



## **“The role of youth in poverty eradication and promoting prosperity in a changing world”**

**30-31 January 2017**

### **INFORMAL SUMMARY OF THE PRESIDENT**

The ECOSOC Youth Forum continues to serve as the UN’s dedicated platform that brings together young people in discussions with leaders from governments and civil society on a range of issues, including sustainable development, the peace and development nexus, human rights, and prosperous and inclusive societies.

This year, it was underscored that young people’s commitment to global solutions is a good example for all and a key to solving global challenges, including uncertainty about the future of globalization and need to secure a more prosperous and sustainable future..

It was especially noted that all governments perform better when they take their youth population’s concerns seriously; embracing new media, technology and scientific breakthroughs. Young people, therefore, needed to be empowered as innovators in the development process, not just beneficiaries or consumers.

As the ECOSOC Youth Forum feeds into the high-level political forum (HLPF) and the High-level Segment of the Economic and Social Council, it represents one concrete way in which youth directly contribute to the follow-up, implementation and review of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The following key messages permeated the discussions held in the Forum this year:

- Robust, innovative and progressive youth policies provide a framework for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, enabling young people to fulfil their potential as active members of society.
- The 60 indicators of the SDGs that speak directly to youth represent an “invisible goal” on youth that need to be measured to ensure implementation of youth-related issues. Young people should, therefore, own the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and be empowered to play a part in its implementation, review and follow-up.
- Involve youth in SDGs implementation in a formal way, including through mechanisms like youth advisory councils, as youth can be powerful actors in holding

- governments accountable, and in conceiving strategies and policies to achieve the 2030 Agenda. In addition, the implementation should be rooted at the local level in order to foster context-specific solutions and allow for grassroots youth involvement.
- Economic growth must be inclusive and sustainable, benefiting all in society and leaving no one behind, particularly youth. Promoting entrepreneurship is one of the best ways of eradicating poverty and promoting opportunities for youth.
  - Empowering youth means promoting young people to have new roles in running economies; expanding their access to education, finance, financial literacy, health, decent and green jobs; and discussing options for a more sustainable future.
  - New and innovative technologies should be mobilized as a means for promoting quality education and vocational training for young women and girls.
  - The development of youth-specific indicators can identify priority areas that require policy action. The UN needs to lead the way in efforts that develop indicators and support capacity-building for data collection and analysis.
  - The importance of fostering civic and political spaces for young people was highlighted. The Program of Action for Youth should be upgraded to better reflect contemporary youth issues.
  - Member States should seriously consider including youth representatives in their delegations to the HLPF.
  - The UN development system has taken various steps and started initiatives to support youth engagement and empowerment in areas including governance, peace and security, employment as well as running for office and helping to resolve conflicts. Avenues for institutionalizing this progress should be further explored.

## **I. PLENARY SESSIONS**

### ***Panel discussion on the role of technology in implementing and monitoring the SDGs***

The session highlighted the importance of the media as well as the media platforms, including those built on new communications technology, in order to strengthen awareness and partnerships as well as to foster inclusion and participation.

In order to ensure inclusion, technologies must be developed through an equity lens and made freely accessible, with the help of governments and the private sector. Furthermore, technology deployment should be informed by comprehensive data assessment at all steps, integrating local knowledge, and when feasible, local languages, and aim at facilitating knowledge-sharing, promoting digital literacy and enhancing institutional space for the participation of young people.

### ***Youth engagement in eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity: Voices from the field***

The plenary discussion highlighted the importance of education and employment, entrepreneurship, technology and participation in policy-making.

Speakers strongly emphasized the importance of supporting entrepreneurship and green industries, including social entrepreneurship, to generate self-employment. The importance of technological literacy was therefore highlighted.

Youth constitutes the majority of the population in the francophone space where education, training and employment are main concerns, hence the initiative by the international organization of La Francophonie to create an institute for education and training in Dakar to support States in their efforts to strengthen the capacities of young people and their organizations.

Youth advisory councils were recommended, and in addition to governments, the role of the United Nations and the participation of youth in the UN's work were also emphasized.

***Interactive Roundtable on Means of Implementation and Financing for Youth Development, featuring Ministers and other High-Level speakers***

Investing in youth employment pays off in terms of economic growth, peace and the achievement of sustainable development for all, and national youth employment strategies can help in this area.

SDG 17 reflected a range of targets that address the achievement of the SDGs and youth empowerment as a crosscutting issue. Youth is not a standalone goal but reflected in 60 targets and represents an invisible goal that has to be made visible. South-South and triangular cooperation and multi-stakeholder partnerships are important for innovation and resource mobilization.

Timely and accurate statistics play a vital role in enabling policy makers to target policies on youth issues.

## **II. THEMATIC BREAKOUT SESSIONS**

***End hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture***

The importance of engaging the youth in agriculture and food security-related actions was highlighted as a key component for promoting development. Engaging the youth in agriculture will require a clear articulation of the different opportunities that exist within the sector. Furthermore, there is a need for policies and activities that make agriculture and entry into its value chains a feasible business possibility and source of livelihood for young people.

Communities must address information asymmetry that farmers face, and leverage existing knowledge, technology and other resources, in order to enhance the benefits to young farmers.

***End poverty in all its forms and create decent jobs for youth***

Self-employment was a critical solution to youth unemployment. It requires an enabling environment built around national entrepreneurship strategies, optimization of the regulatory environment, enhancing entrepreneurial education and skills development, facilitating technology exchanges, innovation, ICT training and access as well as promoting awareness and networking.

Quality apprenticeships were highlighted as important in linking young people and potential employers. Skills and training should be provided by a wide range of stakeholders, including governments, the private sector and civil society.

In addition, the multiple sources of fragility, with conflict as one of the most important one, were causing other difficulties such as lack of access to education, employment and training, this was a major obstacle to ending youth poverty.

***Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages***

Recently, there has been an increased focus on the specific needs, characteristics and potential contribution of young people on health. However, at the global level, this recognition has largely been confined to the area of sexual and reproductive health.

Key issues such as non-communicable diseases, mental health and sexual and reproductive health, with recognition of the varying health issues and priorities across countries and regions, were emphasized.

Full and meaningful participation of young people in all policy cycles, including in the area of health, needs to be ensured from planning to implementation. Speakers also highlighted the need for more support for existing intergenerational collaboration within SDG3.

***Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls***

Strengthening the social, economic and legal rights and engagement of young women and girls as both targets and active change agents of all public policies, including conflicts, global peace-making, peacekeeping and peace-building agenda were emphasized.

Politicians and local authorities should engage on this issue, including through the use of social media.

Biased gender norms and stereotypes should be changed, and measures including inter-generational dialogue, co-creation of engagement strategies with men, and story-telling advocacy should be promoted.

***Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation***

Infrastructure development is a key area for social entrepreneurship, and should address both rural and urban demands. Social entrepreneurship or applying business solutions to solve social problems in the context of the 2030 Agenda links the three aspects of SDG 9: infrastructure development, sustainable industrialization and innovation.

Digital social currencies that allow transferring value beyond money in a decentralized way, can act as a tool to provide access to financing for social entrepreneurs. They also enhance transparency and traceability of transactions and foster peer to peer collaboration.

The measures recommended for action included the development of a comprehensive policy and institutional frameworks, funding opportunities and skill sets to support entrepreneurs throughout all stages, from the inception of an idea to implementation.

***Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development***

Conserving oceans, seas and marine resources provide decent work and crucial ecosystem services and is critical for sustainable development.

The conference on the implementation of SDG14 in New York in June would discuss pathways to successfully implement the goal on oceans in order to promote voluntary commitments and innovative partnerships.

Some emerging issues include ocean acidification, marine litter, marine biodiversity and fish stocks as well as ocean literacy. These issues all link especially to SDG13 on climate change, SDG3 on health, SDG12 on sustainable consumption and SDG2 on zero hunger. Interlinkages between science and education on oceans are key. Building bridges to the youth constituency to consult on SDG 14 issues was highlighted as crucial.

### **III. BREAKOUT SESSIONS ON KEY REGIONAL PRIORITIES FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**

It was noted that young people in all the regions have similar problems, although solutions to them often varied depending on local context. With regards to employment, there was the need to institutionalize incubation and mentorship programmes as well as internships, and to link education and jobs to ensure that higher education is providing the right skills for the job market.

The key role of political leadership, disaggregated data and evidence as well as competent institutions and development cooperation were also relevant in addressing youth problems in all regions.

#### ***Africa***

On African youth, the following recommendations were made:

- Young people should be encouraged to become social entrepreneurs in order to develop their own solutions. In this regard, the private sector, government and civil society should further support Africa's youth in providing an enabling environment for social entrepreneurship.
- Public-private partnerships in the industry and infrastructure sectors, in particular, would be essential for job creation, and renewable energy and climate change would also provide opportunities for youth. African youth would also need direct and fast access to funding opportunities to invest in entrepreneurial ventures and other projects.
- Accessible financial products must be crafted in a flexible way to incentivize young people to start up business and entrepreneurship. Africa's education systems need to be accessible to all youth. Academic curricula and vocational training need to be matched with job opportunities. Finally, African leaders should eliminate corruption and ensure transparency to provide an environment in which youth participation and leadership can flourish.

### ***Europe, North America and other States***

In this region, it was noted that:

- Young people were very aware of issues related to sustainable development, but did not specifically know about the SDGs. Young people were not accessing their rights, including political rights, and the social model is not protecting young people anymore. Too many young people lived in poverty with precarious employment, low-paid jobs and no job security; especially Roma, asylum seekers, and other vulnerable groups are most affected.
- Public policies need to target access to rights, barriers to education, access to labor markets, social and health care services, and dedicated financial support.

### ***Latin America and the Caribbean***

In this region, it was recommended that:

- The support for young people is a responsibility of all, and multi-sectoral alliances that include government, private sector, civil society and young people must be created and consolidated. Initiatives such as the Youth Power that promotes the use of Positive Youth Development at all levels, among other initiatives, were having great impact in the region, and should be scaled up.

### ***Asia and the Pacific***

In Asia and Pacific, it was stressed that:

- The pressing issues facing young people mostly related to quality education (SDG 4); hunger (SDG2); gender equality (SDG 5); decent work and economic growth (SDG 8); life below water (SDG14); and partnerships for the goals (SDG17). Whereas most governments provided free compulsory education in elementary and secondary schools and in some colleges, wide gaps by gender, income level, disability status and across regions remained.
- Guidance on issues including early marriage, teenage pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, substance abuse, delinquency and climate change into formal school curriculum. Knowledge-sharing and strategic use of media for advancing initiatives for youth should be facilitated.

### ***Arab region***

In the Arab region:

- It was recommended that school curricula need to include skills education through enhanced non-formal education funds, and the promotion of critical thinking, instead of memorization. Space for youth needs to be created as part of the peace and security narrative, while adopting a more bottom-up approaches that involve youth in negotiation processes.

#### IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the concluding session, it was emphasized that countries and institutions need to support the youth so that they can take the helm together and steer globalization in a positive and empowering way as they can help surmount the challenges of technology, climate change and globalization in order to build sustainable economies and deliver on the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In addition, leaders should voice their support for a permanent structure in the UN system to address youth issues; a structure that allows youth to have a formal say on achieving the SDGs.