



Your Rights, Your World:

The Power of Youth in the Age of the Sustainable Development Goals

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Disclaimer: This report was written by a seven member task force comprised of members of Occidental College at the United Nations program. For four months, participating students interned in various agency or permanent missions to the United Nations. As the authors are not official UNICEF staff members, this report in no way reflects UNICEF's views or opinions. Furthermore, this report in no way endorses the views or opinions of Occidental College.

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FOREWORD

WHAT DEFINING MOMENTS HAVE EMPOWERED YOU TO CREATE POSITIVE CHANGE?

This report centers around the notion of building awareness and internalization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and human rights among youth. In reading this report we hope that you hear the voices of youth as not only the leaders of tomorrow, but also the leaders of today.

In his refugee camp, Chernor Bah (Sierra Leone), came across a UNICEF article detailing how other young people set up child parliaments to have their voices heard. **“I learned that we have rights. We have a voice.”** After reflecting on this information, this sparked the idea for Chernor to set up a child parliament in Sierra Leone. This highlights the **empowerment of knowledge:** children need a platform to learn about what their peers are doing across borders. “That is the power of the SDGs. The solidarity. The knowledge that it happens elsewhere.”

Xiuhtezcatl Martinez (United States) described how seeing the tangible and raw impact of climate change pushed him to campaign against fracking in his community. “It’s a process that is really affecting my community. **Many kids are getting sick because the air is contaminated with chemicals...but really, just get inspired and excited about something!** The oceans, the forest, the mountains. Find out how you can do something to protect that.”

Ama Peris (Sri Lanka) attended a large youth conference bringing together students from different regions to build tolerance and understanding between different communities following the end of the civil war. Through this experience, she was exposed to students her age and heard their experiences about the war. The conference empowered her to create her own project, connecting schools in a northern refugee community to students in a southern international school to build tolerance. The students sent shoeboxes to the partner school, filled with gifts and stories. **“Just the notion that there is someone out there listening to you is powerful in itself.”**

A 13 year old girl (Indonesia) tackled human trafficking in her community by creating her own foundation. Her family often took her to orphanages and through this exposure, she learned about trafficking and prostitution. **“Something clicked. I realized that this is my calling.”** Her mother took her determination seriously and helped her to set up to open a safe house for vulnerable girls. **“Adults might tell you that you can’t do something. But sometimes, it isn’t the adults. We often tell ourselves that we are too young to do something.** We say, ‘I’ll do it when I’m older’. But we are not going to do it when we’re older because that clicking moment may only happen once. So if you feel it, take a hold of it. Say, ‘I’m gonna do something’.”

Baruani Ndume (Tanzania) described how his life changed when he learned about children’s rights at school. **“I realized I was not alone. And I knew I could make a difference. I wanted to improve my situation and that of the other children in the camp....**Basically, knowing my rights allowed me to be confident, stand up and make a change with my friends.”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The task of creating realistic recommendations for how UNICEF can use the Sustainable Development Goals as a tool to empower children from varying political, social, economic, and cultural contexts is a particularly daunting challenge; however, with the support and assistance of a variety of exceptional individuals, it has proved to be a phenomenal experience. And we are grateful to have had the opportunity. To begin with, we'd like to thank the original visionaries of this report--Olav Kjørven, Shannon O'Shea, and Callie King-Guffey. Providing a student led task force with the platform to voice their recommendation on this matter speaks to UNICEF's commitment to genuinely engaging with youth.

Behind all of our case studies, lessons learned, and recommendations are powerful individuals who are tirelessly working to change the world. We are immensely grateful to all the individuals who graciously shared their support, stories, thoughts, and creative ideas: Alexander Kauschanski, Ama Peiris, Baruani Ndume, Bernard Combes, Brynda Grube, Carina La, Chernor Bah, Dean Brooks, Eunan Meyler, Frances Bestley, Frédéric de Pourtalès, Jenny Buccos, Jerome Lechien, Julene Landáburu, Julene Landáburu, Julia Rainer, Katie-Jay Scott, Kaya Khandaka, Kerida McDonald, Laura Lasance, Marie Wernham, Montse Perez Cisneros, Montserrat Perez, Nazy Amin, Nicola Sansom, Ntiokam Divine, Raf Galdeano, Regina Arauz, Regina Arauz, Saara Vuorensola Barnes, Sarah Williams, Saskia Schellkens, Susana Itzel Hernández, Victor Ochen, Warda El-Kaddouri, Xiuhtezcatl Martinez, and the wonderful young people in the 8th and 9th grade classes at the United Nations International School. Their sheer determination to empower young people and eagerness to contribute to our report speaks to the significance of this work.

Thank you to Cindy Goldberg for editing our report. In our own capacities, we worked hard to frequently edit ourselves, but we thoroughly appreciate having an outside perspective provide constructive feedback. Moreover, thank you to Beth Fisher for creating a beautiful cover page.

Finally, thank you to our Occidental College network particularly, Doug Gardner and Jacques Fomerand who have provided guidance for the past four months. Additionally, we would like to recognize Sherry Simpson-Dean and Sanjeev Khagram for pioneering the incorporation of task forces into the Oxy at the United Nations Program. Lastly, thank you to Dean Jorge González, professors in the Diplomacy and World Affairs department and staff in the International Program Office for supporting this program from Los Angeles.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides recommendations for ways in which UNICEF, and similar organizations, can support young peoples' ownership of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). In order for the newly adopted 2030 Agenda to succeed, organizations and governments must genuinely include young people in the implementation process. Recognizing young people as the leaders of the present and the future, we urge UNICEF to intensify efforts to seek relationships with youth and support change through grassroots initiatives. This report analyzes successful practices from three country case studies (the United Kingdom, Colombia, and Uganda) as well as two thematic case studies focusing on climate change and children in emergency situations. The recommendations, which are based on case studies and the creativity of young people, address the question of SDG implementation through creative learning methods, entertainment and youth participation. This report provides recommendations for traditional school settings as well as non-traditional settings. From these recommendations our team has created several initiatives that UNICEF can take forward.

BACKGROUND

PURPOSE OF STUDY: WHY NOW?

At the opening ceremony of the Sustainable Development Summit, Malala told world leaders to: "Look up, because the future generation is raising their voice." A hush fell as the politicians turned their heads toward the 193 glowing lanterns in the dark.

Malala's powerful speech marked the beginning of the age of the Sustainable Development Goals. Fifteen years from now, we shall collectively look back on that moment and reflect upon the progress of our humanity. To reach the world we want in 2030, harnessing the power of human imagination is essential. We need the power of imagination to picture a better future and to imagine innovative solutions to tackle the difficulties we face today. Young people were the most engaged in formulating and promoting the 2030 Agenda. And now, young people are absolutely essential to the success of this global ambition. Worldwide, there are currently 1.8 billion young people, whom in many countries represent the majority of the population (reaching 80% of the population in some African countries). These young people have an unprecedented ability to imagine, unbridled as of yet by the constraints of dominant norms, stereotypes and behaviors which gradually become entrenched over time.

For this report, we have interviewed young people and experts as well as analyzed case-studies from diverse contexts to understand why and how young people should be engaged with the 2030 Agenda. We observe common trends and provide concrete recommendations to UNICEF and partners highlighting the ways such organizations can actively engage a generation of young change-makers and activists.

The year 2015 is an interesting and challenging time for youth. With information technology and new social media, we are more connected than ever to global events and movements. Yet so many young people have still been ‘left behind’ by the progress of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): millions of children are still “blocked by deprivation and discrimination based on factors beyond their control.” Young people today live in a world where they simply cannot ignore the global forces that surround them. Transnational phenomena such as climate change, globalization, mass migration flows, conflict and rapid technological innovation mean that our collective survival is dependent on a global mindset. We must cherish our relationship with the natural world and find ways to promote empathy over prejudice.

The Sustainable Development Goals offer a framework for young people to become part of a wider purpose, whilst cultivating the global mindset we so desperately need. At the 70th General Assembly of the United Nations, Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, committing themselves to seventeen interconnected Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) “for people, planet, and prosperity.” Developing and developed countries alike must take transformative steps with stakeholders to build awareness of the goals for people around the world to implement this action plan.



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In order for the 2030 Agenda to succeed, young people must be informed about their rights and provided with the tools to take action and hold governments accountable to achieve the SDGs. According to Project Everyone, 500 million children were reached with the World’s Largest Lesson on the SDGs. Mobile operators text almost one billion people about the goals. Yet throughout our interviews for this report, we still found that many were unaware of the 2030 Agenda or the accompanying goals. This unprecedented global agenda may have been launched in New York City, but it is imperative that actors on the ground work to change this narrative and foster local ownership of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Children and young people will be key agents among the stakeholders who will realize the agenda; they, more than anyone, will experience the fruits and burdens of today’s policy and therefore need to be incorporated into the dialogue. As such, we must move beyond treating children and youth as a homogeneous, voiceless group. We must move beyond the ‘victims or trouble-makers’ dichotomy and recognize them as both the leaders of the present and future. More action must be taken to incorporate and empower non-politically active and vulnerable children. Young people want to be heard, and to count. It is our voice, our world.

DEFINING KEY CONCEPTS

Children and Youth

Children specifically refers to all persons under eighteen while youth encompasses children and ages under thirty.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda

The 2030 Agenda seeks to stimulate action for sustainable development over the next fifteen years through goals and targets. This universal agenda includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets that focus on: people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership. These goals are integrated to balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the *economic, social, and environmental*.

Sustainability

Sustainability integrates economic, social, and environmental spheres and maintains a long-lasting impact beyond the short-term.

Marginalized/Vulnerable Youth

Marginalized youth often lack access to education, opportunity, and knowledge of their human rights. While the degree of marginalization and vulnerabilities vary from country-to-country, each country has marginalized or vulnerable youth irrespective of their high, middle, or low-income status. The term marginalized can also refer to those who are vulnerable due to race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disabilities, gender, etc.

Bottom up approaches

Bottom up approaches rely on a grassroots, community-lead, and people-oriented initiatives. Bottom up approaches are oftentimes very effective in shifting norms compared to top-down approaches. Top-down approaches attempt to implement change through laws and policies enacted by the government.

Building Awareness vs. Internalization

Building awareness popularizes a concept so that children across the globe realize that the SDGs exist. In contrast, when children internalize the SDGs this can result in changes of behaviors, attitudes, and actions. However in this report, we use the term building awareness with the ultimate goal of internalization.

Human Rights and SDG Learning

Human rights learning aims to teach children about their human rights in accessible and tangible ways. The SDGs provide an opportunity to update the principles of human rights to suit the promotion of the twenty first century. Children must learn about the interdependence of the natural world and their livelihoods: caring about the oceans and life on land will help empower young people to care for and feel concern for their environment and sustainability. This report links the SDGs and human rights through human rights learning.



METHODOLOGY

1. Our team conducted an intensive research survey surrounding human rights learning, to determine the projects most applicable to this report.
2. After determining the three country case studies and two thematic case studies we researched country contexts, UNICEF's presence and projects in the region, and identified local organizations, experts, and implementers.
3. Our team conducted nearly 25 individual and group interviews with local organizations, experts, and implementers to identify best practices. Following these interviews, we analyzed the core-strengths of each case-study and determined ways to strengthen these practices through the SDG framework.
4. Additionally, we recognized that one of our strongest assets is that we ourselves are young people. Therefore, we created a "youth voices" section to highlight both our own ideas and ideas of other young people. We interviewed close to 25 young people, including youth delegates from the United Nations, students from the United Nations International School, and young activists from around the globe.
5. After analyzing the case studies and interviews, we synthesized the main themes of our research to provide concrete and creative recommendations aimed at how UNICEF, and similar organizations, can build awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals.

What is Success?

Throughout our research process we grappled with the following questions: How do we measure success? Is success the number of young people that have heard of the 2030 Agenda? Is success when a young person becomes seriously engaged in activism; or is it enough for a girl to feel empowered to put her hand up in a classroom? How do we monitor the journey of changing habits, a process that can take years?

We quickly determined that memorization of human rights and the Sustainable Development Goals is not adequate. A successful case study of human rights learning is one that reflects true behavioral change and examples of youth empowerment. The majority of our case-studies feature a number of good practices such as capacity-building, technological innovation, and youth ownership.



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Case Study Selection:

We chose a diversity of case studies that display sustainability and applicability. Each of the case studies display good practices worthy of replication in other regions.

Given the global nature of the SDGs, our country case studies reflect the various cross sections of the world: high-income, middle-income, and low-income countries.

Within the middle income country case study, we include a thematic section on climate change. Additionally we have a fourth case study focusing on “children in refugee situations.”

We selected the United Kingdom as our high-income country case study because UNICEF UK has been particularly active in promoting child-rights throughout schools in the UK. We analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of the Rights Respecting Schools Model. To further highlight non-school based approaches, we looked at sport as a medium for positive change through the UK-based charity Football Beyond Borders.



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We chose to examine Colombia as our middle-income country case study because of its National Development Plan that incorporates 91 of the 169 SDG targets. This reformed government framework accounts for environmental, social, and economic dimensions of climate change and serves as a model to other countries for implementation of 2030 agenda. We focused on teaching and empowering children to take action through education and religious networks.

We also interviewed several education experts to inform a thematic section which highlights innovative ways to teach Goal 13: Climate Action in the classroom.

We choose to focus on Uganda as our low-income country case study because of its young and active demographic. Despite the challenges faced in everyday life, young people continue to work towards building peace in their society.

Case Studies:
United Kingdom
Colombia
Uganda

Thematic Sections:
Children in Refugee Situations
Goal 13: Climate Action

In our research we focused on Unicef’s U-Report, the African Youth Initiative, and S.A.L.V.E. International.

Lastly, we chose to include a “children in refugee situations” section because there are over 30 million refugee children today. In Tanzania, we chose to focus on Sisi kwa Sisi, a child-rights based radio station. We also chose to focus on a human rights mobile library in Darfuri Refugee Camps that uses solar-powered kindles and refugees to teach children about human rights.

Limitations of the Report

Some political environments are more conducive than others for human-rights learning. This report does not provide top-down recommendations of how organizations can encourage politicians to become more open to actual implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Instead we take a bottom-up approach, with the view that our recommendations will equip young people with the tools to feel empowered and aware of sustainability issues. This shift in norms has the potential for young people to hold their governments accountable to the promises they made at the Sustainable Development Summit in 2015.

Whilst our report is intended to target more marginalized youth, it was extremely difficult for us to engage with this group for this report due to geographic, cultural, and resource limitations. We strongly encourage UNICEF to build upon our work and reach more marginalized youth, in order to strengthen our recommendations.

Case Studies: Building Awareness of Human Rights and the Sustainable Development Goals amongst Children and Youth

The following section will highlight five case-studies, including three country cases and two thematic sections. Our case-studies will highlight various good practices of human-rights learning and youth experiences, to inform and inspire practitioners working towards building SDG awareness and implementation.

Case Study | United Kingdom | High Income

Background

In the United Kingdom, education is compulsory for all children between the ages of 5 and 16. Despite the successes of the UK's education system, high-levels of economic and social inequality still exist among the population. When building awareness of the SDGs in a high-income country such as the UK, implementing programs through schools will serve as the most effective mechanism to reach the majority of children. However, we must recognize the risks of focusing solely on schools to build awareness of rights amongst children and youth. The high-income case study will review both school-based approaches and creative civil society efforts to reach young people who have been 'left behind.'

“You have a duty to stop and listen to me, because I have a right to be heard and a right to be protected from violence at home” ~Child to Teacher, in a UK Rights Respecting School.

Rights Respecting Schools Award (RRSA)

The UNICEF UK Rights Respecting Schools Award (RRSA) supports schools across the UK to put the UN Convention on the Right of the Child (UNCRC) at the heart of school practices. This long-term program encourages schools to demonstrate that they have achieved a range of criteria established by UNICEF UK “based on educating children about, through and for their rights.” Schools must opt-in to the program and are supported by UNICEF UK to implement a comprehensive and whole school approach to child-rights.

Core Strengths of the RRSA Model

Builds Awareness: Children have a good understanding of their rights and are empowered to become ‘agents of change’

Self-sustaining: Builds capacity of teachers and children

Whole-school Approach: Rights education embedded throughout the curriculum and governance structures

Strengthens Relationships: Empathy and relationships improved through rights-based language and behavior



Builds Awareness

Studies measuring the impact of the RRSA program in schools across the UK have, in general, been overwhelmingly positive. For example, a qualitative evaluation of the program indicated that the RRSA program was “associated with children having a good knowledge of the CRC, being motivated to take action for others rights, and being involved in decision-making in their schools.” We spoke to Marie Wernham, a child-rights consultant working for UNICEF Geneva, and she argued that there are dramatic differences between the children educated in rights respecting schools, compared to those who are not. **Children are aware of their rights and are able to use rights-based language to communicate their needs to their teachers in an effective way.**

For example, one child, after learning about his rights, stopped his rushing teacher and said: *“You have a duty to stop and listen to me, because I have a right to be heard and a right to be protected from violence at home.”*



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Sustainability and Whole-school Approach

The model is described as “self-sustaining” as UNICEF UK’s role is largely focused on support and quality assurance, allowing teachers to build their own capacity and learn from local expertise in the teaching workforce. It encourages teachers to recognize that child-rights cannot be taught as a ‘stand-alone’ subject, but must be embedded in the school’s governance system, throughout the curriculum and in various projects.



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Strengthens Relationships

Rights Respecting Schools have reported a positive impact on relationships, well-being, better learning, behavior, improved academic standards and a decrease in bullying. According to UNICEF, RRSA schools experience a “reduced hierarchical divide between staff and pupils, due to a common rights-respecting language.”

Post-2015 Opportunities for Improvement

One key challenge facing the RRSA UK is the ‘opt-in’ dimension of the award. In Scotland, for example, over 40% of schools are involved in the Rights Respecting Schools Award. This is a great achievement, but means that there are huge barriers to raising awareness of child-rights amongst children who are unable to attend accredited schools. In an interview with Frances Bestley, Program Director of the RRSA UK, noted that a disproportionate number of faith schools opt-in to the program because they already subscribe to the values encompassed by human rights.

Frances also suggested that UNICEF UK is not doing enough to correct the self-selection bias of head-teachers already 'sympathetic' to the values of the child rights convention. More resources should be allocated to allow UNICEF UK to partner with struggling schools in deprived areas.

UK Rights Respecting Schools have been embracing the SDGs in their lessons so far - particularly as part of the World's Largest Lesson initiative. UNICEF UK reports that there were a "flurry of activities in Rights Respecting Schools, where pupils and staff got together to ensure everyone learned about the new goals." For example, at Torriano Primary School in London, children and staff created their own films to raise awareness of the SDGs. But UNICEF UK must ensure that these are not 'stand-alone' events. Children and young people should 'own' the SDGs, which means mainstreaming the goals into different aspects of the curriculum and strengthening the connection between child rights and the SDGs.

Football Beyond Borders: Sport for Positive Change

Our interviews with young people highlight that often, school is not the ideal place for young people to truly internalize their rights. Football Beyond Borders (FBB) is a UK-based charity which "uses the power of football to tackle inequality and provide opportunities for young people to achieve their goals and make their voices heard."

FBB engages disadvantaged young people who have a fraught relationship with the formal education system, and supports them in becoming active and empowered citizens.

"I used to get in a lot of trouble before I started with FBB. FBB is not just about football. It's about opening your eyes to all the opportunities available to you." – Jordan, 13.

FBB combines football training sessions with mentoring and tutoring programs focused on providing education and employment support to some of London's most deprived and excluded young people. The FBB Wanders Programme uses football to break down borders of class and race. 'Youth Beyond Borders' examines "a range of social issues such as racism, inequality and gentrification through the lens of football, before focusing in on one that the participants want to build a campaign around." There are weekly matches in South London, where older university graduates play the "dual role of teammates and mentors" to participants aged from 16-21 years of age.



Core Strengths of the FBB Model:

- Gives young people the practical skills to bring about social and political change*
- Transforms a passion into social good*
- Utilizes mentorship model*

Gives Young People the Practical Skills to Bring about Social and Political Change

The Youth Beyond Borders project trains the young footballers in campaigning, public speaking, teamwork and project planning, allowing young people to bring about social and political change as a collective. Last year, the FBB Youth Leaders chose to focus on the lack of safe and affordable football facilities in their local community, and implemented a campaign calling for the renovation of a dilapidated 5-a-side pitch on the Angell Town estate in Brixton, London. Thus when given the agency to create and lead a campaign, these young people chose to focus on issues related to Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities.

Transforms a Passion into Social Good

As founder Jasper Kain says, "I am happiest when I am playing, watching and talking about football. It brings the same unimaginable joy and personal development to millions worldwide and has the power to enrich people's lives and support communities." Through transforming this passion into a force for social change and mentorship, FBB has successfully engaged hundreds of young people. Mentorship through sport can make youth activism enjoyable and relevant.

Mentorship Model

It is very important for young people to have positive role-models to look up to in society, particularly if they live in troubled households. Football Beyond Borders creates a space for disadvantaged young people to play weekly matches alongside university graduates working in a range of professional fields.

Through the matches and one on one mentoring sessions, the young people overcome the segregation of their communities, through building positive relationships with diverse individuals and being empowered to become active citizens.

Post-2015 Opportunities for Development

Importance of building relationships and trust to internalize rights. RRSA is focused on strengthening relationships and dialogue between teachers, students, and the outside world through mentorships and peer to peer engagement. This point is generalizable to other contexts and education systems.

Encouraging activism through sport is powerful. Sport can be used to analyze different SDG concepts such as inequality, sustainable cities and communities, and quality education. This point is also generalizable to other contexts, as shown in our 'youth voices' section.

Changing notions of 'education'. Several interviewees complained that the UK education system is focused too much on attainment, rather than focusing on the well-being of the 'whole child'. As a result, it is not compulsory for teachers in England and Wales to learn about the child-rights principles. More work needs to be done, in partnership with government, schools, pupils and parents, to foster an evolving concept of education which is more inclusive of the child's personal development.



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Case Study | Colombia | Middle Income

Background

Colombia has been heralded as an SDG early adopter ever since President Juan Manuel Santos issued a decree in February 2015 that established an Interagency Commission for the Preparation and Effective Implementation of the 2030 agenda and the SDGs. This decree came well in advance of the adoption of the 2030 agenda in September and since then, the country has aligned its National Development Plan with the 2030 agenda. According to one review, 91 of the 169 SDG targets are included in Colombia's Development Plan, which demonstrates the high level of importance of the SDGs for Colombia. UNICEF will be a central partner in the achievement of these intertwined agendas as the involvement of children is integral to realize the objectives for Colombia.

Religious Networks in Colombia: The Lutheran World Federation

Given that 90% of Colombia's population identifies as Roman Catholic, we decided to investigate how UNICEF and partners could utilize religious networks as an outlet for children to learn about and engage with the SDGs in the country. Religion, especially Catholicism, is deeply engrained into Colombian culture. For example, the Colombian constitution states that public education shall not conflict with the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church, and courses in the Catholic religion are compulsory in schools. The Catholic Church also has an agreement with the government of Colombia to deliver education in rural areas without state-operated schools.



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In addition, the church plays a key role in Colombia's peace process by providing guidance and assistance with peace negotiations between the Colombian government and FARC rebels to push for peace and justice. At the local level, churches are providing legal, psychological, physical and spiritual support to victims, especially for vulnerable and displaced persons. The church provides a place and environment to help victims heal through prayer, action for peace, and promoting truth and justice.

As a faith based humanitarian organization working with the Catholic Church, The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) could partner with UNICEF to make the SDGs particularly relevant to children. In Colombia, LWF prioritizes three core areas in its work: the promotion of human rights, long-term sustainable development, and humanitarian action. It coordinates with the Catholic Church on land rights and uses its network to access departments like Arauca and Chocó.

In addition, **the organization conducts hands-on projects in communities and holds workshops with local children on disaster risk reduction.** The community connection and presence of the Church gives it a status that even the state does not enjoy in some localities. Residents can see the Church in their daily lives and trust it as an authority more, because of its direct and visible engagement with their community and interests.

Core Strengths of Religious Networks

Coordination: There is a great deal of existing coordination in the country. Inter-denominational religious networks are often engaged with humanitarian development and work with other organizations in a humanitarian cluster.

Networks Outside of Educational System: While schools can engage children and youth, there is a risk that vulnerable children will be left out if programs are only initiated within the formal education system.

Supplements and Serves as Education System: The Church not only supplements the formal education system but *is* the education system in certain localities and therefore, is a prime partner for cooperation.

Post-2015 Opportunities for Development

UNICEF and partners should **engage these networks** and work more closely with religious networks as a means to reach vulnerable children.

UNICEF and partners should find ways to **reach children inside and outside formal education systems to foster passion for the SDGs.** Religious networks can be a powerful tool for reaching young people.

The Role of Youth to Advance Goal 13 on Climate Action for Colombia

Although climate change impacts all countries, we chose to focus on climate change because of its relevance to our Colombia case-study. As Frank Pearl, Columbia's former Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development, said: Columbia is the *third most vulnerable country* to climate change in the world. 95% of Bogotá residents already believe climate change affects their quality of life. Colombia also experiences the highest rates of natural disasters in Latin America and has extremely biodiverse ecosystems in biomes across the countries. Therefore, Colombia both has much to lose from climate change and is unusually susceptible to climate processes. In 2014, UNICEF's priority areas in Colombia included violence prevention, reducing inequalities, and law and policy. In the wake of the SDGs and as the peace process continues, climate action could be integrated into the organization's work and provide neutral ground for UNICEF to engage with youth.



Marcela Tobón Yagarí, representing the Embera Chamí ethnic group in Colombia, speaks at the 'Indigenous Youth Initiatives' event at UNICEF House. © UNICEF/UNI111550/Markisz

Engaging the most vulnerable groups now will be crucial to achieving the SDGs and maintaining progress so that no one is left behind. Young people must be taught about the SDGs and climate change in an engaging way so they internalize the lessons and feel empowered to take action.

While Colombia's example provided the initial impetus for our study, it is clear that there are many good ideas across countries about the best methods to teach about the environment, sustainability and climate change. We believe this theme provides fertile ground to engage children early with a topic that will inevitably affect them more than any prior generation as global warming continues. Our interviews and case studies provide some ideas of how Goal 13: Climate Action can be translated locally so youth and children can engage in meaningful ways.

Lived Experience as the Best Teacher

Saara from the Lutheran World Federation provided an example of how the most vulnerable children can be engaged even when literacy is an issue. In her direct community work, where illiteracy and a low levels of education are prevalent. Saara's organization has used disaster risk reduction as an entry point for dialogue on climate change. Her organization has created workshops in which youth gather and are encouraged share how they felt and were affected by natural disasters. After the initial discussion they are then given the bigger context with videos and other learning materials. Other members of the community could also be involved in these workshops, such as the elderly, who could explain how they have seen the changes to crops and in weather trends with their own eyes during their lifetimes. In this way, the whole community could be incorporated in discussions, the theme could be made tangible, and local trends could be connected to global issues.

Classroom Games

Interactive games are often an effective way to engage young people with complex issues such as climate change.



jucce.org

For example, the Joint US-China Collaboration on Clean Energy (JUCCE) is a non-governmental organization based in Shanghai, China that aims to “give young people an appetite for sustainability.” JUCCE created the first food education program in China entitled “A New Way to Eat”, which was designed to change young people's behavior by linking nutrition to sustainability.

JUCCE uses flashcards to teach the children basic food groups and the difference between healthy and unhealthy foods. The flashcards help students to understand and internalize the food supply chain and environmental impacts through activities incorporated into lessons. One example is “I Know Where My Food Comes From.” In this game, children take turns matching the food flashcards to a large poster of where the food is grown- below ground, on the ground, on a stalk, or on a tree. This activity aims to teach children about how the food they eat comes from nature.

JUCCE also blends science experiments and games with facts about commonly eaten foods. An effective and replicable activity involves observing an eggshell that is dropped into a glass of Coca-Cola. The Coca-Cola dissolves the eggshell, whilst teachers can explain that, like eggshells, people's teeth are made of a similar material that is eroded by soda.

Through short, hands-on, country-adapted activities, JUCCE engages with children on their level and in a way that is relevant to their lives.



Coke and eggshell experiment. <https://ourmontessorihome.wordpress.com/2011/11/25/soda-and->

Localized Hands-On Approaches

Bernard Combes from UNESCO reinforced the importance of creating short and engaging lessons to educate youth about climate change. Climate change education requires collaborative and hands-on lessons for both kids and teachers to work in teams and share their diverse perspectives and experiences with climate change. Regional differences must be taken into account; even if a lesson plan is shared globally, it should be adapted to put the broader issue in the local context.

Bernard reaffirmed the need for schools to develop climate change projects allowing youth to go out into the environment to learn how it affects them. It is essential for youth to relate lessons learned in the classroom to what is happening outside the school walls. Global problems can be taught through tangible examples. Instead of having Parisian students only learning about the value of forests through videos of the Amazon Rainforest, they could also visit and explore the woods around Paris.

Collecting, Measuring, and Analyzing Data

It is essential to also give children and youth a stake in projects by allowing them to collect, measure, and analyze environmental data such as temperature, precipitation, and to provide them with the resources and help to work on solutions, such as rainwater harvesting systems and vertical gardens. Some projects, such as planting shady trees on the side of the school that receives the most sun, can provide both the hands-on and data elements. Students can measure temperature before the project, help plant the trees, and then see the temperatures (and air conditioning bills where applicable) drop as a result. These types of projects, when they are fun and connected to global issues like the SDGs, enable children to be agents of change.

Combining Education with Activism

Peter Littlewood, at Young People's Trust for the Environment, persuasively articulated that young people must be engaged with important climate issues without being overwhelmed. **Educators must teach children the facts about climate change and showcase simple ways to make a difference** while they are young. Youth need to understand that everyone must take collective responsibility. Through learning to take action as children, youth will grow up to become more environmentally responsible than previous generations.



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Respect and Differentiation in the Classroom

Brynda Grube, a teacher at Kingsbridge International High School, shared ideas on how to engage children and youth once they are already in the classroom. Located in the Bronx, NY, Brynda's students resemble some of the most vulnerable, because in order to enroll they can only have lived in the country for less than two years. These children come from recent immigrant or refugee families. As a result, many of these students have access to few resources, are often not fully literate in their native languages, and speak little English.

To deal with large classrooms of students of varied backgrounds and abilities, Brynda uses the technique of differentiation, or peer-to-peer learning by splitting the students into groups. She pairs less advanced students with a student that has grasped the subject matter in small groups and then takes one larger group of students for herself. In this way she tries to respect each of the student's capabilities and their current level of understanding. This has created more engagement from her students and improved learning outcomes.

In order to build awareness of particular SDGs, teaching the principle of respect was Brynda's chief recommendation. By illustrating that everything and everyone is connected together and plays a unique and essential role in the natural world, students will understand the need to respect their world and each other. Once a culture of respect is cultivated and taught, Brynda believes we will be better able to achieve the SDGs without having to get into the murky language and details that speak less to children. In that way, Brynda's example relates to Bernard's recommendation of the need to translate the SDGs into "kid language."

Empowering Teachers

A recurring theme in our interviews was that lesson plans and pedagogical techniques are only as effective as the educators using them. The teachers must also feel empowered and invested in the process. Teachers should be encouraged to use materials on hand (such as sticks and natural materials from the area) to create their lessons and connect the ideas to what they see in their own lives. Ultimately, UNICEF and partners could serve as mediators and enablers in this learning process (by disseminating example lesson plans and giving access to technologies to watch videos), but should encourage children and teachers to design the final product and celebrate their resulting projects.

Technology and Climate Change

To both ensure that best practices are distributed and to sustain interest, we need to create an environment of global collaboration. One method for the exchange of perspectives, especially to reach vulnerable groups, is through computers and the Internet. Globally, many children and teachers do have access to computers, especially in urban areas. Communal media centers can be a useful tool for vulnerable or disadvantaged segments of the population to gain access to computers and the Internet.



© UNICEF/UNI74408/Markisz

Bernard Combes from UNESCO described a UNESCO project that included an interactive web platform for teachers and students to share their ideas on biodiversity. Teachers collaborated by exchanging lesson plans while students were able to realize how their problems resembled those of their peers 10,000 miles away through online conversations and webinars.

- Take advantage of existing networks and relevant authorities to teach the SDGs through fun, hands-on, participative activities outside the classroom.
- Climate action offers fertile ground to engage with youth about global issues in a way that is applicable and relevant to their lived experience



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A final reinforcing practice to expand the conversation on the SDGs and climate change is through local radio talk shows where local issues could be discussed in relation to climate change. While internet access is becoming increasingly common, it is not yet universal. Radio is a chief source of information in many regions. Strong community partners are indispensable for long term realization of goals.

Post-2015 Opportunities for Improvement

- Work with local teachers and community leaders to translate SDGs and climate change terms into “child-friendly language.” Support the development of short and engaging lessons that can be used in schools or community groups, such as churches.
- Respecting children and teaching respect can indirectly teach them about the SDGs and human rights.

- Natural disasters and other climate change effects, such as land degradation and increased flooding, are tangible events that can be dialogue starters
- Adaptation and mitigation activities can be low-tech, fun ways for youth to see themselves as making a difference: planting trees and creating vertical gardens out of recyclable bottles are all helpful projects that can empower children to view themselves as agents of change
- Especially, in post-conflict situations, many of the SDGs are difficult to teach in a way that does not raise political and ideological questions. Climate change and environmental issues can be framed as neutral ground to share common experiences and exhibit how interconnected the goals need to be.



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Case Study | Uganda | Low Income

Background

Uganda, a landlocked, low-income country located in East Africa, has one of the youngest populations in the world. As of 2014, 56% of the 37,782,971 population is under 18 years old.

Overall, 43% of children and youth in Uganda are moderately vulnerable, and 8% are critically vulnerable. Due to the high rate of poverty, and the country's history with violent conflicts, vulnerable children and youth are being left behind. Among the most vulnerable youth are street children, children affected by violent conflicts, and children based in rural areas. Unaware of their rights, children are unable to hold their governments accountable. This section focuses on discerning the most effective methods to reaching a population that is not easily accessible through the normal channels of education and technology.

In order to reach all youth, UNICEF and similar organizations should promote SDG learning inside and outside the classroom. It is vital UNICEF continues its current work, promoting good standards, quality education, and human rights learning in Ugandan schools. Although flawed, the education system is a crucial way to reach children, because of the emphasis in society on the importance of education. However, **this case study will focus primarily on initiatives promoting human rights learning outside the classroom.**

This case study will review UNICEF's efforts to promote child rights and participation through U-Report. This section will also be followed by an analysis of the African Youth Initiative Network, and Support and Love via Education (S.A.L.V.E.).

UNICEF Initiative: Uganda U-Report Youth Participation

UNICEF supported the development of U-Report, which was launched in May 2011. U-Report is a free SMS service used by over 230,000 U-Reporters, that enables youth to voice their opinions regarding various issues. U-Report has developed partnerships with the government, non-governmental organizations, youth and faith based organizations, and private companies.



© UNICEF/NYHQ2015-0130/Naftalin

Users can easily join by texting “join” to 8500. Every week users answer a free SMS question or poll, relating to issues such as child protection, health, education, resources, etc. Results are published in newspapers, relayed on the radio, and shared with members of parliament.

Furthermore, the most active U-Reporters have the chance to present the views of their fellow friends on a TV or radio show, or with a member of parliament. U-Report is extremely important and valuable; As stated on its website, it gives children and youth the “opportunity to participate in the decisions that affect them and take an active role in the development of Uganda, leading to transparency and accountability at the grassroots level.”

Core Strengths of U-Report:

- **Freedom of Expression**
- **Child and Youth Engagement**
- **Changing Norms and Self-Sustaining Behaviors**
- **Targeted Policy**

Freedom of Expression and Child and Youth Engagement

Through the U-report, Ugandan children and youth are given the opportunity to speak their minds on the most pressing issues affecting their everyday life. Voicing their opinions to those in power is an opportunity not often extended to the youth. To highlight this point, Leila Nassanga, a U-reporter, states, U-report is “a strategy that can add value to young people’s lives. They have issues and they fear to speak up, they don’t know where to get assistance.” Therefore U-report has been particularly important in mobilizing youth and enabling them to hold their government accountable.

Changing Norms, Self-Sustaining Behaviors and Targeted Policies

Through the input from the youth, not only can UNICEF devise better programs to address their needs, but most importantly, so can their local governments. The U-report enables youth to hold governments and politicians accountable.

By encouraging child and youth engagement, it is working towards a sustainable method of changing norms and creating a conducive environment where child rights and opinions are valued.

Post-2015 Opportunities For Improvement:

- **Take the program offline** to reach to the most at risk children and youth. In particular, children in rural areas or on the streets, who do not necessarily have access to the internet and technology.
- In order to reach street children, UNICEF could **partner with S.A.L.V.E. International** to incorporate U-report stations into their drop-in centers. The stations could serve as a space where the children could gather, discuss the day’s question, and use the services available to send their feedback to U-report.
- In order to reach children in rural areas, UNICEF could **partner with AYINET** to incorporate the service into AYINET’s mobile libraries. Through these libraries, AYINET can inspire and provide a platform for children to discuss the topics presented in U-Report.
- Target more child engagement under the age of 24 (U-Reporter average age):
- Translate the questions and application into local languages
- **Use the U-report platform for educational purposes:** The U-report methods can be used to provide students lessons on the SDGs by sending them texts with lessons and engaging quizzes. Eneza Education in Kenya, is pioneering the idea of delivering education through text.

AYINET: African Youth Initiative Network

AYINET was founded in 2005 as a non-profit organization based in Lira, Uganda.

The mission of the organization is “to mobilize and empower the youth and communities in promoting healthy, peaceful and just societies.” AYINET achieves its mission by providing medical and psychological treatment for victims affected by the war in Northern Uganda, supporting victims seeking transnational justice, and empowering at risk children and youth.

The organization engages youth through School and Community outreaches in Lira, and through their Youth at Risk, and Youth as Game Changers for Peace and Reconciliation Program. In addition, an AYINET newsletter is produced, and distributed among different communities. The newsletter contains both local and international stories of programs, activities and events. It provides a platform for the children and youth in different communities to showcase their work, learn about new ideas, and most importantly it spreads good news that lifts moral.

AYINET founder Victor Ochen is a SDG ambassador for goal 16 (peace and justice). In Victor’s words, “without goal 16 none of the other goals can be sustainable.” He believes the SDGs present a good opportunity for communities to incorporate the goals into their agenda, and be part of global development.



africanyouthinitiative.org

Core Strengths of AYINET

- Medical and Psychological rehabilitation program for children and youth affected by the war
- Engaging and empowering youth as leaders in sustainable projects
- Engaging teachers to promote tolerance and understanding
- Offline work

Medical Program

This program extremely crucial in promoting healing, tolerance, and understanding in the communities.

Engaging and Empowering Youth

AYINET engages and empowers at risk children, who are in the rebuilding phase of a post conflict situation. If the youth can play a role in violent conflict, they can also play a role in peace.

AYINET Youth Empowerment

A MESSAGE TO THE YOUTH

Dear youth,

I greet you all. I want to let you know that change is within us, that we are the drivers of change within our communities. In order to bring about this change, we need to shape our behaviours, attitudes and thinking in a positive way. It is proper to engage our minds with things that will improve the welfare of our environment.

It is also important for community leaders at different levels to involve the youth in decision-making regarding matters that affect them. Gender-based stereotypes and marginalisation of different groups are obstacles to the progressive development of the community. Both boys and girls, men and women can work together to bring about peaceful transformation of the communities we live in. If we give them the opportunity, we will discover that youths have the skills, abilities and passion to do things that can bring about change.

Ronald Opiyo

Hello readers!

Thanks for walking the path of peace with us! We take strength from your support. Because of you, we can dedicate our lives to building a more peaceful Africa. Peace is all we need and all anyone wishes for. Peace cannot be achieved through violence, but only through peaceful means.

Becky

Our Facebook Responses

The response with the most likes will win a PEACE GENERATION T-shirt from AYINET.

A lot of people, including youth, say that seniors are clinging to various forms of leadership instead of handing them over to the youth.

What can youth do to get involved in peaceful leadership?

Emmanuel Gisa Dugala answered: "First, start a peace project or join an existing one. Second, build trust between youth and the Government. Third, understand the history of conflicts and learn from both sides. Fourth, read and follow the news to stay informed. Fifth, attend conferences, lectures and programmes that advocate for peace and cultural exchange. Finally, promote inter-generational exchange between youth and their parents and elders."

Collins Kibite wrote: "Some youth are very reckless with their decisions and act in a way that portrays a bad image of the youth to elders. The elders then don't take us seriously. It is upon the youth to work hard and be recognized, have peaceful dialogues with elders and advocate for what they want in a friendly manner. Force and rights on the streets will achieve nothing."

FUN CORNER

QUIZ!!

In not more than 200 words, describe and suggest a solution to a conflict within your community.

Please deliver or e-mail your answers to the address below. The best answers will be published on our website and win a PEACE T-shirt.

Please deliver or e-mail your answers to the address below. The best answers will be published on the AYINET website and will win a PEACE T-shirt.

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AYINET newsletter example

“I could have picked up a gun, and now could have been wanted by the ICC, but I decided to take another path, and look where it has taken me now” ~ Victor Ocher, AYINET Founder

Engaging Teachers

Engaging and providing support for teachers through the school outreach, is a vital part of AYINET’s program. Through this program, AYINET can create programs to help educators teaching at risk children and youth. Furthermore, bringing teachers and students together for discussions promotes understanding.

Offline Work

AYINET is effective in reaching out to communities in rural areas through various programs such as newsletters and mobile libraries. These mobile libraries move between various communities and provides access to speeches, sport games, and reading materials. This stimulates and screening leaders foster discussion around leadership, rights, and understanding.

Post-2015 Opportunities For Improvement:

- **Social impact center:** Provide space to train youth on skills in the field of agriculture, medical, computer, etc. It will serve as a supportive space, enabling youth leaders to come together, promoting growth, and peacebuilding. This space could be used to promote SDG learning, and enable the youth to incorporate the goals into their agenda.
- **Peer-to-peer mentorship and teaching program:** This will connect youth leaders with younger children. Developing this peer-to-peer partnership provides a platform for peer-to-peer teaching on the SDG’s.

- **Partnering with international organizations:** Collaborating with international actors, could further strengthen the work being done by both actors to promote initiatives to reach SDG goals.
- **Working with clan and religious leaders to promote tolerance and understanding:** These leaders have an immense influence on their respective communities; receiving support from these leaders can strengthen the legitimacy of the programs to promote the SDGs.

S.A.L.V.E.

S.A.L.V.E. International was developed in 2008. It is a UK based organization in Uganda, working towards meeting the needs of children in the streets of Jinja, Uganda. S.A.L.V.E. provides support to street children through their Street Outreach program, Home Tracing program, Rehabilitation Home, Family Skills and Business Development Program, and Research, Community Education and Partnership.

Because, the SDG’s focus on the hardest to reach, this could legitimize the initiatives undertaken by S.A.L.V.E. for street children. In the coming year, S.A.L.V.E. will be launching a new program to work with street children dealing with drug addictions.

Street children addicted to drugs are extremely vulnerable. The children have a harder time leaving the streets, are more likely to face violence, and partake in crime. In particular, goal 16.2 advocating for an end to “abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children,” is the most vital for street children.

Core Strengths of S.A.L.V.E.

- Provides child rights education at the their drop in centre for street children.
- Provides a platform for the children to put the

- Works towards changing norms about street children, by working with the families, and wider community to address the reasons children leave homes for the streets.
- Strong outreach to the street children and working continuously to build trust.



salveinternational.org

Street Outreach and Changing Norms

Through its Street Outreach Program, S.A.L.V.E.'s team builds relationships with the children they encounter on their regular street walks. The team offers the children counseling and guidance. S.A.L.V.E. works with the child to assess their needs, in order to figure out the best way they can assist the child in leaving the streets.

In addition to working with street children, S.A.L.V.E. works with families to address the needs of children, and prevent them from taking to the streets. S.A.L.V.E. offers counseling and support on these issues to families, and community leaders. Lastly, the organization works towards dispelling negative stereotypes of street children in the community, by hosting trainings to challenge attitudes, and beliefs on street children.

Child rights education and putting rights into practice:

In their drop in center, S.A.L.V.E. provides child rights education for the street children.

This is particularly important, because it ensures that street children have access to an education curriculum, which teaches them about their rights. However, this alone is not sufficient. It is important for the children to put the skills and ideas they have learned regarding child rights, into practice. S.A.L.V.E. provides this platform, by enabling the children to write poems, stories, and blogs, which are shared locally and internationally. This year the children produced a newsletter entitled, "News from the Street", a video that is available on youtube, and have been featured on their local radio. Lastly, S.A.L.V.E. International works to connect the street children to local leaders, such as police and local council, in order for them to engage in discussions.

"My Mum is an alcoholic! Some nights I would go home and see if she was drunk. If she was I would return to the street for the night as I feared her abusing me" ~Ian, 8 years old

Post-2015 Opportunities For Improvement:

- Incorporating more child rights and SDG into their education curriculum.
- Work with other local Ugandan organizations (for example AYINET) to distribute newsletter among other communities, in order to promote idea sharing amongst youth.
- Work to incorporate Unicef U-Report into Drop-in centre, or to adapt the program to be functional on Radio, in order to better reach street children.

Case Study | Education and Empowerment with Refugee Children

Background:

Today, 62 million children live in humanitarian crises, and of this population, 30 million children are refugees. We are witnessing not only the largest number of displaced people in the world since the second World War, but also an unprecedented, staggering escalation of humanitarian needs. Global displacement trends show that number of people displaced per day has dramatically escalated from 11,000 people in 2010 to 42,500 people in 2014.

We chose to create a section specially focusing on refugee children not because the children are inherently different, but because the circumstances in which they live are extraordinary. Looking just at Syrian refugees, we see that the children of this generation suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, are more likely to be forced into labor or early marriage, and commonly live without their basic human right to to education.

“You can not cut funding, we have the right to education.” ~ Refugee Child

R2E Library: A Human Rights Mobile Library

In 2012, a student i-ACT and Human Rights Watch task force based in Los Angeles started a program called The Right to Education Human Rights Mobile Library (R2E Library) in one of the most prolonged refugee situation today - Darfur. This program was initiated in response to the protracted nature of the conflict, the longstanding refugee camps, and the disjointed access to education for children. It created a safe environment for community discussions about human rights.

Core Strengths of the R2E Human Rights Mobile Library

- Sustainable project through both technology and capacity-building
- Replicability in other camps



Capacity Building and Sustainability

As with all sustainable, grassroots programs, the R2E Library program is refugee-led. i-ACT has engaged in capacity-building to train local refugee teachers how to operate the mobile library. Trained refugee librarians are engaged in problem solving, literacy, technology, facilitation, and project management skills. As librarians, their role includes bringing the mobile R2E Library to each primary and secondary school in the camp, conducting community outreach to raise awareness of the Library and hosting community dialogues.

The teachers educate about human rights from Kindle devices that contain information such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The libraries are in full-use and reaching all the primary schools in Camp Djabal and Goz Amer. Each week, the library spends five days at each of the six primary school in both camps.

Teachers “check out” books and Kindles and use them for lessons during school. The benefits of the program being refugee-led speak not only to the sustainability of the project, but of the “peer to peer learning” aspect as well.



Bridging the Gap Between Sustainability and Technology

The tablets containing the information are solar-powered and can be updated with new information very easily making it a very sustainable way to maintain the program. Originally, the program had just textual materials which were eventually destroyed in a fire. There is a unique opportunity to bring a variety of information in a risk-reducing way to refugee camps through technology. In an interview, Katie-Jay Scott of i-ACT outlined potential future uses of technology such as apps, global networks for interaction, and interactive modules. She also stated that the organization would be extremely open to placing information about the SDGs on the Kindles, which would allow integration in lesson plans throughout the Darfuri refugee camps.

The Darfuri refugee camps have started to use closed social networks in order to engage with the outside world. Pazocalo is an internet-based communication system designed specifically for users with no prior computer skills and low literacy rates. It allows refugee users to work offline and then connect to a satellite when needed.

Individuals and communities anywhere in the world can use an interactive website to read or view messages and respond. Pazocalo is an ongoing link between the voice of Darfur refugees and the world. Engaging with the outside world allows more opportunities for human-rights learning, and bringing “pen-pals” to the technology-generation has the potential to create deeper human connections and increased awareness of human rights throughout the world. Given Mark Zuckerberg’s stated commitment to bring Internet to all refugee camps, this is another potentially sustainable project that could be implemented in refugee camps globally.



iAct

Project Results:

Results show that children seem to be truly internalizing their rights. During an interview Katie-Jay described how amidst attempts to cut funding for education programs, a child stood up and stated “You can not cut funding, we have the right to education.” The program lesson plans have become interactive in nature, resulting in children wanting to become the “sanitation captain” of the class. Therefore, not only are children internalizing their rights from lesson plans, but they are engaging in peer-to-peer learning which then becomes ingrained in all interactions.

Currently, i-ACT is in the process of leading a new project called “Taking the Human Rights Temperature of Your School,” which is a survey designed to measure the level of human-rights friendliness of different refugee schools in Darfur. This survey is being led by refugees to make the human rights learning program more effective and to spread it to hit all of the target groups. This program is empowering for the children and allowing them to become aware of their rights. Once one has moved from knowing their rights, the next step is holding someone accountable for upholding their rights. While there has been education and internalization, the next challenging topic is accountability, which UNICEF will have to address after it raises awareness of human rights for children throughout the world.

Post-2015 Opportunities for Improvement:

- Strengthening accountability mechanisms
- Wider implementation
- Increased social interaction between refugee camps
- Interactive modules for children

Sisi kwa Sisi: The power of radio

In 2008, 15 year old Baruani Ndume came up with the idea of a radio program called Sisi kwa Sisi (Children for Children) with the intention of championing the human rights of other refugees. The program sought to teach different generations about the importance of children's rights and to explain the situation of child refugees to people outside the Nyarugusu refugee camp in Tanzania. Using the radio station as a platform to change the attitudes of people in their community, a group of approximately 20 children ages 12 through 17 discussed topics such as health, school and gender equality. With the assistance of World Vision Tanzania, it aired every Saturday night for 2 years in Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Burundi.

“Let me start by saying that refugees are people. Refugee children learn like all other children.” --Baruani Ndume, 22 years old, Co-founder of The KidsRights Youngsters



Photo credit: KidsRights

The impact of the program was transformative, but not immediate. Adults in the camp who initially told him “you are a little boy and you cannot do something like this.” wanted to collaborate once the program became successful. Many people became more educated and aware of children's rights. Village chiefs asked the program to share the names and information about children who were separated from their parents in war. In the end, over 50 children were reunited with their parents. Moreover, because of the radio program, more parents sent their children to school. Our team interviewed both Baruani Ndume and Cheron Bah, who also set up a radio station in his refugee camp in Sierra Leone, to gain a deeper insight into the power of radio for transformative change.

Core Strengths of Sisi kwa Sisi Radio Model

- Builds awareness of rights
- Every child has a story to share
- Powerful demonstration of youth as agents of change
- Accessibility
- Fostering hope through “little miracles”

Building Awareness of Rights

Through dialogue, children have the opportunity to learn about their own rights as well as to teach adults. In an interview, Chernor Bah told us that young people are able to take ownership of their own narratives and learn about their rights in a fun and engaging way through panel discussions, youth-led journalism, and Q&As with policy makers.

Everyone has a story to tell

Baruani’s radio show discussed the problems and challenges refugee children face in the camp. For many children, it was a huge support to talk to someone and to be able to share their experiences. Chernor Bah noted that his radio show created a platform and opportunity for young people to tell their stories. **“Everybody has a story to tell and wants to tell that story. When a big crisis happens, the journalists and UN staff come in and they only want to hear the most gruesome stories.** The stories of people who reinforce a certain stereotype. But there is a significant core in the middle. **The children who suffer silently. They hear: “you are not victim enough.”** Yet radio programs can be empowering for everyone. It gives everyone a sense that your story matters. It gives anyone a platform.”

Youth as agents of change

Both Baruani and Chernor spoke of the radical aspect of radio: it shows adults that children can ask questions and have opinions. It shows that children have the capacity to lead, to host radio shows and report on issues. Baruani said: “many people learned about children’s rights..because of the show. They learned about our initiative, showing how children can contribute to change. More parents sent their children to school.”



Photo credit: KidsRights

Accessibility to different demographics

Radio is an effective model because it can appeal to wide audiences. Baruani’s radio program was streamed in several countries, for example. Chernor Bah’s radio show had programs for different age-groups: “We had 12 different programs around a range of issues. We have programs for younger kids; programs about the peace process; interviews with child soldiers. Everybody was welcome.” Radio is also an effective way of reaching children who cannot read.

Fostering hope, celebrating little miracles

Chernor said that radio is particularly empowering in refugee camps because “it creates a narrative that this is not the end. There is a future. The hope element is very important. Radio can highlight the story of the kid who is doing awesome things someplace else. Or it can celebrate the little miracles that happen everyday. It creates a new normal.”



Chernor Bah

Post-2015 Opportunities:

- Barauni first imagined the idea for a child’s right radio program after learning that he had human rights. This allowed him to be confident, stand up and make a change with my friends. When speaking with Baruani, he felt strongly that *“understanding the SDGs can give them good ideas about sustainable development, and enables them to understand what is agreed internationally. It can support you to become confident about your local projects and initiatives. Knowing not to be alone in this is something that helped me take action.”*
- Setting up a radio station requires technical support and resources. We propose that UNICEF and partners use the framework of the SDGs to promote radio stations led for and by young people, particularly young refugees following the crises in the Middle East. In the midst of the Syrian refugee crisis, we urge UNICEF to remain cognisant of refugee situations also occurring in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The access and ownership of such technology may give them a voice and the hope of a better future.

“Understanding the SDGs can give [children] good ideas about sustainable development, and enables them to understand what is agreed internationally. It can support you to become confident about your local projects and initiatives. Knowing not to be alone in this is something that helped me take action.” -Baruani Ndume, 22 years old, Co-founder of The KidsRights Youngsters

Djabal and Goz Amer Camps	Nyarugusu camp
Refugees were part of the process of implementing the human rights mobile library because they saw it as an opportunity to advance their education.	Adult refugees were generally more resistant towards radio show because they thought the 15 year old founder of the program was too young to be taken seriously.
Highlights the power of human rights education through the traditional school format.	Highlights the power of human rights education through social engagement.

Youth Voices:

We interviewed many young individuals from across the globe as well as ourselves to learn more about what young people think about: promoting the SDGs, youth activism, the joys and the challenges of being young. Through these interviews, we showcase innovative ideas created by young people to engage with and take ownership of our future. Several themes emerged:

WHAT IS THE POWER OF BEING YOUNG?

Innocence

One interviewee spoke about the power of innocence. When young people engage in causes for social good, they are often doing it voluntarily, without covert motivations - whilst balancing family duties, social life, education, or simply the trials of daily survival.

"I'm speaking from a very innocent point of view. I'm not politically or financially invested in climate change. Nothing. I'm not making money out of climate change, you know? I'm 15! I can't even vote. That's what is so beautiful about me and young people doing something about this problem. Innocence gives us that opportunity to understand the problems in a way that will get people really excited about supporting us. We're doing it for us - for our future, our children, our grandchildren. That's it. No tricks up our sleeves." - Xiuhtezcatl Martinez



Photo credit: KidsRights

Direct experience of youth and empathy

A young person speaking out about their personal experiences can have a powerful effect on decision-makers. Children and youth know their needs and their dreams and therefore, they should be taken seriously. Particularly, when decisions affect their daily lives.

"When you live in a refugee camp for a long time, you begin to understand the power structures. You can realize: these are the resources, I have, these are the stories I have lived through, this is the knowledge I have. I can now make my move." - Chernor Bah

"Someone who is young, no matter what background...has the time and opportunity to make a change. In the community and beyond...Being young, we have a special power that is very valuable to decision-making processes affecting us at all levels: we know our situation, our challenges, our needs." - Baruani Ndume

Limitless imagination for change

"When you are young, you are uninhibited. Life has a terrible way of teaching us to be limited. When you are a child with less knowledge, you are not concerned with the protocols. You just have an idea! You want to do it! The hardest thing to do is unlearn. As we grow up, we learn so many things but we overlearn the lessons. As a child, you are more open to change." - Chernor Bah.

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE ORGANIZATIONS LIKE UNICEF TO SUPPORT YOU IN YOUR DAILY LIFE AND/OR ACTIVISM?

Support, time and space

Some students, presently collecting data to hold the UK government accountable for Goal 5: Gender Equality, wanted acknowledgment from UNICEF that for them, “this is not a job. It is what young people do alongside work and studying. Acknowledge that we face a lot of constraints. Give us the extra support, time and space....If a young person has taken the time to write your organization an email, please reply.”

Condense the information virtually in an accessible format

Young people asked for UNICEF to provide an accessible virtual platform with data and advice on the SDGs. One respondent said: “We simply don’t know how to find the information...how the indicators are being formed, how to hold governments accountable...” Ideally this virtual space would also give young people training on how to create social change in their communities and collect data to hold officials accountable as well as accessible information on SDG progress.

Empowerment through quality education

Education consistently appears as an important priority for young people. Members of the Youth Advocacy Group, for example, work tirelessly to ensure that leaders put #EducationFirst as part of the 2030 agenda. One young woman described how, following the death of her brother by gunfire, a teacher asked her a question which set her upon a new path: “Do you want to be a victim, or do you want to do something about it?” This question empowered her to ‘think wider’ and train her fellow students in peer mediation, leading to a significant drop in violence in her school. The importance of having an enabling educational environment, which provides support for young people who cannot find support at home, is hugely important.



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Create opportunities linked to rights

Some respondents made the link between rights and opportunities. Without the opportunity to participate and be heard, rights cannot be claimed. Thus organizations like UNICEF should create the opportunities for young people to take ownership and claim their rights through hosting tours that foster debate, or encouraging radio stations and creative initiatives led by young people.



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“Help us make our voices count....We need to be empowered as change-makers....we need urgent support to get recognized, continue our education and contribute to society as full global citizens.” - Baruani Ndume

HOW WOULD YOU REACH OUT TO PEERS YOUR AGE TO ENGAGE WITH SDG ISSUES AND INSPIRE ACTIVISM?

Make it fun: Music, Dance, Film

One young woman from Kenya is very passionate about film and said the best way to reach young people is to produce creative and interesting films relating to the SDG issues. These films can be screened in different communities. Films are particularly effective for young people who cannot read and can spark discussions after the screening.

Music, especially hip-hop, is also an exciting way to get young people excited and passionate about something they normally wouldn't be.

The general message from young people is that taking action on issues should be fun. Young people should be able to pursue their passions through activism: as one young person stated, "taking action on climate change by using the things they love to change the world."



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Creating safe spaces for discussion through sports and art

Many youth highlighted the power of sport and art to start discussions about wider social issues. As seen in the UK case study above, sports are seen as particularly effective: by playing sports together, children and youth from different communities can connect and build meaningful relationships. Baruani Ndume organizes football matches to connect children in and outside his refugee camp. This promotes tolerance, understanding and creates the feeling of being part of a group.

Baruani also spoke of how arts can also be effective in starting interesting discussions: by writing poems or making paintings, children can express their situation and learn about their rights. The poems and art pieces can then be used to inform the larger community.

Two youth delegates interviewed had experiences teaching in Togo and Peru and spoke about the difficult reality of teaching young children. They emphasized the need for engagement and attention grabbing activities. The school's physical education (P.E.) programs, or after school programs could be great opportunities to engage kids physically as well as intellectually. Teachers could introduce the SDGs in the classroom and then make up related games during free time. A game could entail "run the fastest to the goal that means the most to you." The kids could run to the goals that resonates the most with them and then the teacher could ask a few to explain the reasoning behind their choices.

The youth delegates also emphasized the importance of creating small groups so kids can contribute to the conversation and have their voices heard.

Connecting the SDGs to personal issues

Almost every young person interviewed said that the SDGs need to be explained and presented in a way which is directly relevant to their daily lives and needs. Starting with local issues can serve as a good platform to demonstrate how these struggles are part of a wider movement.

“We try to connect these problems to them personally...everyone is impacted by climate change....Work on the issues closest to you. The issues that affect you, your family, your community.” - Xiutezcatl Martinez

Making materials accessible to all

Many young people stated the need for the SDGs to be presented in appealing and engaging formats like the superhero comic books recently produced by UNICEF and its partners. They also stressed the need of these materials to be presented in local languages. One student noted the importance of materials being designed with disabled children in mind first: blind students cannot visually engage with the comic books, so more materials must be produced to encompass the needs of diverse groups of children and youth.

Workshops to empower agents of change

In our interviews, young people also reiterated the importance of children as agents of change rather than consumers of change. In this regard they suggested creating hands-on workshops to engage kids in learning about the global goals. UNICEF could also partner with local organizations to facilitate summer camps or retreats, particularly for low-income kids, who might not get the support that they need in school to learn about these issues. In our conversations with young people from high income countries and refugee camps, the individuals reiterated the importance of children as agents of change rather than passive consumers of products and ideas.

The workshops can provide an opportunity for young people to take ownership of a specific SDGs and create a “beyond the classroom initiative” on a matter that they care about.

Creating spaces outside the classroom

When Chornor Bah, Youth Engagement Coordinator for A World at School, enters towns to work with girls throughout Sierra Leone, he deliberately avoids using the schools. “School is associated with a certain type of learning. It is where I am told what to do and what not to do.” The most effective way to learn about human rights is through creativity, outside the classroom. “The work I do now...is really about creating these groups of young people and giving them the tools and resources to learn about rights. It creates social capital. They come together to play and talk about things. They have joy when they come together. I don’t remember many times I felt pure joy in the classroom.”

Using technology to connect within and across borders

Ama Peiris, a young Sri Lankan woman studying in the USA, uses Skype to teach students back home in Sri Lanka. These classes allow young people to develop a sense of empowerment. For her, there is intrinsic value in teaching via technology. “Just the notion that there is someone out there listening to you is powerful in itself.”

Kartik Sawhney, a blind student from India studying at Stanford, uses radio to combat the negative attitudes people hold about young people with disabilities. He uses radio because television still has limited reach in rural areas in India. On his radio broadcasts, he talks about how disability is not a curse and explains how “you can live life pretty normally, but just do certain things differently.” “What really makes a difference is when you talk to people can give them case-studies. Tell them: this is somebody who has actually done this. When I decided to take up science at school, I contacted blind scientists in the USA because I thought: if they can do it, I can do it.”

CONCRETE IDEAS INSPIRED BY INTERVIEWS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE:

Pen-Pal Initiative

In order for young people to better understand the universality and global nature of the SDGs, we propose the facilitation of a pen-pal system in which children who live as close as a street away, or in different continents, can write to each other sharing their achievements. Depending on an area's accessibility to WiFi, the letters can be shared either through a UNICEF online system or through mail.



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We advise coupling the pen-pal initiative with school workshops that focus on the SDGs that provide young people with the opportunity take ownership of a specific SDGs and create a 'beyond the classroom initiative' on a goal that they care about. Classes such as geography teach young people about borders that separate us from one another. Few classes, however, teach youth about the commonalities that we share with people who live in far off areas. The objective of the pen-pal system is for young people to understand that we are not alone and to increase levels of empathy.

Moreover, participants can see that the SDG causes are important to children across the world, creating a link between the local and global. For countries with the capacity, using technology for social connections can make the SDGs cool.

Not every day, of course, will yield an accomplishment. On the contrary, many days will be wrought with challenges. During these moments, a student can write her frustrations to their pen-pal buddy. Perhaps their buddy has encountered a similar obstacle and can share wisdom, or maybe her buddy simply has an idea that can be of use. In moments of doubt, a pen-pal buddy can provide support, reiterating the spirit of solidarity.

Our World through My Eyes: Using Social Media to Breakdown Stereotypes

This idea draws on UNICEF's strong reputation, recommending that the Post-2015 Development Agenda Unit create a Twitter and Instagram account with the intention of a new young person "taking over" every day. In this way, young people from around the globe can share the how their actions, whether they be big or small-, are making the planet better. UNICEF has nearly 5 million Twitter followers and 787,000 Instagram followers. With its well known brand, we expected that this additional UNICEF account will also attract a large followers base.



For the same reason that Humans of New York is widely popular, these accounts will allow followers to view the world from someone else's perspective. The ultimate goal of this strategy is to break down stereotypes. Similar to the way UNICEF sponsored a Syrian refugee twitter take over and a youth takeover at the Conference of Parties in Paris (COP21), young people who are working on projects that promote the SDGs would have access of the Twitter or Instagram so that they can share their stories. This idea gives young people the opportunity to show other young people what they are doing to promote the SDG. Equally important, it shows adult followers that young people must be taken seriously as agents of change. In this sense, UNICEF would be providing young people with not only the opportunity for their voices to be heard, but to also count.

SDG Digital Platform Initiative: UNICEF as Coordinator

Now that the United Nations is transitioning from adoption of the SDGs to implementation, it is essential to monitor this implementation. We strongly recommend UNICEF partner with the website "SDG Tracker," or other similar websites, which currently contains only the global goals and targets to monitor progress. UNICEF should be a leader in promoting its usage for the entire UN system. This digital platform would be a web of information linking goals, entities, and regions so people can explore, get engaged, and become involved in efforts relevant to them. The website would link development goals to initiatives, broken down by subsections such as Initiatives by Youth, Initiatives by United Nations Organizations, Initiatives by NGOs, Initiatives by Governments, and Initiatives by the Private Sector.

In addition to each of these categories, the website would be tagged in order to be browsable from different perspectives so users could search by theme, such as "climate change", countries such as "France", and income-status, such as "low-income."

Reaching young people without technology

Although we live in a technologically revolutionized age, 4.4 billion people in the world still lack access to the internet. Therefore it is important to also engage and empower children and youth without technology, by creating a platform for exchange and sharing stories offline.

In order to teach the children and youth who do not have access to the internet and technology, we propose newsletters written and illustrated by children and youth, recounting their experiences promoting SDG causes in their communities. We also advise UNICEF to create children and youth led Task Forces at each country office. This Task Force will assume responsibility for producing this newsletter, which would contain comics, crosswords, pictures, poems, and stories about youth leaders in the communities.

The newsletters could be produced monthly, with each month dedicated to a different goal. Each newsletter would build on the topic of the previous newsletter, allowing kids to see how the numerous goals are interconnected. The Task Force would work in cooperation with the country office and its local partners to discover and reach out to local actors who want to tell their stories. The newsletter would be translated into local languages and distributed by the country offices (both online and on recycled paper to reach those without access to technological devices). The messages can also be spread between communities through different art forms: songs, poetry, and mobile library/cinema screenings followed by discussions.



My number 1 wish is to go back to Syria. Whether it's tomorrow or in 10 years, I want to go back home #youthtakeover

9:20 AM - 30 Sep 2015



Community-Organizing Model: Actively Reaching Out to Young People

Many young people globally are already working towards the 2030 goals through small and large actions: e.g. collecting data on gender-based violence in their communities; organizing campaigns to protect the environment; or innovating new technologies to combat difficulties in their communities. At the Global Communications Team Meeting in UNICEF (October 2015), there was discussion on the need for UNICEF to view itself as a supporter and facilitator of youth-led movements. This contrasts with the current model of UNICEF creating and leading campaigns for young people.



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We strongly support this reconceptualization of UNICEF's role and suggest that, at both headquarters and country-offices, UNICEF should actively reach out to young people who have demonstrated the potential to have a strong social impact. Many young people find it difficult to be taken seriously by adults or to develop meaningful partnerships. Many young people would appreciate receiving the powerful legitimacy of UNICEF's support. We propose a serious review of local community-organizing models, which actively reach out to members of the community and support individuals to make tangible changes through engaging and relevant campaigns.

UNICEF SDG Awards

Another way to make the SDGs fun would be to create project contests or to have UNICEF-sponsored awards, supporting youth activism. In our preliminary online investigation, we saw that already one group of Colombian students and their teachers won a prize for their reforestation project called "Cigabiónica" in an international contest held in Mexico called "Design the Change." Their project, a flying drone that dispersed seeds to begin reforestation, is an example of the kind of empowering activity that children could be more involved in as they learn about the SDGs and their human rights.

Building Awareness: Opportunities and Challenges for UNICEF and Partners

UNICEF is uniquely situated to foster and support a generation of young people who are informed, empowered and motivated to make a difference. There are many factors working in UNICEF's favor, including: a strong brand awareness and valued global reputation; a strong field presence; and an ongoing tradition of youth engagement. These factors combine to create unparalleled opportunities for UNICEF to capitalize upon the momentum of the 2030 Agenda.

Opportunity: Bridging the Humanitarian-Development Divide

In one of the worst humanitarian and refugee crises since the Second World War, an enormous gap has emerged between the humanitarian and development worlds. UNICEF, with its global brand reputation and extensive experience in both the realm of development and humanitarian work has an opportunity to be a leader in bridging the humanitarian and development worlds.

UNICEF can facilitate closer coordination between humanitarian and development organizations at the United Nations in cases of humanitarian emergency, as well as pair local, field-based humanitarian actors and

Authority Figures: Engaging Families, Guardians and Teachers

For SDG learning to be truly effective, UNICEF and partners will also have to focus on key adult figures in children's lives. It may be difficult to engage with guardians, who might be busy, uninterested or even the perpetrators of abuse. In particular, teachers have a large role to play in raising awareness of the SDGs. The World's Largest Lesson was a commendable achievement globally. *However, teachers need sustained support to allow them to adequately educate about global issues and challenge entrenched harmful practices within their communities.*

In an interview with the founder of ProjectExplorer, an organization distributing free multimedia content across schools to improve students' global awareness, Jenny Buccos noted that many children are naturally curious about global politics and activism. Yet the teachers, often coming from conservative and isolated communities, observe that they do not have the knowledge or resources to teach about these fast-moving global issues. *ProjectExplorer overcomes this barrier by providing teachers with access to informational briefs about issues as diverse as the Syrian crisis, Boko Haram in Nigeria, and the histories of various nations.*



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organizations with local development organizations. In order to reflect this changing reality of addressing humanitarian crises by incorporating development at the very beginning of a crisis, the UNICEF funding message to donors needs to be broadened to include this focus on development instead of being crisis-driven. The international community cannot continue with business as usual, and UNICEF can play a crucial role in addressing one of the greatest challenges facing the world today.



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Political Context: Perception of the United Nations

Over nine million individuals, including 2,215,312 children under the age of 15, were consulted in the MyWorld survey conducted by the United Nations Millennium Campaign to highlight the goals that were most important to their lives. UN Member states took ownership of the process and many have already begun to incorporate the SDGs into their national development plans. However, practitioners may find that efforts to build awareness of specific goals and targets will be met with resistance from certain communities. In an interview with a young woman from Nigeria, it was highlighted that members of her family would respond with suspicion to any 'agenda' emanating from the United Nations.

According to this interviewee, the UN is perceived by some in her community as a 'Western', 'top-down' organization with untrustworthy political interests. There is already sufficient groundwork to make these goals truly national and local; to do this, youth ownership of these goals is essential. It will be best to begin by introducing the most relevant goal to each individual/community and connecting its likelihood of success or sustainability to other goals. This is to show how interconnected and important the goals are. For example, Decent Work and Economic Growth is connected to industry, innovation and infrastructure, which is linked to good governance and lack of corruption.

In contexts of growing distraction and disillusionment, young people are increasingly turning towards crime, prejudice and even violent extremism. Thus the question of making youth activism 'cool' becomes particularly relevant. Fighting for peace and tolerance must be an attractive option to those angry at the status quo. Regarding these young people, UNICEF must find ways to make activism and leadership appealing. Empowerment should start with activities young people enjoy and are popularized as cool, whilst respecting cultural differences. For example, 15 year-old Xiuhtezcatl Martinez makes activism engaging by connecting climate change issues with hip-hop and rap.



Photo Credit: Jenna Mowat

Internalization: Making Youth Activism 'Cool'

Building awareness of human rights and the SDGs is one thing; fostering a generation of youth leaders is another. Our report showcases a number of young change-makers, reflecting the capacity of young people to stand up and make a difference. However, it is a simple reality that being a leader can be extremely intimidating. It can be very difficult for a young person to challenge their peers, stand up for a cause, or dedicate time and energy to activism.

Seventeen Goals

One of the strengths of the SDGs is that they are so broad, reflecting the participation and priorities of millions. Yet seventeen goals is arguably a very large number for children and young people to digest and internalize. To address this challenge, educators must encourage individuals to focus on the particular goals that matter most to them. *Yet practitioners must work hard to avoid downplaying the complex and interdependent nature of all seventeen goals. The SDGs should be presented in a child-friendly, relatable way which emphasizes their interdependence and broad scope, without overwhelming the learner.*



Call to Action: 10 Common Themes and Recommendations:

Far too often young people are perceived solely as objects without control over the forces around them instead of potential agents for change. To empower these young people to be positive actors of change, they need to have more than an awareness of their rights. They must internalize and believe that they are powerful enough to change the social structures/institutions under which they live. These are our recommendations for how UNICEF and similar organization can best engage and use the SDGs to support the transformative power of young people. This section draws from the findings of our case-studies and interviews above:

1. The power of being heard and taken seriously

As Baruani Ndume said, “help us to make our voices count, not only heard.” Young people do not want to feel tokenized; they want to be treated as equal to adults and believe that their voices can have an impact. This recommendation necessitates a mindset shift: give young people to space to create campaigns, articulate their needs and collect their own data. When conducting consultations, follow-up with young people and show them how their responses made a tangible difference. As ‘The KidsRights’ Youngsters assert “realizing children’s rights more effectively calls for the perspective, experience and authority of children and youth themselves.”

2. Re-conceptualizing ‘Quality Education’: Exposure and empowerment through education

Goal 4 calls for “inclusive and equitable quality education..for all.” We believe quality education cannot be achieved through the classroom and textbooks alone. More aspects of traditional curriculums should be geared toward real-life scenarios and young people should be empowered to create social change through their daily subjects. This will normalize activism and help to overcome the intimidating aspects of youth leadership. For example, through mathematics children can be empowered to collect data about gender/racial bias in their school and create statistical models. Teaching about climate change represents an opportune moment to link formal education with practical steps for change.

3. Inspiring Imagination: Start with what kids love

Make activism and youth empowerment fun. Often the best way to engage young people is not to start with the challenges, but to start with their passions. We have seen countless examples of young people harnessing sport, radio, music, film, art, poetry and other mediums to start conversations about difficult issues. Such activities engage young people in the long-term and foster strong relationships. Starting with passions is also a good way to inspire sustained mentorship. UNICEF and partners can create a platform to show young people examples of how to harness their hobbies for positive change. With relation to the SDGs, we suggest starting with 17 hobbies young people love - such as music, sports, art and demonstrating how individuals can transform their passions into actions for sustainable change.

4. Using sustainable technology: Start with the needs

Throughout our interviews, it was emphasized that technology should not simply be used for the sake of ‘innovation’. Kartik Sawhney, a young innovator from India, argued: “Don’t just innovate for the sake of it...Really try to understand the problem you are addressing. Have diversity on your team, especially from the community you are trying to help.” UNICEF and partners should always start with the needs of a particular community and work with local actors to adapt technology to suit these needs. A good example of this can be seen in our case-study on human-rights mobile libraries. Technology and innovation also needs to be accessible to all children: for example, begin with the needs of young people with disabilities and develop new creative initiatives appropriately.

5. Engaging teachers, adults and guardians

Young people and children are not isolated actors; they can be strongly influenced by the opinions and norms of their elders. Therefore it is really important that UNICEF and partners develop ways to make adults excited about the SDGs, and to empower children to safely question prevailing norms in their households and schools. The mentorship model of Football Beyond Borders, our UK case-study, demonstrates the power of positive role-models.

6. UNICEF Focal Point to Coordinate Work on the SDGs

As a direct recommendation for UNICEF, it is essential that there is a dedicated team working on the SDGs to co-ordinate the work across agencies and ensure that young people’s voices are included in high-level decisions related to the Sustainable Development Goals.

7. Actively reach out and support youth movements

According to the AIESEC YouthSpeaks Survey, young people view youth-led organizations as the second-most effective mechanism to drive change after government. Organizations like UNICEF should conduct country-wide research and actively reach out to young leaders. Offer young people support for their activism and provide legitimacy for their projects, for example through a global award-scheme.

8. Goodwill ambassadors, SDG Champions: Using non-traditional celebrities as ambassadors for change

Celebrities with large followings are a great way to draw attention to certain issues and inspire young people to fight for change. Young people are increasingly following leaders on social media, in addition to conventional music artists and actors/actresses. We suggest that UNICEF creates meaningful partnerships these ‘virtual’ celebrities as ‘SDG Champions’: for example, by engaging vloggers, bloggers, tweeters and popular instagrammers. This could be done in an interactive way, by making youtube vloggers compete by creating videos relating to their SDG experiences, or by training young people with the media skills to interview these celebrities.

9. Capacity Building: Ensure that projects are sustainable and long-lasting

We selected case-studies which demonstrated long-lasting impact and had the capacity to continue after the initial project creators moved on. Initiatives intending to build awareness of rights and the SDGs must harness the capacity of educators and young people to develop leadership skills, technical expertise and the motivation to continue activism.

10. Working across sectors to create the conditions for change: empowering young leaders is the most effective way to create change

Through our research and interviews, we believe that the most effective way to ensure success in achieving the ambitious 2030 agenda, UNICEF and similar organizations must focus more attention on supporting young leadership through education, training and creating real life/virtual spaces for promoting youth ownership of social change.

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