

Chapter 3

The Sustainable Development Goals and Youth Mainstreaming

This chapter:

- discusses youth mainstreaming in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- expresses the notion of social equality for young people, the end-goal of youth mainstreaming, through an equality matrix for youth pegged to the targets of Goal 10: Reducing Inequality Within and Among Countries
- unpacks the implications of accountable and transparent institutions for youth mainstreaming in relation to selected targets of Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.

3.1 The SDGs and young people

One of the main reference points for this publication is the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in 2015, particularly their articulation of the primacy of social equality in Goal 10: Reducing Inequality, which is of direct relevance to what we are trying to achieve through youth mainstreaming.

Before narrowing down on the relevance of the SDGs to youth mainstreaming, it is important to remember that the goals make specific reference to youth in several targets. These are shown in Box 3.1.

However, our position is that the approach to every target of all 17 goals will have a specific, age-related, impact on youth. Our analysis will be based on an understanding that all SDGs are interconnected and indivisible, and that each SDG has an implication for young people in the way policy and programme decisions are made.

3.2 The SDGs and youth mainstreaming

As discussed in Chapter 1, youth mainstreaming is about achieving social equality for youth and adults through processes

Box 3.1 SDGs with specific references to youth

The SDGs that are generally seen as most pertinent to young people's empowerment and development fall into two categories;

- **Those that refer to age disaggregation or age groups:** Eight goals refer to age disaggregation or age groups in the goal, targets or indicators. These are Goals 1 (poverty), 3 (health), 5 (gender equality), 8 (decent work), 10 (inequality), 11 (sustainable cities), 16 (peaceful, just and inclusive societies) and 17 (partnership).
- **Those that specifically mention young people:** There are explicit references to youth, young men and women, adolescents, girls and women aged 20–24 in the targets or indicators of nine goals. These are Goals 1 (poverty), 2 (hunger), 3 (health), 4 (education), 5 (gender equality), 6 (clean water and sanitation), 8 (decent work), 13 (climate action) and 16 (peaceful, just and inclusive societies).

This is covered in detail in the Youth Development Index.¹

for equity and justice. Consultations with youth leading up to the formulation of the SDGs highlighted their vision for a world where equality and non-discrimination were the norms. Equality for youth and society was the most important principle identified by young people in the DFID-CSO document *Youth Voices on a Post-2015 World*.² Moreover, youth between the ages of 16 and 30 formed 58 per cent of the millions who voted on themes affecting their lives in *We the Peoples: Celebrating 7 Million Voices*,³ thus significantly influencing the results that placed education, healthcare, jobs and responsive government as the four key development priorities.

*Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*⁴ recognises the interlinkages between different dimensions of inequality. Mainstreaming marginalised groups, including youth, particularly marginalised youth, then becomes a critical precondition for reaching the goals, because of the SDG aspiration to 'leave no one behind', and because of the principle of universality and of reaching 'the furthest behind first'.⁵ The SDGs also help us move beyond addressing the symptoms of poverty to ensuring participatory governance to achieve targets.

The 2030 Agenda also explicitly recognises the role of young men and women as agents of change, and their critical role as those who 'pass on the torch' to future generations in line with the SDGs' main theme of sustainable development.

Box 3.2 Social aspirations go beyond the SDGs

Social aspirations are often expressed in ways that are not measurable through SDG indicators. Some of these aspirations that are relevant to youth and not explicitly stated in the SDGs include ending child labour and undernourishment, ending illiteracy and violence, and expressing access to food and water as a basic human right. Some observations on the SDGs also note the need to better reflect human rights discourses, economic rules that inform equality, roles and responsibilities of rich countries and economic institutions, or discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer/questioning and transgender (LGBTQ) communities etc.⁶

However, even as we use the SDGs and targets as globally endorsed benchmarks, young people's aspirations often move beyond the SDGs (see Box 3.2), e.g. for education or fulfilling employment. Indeed, in this publication, we will integrate additional transformational paradigms of development that are not explicitly stated in the SDGs and targets.

Having established that, the SDGs are recognised as a significant move in defining and shaping a youth-centric global development agenda in that:

- mainstreaming youth plays a critical role in fully realising the SDGs;
- reaching the SDGs is of critical importance to young people's wellbeing and rights; and
- young people have also played a significant participatory role in shaping the SDGs to ensure their relevance to them.

This publication itself will utilise the SDGs as a benchmark in:

- defining an integrated vision for holistic youth empowerment and development;
- articulating equitable outcomes; and
- framing the context for case studies of good practice.

Now, we will examine how the SDGs articulate both the outcomes and processes of youth mainstreaming, reflecting elements of Figure 1.1, the youth mainstreaming arrow.

3.2.1 Equality (the outcome of mainstreaming)

The end-goal of youth mainstreaming is obtaining social equality for youth in relation to adults, as defined in the YM

definition above. The SDGs made a landmark conceptual turn from a narrower lens of poverty alleviation in the MDGs to one that addresses the distribution of wealth and development outcomes, as indicated in Goal 10: Reducing Inequality Within and Among Countries. Equitable outcomes for all are specifically mentioned in Target 10.2, which calls to ‘Empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all’ including for all ages. This focus on the generational imperative is significant.

The goal refers both to income equality and equality of development outcomes through health, education, justice and so on, for all people. Target 10.3 says ‘Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard’ to achieve equality. Targets also call for striving for ‘fiscal, wage and social protection policies’ that contribute to social equality within and among nations. The commitment of the SDGs to ‘leave no one behind’ also highlights the interconnectedness of all SDGs to components of inequality (see Table 3.1).

All national development outcomes reported against the attainment of the SDGs will, therefore, be assessed for reaching the equality goal as much as growth goals.

3.2.2 Youth-centric institutions and planning (process 1 for youth mainstreaming)

Accountable, transparent and inclusive institutions and planning processes play a key role in facilitating youth-centric planning, and therefore contributing to youth mainstreaming. The SDGs clearly recognise this role of institutions, best articulated in Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. Targets 16.6 (effective, accountable and transparent institutions), 16.7 (responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making), 16.10 (public access to information and fundamental freedoms)¹⁰ and 16b (non-discriminatory laws and policies) are of particular importance (see Box 3.3). This institutional strengthening needs to be reflected in all legislative and policy processes and sectors in the implementation of all 17 SDGs.

Box 3.3 Articulations of youth mainstreaming in SDG indicator drafts

An earlier version of proposed indicators for Goal 16 on participatory decision-making proposed the following as an indicator: 'Proportion of countries that address young peoples' multi-sectoral needs within their national development plans and poverty reduction strategies'.⁷ Even though this did not reach the final endorsed indicator list, this establishes the primacy of institutional strengthening for youth mainstreaming.

3.2.3 Youth participation (process 2 for mainstreaming)

Youth participation is the second critical process element for youth mainstreaming.

SDG Target 16.7 (responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making) has implications for the participation of all, and by inference youth, in decision-making that affects their life and society.

SDG Target 4.7 of Goal 4, Quality Education, reflects institutional roles in catalysing young people's social, political and economic empowerment (see Annex 2) and, therefore, their citizenship role, by supporting the creation of 'knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development', in this case, for young people. This educative role is central to young people's ability to participate in the life of society.

So, in brief:

- all development goals have an impact on young people, even though only some explicitly mention youth;
- the SDGs will inform our discussions, as they are a framework which many young people have signed up to; but also
- youth may choose to go beyond the goals in terms of addressing injustice and inequality.

3.3 The Equality Matrix for Youth: Expanding SDG 10 targets

What is this social equality we are trying to achieve for youth? How do we express it in quantitative and qualitative ways? How do we integrate a youth lens to policy and planning processes that may not otherwise incorporate this lens? This discussion becomes important so that we constantly remember to what end we are transforming our institutions.

In Table 3.1, the Equality Matrix for Youth, we:

- Examine the most relevant targets of SDG 10: Reducing Inequality as a goal that best expresses what we are trying to achieve through youth mainstreaming across all goals.
- Examine the broad range of variables the goal addresses beyond traditional measures of income equality. It includes social, political and economic inclusion, fiscal and wage equality, social protection equality and a range of other determiners of social equality which are integral to youth empowerment.
- Align SDG 10 targets to the other 16 SDGs to demonstrate the comprehensive way in which the targets help us articulate social, political and economic equality for youth.
- Examine the greater benefits to governments and other stakeholders of youth-mainstreamed approaches to reaching development and social cohesion targets,
- Consider key implications for youth mainstreaming for each Goal 10 target in a broader sense.
- Highlight the centrality of partnerships for reaching all SDGs.
- Encourage discussion around the linkages of the SDGs and human rights frameworks.

3.4 Goal 16 and institutions for youth

Goal 16 provides a framework for strengthening youth mainstreaming through institutional processes across all 17 SDGs. Table 3.2 illustrates the implications for youth mainstreaming for the most relevant targets.

Table 3.1 The Equality Matrix for Youth (SDG 10: Reduce Inequality, its targets and its relationship to other SDGs)

Equality goal targets + related SDGs	Benefits of youth mainstreaming	Some implications for youth mainstreaming ⁸
<p>10.1: By 2030, progressively achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40 per cent of the population at a rate higher than the national average:</p> <p>a) Faster income growth for the poorest [also for youth] 1: No Poverty, 2: Zero Hunger, 6: Clean Water and Sanitation, 7: Affordable and Clean Energy, 12: Responsible Consumption and Production.</p>	<p>1: Helps to efficiently reach poverty reduction goals by addressing specific needs of youth groups 2: Creates efficiency and reduces burden on social welfare programmes 3: Demonstrates practised state commitments to social equality 4: Reduces youth discontent and disillusionment and therefore creates greater collaboration and social cohesion</p>	<p>Are the concerns and rights of young people in the bottom 40 per cent integrated into planning for income growth? Are these poorest youth groups able to influence policy? How advanced is life-cycle poverty analysis etc. that enables the analysis of intergenerational poverty so as to meet the interests of young people in the bottom 40 per cent?</p>
<p>10.2: By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status. Target broken down:</p> <p>a) Social inclusion [including for youth] 3: Good Health and Wellbeing, 4: Quality Education, 5: Gender Equality, 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities.</p>	<p>1: Helps greater access of young people to public services 2: Helps make public services more relevant and responsive to all service receivers, including youth, and therefore more efficient, both financially and socially 3: Builds trust of youth in government and greater collaborative engagement 4: Creates a healthy, educated population 5: Reduces youth discontent and disillusionment and therefore creates greater collaboration and social cohesion</p>	<p>How is young people's social inclusion factored into planning for health, education, gender and the creation of cities and communities? Are young people, and young service users, more specifically, able to influence decisions in these places, particularly the most marginalised young people? Are they able to obtain affordable, accessible services with dignity and safety/confidentiality? Are young women's voices heard and respected within these spaces; are their concerns considered? Are young people able to influence the planning of cities and communities so that their needs are addressed in urban and community planning?</p>

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Table 3.1 The Equality Matrix for Youth (SDG 10: Reduce Inequality, its targets and its relationship to other SDGs) (cont.)

Equality goal targets + related SDGs	Benefits of youth mainstreaming	Some implications for youth mainstreaming ⁸	
b) Economic inclusion [Including for youth] 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure.	1: Higher levels of youth employment and better working conditions irrespective of age 2: Builds trust of youth in government and greater collaborative engagement 3: Reduced youth discontent and disillusionment and therefore greater social cohesion 4: Enhances investments and wealth	Are young people's location in transition from education to employment, their role in beginning new families etc. factored into employment policies? Are young people able to participate as equals in trade unions, professional bodies and other bodies representing the interests of working people? Is industry, innovation and infrastructure focusing on young people's interests, including acknowledging young people's role in innovation? Do young people have formal mechanisms within which to participate in decision-making in all development institutions and political institutions? Are young people adequately represented in party politics to represent youth and other interests and transform party political cultures? Where this is not the case, are affirmative action laws in place?	17: Partnerships in all sectors for youth development/empowerment, youth data and budgets, youth participation, youth safeguarding
c) Political inclusion [Including for youth] 13: Climate Action, 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.	1: Greater meaningful youth participation in governance and electoral politics creates more relevant, responsive and efficient programmes for young people and for all 2: Potential financial and human resource savings due to focused, relevant programming 3: Governments demonstrate practised commitments to participatory decision-making and collaborative planning that help reach targets in Goal 16		

<p>10.3: Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard:</p>		<p>17: Partnerships in all sectors for youth development/ empowerment, youth data and budgets, youth participation, youth safeguarding</p>
<p>a) Equal opportunity/ equality of outcome [including for youth] Goal 5: Gender Equality.</p>	<p>1: Equal development outcomes for youth benefit all of society 2: Enables young people to be equal partners in social development 3: Builds a strong, cohesive society</p> <p>1: Justice system supports reaching Goal 10, including for youth, ensuring equal justice for all 2: Executive commitments to equality and justice supports equality measures for youth and leads to social equality 3: Governments demonstrate transparency and accountability, thus building bridges and trust with youth 4: Provides foundational support for reaching equality</p>	
<p>10.4: Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality:</p>		<p>Are there adequate measures in place to ensure fair fiscal policies and their transparent implementation? Are there progressive taxation regimes, whose returns are used to support programmes for equity, including for young people? Are the absence of equitable fiscal policies and lack of fiscal transparency affecting investment in young people in specific ways? If so, how? How are transnational capital flows regulated to ensure equity and justice?</p>
<p>a) Fiscal policies [that favour youth] 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.</p>	<p>1: Contributes to greater transparency and accountability of financial institutions to youth 2: A youth lens helps to direct investments that result from good fiscal policy to where they are most required for young people, efficiently and effectively</p>	

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Table 3.1 The Equality Matrix for Youth (SDG 10: Reduce Inequality, its targets and its relationship to other SDGs) (cont.)

Equality goal targets + related SDGs	Benefits of youth mainstreaming	Some implications for youth mainstreaming ⁸	
b) Wage policies [that support youth] 1: No Poverty, 5: Gender Equality, 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.	1: Provides decent employment opportunities for youth 2: A more content and productive youth workforce 3: Greater national productivity	Are wage policies fair to young people? If not, what is being done? How are young people involved in consultative processes that help create fair wage policies for all? Are young women specifically affected by unfair wage policies? How does this influence them?	17: Partnerships in all sectors for youth development/empowerment, youth data and budgets, youth participation, youth safeguarding
c) Social protection policies [including for youth] 1: No Poverty, 3: Good Health and Wellbeing, 4: Quality Education, 5: Gender Equality, 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.	1: Reduces cyclical intergenerational poverty 2: Ensures equitable distribution of services and lowers social conflicts 3: Increases trust in government 4: Creates a content, collaborative youth population	Are social protection policies adequate, and are they adequately funded? Does the lack of funding for social protection affect young people in specific ways? Are young people actively involved, through formal structures, in influencing fair and equitable distribution of social protection benefits, as well as in dialogue to enhance investment in social protection? How are specific groups of young people such as women, ethnic and sexual minorities, young people living with disabilities, and so on, affected by social protection policies, or lack thereof?	

A similar youth mainstreaming lens can be applied to 10.6: Voice of developing countries in decisions of economic and financial institutions; 10.7: Migration and mobility; 10a: Differential treatment for developing countries; and 10b: Official development assistance and financial flows to states with the greatest needs, all of which require the incorporation of youth rights and will indeed benefit from it. Similarly, the 11 official UN indicators ascribed to Goal 10 can be measured for young people as well (see United Nations, Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, SDG 10 available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg10>).⁹

Table 3.2 SDG 16 and youth mainstreaming

Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (youth mainstreaming process)	
Focus here: Accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels	
Selected targets	Implications for youth mainstreaming in all 17 goals
16.6: Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels	Are there institutional policy guarantees for accountability and transparency to youth? Are institutions accountable to young people in responding to their aspirations and rights? Are there mechanisms in place to ensure transparency and communication with young people?
16.7: Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels	Does policy require public and youth consultations in decision-making? Are representative groups of young people involved in institutional decision-making at all levels? Are they able to influence decisions?
16.10: Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements	Are there constitutional and structural guarantees that ensure public access to information for youth in youth-friendly formats? Do young people have access to public information, including on access to public services, in youth-friendly forms? Are their fundamental freedoms to express opinions and participate in public life safeguarded?
16.b: Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development	Are laws and policies in place to ensure intergenerational equality with a specific focus on intergenerational equality for marginalised youth groups?

3.5 The Youth Development Index (YDI)

The Youth Development Index (YDI), developed by the Commonwealth, is a composite index of 18 indicators¹¹ that collectively measure progress on youth development through the five domains of education, health and wellbeing, employment and opportunity, political participation and civic participation. It compiles available global youth-related datasets to form an assessment of relative achievements across countries. The 2016 *Global Youth Development Index and Report*¹² measured progress in youth development for 183 countries, including 49 of the 53 member countries at the time of the report.¹³ The YDI supports the disaggregation of data for youth in working towards reaching SDG targets and goals, and will be a useful tool at the national level for measuring the social equality of young people. Just as the gender equality goals



Box 3.4 Reflections on Chapter 3: The Sustainable Development Goals and Youth Mainstreaming

- In your context, have the SDGs been incorporated as a tool for national and subnational development strategies?
- How effective are the SDGs in helping us mainstream youth in planning, and in measuring changes for youth and everyone?
- Which human rights instruments/articles best reflect SDG targets and goals that you work with?
- How do young people's aspirations go beyond the SDGs' targets and indicators in your contexts?
- How can the YDI be used to measure/demonstrate equity/equality for young people?

and targets in the SDGs help measure the ultimate outcomes for gender mainstreaming, the YDI will be a support in measuring equality for youth.

3.6 Conclusion

The Sustainable Development Goals are an important, though incomplete, reference point for the articulation, implementation and evaluation of youth mainstreaming, particularly their recognition of the importance of reducing inequality, which underpins the vision of mainstreaming. The SDGs can be complemented by the Youth Development Index (YDI) in examining outcomes for youth, given its focus on youth development.

Notes

- 1 Commonwealth Secretariat 2017, 17.
- 2 See Chapter 2: Why Youth Mainstreaming?
- 3 United Nations 2015c.
- 4 United Nations 2015b.
- 5 United Nations 2015a, 1 and 3.
- 6 For example, see Sengupta 2016.
- 7 UNDP/PRIO 2016, 8: Targets 16.1 on Peace, 16.3 on Justice, 16.7 on Inclusion and 16.10 on Freedoms.
- 8 These example implications involve multiple dimensions of social change, as reflected by youth aspirations that may go beyond those implied by the SDG indicators for these targets.
- 9 United Nations 2015c.
- 10 Plan et al. 2016 addresses youth-inclusive indicators for Targets 16.6, 16.7 and 16.10.

- 11 See the Equality Matrix for Youth, Table 3.1.
- 12 Commonwealth Secretariat 2016.
- 13 The number of Commonwealth member countries was 52 at the time of writing.

References

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