The Student Political Research Initiative for New Governance (SPRING) Institute

thespringgroup.org

Brian Zhou, Executive Director, brian@thespringgroup.org

Chapeau

The Summit/Pact of the Future is a key opportunity to shift course and involve youth in *all aspects* of participation in policy and governance at the UN. Now more than ever, youth stakeholders and actionists are the *best* prepared to respond to emerging challenges and leverage new opportunities. In this brief, we call for the Pact of the Future to implement changes that will best equip youth to become the actionists and problem-solvers of the world's biggest challenges. In each chapter, we call upon the UN and stakeholders to:

1. Expand opportunities for youth involvement in SDG initiatives and microfinancing moonshot projects from the unbanked youth.
2. Create a more peaceful world for youth with a renewed emphasis on disarmament and arms transfer treaties alongside bolstering peacekeeping missions' strength and accountability.
3. Close digital divides that prevent youth around the world from learning and engaging, alongside supporting multilateral action on emerging technologies to make technology used for good.
4. Consolidate and expand opportunities for youth stakeholders to engage with and provide meaningful consultation to UN task forces on various issues.
5. Further engagement with other multilateral institutions while lowering the barrier to entry to become a Youth Delegate, and creating opportunities for youth beyond the select few youth delegates from any region or country.

Chapter I. Sustainable Development and Financing for Development

1.1   Sustainable Development

Development on a global scale sees varying levels of success and growth. Despite that, one commonality among many nations is the shared interest in achieving more sustainable development to ensure a better future for the coming generations.

To bolster action on the SDGs, the UN should:
1. <u>Collect data on country-specific SDG activity:</u> tracking this information will improve national accountability on SDG progress.
2. <u>Bolster calls-for-input on SDG initiatives:</u> Calling in different stakeholders and entities to submit proposals can enable the reporting of different measures and successes other countries have made regarding the UN SDGs.

1.2   Financing Development

Financing for the SDGs can range from gathering donations from individuals worldwide to exploring partnerships with governments and non-government actors. With a youth-centric focus, we believe that more action is needed to provide funds for youth activists who lack access to funding around the world.

In support of the unbanked, we recommend:
1. <u>Diversify funding sources:</u> A mix of governmental funding, civil society organization donations, and public-private partnerships can lead to cooperation on developmental projects in areas that need it most.
2. <u>Strengthen microfinance[1] & Multinational Development Banks[2]:</u> Improving the capacity of these organizations to lend money for projects is key to infrastructure development in underserved areas and empowering youth innovation for the unbanked.

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[1] United Nations Capital Development Fund, n.d.
[2] United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, 2020

Chapter II. International Peace and Security

2.1   Conflict Prevention, Mediation, & Disarmament

The UN has many conflict prevention and mediation mechanisms at its disposal, such as the UN Security Council and Peacekeeping Program. Current threats to conflict prevention & mediation include persistent arms proliferation, rising ethno-religious tensions, and lackluster support for UN mechanisms designed to quell conflict.

To empower further conflict prevention and mediation efforts, we offer three recommendations:

1. Expand funding for UN Peacekeeping programs:[3] Counteracting cuts in the Peacekeeping budget would bolster the scale and depth of the program's impact needed for success.
2. Consistent accountability checks/scrutiny of UN conflict prevention/mediation programs: The implementation of corrective measures such as Resolution 2272 (cracking down on sexual exploitation from peacekeepers during missions) maintains the trust needed between the UN and the communities they serve.
3. Increase bilateral and multilateral gradual arms reduction treaties: Similar to the New START Treaty, phase-outs of nuclear arms are a critical step toward reducing geopolitical tensions. The UN must encourage states to forge binding treaties in the spirit of disarmament (with proper enforcement and auditing mechanisms).[4]

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[3] United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, n.d.
[4] United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, n.d.

Chapter III. Science, technology and innovation and digital cooperation

3.1 Scientific Literacy & Education

In both developed and developing countries, citizens are not prepared for new tech developments. Even in the best scenarios, education systems do not teach basic awareness of issues such as privacy, bias, and misinformation in social media, AI, and the Internet. With digital development outpacing education, the UN must increase awareness and education, not only for youth but for every citizen.

We encourage the UN to:
1. Collect data about tech awareness internationally: Following the COVID-19 pandemic, student learning outcomes naturally faced drastic changes, and there is an abject lack of data.[5] Questions should ask whether or not citizens know how various technologies work from an educated user standpoint and whether they realize the risks of their actions. This data would inform governments and researchers as to the state of technology awareness, allowing the UN, national governments, and other institutions to find problems and develop solutions.
2. Create new resources for technology awareness using technology: With the Internet and now generative AI, education systems can offer tailored learning experiences for every child at low costs.[6] This would take the form of partnering with nations and corporations to develop tools that educate both students and citizens at large about technology and the role it plays. Modules should include items on information, AI risks, data privacy, etc. Additionally, the UN should promote such technological tools for general education subjects.

3.2 National-level Policy

Technological developments have increased rapidly in recent years, with development completely outpacing legal codes and government action. Globally, free expression is under strain and misinformation is on the rise, with AI only adding to the list of technological issues for which nations are unprepared.[7]

The UN should take action to encourage the development of responsible and regulatable technology:
1. Encourage nations to increase their investment in reputable technologies (i.e. trustworthy artificial intelligence): the UN can ensure the ethical development of advanced technology by creating a set of clear standards for trustworthiness that must be reached that address concerns over accountability and privacy, and encourage greater transparency in their training.
2. Collaborate with governments to ensure that their legal codes on science and technology are adequate and compatible with other nations: the UN should work with nations so that their legal codes align with the SDGs and Principles for Ethical Use of Artificial Intelligence,[8] while also ensuring that individual nations do not differ drastically, allowing for innovation to spread responsibly across borders.

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[5] McKinsey & Co., 2022
[6] McDiarmid & Zhao, 2022
[7] Shahbaz & Funk, 2021
[8] Inter-Agency Working Group on Artificial Intelligence, 2022

Chapter IV. Youth and Future Generations

4.1   Youth Involvement in UN Aims to Safeguard the Future

The UN and member nations often leverage youth input to support various UN agreements and commitments; to address climate issues, the UN operates a Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change[9] and offers summits/opportunities for youth to create meaningful solutions to climate change. The Office of the High Commissioner maintains a Youth Advisory Board for human rights.[10] However, current youth involvement is:

- Limited to certain challenges from dozens the Pact for the Future addresses; other areas, such as AI, lack youth comparables to the AI Advisory Body. The Secretary-General's task force on Youth, Peace, and Security ironically lacks opportunities for youth involvement.[11]
- Limited to small boards consisting of around ten often older and prominent youth members

To effectively mobilize youth to tackle future challenges, the Pact for the Future should:
1. Create an explicit commitment to increasing youth involvement and opportunities: The United Nations and member nations should involve adolescents (10-19)[12] and youth (15-24) in the Pact for the Future alongside new commitments to create partnerships with civil society to elevate the youth voice.
2. Provide a platform for youth to seek opportunities to engage with the UN: Current systems are difficult for youth to navigate and find ways to meaningfully engage on advisory boards and thus unintentionally filter the types of youth who can engage; increasing equitable participation can be done by making opportunities more known and available.

4.2   Closing the Digital Divide

COVID-19 demonstrated that access to technology is essential to maintaining education for youth around the world. However, the digital divide remains a barrier to education for many, which will continue to worsen as technology becomes more critical to productivity, learning, and engagement. The UN should work towards increased connectivity so that youth around the world have access to the internet. In particular, disparities in internet access by socioeconomic status should be addressed.

To do this, the UN should collect data on areas where youth do not have access to the internet and work to provide connectivity:
1. Subsidize internet programs for youth affected by the digital divide: Doing so will not only allow many youth access to educational resources otherwise unavailable but will also work to bridge the financial gap in internet access.
2. Utilize the UN's research consortium[13] to study digital connectivity around the world:[14] Scientific partnerships with NGOs can help find areas that need aid the most.

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[9] United Nations Climate Action, n.d.
[10] Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, n.d.
[11] United Nations Peacebuilding, n.d.
[12] World Health Organization, n.d.
[13] United Nations Academic Impact, n.d.
[14] Sanders & Scanlon, 2021

3. Establish efforts to bolster internet access in communal spaces.

4.3   Gender Equality

The UN must work quickly to address pressing gender inequalities and injustices, such as the gender pay gap, workplace discrimination, sexual harassment/assault, and general infringements of human rights/dignity.

We suggest several approaches to tackling these problems:
1. Collect data on regions where child marriages occur: The UN should work to collect regional data about gender disparities in education access, with a focus on the specific barriers to education for girls in specific regions. By identifying these regions, the UN can adapt to provide solutions for girls in these situations to receive education despite the barriers in place.
2. Forge more partnerships with regional institution blocs: Building on the United Nations' collaboration with the European Union on the Spotlight Initiative to reduce gendered violence, the United Nations should seek to partner with other regional institutions (i.e. the African Union) to expand the reach of their work and scope of impact.

Chapter V. Transforming Global Governance

5.1   Multilateralism & International Cooperation

The UN Summit of the Future and Pact of the Future, born of Secretary-General Guterres' grand UN 2.0 vision, must meet a high threshold of international support/backing to implement programs/policies to strengthen fulfillment of the Sustainable Development Goals. With this premise in mind, the UN must do 2 things:

1. Improve engagement with regional institutions on a policymaking level: The UN's limited interaction with regional institution blocs (i.e. African Union, Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa, etc.) has hindered its capacity to progress its SDG initiatives in regions that need it.[15] Engagement with these institutions would build the UN's legitimacy and bolster SDG initiatives in areas where regional institutions govern.
2. Balance power dynamics of the UN Human Rights Council, UN Security Council, etc.: Outsized influence and funding must not interfere with the UN's activity to investigate and take action against hostile UN members.[16] Double standards and perceived hypocrisy dilute the UN's legitimacy, and by extension, its political capital to enact change.

5.2   Integration of Youth into UN Policymaking

With the youth's ascendancy into politics and activism in the 21st century, the UN has regained consciousness of the demographic's importance in policymaking efforts. The UN has instituted many Youth Forums (ECOSOC, UNESCO, UNODC, etc.), youth delegate systems (UN Youth As Researchers [UN YAR], UN Youth Delegate Program [UNYDP], inviting youth delegates to UN SDG Summit/UNGA/UNIDP, etc.), and other similar opportunities. We suggest the UN take 2 measures to increase their engagement with the youth:

1. Centralize UN call-for-input/paper, summit, and consultancy opportunities in one place: The dispersion of call-for-inputs/papers across different UN agency pages makes it difficult to see all opportunities in one place.[17] With successful inter-agency centralization of calls, youth would likely submit more papers and provide relevant councils/advisory boards with a valuable youth perspective.
2. Lower the barrier-to-entry for UN youth delegate status: Only a few countries have implemented the UNYDP;[18] countries have different eligibility criteria to be a UN youth delegate from one another; a few non-state entities can send a youth delegate to summits. Given these issues, a streamlined site/form for individual events to apply for youth delegate status can be a viable solution to increasing the volume of youth interest in UN work.

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[15] United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, n.d.

[16] Pauselli et al., 2023

[17] United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, n.d.

[18] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Youth, n.d.