

16 X 16 BLOG SERIES

SDG 16: Our Life, Our Future – What do YOUth mean by Meaningful Inclusion?

Lynrose Jane D. Genon, Project YACAP; Young Women+ for Peace & Leadership; 16 x 16 participant.

I believe that achieving peace, justice, and inclusion in any country is only possible when involving the youth. My name is Lynrose Jane D. Genon and I am a 24 years old woman from Mindanao, Philippines.

In the Philippines, I live in a community that is susceptible to experiencing different kinds of violent conflict, and I am aware that when young men and women lives in such a community, they become more familiar to violence, conflict, and war than peace; and when youth experience violence, discrimination, and limited political inclusion, they can lose trust in the governance systems that are supposed to protect and support them.

I have experienced the ugly reality of violent conflict. When I was 13, our community was attacked, because of the failure of the peace agreement. There were gunshots, some of my classmates were held hostage, houses were burnt, and people were killed. At home, it has become part of our system to have a "to-go bag", in case the attack will happen again.

After 9 years, another violent conflict happened, the Marawi Siege. It was a more violent conflict and displaced more than 350,000 individuals, including young men and women. Rebuilding the structures of society, both physical and social, is still ongoing; and we live with constant fear. Our community is aware that peace is so fragile.

Working for a culture of peace

This personal experience brought me to work for a culture of peace. I am co-director of Youth Amplifying, Co-Creating and Advocating Peace: Project YACAP. This is a youth-led program in response to the Marawi Siege in 2017. This youth-led network started with leadership training of 30 young leaders in Mindanao, who then implemented peace projects in their communities; and currently, the network has



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around 300 youth volunteers that work to foster a common vision of society and bridge divides between people. The implementation of the leadership program was funded by the US Embassy-Manila through the #ForMindanao Conflict Response and Peacebuilding Grant.



Visioning workshop in YW+PL-PH, Philippines. Photo: GNWP.

My engagement in Project YACAP introduced me to Young Women + for Peace and Leadership in the Philippines (YW+PL-PH), another youth program of the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders which created a network of 22 member organizations led and initiated by young women. The network aims to empower young women to become peacebuilders in the Philippines. We use social media as a platform to promote accountability to gender equality, women's rights, human rights, and peacebuilding policies. We also organize forums, discussions and campaigns - from youth community discussions to increase awareness of civic responsibilities to impartially educate young voters on systemic implications of voting, criteria in selecting political leaders, and ways to prevent voter intimidation among young local voters.

For more information on,

- 16 x 16 participants: <https://www.youth4peace.info/node/324>
- 16 x 16 Initiative: <https://www.youth4peace.info/node/344>

August
2019

And this network gave me the opportunity to be part of the 16 x 16 Initiative implemented by UNDP Global Youth Programme. My participation in the initiative, as one out of 16 participants from across the world, made me realize that my story is not remotely different from the other 16 x 16 participants'. We share the same challenges and barriers, but we also share the same hopes and are devoted to make our communities a better place to live in. Some have risked their career, some took a gap year, some have faced risks of arrests, and some has been a victim of an assault. Listening to them, I am made aware that these painful realities do not want to be saved, pitied, or victimized, they want to be witnessed and heard, and this witnessing and hearing need to translate into concrete actions. With the Rome Youth Call to Action, we urge governments, stakeholders and partners to take strong and bold action on SDG 16. The 16 x 16 initiative is not just calling for strong youth policies and mainstreaming of youth issues related to SDG 16, it is clearly asking for concrete commitments and opportunities for young people, including young women and girls, to thrive and scale up their initiatives.

Despite the recognition and affirmation that active engagement of youth is fundamental to achieving sustainable, inclusive, and stable societies, persistent deficiencies and disparities are still unacceptably high. More is still needed in terms of financial support in scaling up of youth-led initiatives, disaggregated data collection, and analysis, especially about youth in fragile and vulnerable communities. Governments and other stakeholders must give concrete commitments to accelerate youth participation in the implementation of SDG 16.

Meaningful Inclusion of Youth in Implementing SDG 16

To bridge that gap, there is still a need to empower young people to become change agents themselves, able to craft sustainable solutions at every level. We need to invest in educating the youth about the SDGs. SDGs must be better publicized and advocated. Most of the young people in our community have never heard of the SDGs, let alone appreciate their relevance to everyday life. Young people need to be educated on what the SDGs could affect if they are achieved, and the consequences if they are not. Ownership of the SDGs needs to move outside the UN, and outside the circles of young people who are already actively involved. We need to work more in making every youth own the SDGs, and not just see the SDGs as UN or global goals. We must own the SDGs as our goals.

There is also a need to create more opportunities for young women and men to reinforce our agency. With more opportunities, we, young women and men, can reinforce our capacity as co-creators of peace. One opportunity is to link us up with other youth groups for increased recognition of the power of our collective voice. I experienced this with YW+PL-PH, which is mentored by Global Network of Women Peacebuilders, who brought together otherwise unconnected young women from the Philippines, often sparking ideas that we have not had individually. This has given us a platform to explore our potential for collective expression and action and amplifying our individual works. This and the 16 x 16 Initiative have widened the reach of our stories and gives a platform to transform our participation from mere presence to influence.

And we shouldn't stop at ownership and reinforcing youth's agency, young people and youth-led organizations and networks, both formal and informal, need to have the space and recognition to participate in translation of the 2030 Agenda into local, national and regional policy, in implementation, monitoring and review, in holding governments accountable. Young people need a structured mechanism for participation through decision-making. Governments, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders need to work with youth organizations or groups of young people as partners, allowing young women and men to be in charge and be meaningfully included in the implementation of SDGs. We need to give youth a space to affect systemic change.

When it comes to creating a more peaceful world, we need to be willing to work with each other and be serious in leaving no one behind. Yes, it does not come free and easy. It is a tough task for us to take on, but being on the table is a good start. Now, we need to take a more active part in holding everyone accountable for keeping our seat on the table. The SDGs are our life and future and you cannot talk about our life and future without us.

To follow Lynrose on Twitter: @LaDamaElleSa

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