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Sustainable Development

Youth development links to sustainable development

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

This report provides an analysis of the linkages and complementarities on youth issues between the World Programme of Action for Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It also describes recent initiatives pertaining to youth policies and programmes, which are based on inputs received from Member States, United Nations entities and civil society organizations. History proves that the inclusion of youth in sustainable development has always been effective, hence the continuation of their inclusion.

According to the United Nations, Youth should be included in sustainable development because they Critical thinkers, as Youth have the capacity to identify and challenge existing power structures and barriers to change, and to expose contradictions and biases, Change-makers: Youth activism is on the rise the world over, bolstered by broader connectivity and access to social media, Innovators: In addition to bringing fresh perspectives and Youth best understand the problems they face and can offer new ideas and alternative solutions, Communicators: Young people can be partners in communicating the development agenda to their peers and communities at the local level, as well as across countries and regions, Leaders: Youth-led organizations and networks, in particular,
should be supported and strengthened, because they contribute to the development of civic leadership skills among young people, especially marginalized youths.¹

I. Introduction

1. The World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY), now 20 years old, was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1995. WPAY provides a policy framework and practical guidelines for national action and international support to improve the situation of youths around the world, including countries without a developed youth policy. In terms of the interlinkages between the World Programme of Action for Youth and Sustainable Development Goals, many of the priority areas listed in the World Programme of Action for Youth ² are addressed in the Sustainable Development Goals, except for intergenerational issues. Some of the priorities are clearly identifiable within the Goals, such as education, in Goal 4; employment, in Goal 8; and girls and young women, in Goal 5. Hence, all the Sustainable Development Goals apply to youth.

2. According to UN statistics, of the 232 global Sustainable Development Goal indicator frameworks, developed by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) and agreed upon at the 48th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission held in March 2017, 68 provide information relevant to youth development, while an additional 18 are deemed highly relevant to youth in that they measure one of the priority areas of the World Programme of Action. Of the 68 indicators mentioned above, 53 directly contribute information about the socio-demographic situation of young people, while 15 provide information about the enabling environment that is conducive to youth development. The youth sociodemographic indicators can be divided into two categories: 9 measure youth-specific issues, such as adolescent births; youth not in employment, education or training; child marriage; and youth having experienced sexual violence during childhood, and the other 44 are disaggregated by age or by group, for example, the proportion of individuals using the Internet or the number of victims of human trafficking. Additionally, 15 indicators provide information about the enabling

environment that is conducive to youth development. These can measure specific youth enablers, such as trained teachers in lower and upper secondary education, or effective climate change-related planning and management focusing on youth. They can also measure enabling factors conducive to social development in general, such as social protection coverage or public allocations for gender equality and women’s empowerment.³

3. An analysis of youth-relevant indicators by tiers according to United Nations statistics, reveals a balanced distribution, with 30% pertaining to tier I, 41% to tier II and 28% to tier III. The tier I youth-relevant indicators relate mostly to youth health, education and employment, on which data have been extensively collected for many years, while tier III youth-relevant indicators pertain to more recent statistical fields, such as a youth-enabling environment, climate change or governance.⁴

4. One of the main ways that the Sustainable Development Goals aids in implementing the World Programme of Action for Youth is evident in the global indicator framework: leaving no youth behind. The global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals offers the potential to gather more robust information on the situation of youth, which in turn could support better implementation of the World Programme of Action through enhanced evidence-based youth policies. For example, although suicide and accidental death from self-harm is the third leading cause of death among young women and young men, it is an issue that is often neglected in youth policies. Also, Youth poverty is a key topic of both the World Programme of Action and Sustainable Development Goals. Thus, the global indicator framework will allow for two perspectives on youth poverty not covered in the Programme of Action: (a) young people living below the international poverty line (with the data disaggregated by sex, employment status and geographical location); and (b) youth poverty in all its dimensions. Another example relates to youth mortality; World Programme of Action indicators track five causes of mortality: maternal causes, road traffic accidents, homicide and conflict-related and self-inflicted injury. The global indicator framework has an additional 4 causes: (a) household and ambient air pollution; (b) unsafe water, unsafe sanitation and lack of hygiene; (c) unintentional poisoning; and (iv) disasters.⁵

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⁴ Ibid.

5. The United Nations has a series of events which surround Youths and their development linking to sustainable development, such as International Youth Day 2019 which was aimed at "Transforming Education" by striving to make education more relevant, equitable and inclusive for all youth. This was rooted in Goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development- "to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all". Goal 4 is basically stating that educating youths is the key to sustainable development, as it improves the overall quality of life of youth and helps them secure successful futures. This goal aims to facilitate literacy and numeracy among youth, and equal opportunities for all people, regardless of gender or disability.6

6. A recent study, done by Ipsos for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s Goalkeepers campaign, conducted in 15 countries worldwide (40,506 interviews were conducted between July 9, 2018 and August 22, 2018) found that globally, young people are more optimistic about the future than older generations. Case Studies from all corners of the world, gathered by the world Youth report, seem to justify young people's optimism. The latest UN DESA's World Report is clear: "Young people have the potential to save the world. All we have to do is let them do just that; And that means giving them a fair shot at quality education and decent jobs"- Assistant SG in UN DESA and UN Chief Economist Elliot Harris.7

7. Youth Education enables upward socioeconomic mobility and is a key to escaping poverty. Youth Education is also essential to achieving many other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). When youths can receive a quality education, they can break from the cycle of poverty. Youth Education helps to reduce inequalities and to reach gender equality. Youth Education empowers people everywhere to live a more healthy and sustainable lives. Youth Education is also crucial in fostering tolerance between people and contributes to more peaceful societies.

8. The Department of Political Affairs has promoted youth engagement with respect to electoral processes by involving them as voters and candidates as well as agents of voter education, registration staff and polling officials. Through youth involvement in armed conflict situations, including conflict prevention, protection, peacebuilding and post-conflict processes, several tools have been developed, including a global platform, Youth4Peace.info, created by The United Nations Development Programme

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(UNDP), which has supported youth-related peacebuilding initiatives in various countries.

9. By prioritizing youth health, the United Nations increases the likelihood of effective participation from youth of various backgrounds. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has supported the implementation of the Caribbean Community Integrated Strategic Framework for the Reduction of Adolescent Pregnancy. Many initiatives have been undertaken to address adolescent pregnancy, including in Ghana, Guyana and Myanmar.8 UNICEF supported HIV prevention interventions have reached more than 1 million adolescents and young people in Côte d’Ivoire. In Uganda, UNFPA and UNICEF have launched two joint programmes on accelerating efforts to end female genital mutilation and child marriage (Trinidad and Tobago has banned child marriage, while Mozambique and Zimbabwe have formulated strategies for preventing child marriage). Additionally, youth sexual reproductive health and rights and youth health policies have been developed in Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique and Sri Lanka. Thus, allowing youths to be a formidable group, capable of substantially adding to and achieving sustainable development, as agents of change.

10. By implementing the World Programme of Action for Youth to achieve sustainable development, new youth policies, programmes and laws centered around youth development have been formulated. The development of youth policies and strategies is a priority for Member States that enables them to target the specific needs and challenges of youth. In recent years, several States have developed or updated national youth policies. In China, the milestone medium- and long-term youth development programme (2016-2025) is the first set of national guidelines for youth development. Austria has made education or training compulsory until age 18, India has adopted a child labour act and ratified two related International Labour Organization conventions, and Colombia has adopted a youth employment and entrepreneurship act. Youth participation acts have also been adopted in the Republic of Moldova and the Sudan, while Liberia, through its equal representation and participation act, has reserved one seat in Parliament for youth. In Ecuador, the rights and diversity of youth are recognized in the Constitution, together with additional youth-specific rights, such as the right of young people to integrate into the labour market in just and decent conditions.

11. Youth participation is considered instrumental in all stages of the youth policy making process. For example, youth have been consulted during the formulation stage of forthcoming federal accessibility legislation in Canada, the employment policy in El Salvador, the demographic strategy in Germany and the forthcoming youth strategy in the European Union. El Salvador recently included youth in the management board of the national entity in charge of youth policy, while Canada has included youth in the review of its international assistance policy. Youth participation in decision-making at the international level has made significant progress in recent years, with more Member States including young people as part of their national delegations to the United Nations. In 2016, more than 60 delegates from more than 35 Member States attended the seventy-first session of the General Assembly, with Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Canada, Chad, Czechia, Eritrea, Hungary and the United Arab Emirates launching their United Nations youth delegate programmes. Another notable development has been the inclusion of youth delegates not only in the Commission for Social Development but also in the high-level political forum on sustainable development, the Commission on the Status of Women and the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, as well as in other United Nations processes and forums, such as the twenty second session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), the World Health Assembly and the Economic and Social Council Youth Forum.

12. The Report of the Secretary General on May 8, 2019 made mention of progress made with youths regarding education. The report highlighted recent data which shows that in 72 countries, approximately 7 in 10 children aged 3 and 4 are now developmentally on track in at least three of the following domains: literacy-numeracy, physical development, social-emotional development and learning. Based on the report, it can also be said that in the past decade, major progress has been made towards increasing youth access to education at all levels and increasing enrollment rates in schools particularly for women and girls. Basic literacy skills have improved tremendously, yet bolder efforts are needed to make even greater strides for achieving universal education goals. For example, the world has achieved equality in primary education between girls and boys, but few countries have achieved that target at all levels of education.

13. In terms of progress made to the issue of youth unemployment and underemployment; the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth, launched in February 2016 under the leadership of International Labour Organization, brings together 22 United Nations entities in an effort to expand country-level action to promote decent jobs for young people through evidence-based interventions, knowledge and multi-stakeholder partnerships, contributing to the implementation of SDGs and youth employment. In September 2016, the Secretary-General appointed a Special Envoy on Youth Employment to advance the Global Initiative and support the promotion of effective youth employment strategies. Since then, several new joint programmes on youth empowerment and employment have been developed. In Ethiopia, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) has supported youth-led entrepreneurship in strategic industries with high growth and job creation potential. In the Philippines, International Telecommunication Union (ITU) has supported coding training to enhance employment opportunities for youth in the field of technology. And the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) supports more than 20 countries through activities to promote youth agricultural employment, through its Integrated Country Approach in Guatemala, Senegal and Uganda. Lastly, The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has provided economic opportunities for vulnerable young migrants, mobile populations and youth at risk.

II. Challenges

14. According to the UN, obtaining a quality education for our youths is the foundation to creating sustainable development. Over 265 million children are currently out of school and 22% of them are of primary school age, and many of the children mentioned are those who are attending schools but are lacking basic skills in reading and math. The reasons behind this are: a lack of adequately trained teachers, poor conditions of schools and equity issues related to opportunities provided, especially to rural children. Adequate infrastructure and teacher training play a critical role in the quality of education. Sub-Saharan Africa faces the biggest challenges in providing schools with basic resources. The situation is extreme at the primary and lower secondary levels, where less than one half of schools in sub-Saharan Africa have

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access to drinking water, electricity, computers and the Internet. For quality education to be provided to the children of impoverished families, investment is needed in educational scholarships, teacher training workshops, school building and improvement of water and electricity access to schools. Hence, through being in educational institutions, youths not only get the opportunity to be involved and to feel involved, their quality of life is improved through this access to an inclusive education. It therefore can help to equip millennials with the potential to develop innovative solutions to the world’s greatest problems.\(^\text{14}\)

15. Gender inequality: About one-third of countries in the developing regions have not achieved gender parity in primary education. In sub-Saharan Africa, Oceania and Western Asia, girls still face barriers to realize their right to quality education. These disadvantages in education also translate into lack of access to skills and limited opportunities in the labour market for young women.\(^\text{15}\)

16. According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, challenges to the implementation of youth policies range from coordination difficulties and constraints on financial resources to resistance from government entities that do not traditionally engage in youth mainstreaming, struggle to address include those related to high levels of youth unemployment and underemployment; alcohol and substance abuse; gender inequality; migration; and the intergenerational transmission of poverty.\(^\text{16}\)

17. The diversity of youth sometimes makes it difficult to respond to their evolving and multifaceted needs. This can pose challenges to the creation of effective channels for the participation of youth, more specifically, vulnerable and marginalized young people. Moreover, in some ministries, including youth ministries, inadequate human resources and capacity to address youth issues reflect a lack of curricula in this area in many countries, as well as a lack of recognition of work on youth more broadly.\(^\text{17}\)

18. Challenges to the implementation of youth policies range from coordination difficulties and constraints on financial resources to resistance from government entities that do not traditionally engage in youth mainstreaming. Youth policies and their implementation are affected by the broader environment, including the political climate, humanitarian crises, uneven local development, budget cuts and competing


\(^{15}\) Ibid.


\(^{17}\) Ibid.
priorities. This, in turn has a negative impact on the degree of priority given by politicians to youth and the development of youth policy, which will hinder the development or progression of youths which will affect the youth influence in sustainable development.  

19. Regarding political participation, in a third of countries, eligibility for national parliament starts at 25 years old or older. Young people between the ages of 15 and 25 constitute a fifth of the world’s population. Hence, 1.65% of parliamentarians around the world are in their 20s and 11.87 % are in their 30s. The average age of parliamentarians globally is 53 (50 years old for women parliamentarians). Therefore, in countries where the electoral participation of young people is declining and/or in ageing societies, the political influence of young people is also shrinking.  

20. Youth alcohol and substance abuse: Surveys by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) on drug use among the general population consistently show that the extent of drug use among older people remains lower than that among young people. Data shows that peak levels of drug use are seen among those aged 18–25. This is broadly the situation observed in countries in most regions and for most drug types. The extent of drug use among young people, in the past-year and past-month prevalence, which are indicators of recent and regular use, remains much higher than that among older people. Substance use and related problems include: Academic failure, Poor social competency skills, Poor self-regulation, Mental health problems and Poor physical health.  

21. Migration: According to the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Young people migrate for a plethora of reasons. The decision to migrate is often related to important life transitions, such as obtaining higher education, finding and starting work, or getting married. With some 71 million youth unemployed globally in 2016, the search for work continues to be a significant driver of youth migration in both developed and developing countries. Many youths also choose or are forced to migrate to escape poverty, violence, conflict, or are displaced due the effects of war or climate change. As such, youth are heavily represented in migration for humanitarian reasons, including as refugees, asylum-seekers and as unaccompanied minors. However, for some young people, especially young women and those in irregular situations, migration confronts them with challenges and confers to them certain

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vulnerabilities. These vulnerabilities include discrimination based on gender, migration status, ethnicity or religion; poor working conditions (often exacerbated by the relatively low levels of bargaining power and trade union membership among young migrant workers compared to their adult counterparts); lack of access to basic social services such as health; risks associated with sexual and reproductive health; and lack of social protection or loss of social protection entirely once the migration status of the young migrant changes (from student to graduate, for example). Therefore, the migration experience can end up representing a risk for youths. Statistics and data from the Report of the UN inter-agency network ‘Global Migration Group’: Migration and Youth 2014 In 2013, highlight that young migrants (aged 15 to 24) represented 12% of the total migrant population (28.2 million people).

III. Future Priorities

22. Improving the degree of priority given by politicians to youth and develop and enforce existing national policies for youth progression and coherent cross-sectoral efforts in line with the World Programme of Action for Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in developing countries (2019 – Commission for Social Development, 57th Session Resolution 57/1: Resolution on Policies and Programmes involving Youth) and encouraging Member States to continue the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth, including its 15 interrelated priority areas, as a policy framework with practical guidelines for national action and international support to improve the situation of young people at the local, national, subregional, regional and international levels, while taking into account the views of youth and youth-led and youth-focused organizations as part of the effective participation of youth in society.

23. Prioritizing and committing adequate resources for the implementation of youth-related policies, including youth participation in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation stages; Maintaining a holistic youth

21 Ibid.
22 2019 – Commission for Social Development, 57th Session Resolution 57/1: Resolution on Policies and Programmes involving Youth
development perspective, including investing in culture, sports and civic engagement, can be difficult when one issue is particularly acute, such as youth unemployment.23

24. Addressing ongoing challenges that youth policies struggle with, inclusive of those related to high levels of youth unemployment and underemployment; alcohol and substance abuse; gender inequality; migration; and the intergenerational transmission of poverty.24

25. Strengthening the capacity of national statistical offices to design, collect and analyse gender, disability and age-disaggregated data to contribute effectively to follow-up, reporting and accountability for the achievement of the youth dimensions of the 2030 Agenda.25

26. Continuing the Promotion Youth participation in sustainable development by establishing legally recognized youth participation mechanisms is essential for high-quality participation by youth. Many countries have continued their support for such mechanisms at the national and local levels, while others have created or are creating new ones. Member States highlight the effectiveness of combining both in-person and online avenues for participation.26

27. In terms of Strengthening institutional arrangements for youth by strengthening youth governmental entities, Member States are pursuing policy coordination as a key element of ensuring the implementation of youth policies at all levels.27

28. Improving Youth data, research and evidence-based policy orientation, as, despite the important progress made, additional efforts are required in order to obtain better disaggregated data on youth, marginalized youth, and to measure youth participation and civic engagement. Youth-related data will be provided on a wide array of issues that were not measured with World Programme of Action indicators, such as gender-based violence, gender parity in average hourly earnings, time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, researchers, missing persons and trafficking, safety perception when walking alone, or number of positions in public institutions. The use of such data could strengthen the evidence for effective implementation of the World Programme of Action. For example, global information about youth access to finance

24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
services (Sustainable Development Goal indicator 8.10.2) could open new perspectives in terms of youth financial literacy and inclusion policies.  

29. Mainstream the perspectives of youth, especially marginalized youth groups, into all policies and programmes, carried out at all levels by all governmental departments, to ensure the effective implementation of the World Programme of Action and that no youth are left behind. Many Member States host intergovernmental youth coordination mechanisms, either through dedicated structures or through participation in sectoral mechanisms. Youth ministries have made renewed efforts in their coordination missions thanks to specific mechanisms. France has created a youth policy advisory board, directly reporting to the Prime Minister, whose goal is to ensure the consistency of youth policy. To ensure youth mainstreaming, youth governmental institutions are engaged in other intergovernmental coordination mechanisms, such as on gender (in Mexico and Uruguay), bullying (in China) and citizen security (in El Salvador). The Federal Ministry of Economy, Family and Youth of Austria provides youth training to other governmental institutions.

30. Mainstreaming of youth into environmental issues of the Sustainable Development Goals by allowing youth to play instrumental roles in their local communities in the sustainable management of natural resources. Under the 2030 Agenda, greater progress in integrating the social, economic and environmental components of youth development is under way, although additional efforts are needed, regarding the mainstreaming of youth specific dimensions into environmental policies.

31. Inclusion of Millennials in national sustainable development efforts through the mainstreaming of youth into national sustainable development plans, and the mainstreaming of sustainable development into youth policies. Several Member States have mainstreamed the Sustainable Development Goals into their national youth policies and programmes. Youth-led organizations themselves can play a strong role in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, through awareness-raising, training and volunteerism (for example, the European Youth Forum).

32. Multiplying efforts of the United Nations entities in actively supporting Member States and young people in achieving youth development by recognizing that high rates of youth unemployment persist, as do high rates of underemployment, vulnerable employment and informal employment, leaving many young people in

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29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.
situations of working poverty or in jobs that have limited access to social protection and that do not provide adequate labour standards; and that education, both formal and non-formal, and training promote equity and social inclusion, and recalling in that sense the need to substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship and to help ensure that by 2030, all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy, as well as to substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training.  

IV. Further Reading

Report of the Secretary General on Youth and Sustainable Development

https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1299017

For a general overview on Sustainable Development


https://www.bccic.ca/sustainable-development-goals/


For an overview on Youth Participation and their Links to Sustainable Development

https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/youth/

https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/


https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/09/why-young-people-are-key-to-achieving-the-sdgs/


https://youth4globalgoals.org/

Summary records of Youth Development

Challenges preventing youth contribution to sustainable development

https://www.unode.org/wdr2018/prelaunch/WDR18_Booklet_4_YOUTH.pdf

Policies and Programmes involving Youth


Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) of young people


Youth and the Environment