



TORCHBEARERS FOR THE SDGs

Consultations on Meaningful Youth
Engagement and the 2030 Agenda
Outcome Document



Background

The [SDG Summit 2023](#) provides a unique opportunity to expand and strengthen meaningful youth engagement at all levels, particularly in the scope implementation, review and follow-up of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Building on the views and recommendations from young people, highlighted during the "[Youth & the SDGs](#)" global consultation, the outcomes of the [2023 ECOSOC Youth Forum](#), as well as the process culminating in the [Secretary-General's Policy Brief on Meaningful Youth Engagement in Policymaking and Decision-Making Processes](#), the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth facilitated a youth-led meaningful youth engagement roadmap towards the SDG Summit 2023.

4200+
REGISTERED
PARTICIPANTS
FROM 159
COUNTRIES.

Over 4,500 young people from all regions contributed to the process. 4,273 young people from 159 countries registered to participate in the Torchbearers for the SDGs: Consultations on Meaningful Youth Engagement & the 2030 Agenda held on [30 June](#) and [11 August](#) 2023. Additionally, 324 young people from 14 youth-led and youth-serving organizations participated in [self-organized youth consultations](#).

Many youth participants expressed gratitude for the unique opportunity to have their voices heard on a global platform through these consultations.

Six keynote listeners provided reflections after listening to a series of youth remarks throughout the consultations:

- **Jayathma Wickramanayake**, United Nations Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth
- **Guy Ryder**, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Policy
- **H.E. Ambassador Martin Gallagher**, Deputy Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Ireland to the United Nations
- **Patricia Herdt**, Deputy Permanent Observer for the International Organization of La Francophonie to the United Nations
- **Charles North**, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Global Partnership for Education
- **Abby Finkenauer**, United States Special Envoy for Global Youth Issues

The objectives of the "Torchbearers for the SDGs: Consultations on Meaningful Youth Engagement & the 2030 Agenda" were to:

1. Strengthen meaningful youth engagement in policymaking and decision-making processes, particularly in the scope of the 2030 Agenda.
2. Spotlight youth as bearing the torch of sustainable development to future generations by highlighting their key contributions to the 2030 Agenda.

To frame the discussions, youth were invited to share their views, recommendations and commitments on five main questions:

Question 1 What are some of the challenges or barriers you have faced or identified as a young person or youth organization, movement and network, when taking action on the SDGs?

Question 2 What are key opportunities to enhance youth leadership in SDG implementation, monitoring and review in your specific context?

Question 3 How can youth be better engaged as full-fledged partners in SDG implementation?

Question 4 How can meaningful youth engagement, in particular of marginalized and vulnerable people, be further strengthened and mainstreamed in SDG implementation, monitoring and review at global, regional, national and local levels, including grassroots?

Question 5 How have you, as a young person or youth organization, movement or network, contributed to SDG implementation or led initiatives on the SDGs so far?

The two-part virtual youth consultation series was organized alongside the Major Group for Children and Youth (MGCY) and the International Coordination Meeting of Youth Organization (ICMYO). In parallel, MGCY facilitated a complimentary youth-led process featuring on-the-ground consultations beginning in October 2022 across different UN fora as well as virtual discussions fora as well

virtual discussions towards the development of the [Global Youth Position Paper for the SDG Summit](#).



ECOSOC Youth Forum Day 3: Youth & the SDG Summit (Photo Credit: UN Youth Envoy/Joel Sheakoski)

Youth Perspectives from the Consultations

Our Shared Commitment: Spot-lighting Youth as Bearing the Torch of Sustainable Development to Future Generations

Youth as Partners: Youth called for recognition as equal partners in policymaking and decision-making processes at all levels. They want to contribute to processes, from inception to delivery, alongside their governments, the United Nations, civil society, the private sector and other decision-makers. They demanded intergenerational collaboration based on mutual trust and their engagement as full-fledged partners to be facilitated and ensured in all processes.

“ We need support and investment to ensure meaningful participation and leadership of young people, women and girls in all their diversity in decision-making, including planning, implementation and monitoring process regarding the COVID-19 recovery and implementation of the SDGs. ”

– Young person from Thailand

Institutionally Mandated: Youth advocated for their meaningful engagement to be a standard practice in all policymaking and decision-making processes. They highlighted that their engagement in these processes should be formally mandated to prevent an ad hoc approach and to ensure that youth views and recommendations are integrated throughout the full decision-making process.

“ For youth to have trust and faith in multilateralism,(...) it's essential that avenues for engagement such as creating working methods for the Security Council (and)

monitoring the meaningful engagement of youth in all UN decision-making processes... are followed up on and not left to the wayside.

– Young person from Ireland

Resourced: Youth called for adequate and earmarked funding to support their participation in decision-making processes and youth-led SDG implementation initiatives, regardless of language, educational background, or financial status. Youth also highlight the importance of investing and funding their solutions directly. Adequate and earmarked funding for the engagement of young people is critical to support their participation in decision-making processes. Moreover, they stress the need to invest in an enabling environment that will ensure every young person is empowered to reach their fullest potential. It is a critical prerequisite to their meaningful engagement in policymaking and decision-making processes.

“ It is imperative that we expand opportunities for young people to contribute to high-level forums like the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council. Right now, the United Nations Youth Delegate Programme is extremely limited and inaccessible for most young people. Only 31 countries had youth delegates to the 2022 General Assembly. This does not allow for adequate representation and thus, so many perspectives are left out in this programme. ”

– Young person from the United States of America

Our Shared World: Progress & Remaining Gaps & Challenges

Rights-Based and Safe: Youth emphasized the need for their fundamental human rights to be respected, promoted and protected, including but not limited to their engagement in decision-making processes. Young people highlighted the need to be informed and educated about their rights, sharing many examples of how they lead this work within their communities and among their peers. They also stressed the importance of holding duty-bearers accountable for promoting, protecting and fulfilling those rights. Youth also highlighted safety and protection as critical components to meaningful youth engagement in civic space, identifying various challenges in this regard, including but not limited to young people living in conflict-affected areas. Youth demanded that duty-bearers ensure that measures to protect youth from any kind of threats or attacks, including retaliation, or reprisals to be established and strengthened at all levels.

“ One of the biggest challenges for those who operate or live in conflict zones is the protection and safety issue for young people. ”

– Young person from India

Transparent: Regarding this global consultation process, youth expressed expectations on understanding how their inputs will be shared, with whom, for what purpose and to be clearly updated. Moreover, youth called for the same principles to be upheld in the wider scope of policymaking and decision-making processes at all levels, highlighting that often they are invited to share their views and recommendations; however, the final outcomes do not reflect their perspectives. When this happens, youth often feel frustrated and confused. They called for transparency to be upheld as part of their engagement.

“ We recommend including an update on how these proposals have been implemented in the next UN report on youth engagement. ”

– Young people from Bosnia and Herzegovina

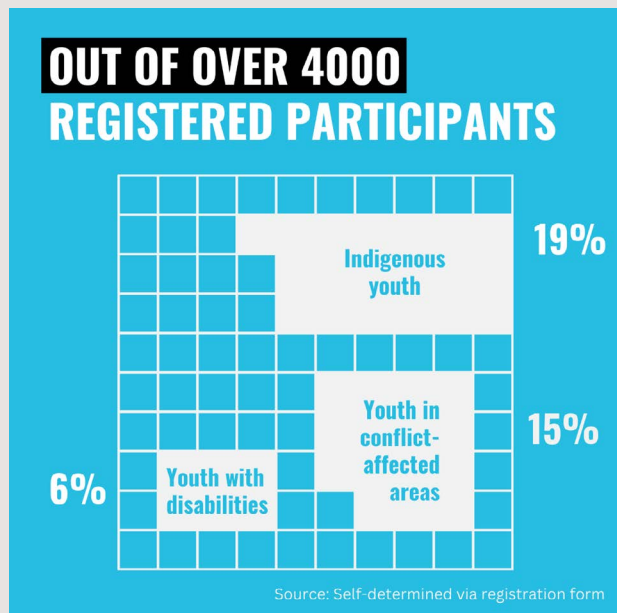
Accessible: The need for accessibility was stressed by youth throughout the consultation process. Youth urged that UN spaces - online and offline - be open and accessible to everyone, particularly young persons with disabilities. Moreover, they stressed that decision-making processes should be made accessible to all groups of young people, particularly those with disabilities.

“ Strengthening meaningful youth engagement, especially among populations with disabilities, in SDG implementation requires inclusive strategies. Providing tailored training equips them for effective participation. Inclusive platforms and virtual spaces must be established for safe and accessible engagement, accommodating physical limitations. Indigenous and minority youth with disabilities voices should be prioritized. Localized approaches should address specific challenges, such as accessible infrastructure. Data collection should encompass youth with disabilities' unique needs and obstacles. ”

– Young people from Ghana

Diverse and Inclusive: Youth highlighted that diversity and inclusion should be upheld at all levels concerning their meaningful youth engagement in policymaking and decision-making processes. Based on the principle of non-discrimination, all efforts should be made

to ensure inclusiveness and diversity of voices, regardless of race, sex, language, religion, age, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, disability, migrant or economic status and other characteristics. Moreover, they called for an intersectional lens, based on youth's multiple and intersecting identities, to also be applied.



“ *When we want to talk about meaningful participation of young people, we should also recognize the scope of young people itself: it has a lot of diverse groups.* **”**

– Young person from Timor-Leste

Our Shared Future: Turning Our World Toward 2030

Designated: Youth advocated for a “seat at the table” in all decision-making processes affecting their lives, livelihoods and futures, including in the scope of the SDGs. They call for these seats to be designated specifically to youth to avoid unequal power dynamics and competition between youth and non-youth actors. They also particularly called for designated seats to be made available for youth in all UN processes.

“ *In most decision-making sessions, a young person could not participate and the average age of participants are more than (in their) 40s, unfortunately, so young people should and must participate in even high-level meetings and we should hear their voices.* **”**

– Young people from Iran

Voluntary: Youth stressed that for their engagement to be meaningful, it must be voluntary, meaning that they must not be coerced into participating in actions or expressing views against their beliefs and wishes, as well as that they should have the right to cease involvement in any process at any stage. They highlighted that freedom of expression must be protected, promoted and ensured.

“ *We must organize more free dialogues with youth. It's one of the most important parts to leave no one behind.* **”**

– Young person from Uzbekistan

Informative: Youth called for clear, timely, diversity-sensitive and age-appropriate information to be provided throughout their engagement process. Youth emphasized the importance of reaching youth where they spend time, including but not limited to education institutions, places of youth, places of leisure, social media and more. Youth also raised the importance of sharing information about roles, rights and responsibilities transparently to ensure their safe and effective engagement at all levels. Concerning the UN, they highlighted the importance of providing and being able to share information in various languages to ensure inclusion and diversity.

“ **Meaningful youth engagement, in particular of marginalized (and) vulnerable young people (...), can be strengthened by widening awareness to young people through the channels that they truly engage in.** ”

– Young person from India

Reciprocally Accountable: Youth demanded mutual accountability mechanisms that would ensure both youth and duty-bearers, including but not limited to Member States, the United Nations system and others, are held responsible for their actions and commitments. They demanded transparent information on how their inputs have been used and interpreted to influence outcomes. They also flagged the importance of consulting with wider youth constituencies throughout the engagement process. Moreover, they highlighted the heterogeneity of youth, stressing the importance of ensuring the perspectives of youth in all their diversity are captured as part of various processes. They highlighted the multitude of ways youth are already supporting the implementation of the SDGs at all levels and stressed the importance of these diverse perspectives and realities to be reflected in outcomes of intergovernmental processes at the UN and beyond.

“ **We are in urgent need of accountability mechanisms put in place to secure meaningful youth engagement. We are not requiring youth representatives to be accountable for their actions and ensuring practices such as gatekeeping, tokenism and youth-washing are not happening in 2023 and beyond. We invite the UN Youth Office to spearhead capacity-building sessions to teach how to engage youth meaningfully.** ”

– Young person from Colombia

YOUTH ARE KEY TO IDENTIFYING NEW SOLUTIONS THAT WILL SECURE THE BREAKTHROUGHS THAT OUR WORLD URGENTLY NEEDS.



— Our Common Agenda
Policy Brief on Meaningful
Youth Engagement

Opportunities to Strengthen Meaningful

Youth Engagement at All Levels

Youth are critical agents of change and torchbearers of the 2030 Agenda for current and future generations. As highlighted in the [Secretary-General's policy brief on Meaningful Youth Engagement in Policymaking and Decision-Making Processes](#), some 90 SDG indicators are deemed to be youth-related.

Youth have a vested interest in the realization of the SDGs, both as stakeholders and active

contributors. The various ways in which youth, in all their diversity and all over the world, are leading SDG implementation was brought to the forefront in the scope of this global consultation process. From igniting social change through advocacy and mobilization, to leading solutions that promote sustainability, peace, equality and social justice, to exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms across various

platforms, youth are critical to delivering a rescue plan for people and the planet. By pushing for more inclusive decision-making processes and applying an intersectional lens to SDG implementation, youth ensure that diverse perspectives of those most often left furthest behind – including young persons with disabilities, indigenous youth, young refugees and migrants, gender-diverse youth and more – are actively integrated into decision-making processes. Through the “Torchbearers for the SDGs: Meaningful Youth Engagement & the 2030 Agenda” global consultations, youth shared their perspectives and recommendations on strengthening meaningful youth engagement at all levels. Two key opportunities stood out for the global community to further strengthen meaningful youth engagement efforts at all levels:

Endorse a global standard for meaningful youth engagement based on guiding core principles

Youth are not just asking for a seat at the table; they are rightfully demanding a role in setting the agenda, shaping the discussions and implementing the decisions. They want “real and concrete accountability” – a system transcending tokenistic involvement to ensure actionable change.

With that in mind, youth called for a global standard for meaningful youth engagement based on guiding core principles that build on the 11 principles outlined in the [Secretary-General's Policy Brief](#). This recommendation is not a one-size-fits-all checklist; it's a dynamic framework for diverse youth contexts. It is a demand for a consistent, transparent and equitable framework ensuring the perspectives of young people result in actionable change. They call for meaningful youth engagement to be institutionalized, making it a mandatory, not optional, part of policymaking and decision-making processes at all levels. By formalizing these principles into a global standard based on core guiding principles, we move from abstract ideals to actionable guidelines. It ensures that meaningful youth engagement is not

an afterthought but a prerequisite for sustainable development. It serves as a blueprint for empowering young people to contribute meaningfully to solving global challenges, including in the scope of the 2030 Agenda. Meaningful youth engagement is particularly crucial for achieving the SDGs, as youth are already leading innovative solutions and diverse initiatives in various areas, like climate action, gender equality and education. Their leadership is not in the future; it is happening now – and young people must be supported and empowered to continue their work as full-fledged partners.

Require meaningful youth engagement in all United Nations decision-making processes

Youth are demanding a structural overhaul of how they are included in decision-making processes at the UN. Although they recognize that progress is being made, they find many of the current arrangements “ineffective and, at times, tokenistic.” They are frustrated with the gap between their input and its impact on actual decisions. They want to be part of the entire process, not just invited when a decision is announced. Young people call for their engagement to be “more meaningful, diverse and effective.” They want existing commitments to be “translated into action at all levels.” They seek a system that is not just participatory but is also representative, inclusive and impactful. Youth also advocate for more systematic financing and resourcing, especially for those from the Global South and marginalized and vulnerable groups, to ensure inclusivity and diversity. With that in mind, they call for meaningful youth engagement to be required in all UN decision-making processes, including across the organizations various deliberative and decision-making bodies.

