to a Post-2015 Development Framework



ECOSOC Youth Forum

**Session background:**

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action provides a blue print for women's empowerment in 12 critical areas of concern, including poverty, education and training, health, violence against women, armed conflict, economy, decision-making, human rights of women, the environment, media, and the girl child. Many of the actions in these areas directly benefit young women and girls.

Ensuring equal opportunities for girls, including in participatory fora, is a central tenet to achieving sustainable development; however, nearly twenty years after the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, young women and girls remain vulnerable to multiple forms of discrimination and violence.

Session objectives:

As a contribution to the Beijing+20 process, the Forum could look at the status of young women and girls and how engagement by young people could generate new opportunities for promoting rights and opportunities for girls. As an advocacy tool, the Forum could launch a Youth Declaration on Gender Equality.

5. Global, Regional and other processes**Session background**

In the past number of years much work has been carried out at the national, regional and global levels to solicit youth input to Post-2015 development processes. Both online and offline, young people have been engaged in contributing their views, opinions and expertise to a number of fora, as well as carrying out their own initiatives and campaigns to advocate for a representative, inclusive and youth friendly agenda.

Session Objective

The Forum will hear from the participants of a variety of national, regional and global processes which have filtered into and are of relevance to the Post-2015 deliberations and discussions. It will examine some of the key messages and outputs of such processes in light of the Forum's own discussions, as well as consider recommendations arising from participants of these processes on how to strengthen youth participation as we move into the elaboration and implementation of the SDGs.

Preparation of the Forum



The preparation of the Forum will be undertaken by a core group comprising of the co-organizers UN DESA's Office for ECOSOC Support and Coordination and its Division for Social Policy and Development as well as the Office of the United Nations Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth. Members of the Interagency Network on Youth Development will support the substantive and logistical preparation of the Forum with some members taking the lead for various sessions (See annex). A small group of official youth delegates, representatives from the Children and Youth Major Group will also participate in the planning of the Forum.

Format

The meeting will open with formal statements by the President of ECOSOC, the President of the General Assembly, the Secretary General and a representative of a youth-led organization or an eminent young speaker. The Youth Envoy will set the stage prior to the start of the sessions. The Forum will feature five working interactive sessions spread across the two days. Day one will commence with key-note speeches followed by sessions on managing the transition from MDGs to SDGs and the commemoration of the WPAY.

The second day of the meeting will open with a keynote address by a youth activist followed by two simultaneous sessions on Youth in Africa and Gender Equality. The Forum will close with a session dedicated to national, regional and global processes. Youth participants will have an opportunity to build upon these processes by offering concrete and practical recommendations on how young people will contribute to the shift from the MDGs to the SDGs.

Throughout all sessions, youth representatives will have an opportunity to engage in an interactive discussion among themselves and with Member States. All sessions during the two-day event are informal and interactive, therefore no written statements should be delivered during the sessions. The outcome of the working sessions will be reported to the Plenary at the end of the meeting.

Participants

The primary participants will be youth delegates, representatives from the Major Group for Children and Youth, youth representatives from Member States, including from National Youth Councils, representatives of regional youth organizations as well as youth-led and youth focused organizations and networks, including those in consultative status with ECOSOC, as well as Government representatives, including Ministers responsible for youth.





To ensure adequate youth representation from developing countries, UN Resident Coordinators will again be requested to provide financial support in sending 1-2 young people to participate in the meeting. The same criteria (represent existing groups/networks involved in global discussions and independent from political parties) will again be used for the selection. Efforts will be made to have regional and gender balance to ensure the inclusiveness of the process and deliberations. To that end, the co-organizers will request the Inter-agency Network on Youth (IANYD), the Regional Commissions and UN Country Offices to sponsor the participation of 1 or 2 young people in the forum.

The meeting will be available through webcast and participants will be able to pose questions via social media through Facebook and Twitter.

Outcome

The outcome will be an ECOSOC President's summary highlighting the discussions and the participants' recommendations/next steps on how youth should be included in the post-2015 development agenda. The summary will be presented at the ECOSOC's high-level segment in July 2015. A call to action from the Forum to the 59th session of CSW may be presented to the Chair of that session. The outcome also might provide input to other related activities including the Secretary-General's report to the seventieth session of the General Assembly and the World Youth Report.

[1] DESA Divisions include OESC and DSPD.

