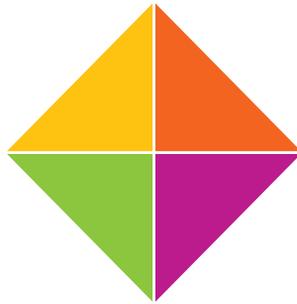


# Post-2015 Negotiation Briefs #7: Youth Engagement and Accountability Mechanisms



## Introduction

This policy brief will introduce language from different documents both formal UN documents and informal such as youth statements and declarations,<sup>1</sup> that provide strong language and highlights the importance of youth engagement and furthermore provides specific accountability mechanisms.

Taking into account that today, more than 2.9 billion people —nearly half the world's population— are under the age of 25,<sup>2</sup> youth engagement through meaningful and sustainable mechanisms is crucial for the youth development of each country. According to the Open Society Foundation,<sup>3</sup> meaningful and sustainable youth participation means the inclusion of young people in the decision-making through different transparent and inclusive platforms at all levels. Young people are informed and consulted on programmes and policies that directly affect their lives. In addition to the fact that young people have the fundamental right to express their voices, there are several clear advantages of young people's involvement: If they are consulted and their voice heard, programs and policies can become more effective and can be adapted to the actual needs of young people.

Today, we face a context where the post-2015 development agenda is being developed on an inclusive foundation, with parallel processes among different stakeholders such as Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and young people.

The role of youth in these processes can not be ignored. For example, in The WorldWeWant consultation, 75% of the seven million respondents were young people under the age of 30. According to the survey young people indicated health and education as top two priorities globally. The successes of the MDGs in health and education have highlighted the complexities of these issues and a large amount of work is still left to be completed in these areas, and a new global agenda will need to address this if the new goals are to meet the aspirations of the people.<sup>4</sup>

## What is Youth Engagement?

The involvement of young people (aged 15-24) on decision-making is commonly referred to as youth engagement. It also includes the following but not limited to:

- × Involve youth in all decisions that affect their lives.
- × Create opportunities for young people to work in partnership with adults on social problems and issues such as health, education, and sustainable development.
- × Promote youth leadership by encouraging young people to plan and facilitate initiatives and activities.
- × Assist young people in developing skills that will allow them to better advocate on their own behalf and create programs and activities that will engage other youth
- × Adults should recognize young people as valuable and equal partners in the planning, implementation and monitoring of policies and programs that affects young people's fundamental rights.

## Why is it Important that Young People to Be Engaged Through Accountability Mechanisms?

According to the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement (USA), youth engagement is a central principle of youth development.<sup>5</sup> Through youth engagement, communities can do a better job of creating the services, opportunities, and support that young people need to develop in healthy ways. From a political point of view, youth engagement is important because young people need the right<sup>6</sup> to represent their own voices and to meet their specific needs. (Zeldin, 2000)<sup>7</sup>

Internationally, young people have been recognized as an important stakeholder that needs to be fully included in the future development agenda. Thus, in

2012 the UN Secretary General Ban-Ki-moon in his Five-Year Action Agenda<sup>8</sup> stated to *“Address the needs of the largest generation of young people the world has ever known by deepening the youth focus of existing programmes on employment, entrepreneurship, political inclusion, citizenship and protection of rights, and education, including on reproductive health”*.

## Accountability Mechanisms and Youth Engagement in UN and Regional Agreements

In the analysis of statements and outcomes documents (including but not limited to the ones mentioned above)<sup>9</sup> that have been adopted by different CSOs, and with the involvement of young people and UN agencies, youth participation is recognized to play an important role for ensuring sustainable development of each nation. However, providing key, consistent, meaningful, and effective mechanisms for youth engagement is still lacking within UN and regional agreements.

The UN 3rd Committee for Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Affairs has adopted an UN Resolution on Policies and programmes involving youth in 2013 (A/RES/68/130) where the member states countries have agreed on recognizing the youth participation as a key to development and that they will work to secure effective, structured and sustainable participation of young people and youth-organizations in relevant decision-making processes.

Furthermore member states were urged to consider including a youth representative as part of the national delegation at international level.

Adopted by the General Assembly in 1995, the Programme of Action recommends that the United Nations Youth Fund support activities that encourage the participation of Youth in devising and carrying out projects whose short time frames often make it difficult to obtain needed support from conventional budgeting processes. The Action Programme further invites Governments, NGOs and the private sector to support the Fund’s activities on a predictable and sustained basis.

This Youth Fund is an example of a mechanism that can ensure accountability mechanisms for youth participation. There was a call addressing donors including Member States<sup>10</sup> and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, to actively contribute to the United Nations Youth Fund in order to facilitate the participation of youth representatives from developing countries in the activities

of the United Nations. However, there is lack of recognition of and investment in the Fund by donors and member states.

Another success for young people in the UN Secretary General's 5-year Action Plan is the UN System Wide Action Plan on Youth (UN Youth-SWAP) developed with the inclusion of young people and youth organizations to highlight the political inclusion of young people. One of the 5 priorities of the UN Youth-SWAP is political participation through accountability mechanisms. Furthermore the Youth-SWAP provides indicators for measuring youth participation in the decision making processes. More efforts need to be dedicated to obtain the necessary funding to fully implement the Youth-SWAP at all levels (international, regional and national).

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action recognizes that we face the world's biggest population of youth, highlighting that special measure for involving young women in the decision making are needed. The declaration is a landmark that provides strong language on youth participation and tackle issues related to the sexual and reproductive health and right of young people.<sup>11</sup>

Programme of Action, International Conference on Population and Development, 1994. Action 6.15:

"Youth should be actively involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of development activities that have a direct impact on their daily lives. This is especially important with respect to information, education and communication activities and services concerning reproductive and sexual health, including the prevention of early pregnancies, sex education and the prevention of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases".<sup>12</sup>

### Accountability Mechanisms and Youth in Post-2015 Negotiations

"Without young people's ideas we, the Panel, would be missing the best hope for a successful set of goals. Bring us your ideas".

UN High Level Panelist Graca Machel, London, November 2012

"Youth participation is fundamental for the post-2015 agenda. They are the ones that will have to do the heavy lifting in its implementation".<sup>13</sup>

Special Adviser to the Secretary-General in post-2015 Development Planning  
Amina J. Mohammed

In December The UN Secretary General has introduced its Synthesis Report called *The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet* which compiled all processes related to the post-2015 agenda that happened on different levels both UN and not-UN. Although the role of the youth in the next development agenda has been recognized within the Synthesis Report as “*torch bearers of the next sustainable development agenda through 2030*”. It failed to suggest specific accountable mechanisms for ensuring meaningful youth engagement. Mostly the language on young people is linked to ensuring access to quality education and better job opportunities.<sup>14</sup>

## Youth Positions on Accountability Mechanisms and Youth

Although young people have been addressed in various documents and platforms, they are still not well presented and their voices are not being heard. An example of that is the research undertaken by the International Federation of Medical Students' Associations called *Investing in Youth and Adolescents is Central to Sustainable Development* that analyzed key youth voices and compare them with member states' statements. One of the top youth priority is: “*Support MEANINGFUL YOUTH ENGAGEMENT: include youth in the designing and implementation of health programs and policies*”.<sup>15</sup>

If we compare the development of the MDGs and the current processes of the revision of the ICPD and the future adoption of the next development agenda youth engagement is even more crucial than before. Key priorities young people identified to be represented within the post-2015 development agenda:

- × Participatory and inclusive approaches must be prioritized in order to collect the voices of those who are marginalized from global decision making processes.
- × The new development framework must be transformative for all young people, guaranteeing their equal status and opportunities no matter what their background.
- × Young people must be partners in the design and implementation of these new strategies.<sup>16</sup>

Another milestone document that addresses youth engagement is the crowdsourcing exercise that was championed by the UN Secretary General's Envoy on Youth together with the involvement of more than 1700 youth organizations. As an outcome was the development of a Global Youth Call *Prioritizing Youth in the Post-2015 Development Agenda* that was recognized by the member states, it stated: “*Support and promote increased and equitable*

*access to open, timely, reliable, accessible and quality information, including through ICTs to enable stronger accountability mechanisms and greater youth participation in decision making*".<sup>17</sup>

In May of 2014, the World Conference on Youth took place where member states, UN agencies, young people and CSOs put together the *Colombo Declaration*. The main section of the outcome document is entitled *Inclusive Youth Participation* and involves language on accountability mechanisms for youth engagement: "*Call on the Secretary-General of the United Nations to establish a permanent forum no youth, for youth and governments to facilitate a sustained dialogue including on the post-2015 Development Agenda*".<sup>18</sup>

However, comparing some of the above mentioned youth positions with internationally agreed language adopted by member states, it could be highlighted that there is clear absence of mentioning specific accountability mechanisms on youth engagement and ways of involvement in the decision making process.

## Resources

- × United Nations Department on Economic and Social Affairs – Youth. [undesadspd.org/Youth/ResourcesandPublications/Youthresolutions.aspx](http://undesadspd.org/Youth/ResourcesandPublications/Youthresolutions.aspx)
- × Sustainable Development Network Solutions. [sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.html](http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.html)
- × Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform. [sustainabledevelopment.un.org](http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org)
- × Main UN website on Beyond 2015. [docs.google.com/document/d/1fRG2zopmGbWO7eAzcxIQ3P\\_lIBArcDe1V-Sd9ihkCzU/edit?pli=1](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1fRG2zopmGbWO7eAzcxIQ3P_lIBArcDe1V-Sd9ihkCzU/edit?pli=1)
- × Major Group on Children and Youth. [childrenyouth.org](http://childrenyouth.org)

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## FOOTNOTES

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9. Refer to page 2.
10. *United Nations Youth Fund Supports 50 Projects*. UN. [www.un.org/events/youth98/backinfo/yfund.htm](http://www.un.org/events/youth98/backinfo/yfund.htm)
11. *Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action*, 1995. [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf)
12. *International Conference on Population and Development, Programme of Action*, 1994.
13. Ammina, M. “The new development agenda: six priorities from Amina J Mohammed”, *The Guardian*, 2014. [www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2014/nov/25/amina-j-mohammed-lessons-for-post-2015-change?CMP=share\\_btn\\_fb](http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2014/nov/25/amina-j-mohammed-lessons-for-post-2015-change?CMP=share_btn_fb)
14. *The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet, Synthesis Report of the Secretary-General On the Post-2015 Agenda*. UN, 2014.
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16. *Youth Voices in Post-2015 Agenda*. DFID / CSO Youth Working Group. [www.youthpost2015.org/wordpress/report/youthvoices.pdf](http://www.youthpost2015.org/wordpress/report/youthvoices.pdf)
17. *ECOSOC Global Youth Call*, 2014.
18. *Colombo Declaration on Youth*. 2014.