

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE AS CRITICAL AGENTS OF CHANGE IN THE 2030 AGENDA

Young people played a crucial role in shaping the 2030 Agenda, which recognises them as “critical agents of change” and integrates their priorities and needs across the economic, environmental and social dimensions of development. Explicitly or implicitly, young people’s aspirations are embedded throughout the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their targets.

With the SDG implementation well underway, young people’s participation and empowerment, from the global to the local level, should be understood as both a means and an end in itself. Indeed, youth voices, actions and solutions, as well as their reach and willingness to influence decision-making, are all essential if sustainable development is to be achieved.

Yet, many young people—who often make up a majority in their societies—still experience interlocked forms of discrimination and marginalization, barriers in accessing their rights, limited civic and political inclusion, high levels of poverty as well as limited access to health, education and decent jobs.

To meet the ambition of the 2030 Agenda and to do justice to young people’s role as agents of change, development actors should systematically promote and invest in meaningful youth participation in SDG implementation, strengthening their involvement in global, regional, national and local level processes as well as enhancing their substantive engagement at programme/project level.

These **Guiding Principles**, developed by the Inter-Agency Working Group on Youth & SDGs*, while not claiming to be exhaustive, are meant for all partners and stakeholders who see the centrality and interconnection between youth participation and empowerment and the achievement of the SDGs. They are meant for those seeking guidance on how to effectively, proactively and responsibly foster youth participation in SDG implementation across development contexts so that the collective power of young people can contribute to real and lasting change. Starting from these principles and the indispensable role of youth organisations, young leaders and networks, development actors should consider additional modalities and avenues by which youth participation can be enhanced, such as through youth volunteerism, South-South and triangular cooperation as well as private sector and inter-generational partnerships.

* The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Restless Development have developed these Guiding Principles, on behalf of the Working Group on Youth & SDGs and the Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (IANYD). UN entities, UN Youth Delegates, the UN Major Group of Children and Youth and other civil society partners, including youth organisations, were consulted in the process. For more information, please contact youth@undp.org.

Why promoting young people's participation and empowerment is a priority for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda:

- ***A human rights imperative*** - Addressing specific needs of young people in all their diversity and supporting their participation and empowerment in SDG implementation are complimentary and have to be recognised, first and foremost, as human rights imperatives.
- ***Young people are key SDG accelerators*** - Drawing on youth expertise, know-how, networks and adopting promising practices for youth engagement early on can create space for experimentation and learning. It also sets the stage for the discovery of innovative solutions, modes of collaboration and actions, such as youth-led development or volunteering, which can multiply development gains over the lifetime of the 2030 Agenda.
- ***A demographic imperative*** - Young people represent a large and important proportion of the population of many developing countries. For many countries with large and growing youth populations, timely investments in young people's capacity development can enable the realisation of a "demographic dividend."
- ***The consequences of inaction*** - Excluding young people from development and decision-making, especially young women, will only hamper prospects of achieving the 2030 Agenda. In the short term, their exclusion from substantive discussions and decisions over SDG localization and implementation is likely to result in policies and programmes that do not adequately reflect their specific needs, that will miss out on their contributions and that are unlikely to be effective and sustainable. In the long term, neglecting investments in youth participation and development, by further marginalising young people, can significantly slow development progress, damage the social trust, challenge the representativeness of governance institutions and ultimately jeopardize peace.

Guiding Principles

1. Approach youth participation and empowerment, in all actions, as an essential principle for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
2. Promote youth participation and empowerment in all phases and levels of 2030 Agenda actions, including planning, implementation and in monitoring and accountability for the Goals, including through youth-led initiatives.
3. Ensure that the alignment of development priorities with the SDGs at all levels addresses young people's specific needs and is responsive to their voices, respects, upholds and promotes their rights, especially by strengthening avenues for youth participation and increasing investments in youth-led development. Applying a human rights-based approach

and the application of international labour standards and other United Nations normative frameworks relevant to the development of young people is key.

4. Foster and support overall enabling environments for inclusive and meaningful youth participation in all phases of 2030 Agenda processes, including through structured, substantive and effective participation in official policy processes, the promotion of formal and informal spaces where young people can engage with each other and the community at large, volunteering schemes, multi-stakeholder SDG initiatives and partnerships and sustainable funding.
5. Strengthen youth agency by supporting capacity development for young people, youth organisations, networks and movements, and all other stakeholders, including authorities and duty-bearers, to enhance mutual responsiveness, trust and collaboration in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
6. Recognise and value the diversity of young people's experiences by finding ways to systematically, sustainably and responsibly engage young people and their organisations, networks and movements, typically left out of development projects and programmes, in line with the Agenda's principle of "leaving no one behind."
7. Promote gender equality and girls' and young women's empowerment as critical for achieving the 2030 Agenda.
8. Advocate for youth-sensitive national and local SDG indicators, in addition to age disaggregation, as a critical avenue for ensuring development progress, make data sources youth-friendly and foster young people's role in generating data on the Goals.
9. Find creative ways to engage young people throughout the entire SDG programme, project or initiative cycle, from consultation and design to monitoring and evaluation of initiatives, while ensuring that M&E frameworks are sensitive and relevant to them.
10. Ensure that young people's participation in SDG action is meaningful by setting clear and substantive objectives and establishing channels whereby youth participation can have a visible impact on outcomes.

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