MEANINGFUL YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND THE 2030 AGENDA REPORT

A virtual conversation on Youth Leadership and the SDGs

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Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda have been a driving force in uniting countries, and public and private stakeholders and an opportunity for young people to become key agents of social change, economic growth and innovation while driving the 2030 Agenda forward. As we get to the mid-point of realising the SDGs, it is important we address the role and importance of youth leadership in the implementation, monitoring and review of the global goals.

Young leaders and youth-led organisations have embarked on and achieved numerous and extensive initiatives while overcoming challenges to ensure they are not just beneficiaries of the SDGs but major contributors to their success. It is without doubt that young people, who according to the United Nations account for a population of 1.2 billion, must be meaningfully engaged as active partners in realising the global goals. It is significant to ensure meaningful engagement with young people who have taken up the challenge to push the world to a better place, providing them with the opportunity to be part of the decision-making process and implementation, leaving no room for any form of tokenistic engagement.

The SDGs Summit 2023 provides a strategic opportunity to expand and strengthen meaningful youth engagement at all levels, particularly in the scope of SDG implementation, review, and follow-up. The Youth Leadership and the SDGs is a youth consultation with young leaders and youth organisations across Nigeria that will raise awareness and recommendations in enhancing meaningful youth engagement in the drive to achieve the SDGs. This also serves as a roadmap on how to ensure the agency of young Nigerians is captured in the drive to attain sustainable development.

The virtual consultation had in attendance over ten young leaders and youth organisations and explored seven consultation questions.
Challenges Faced and Identified by Young Persons / Youth Organisations, Movements, and Networks when Taking Action on the SDGs.

Diverse challenges have hindered the actions of young persons and youth-led organisations in driving the SDGs.

- One of these is the poor and limited data on youths, persons living with disabilities and social problems, especially in Nigeria. The prominence of poor statistics negatively affects the quality of research work and makes it difficult to adequately drive data-backed solutions. In addition, accounting for the number of people who have little to no knowledge of the SDGs is difficult to determine without data and thus continues to affect actions for the SDGs. Tracking progress when it comes to advocacy and poor recognition of young people meeting the SDG targets has been difficult with no clear method to track and monitor progress made so far.

- Lack of adequate templates/blueprints which can serve as a guide in navigating sustainable development. Youth-led organisations and young people often have to start from scratch in creating solutions or taking actions for sustainability. Access to a comprehensive blueprint will guide youth-led organisations and young persons to overcome challenges, make the best decisions and take faster and more sustainable action.
• Another challenge is limited resources (poor funding and a low number of skilled human resources). Lack of access to funding affects the implementation of projects and the motive of scaling social projects across communities. Despite government allocation of funds, targeted communities are often deprived of the needed facilities and have no access to the allocated funds. Obtaining grants has proven difficult to access and youth ideas are not sufficiently funded even after publications and articles on initiatives have been made. Poorly skilled human resources also affect the success of youth-led initiatives when the expertise and skills needed are missing.

• Cultural bias has aided the lack of SDGs awareness in many remote communities as awareness drives have been met with rejections that challenge certain cultural beliefs one of which is female genital mutilation (FGM). This form of cultural bias alongside others has formed hindrances in engaging some communities while raising awareness. In addition to the reluctance of communities to buy into the SDGs is the belief that their primary issues have not been solved.
Limited Youth Representation in Key Decision-Making Processes and Poor Collaboration

Oftentimes, young people are unable to share their opinions and are excluded from key decision-making processes, especially concerning government and development. They are seen as ‘not good enough or mature’ to be included in the conversation to drive meaningful policies and strategies in the country. In line with this is limited collaboration in realising the SDGs. There seems to be a form of competition in the sustainable development space which has hindered the rate of partnerships and collaborations.

One of the challenges organisations face in Nigeria is insecurity and a low number of young people involved in peacebuilding. The presence of a poor belief in the ability of young people to mediate conflicts. Young people are excluded in conflict mediation situations and have little access to opportunities to be internationally certified in peacebuilding.
The Key Opportunities available for Enhancing Youth Leadership in SDG Implementation, Monitoring, and Review to shape the decisions and actions of future generations of "engaged youth"

- **Youth Coalition:** The youth force is an extensive tool to enhance the SDGs. Young people around the world are leading numerous initiatives even with little or no support. Having a youth coalition can serve as a support system for peer-to-peer mentorship, funding and accessing resources for the implementation of the SDGs.

- **Establishing Communities or Platforms:** A dedicated platform whose role will be to inform and support passionate young individuals interested in working towards large global goals. This platform can also amplify the work of young people and youth-led organisations by sharing their success stories. Success stories signify the progress of the SDGs and are instrumental in encouraging the pursuit of the goals to the very end.

- **Open dialogues between young people and the government:** This is to ensure young people are engaged in the decision-making process of policy formulation. Opportunities such as youth forums, summits, fellowship programmes, awards and recognition need to be taken a more holistic approach to ensure youth engagement and participation.
• **Social Media Awareness:** Social media has become a proven tool in driving awareness of sustainable development goals but has not been harnessed by all youth leaders. It is important to have more young people taking action on SDGs to leverage social media to showcase their work, tell their stories and drive awareness of the global goals.

• The integration of sustainable development concepts into the formal education system empowers youth with knowledge and critical thinking skills to address global challenges. The public and private stakeholders need to become more deliberate about incorporating SDGs in governance and the educational system which would shape the future generations of engaged youth.
Steps to Take in Engaging Youth as Full-fledged Partners in SDGs Implementation

- Create an environment that recognises youth values, expertise and perspectives. This means providing an avenue to empower young leaders and youth-led organisations with the needed tools and platform to contribute meaningfully to SDGs implementation. Meaningful support of Initiatives made by young leaders and youth-led organisations can be made despite low funding. It is important stakeholders make their input in the activities of youth-led programmes and not disregard their actions in realising the global goals.

- Addressing youth engagement means leaving no one behind. There must be a need for diversity in gathering the views and perspectives of all youth irrespective of their background. Awareness of the SDGs has to be intensified and localised to ensure representation and inclusiveness. The importance of achieving the SDGs should get to young people in remote places.
A participatory platform will also aid young people in becoming full-fledged partners in SDGs implementation as they can network, collaborate and share their opinions. This platform will also serve as a way for young leaders and youth-led organisations working on global goals to be recognised for their work and motivated to do much more.

It is critical to not take a particular goal as more important than another, in other words, there should be no favouritism in regards to the SDGs. Many young people see some sustainable development goals as having the most recognition while others seem to be sidelined. This action places pressure on young people to move in line with these prominent goals and in turn affects the achievement of all the goals. All SDGs are important and all hands have to be on deck to ensure all the goals are met, not some.
Methods that can Enhance Meaningful Youth Engagement, especially of marginalised and vulnerable groups, in implementing, monitoring, and reviewing the SDGs.

Nigeria is a nation with over 250 ethnic groups, this shows the need to localise the SDGs in a way people of different ethnic groups will not be excluded.

- Materials and information on the SDGs have to be translated into local languages to make them accessible to everyone and have a direct impact on marginalised and vulnerable groups.
- Local-based awareness campaigns will focus on the local and remote communities to provide support and engagement in driving the SDGs.
- Support grassroots mobilisation and community-based initiatives. This in turn will create an avenue to hold workshops, campaigns, and engagements in marginalized communities.
- Explore various modes of communication which can include television channels, radio, graphics images, and other forms of media awareness campaigns.
- In ensuring commitment to the SDGs, partnership is key and a faster means to achieving this commitment delivery. Youth-led and youth-focused civil society organisations can facilitate joint efforts to track progress, advocate for changes and hold relevant stakeholders accountable.
- Also, youth-led and youth-focused groups have Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) representatives who will be responsible for tracking progress and working with young people to ensure commitments are delivered upon.
Key Actions to Drive Meaningful Youth Engagement

- It is significant to have an extensive and authenticated database that holds the number and names of youth-led organisations in Nigeria that play an active role in realising the SDGs which could curb any possibility of sponsors being defrauded by fake and fraudulent persons.

- Opportunities for young people to play an active part in the decision-making and implementation process must be made available for youth-led and youth-focused groups to harness.

- The government should often engage in dialogue talks with young people, and youth-focused groups and establish a partnership to realise sustainable development goals.

- There is an urgent need to localise the advocacy of the SDGs by translating the goals into local languages and ensuring people in remote communities are not left behind.

- The Government must include the sustainable development goals in the curriculum of academic institutions to spread advocacy and achieve the global goals on or before 2030.

- Private and public stakeholders should increase support for initiatives made by young people to achieve global goals. Partnerships and collaborations should not be shunned but fostered to encourage the works of youth initiatives.

- All sustainable development goals must be taken with utmost importance.

- Young people and youth-focused groups that have played an active role in implementing the SDGs should be given a platform to showcase their work and be spotlighted for their contributions.
Connect with Us

Nigeria Youth SDGs Network (NGYouthSDGs) registered as Network of Youth for Sustainable Initiative is a youth-led and youth-serving civil society organisation working with youth leaders and youth groups to advocate for meaningful youth engagement in policies and programmes for youth to lead and thrive.

With a focus on policies and programmes that will enable young people to lead and thrive, we work with youth groups, youth stakeholders like the government, international and national development partners, the private sector, academia, and the press to amplify the voices of youth and facilitate their meaningful participation in the developmental agenda of their country.