

SDG ACTION WEEKEND
16 & 17 SEPTEMBER 2023

Torchbearers for the SDGs: Meaningful Youth Engagement & the 2030 Agenda



Organized by the United Nations Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, Major Group for Children and Youth (MGCY) & International Coordination Meeting of Youth Organizations (ICMYO)

Background

The [SDG Summit 2023](#) provided a unique opportunity to expand and strengthen meaningful youth engagement at all levels, particularly in the scope of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. 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 alongside the Major Group for Children and Youth (MGCY) and the International Coordination Meeting for Youth Organizations (ICMYO) facilitated a youth-led meaningful youth engagement roadmap towards the SDG Summit 2023.

This roadmap included two virtual youth consultations hosted between June and August 2023, as well as the launch of a [Guidance for Self-organized Youth Consultations](#), inviting any youth-led, youth-focused, or youth-serving organizations to host consultations in their communities and contribute to the global process and outcomes. Additionally, MGCY facilitated a [process](#) featuring on-ground consultations since October 2022 across different UN foras and further virtual discussions for the development of the Global Youth Position Paper for the SDG Summit.

The process culminated in the [SDG Action Weekend](#) of the SDG Summit 2023, particularly during the "**Torchbearers for the SDGs: Meaningful Youth Engagement & the 2030 Agenda**" session of the SDG Mobilization Day on Saturday, 16 September 2023. The outcomes of the consultations were unveiled as an outcome document, alongside the final version of the Global Youth Position Paper for the SDG Summit.



Key Issues

- The session centered on the role of youth as torchbearers for the SDGs, as highlighted in the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), the [Our Common Agenda report](#), the [Political Declaration of the SDG Summit](#), and the [UN Secretary-General's Policy Brief on Meaningful Youth Engagement in Policymaking and Decision-making Processes](#).
- Discussions highlighted young people's "fearless optimism" that there is time for course correction to achieve the SDGs by 2030, despite the current rate of only 15% of targets being "on track." This optimism is dependent on promises being translated into concrete actions and young people being meaningfully engaged as full-fledged partners at every step of SDG implementation, alongside their governments, the United Nations, civil society, private sector, and other partners.
- How can youth with disabilities, young women, indigenous, LGBTIQ+, and refugee youth lead SDG implementation and benefit from it? Using an intersectional approach. Intersectionality is not only a concept but a tool for transformative action: gender, disability, race and ethnicity need to be understood holistically to ensure no one is left behind. Intersectionality and a human rights-based approach must be mainstreamed within the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, as well as the Summit of the Future and the Declaration on Future Generations. Young people are not a homogenous group and, therefore, key principles such as accessibility, safety, and participation should be incorporated.
- The interconnections between the SDGs and the climate action agenda from a youth perspective were highlighted. The world continues to be pressed by the urgency to address the climate crisis. Young people are needed to help spearhead acceleration and commitments for people and the planet. Young people are not only leading action on solutions to address the climate crisis, but also convening a collective mobilization effort from the local to the global levels, working to hold decision-makers accountable for their decisions and to deliver on their promises.
- Some of the key principles of meaningful youth engagement were brought into focus: trust building, financing and resourcing youth, and shifting power. The discussion further emphasized that intergenerational solidarity and mutual trust among a diverse array of stakeholders are not merely aspirational but foundational for the collaborative advancement of the 2030 Agenda with and for youth. Realizing this vision mandates a reinvigorated commitment to invest in young people. This involves the adoption of innovative financial mechanisms and a purposeful recalibration of power, positioning young people as fully integrated partners across all facets of policy formulation and programmatic implementation.
- Finally, youth also launched their contributions to the SDG Summit - [a summary of the Torchbearers for the SDGs: Consultation on Meaningful Youth Engagement & the 2030 Agenda](#) and the [Global Youth Position Paper for the SDG Summit](#).



Key Recommendations for Action

- The need to strengthen meaningful youth engagement in policy and decision-making processes at all levels - at the UN and beyond. Young people are torchbearers of the SDGs and demand to be included as full-fledged partners at every step - inception, design, implementation, review, and follow-up - of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and UN intergovernmental processes.
- For youth engagement to be meaningful and transformative, youth traditionally left at the margins, must now come to the center. Young women and girls, youth with disabilities, young refugees, LGBTIQ+ youth, indigenous youth (among others) must participate in and impact all decision-making processes. The 2030 Agenda, as well as the Summit of the Future and the Declaration on Future Generations, must recognize inclusive care and support systems, and decent work for all. Gender equality, accessibility, universal design, and inclusive monitoring mechanisms must be guiding principles for the Declaration on Future Generations (Principle 7, to work towards “closing the digital divides”, and Principle 8, to “to prepare for and respond to future global shocks”).
- Ambition for people and the planet can only be achieved with intergenerational solidarity, multistakeholder partnerships that acknowledge youth as full-fledged partners, and appropriate financial and in-kind investment of resources directly dedicated to youth and the solutions they lead and will enable the increase of youth participation in shaping climate processes.
- To foster meaningful youth engagement, participation must transition from being a mere privilege to becoming a fundamental human right, championed from the grassroots to global spheres. To achieve this transformation, structures and institutions must undergo a profound shift. This involves transitioning from consultative processes to true co-creation of policies and programs alongside young people; moving from resource competition to the allocation of equitable and adaptable funding that caters to the specific needs of youth; and evolving from a landscape characterized by distrust and exclusion of young individuals to one marked by accessible and diverse youth representation in politics and public life.
- In the “Torchbearers for the SDGs: Consultations on Meaningful Youth Engagement & the 2030 Agenda”, youth identified opportunities to concrete strengthen meaningful youth engagement at all levels, calling for the endorsement of a global standard on meaningful youth engagement based on core guiding principles and making meaningful youth engagement a requirement in all UN decision-making processes, including across the organizations various deliberative and decision-making bodies. More information can be found in the [summary of the consultations](#).

For more information, please visit: <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/SDGSummit2023/SDG-Action-Weekend/youth>.