CONCEPT NOTE
BREAKOUT SESSION
POVERTY, INEQUALITY AND YOUTH EMPOWERMENT IN URBAN AREAS
ECOSOC Youth Forum 2016
1 February 2016
3 – 5 p.m.
United Nations Headquarters, New York

1. Background and Context, relevant to the ECOSOC Youth Forum
ECOSOC will convene a Youth Forum on 1-2 February 2015 focusing on “Youth Taking Action to Implement the 2030 Agenda”. The UN-Habitat Youth Unit, UN MGCY, OHCHR, IMCS-Pax Romana and ILFRY will host the breakout session “Poverty, inequality and youth empowerment in urban areas” held at the ECOSOC Youth Forum in New York.

Globally, 85 per cent of the world’s young people live in developing countries, and an ever-increasing number of them are growing up in cities. It is estimated that by 2030, as many as 60% of all urban dwellers will be under the age of 18. All over the world, young people are finding it increasingly difficult to break into the labour market. Youth makes up 25% of the global working age population, but account for 43.7% of the unemployed. This means that almost every other jobless person in the world is between the ages of 15 and 24. The exclusion from the economic, political, and social life of their countries breeds disillusionment, hopelessness, and upheaval.

- As city residents are becoming younger, soaring youth unemployment can breed political and social instability if their lives are being excluded socioeconomically and politically.
- UN-Habitat recognises youth’s potential in creating a better urban future and provide a wide range of research and strategic planning services through our Urban Youth Research Network, State of Urban Youth report and World Urban Forum Dialogue.
- Through researching on and engaging with youth on issues such as education, housing, underemployment, social exclusion, UN-Habitat aims to obtain data and develop strategies attentive to their needs.
2. Description of breakout session
The *Poverty, inequalities and youth empowerment in urban areas* breakout session held at the ECOSOC Youth Forum on February 1st and 2nd 2016 in New York, aims to facilitate a dialogue between ECOSOC youth representatives and Member States and contribute to policy formulation on youth-led empowerment and participation in urban governance. This session will provide the space for youth and policy makers to discuss how to fully integrate youth into the economic and social life of the city.

Youth are vital for the prosperity of cities in the developing world, they still face many barriers —underemployment and unemployment, a lack of access to basic services such as healthcare and education; sanitation and housing; and exclusion from decision-making — which prevent them from reaching their potential. UN-Habitat has worked with cities globally to overcome these barriers through the development of programmes. Some of the greatest challenges that cities face today are generating data on the challenges that the youth encounter. Without those data, city officials are unable to develop strategies that face and fight this exclusion. For example, without local labour market information, it is difficult to plan effective employment training interventions that will help reducing unemployment.

This workshop hosts youth leaders’ representatives and Members States from different countries whom are partners of the UN-Habitat Urban Youth Fund and UN MGCY, OHCHR, IMCS-Pax Romana and ILFRY Networks. The breakout session participants will present their projects and jointly identify best practices and innovative methodologies with potentials for replication and scaling-up. The outcomes of the workshop and base for discussion at the ECOSOC Youth Forum 2016 breakout session will be a set of policy recommendations on how cities and local authorities can prioritise youth participation and how youth and youth-led organizations can be assets, fight against inequalities and for ending poverty and positive change agents achieving inclusive -economic and social life of the city- and sustainable cities and human settlements.

In addition, the breakout session supports an important dimension that underpins the approach of sustainable development: it offers young people opportunities for individual and collective change. This is roped with the key objectives of the session in encouraging participation of youth, indispensable for societal change and for deepening democracy. It underpins the agency of youth who “are not a problem to be solved, but problem solvers themselves”. With youth participation and inclusion, youth in turn, become the engines for creation of the economic and social capital that is needed to jump-start development in many regions of the world. As a result, the demographic “youth bulge” can therefore be a demographic gift to the countries where it is occurring, (UNDP, 2002, p.38). A key outcome from the session will be to show national/local authority representatives that youth are their biggest assets not liabilities in the Agenda 2030 for sustainable development.
3. Objectives

This session will serve as a call to action by youth to Governments and other stakeholders to keep the goals in Agenda 2030 of Sustainable Development.

The session aims to:
- Explore different modalities and mechanisms on how to ensure active and meaningful youth empowerment in urban areas and contribute to fight against inequalities and to end poverty towards creation of inclusive and sustainable cities;
- Discuss what Member States, Governments, NGOs, youth groups and other stakeholders can do to enhance youth participation in urban areas;
- Identify necessary framework conditions, with a focus on the economic and social aspects, particularly inequalities and poverty that will enable Members States in promoting and supporting youth participation.

The session will demonstrate the activism and engagement of youth ready to carry forward the ‘spirit of Agenda 2030’, of Poverty, inequalities and youth empowerment in urban areas.

4. Emergence of resolutions and recommendations

Potential resolutions and recommendations coming out of this session will be around the different modalities to ensure active and meaningful youth empowerment in urban areas and contribute to fight against inequalities and to end poverty towards creation of inclusive and sustainable cities. This will be explored from a spectrum of different viewpoints: Member states, mayors, national youth policy, NGOs, youth and youth-led empowerment, vulnerable communities and international development cooperation.

(Example from session in Africites2015): It is important that there are opportunities enabling youth to engage in political and decision-making processes nationally/locally. On the other hand, Youth’s capacity should be built to ensure that they embrace democracy as a process in which they can engage; policy as a way to achieve their goals; and the municipality as a vehicle for their action. Policies should spread urban prosperity to young people. This aligns the development of young people to city plans in addressing key areas pertinent to youth-led development. Key policy and administration recommendations to national/local authorities wishing to explore this approach include;

1. Youth participation and inclusion needs to be undertaken at Country/City level and be backed up by policies and budgets that identify youth as citizens/ city residents with whom partnership has to be built to achieve youth empowerment.
2. Best practices on youth-led development should be identified, in order to support inequalities, sustainable development and implementation of national/local strategies for youth.

3. Support the development and implementation of institutional and policy frameworks conducive to youth employment and entrepreneurship.

4. Support young men and women in understanding their rights and the channels through which they may exercise their civil and political rights and participate in decision-making processes that impact their lives.

5. Support youth and youth-led organizations to play a pivotal role in helping to re-establish relationships, including a renewed social contract between the state and its citizens (state-building), addressing the root causes of violence, exclusion, conflict in order to avoid recurrence, and see youth and youth-led organizations as peace builders.

5. Flow of the Session and Issues at Stake
The 2 hours session will be conducted in a talk show format, with moderator and four to five panelists. Each panelist will address the following issues and then take comments and questions from the floor.

6. Suggesting Reading materials
- Mapping Urban Youth-Led Development, Opportunities Fund for Urban Youth-Led Development: This report contains the results of an inventory, or mapping, of youth-led initiatives undertaken during the inception phase of the Opportunities Fund. [http://unhabitat.org/books/mapping-urban-youth-led-development-opportunities-fund-for-urban-youth-led-development/](http://unhabitat.org/books/mapping-urban-youth-led-development-opportunities-fund-for-urban-youth-led-development/)


- Cities of Youth, Cities of prosperity: Youth are key to the prosperity of cities in the developing world, yet many barriers prevent them from fulfilling this role - most notably access to education, vocational training, and employment. [http://unhabitat.org/books/cities-of-youth-cities-of-prosperity/](http://unhabitat.org/books/cities-of-youth-cities-of-prosperity/)