

## 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 recognizes this generation as “critical agents of change” and integrates their priorities and needs across the economic, environmental and social dimensions of development\*.

Their participation in the 2030 Agenda articulation and implementation from the global to the local levels should be understood as both a means and an end in itself. Explicitly or implicitly, young people are deeply embedded within the fabric of the Sustainable Development Goals. It is often said that young people’s involvement, volunteering, energy, networks and solutions are indispensable for achieving the goals. Indeed, their knowledge, reach and innovative solutions are essential if sustainable development is to be realized.

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

To meet the ambition of the agenda and to do justice to young people’s role as agents of change, development actors must systematically promote and invest in meaningful youth participation in SDG implementation, from their role in global, regional, national and local level processes to their substantive engagement at the project level.

These **Guiding Principles**, developed by the inter-agency Working Group on Youth & SDGs, while not claiming to be exhaustive, are meant for development actors who see the centrality and interconnection between youth participation and empowerment and the achievement of the SDGs. They are meant for those seeking guidelines 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 real and lasting change. Starting from these principles and the indispensable role of youth organizations, young leaders and networks, development actors should consider additional modalities and avenues by which youth participation can be enhanced, through youth volunteerism, South-South and triangular cooperation, private sector and inter-generational partnerships.

---

\* UNDP and Restless Development have developed these guiding principles on behalf of the Working Group on Youth & 2030 Agenda and in collaboration with other UN entities, the UN Major Group of Children and Youth, and other civil society actors, including youth organisations. For more information, please contact [youth@undp.org](mailto:youth@undp.org)

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

- *A human rights imperative* - Addressing youth specific needs and supporting their participation and empowerment in SDG implementation are complimentary and are first and foremost human rights imperatives.
- *Young people are key SDG accelerators* - Drawing on the expertise, know-how, networks of young people and adopting promising practices for youth engagement early on can also create the space for experimentation and learning that could set the stage for the discovery of innovative solutions, modes of collaboration and actions, such as youth-led development or volunteering, that could multiply development gains over the lifetime of the Agenda.
- *A demographic imperative* - Young people represent a large and important proportion of the population of many developing countries. For many countries that now have large and growing youth populations, timely investments in young people's capacity development can enable them to reap a "demographic dividend."
- *The consequences of inaction* - Excluding young people from development and decision-making will hamper the 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 respond to their specific needs, that will miss out on their contributions, and that may not be as effective and sustainable. In the long term, neglecting youth in these investments by further marginalizing young people can significantly slow development progress, damage the social trust, challenge the representativeness of 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.
3. Ensure that the alignment of development priorities with the SDGs at all levels address young people's specific development needs, respect, uphold, promote their rights and are responsive to their concerns, especially by increasing investments in youth participation and youth-led development.

4. Foster and support overall enabling environments for inclusive and meaningful youth participation in all phases of 2030 Agenda processes, including through structured, meaningful 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 and in multi-stakeholder SDG initiatives and partnerships.
5. Support capacity development for young women and young men, youth organizations, networks and movements, and all other stakeholders, including authorities and duty-bearers, to enhance mutual responsiveness, trust and collaboration in implementing 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 typically left out of projects and programmes as part of the Agenda's principle of "leaving no one behind"
7. Promote the empowerment of girls and young women will be crucial for realizing the 2030 Agenda.
8. Advocate for youth-sensitive national and local SDG indicators as a critical avenue for ensuring development progress, make data sources youth-friendly and foster young people's role generating data on the Goals.
9. Find creative ways to engage young people throughout entire SDG project or initiative cycles, from consultation and design to monitoring and evaluation of initiatives, 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.