



UNCTAD Youth Network
Participation at the United Nations ECOSOC Youth Forum
30-31 January 2017
Pre-discussion report

The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) 2017 Youth Forum will provide a platform for youth to engage in a dialogue with Member States and share ideas on innovation, collective action and solutions to global problems. It will also address the concept of "shared prosperity", at the core of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

UNCTAD will participate in the United Nations ECOSOC Youth Forum through the thematic breakout session "End poverty in all its forms and create decent jobs for youth". Through its Youth Network, UNCTAD provided the opportunity for youth worldwide, between 18 and 30 years old, to share ideas, experiences and concerns, thereby enabling them to engage in the dialogue that will take place during this breakout session.

Specifically, through an online discussion to which about 300 young men and women registered, and a contribution made by the United Nations Major Group on Children and Youth (UN MGCY) the following three topics were brought up during five days:

- 1. Policies, skills development and youth entrepreneurship**
- 2. Public-private action for youth self-employment**
- 3. Inclusive Finance for Youth**

Below is a compile of the views expressed by youth on these topics.

Special remark from young participants on defining the concept of youth:

Youth is not only an age. Youth is a context of innovativeness, energy, boldness, connectivity and eagerness to thrive in a globalized world. Any discussion about youth contributing to the 2030 Agenda has to start from here.

1. Policies, skills development and youth entrepreneurship

- Governments have to rethink education policies and the role of education in development. There is a call for a new generational curriculum that adapts to a rapidly changing environment, needs for sustainable livelihoods and resilient communities. Policies need to build skills that generate livelihoods while empowering people and promoting equality.

- Education needs to be updated to address practical global needs, the needs of the millennial generation, and gaps between community needs and livelihood opportunities through decent jobs, including entrepreneurship avenues. Entrepreneurship knowledge and sensitiveness at an early age is crucial as it instructs young men and women on best practice, knowledge sharing, funding opportunities, partnership strategies and risk management.
- Gaming strategies should be included in the curriculum to develop critical thinking, and problem-solving skills.
- In order to ensure appropriate skill development and a fit for purpose approach, we need to pursue multi-stakeholder cooperation between all economic and social partners including educational entities, governments, civil society organizations, youth groups and employers.
- Education provides freedom. Youth demand better equipment in order to be self-sustainable by becoming entrepreneurs. Current education systems in many countries do not allow the path of youth's involvement in national development. This is because education systems are focused on training people to work for existing organizations in the private or public sectors, instead of providing training to create fresh and innovative entrepreneurs.
- There is a need to have quality education. In some countries the idea that teaching is not an important profession persists. For this reason teachers are not professionally trained to perform their duty. There is a need to revalue the potential of education for young people to overcome different social and economic problems around the world.
- Opportunities for youth need to leave no one behind. Scholarship and some opportunities are given to people holding privileged positions whether they have high intelligence coefficient, have won previews awards or are already successful. However all individuals need the same kind of support in building new skills. At the same time, young people who have benefited from public or private support should focus on assisting others who have not found the same opportunities.

2. Public-private action for youth self-employment

- Any kind of public-private action on this topic needs to place the interests of young people at the center of its terms, and use it as an avenue for maximizing their own gains.
- Youth need an entrepreneurial ecosystem that is widely fed by the expertise and support of different sectors. Partnerships need to pay special attention to contexts where the quality of technology and infrastructure is extremely outdated or not available. This can improve the access to appropriate training and tools, particularly on technology, so that youth are better equipped to create solutions with local, national, regional and global impact.

- The private and the public sector should partner in order to promote technology programmes and access to support SMEs and cooperatives. This would help young entrepreneurs to have access to affordable and appropriate technology to control product quality, improve services, consumer protection and consumer satisfaction and amplify the opportunities of technology-based innovation.
- Youth are collaborative global citizens committed to create a better world. Every day initiatives can be witnessed of young people who unite synergies to overcome particular problems. "Millennials are global citizens, connected in a super exciting fast moving economic ecosystem".

3. Inclusive finance for youth

- An enabling framework should prioritize access to credit and financial entry barriers for initiatives being developed by young people.
- Registration costs for start-ups can be the first financial constraint for many young people; these vary geographically. For instance, while a 50 USD registration fee could seem affordable to youth from developed and a number of developing countries, this amount cannot be afforded by youth from Least Developed Countries (LDCs). In addition, regulations need to find a better balance between the taxation imposed to large companies and the ones imposed to SMEs and cooperatives.
- The inaugural IATF (Inter Agency Task Force for Financing for Development) report formally identifies Youth as a crosscutting issue (chapter 1) that needs to be operationalized in national sustainable development implementation plans. This includes macro and micro economic environments that are youth sensitive and youth friendly.
- Start-ups have a higher risk profile than entrenched enterprises. This calls for policy frameworks that provide a safety net for such initiatives, include favorable finance norms and more institutional support reducing detraction from core activities: Youth call for a set of small privileges that public-private partnerships (SDG 17) could put in place to provide a safer environment for start-ups: business guidance and advice, training, tax exemption for a year time, small loans and easier access to funding to start a company. "The general principle should be appropriate regulatory burden and a business climate that enables all sizes and forms of businesses to play their intended roles in the national economy".