

ECOSOC Youth Forum 2016
United Nations Headquarters, New York City
February 1-2, 2016

54th Commission for Social Development
United Nations Headquarters, New York City
February 3-12, 2016

On 25 September 2015, the 193 countries of the UN General Assembly adopted the 2030 Development Agenda entitled: “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. The agenda is organized into 17 comprehensive Social Development Goals (SDG’s).

The SDG’s are as follows:

1. **No Poverty** - *End poverty in all its forms everywhere*
2. **No Hunger** - *End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture*
3. **Good Health**- *Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages*
4. **Quality Education** - *Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*
5. **Gender Equality** - *Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*
6. **Clean Water and Sanitation** - *Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all*
7. **Clean Energy** - *Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all*
8. **Good Jobs & Economic Growth** - *Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all*
9. **Innovation & Infrastructure** - *Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation*
10. **Reduced Inequality** - *Reduce inequality within and among countries*
11. **Sustainable Cities and Communities** - *Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable*
12. **Responsible Consumption** - *Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns*
13. **Protect the Planet** - *Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*
14. **Life Below Water**- *Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development*
15. **Life On Land** - *Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss*
16. **Peace & Justice** - *Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels*
17. **Partnerships for the Goals** - *Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development*



The 5th Annual ECOSOC Youth Forum which was held from February 1-2, 2016 at the United Nations, was executed under the theme “Youth Taking Action to Implement the 2030 Agenda”.

The purpose of the ECOSOC youth forum is for youth to have their voices heard, on behalf of all the youth in their respective nations, on the topic of economic and social development. I attended the Youth Forum (as well as the 54th Commission for Social Development) under IPA with special help from St. Lois Greene in St. John's, Seamus O'Regan, MP for St. John's South-Mount Pearl and Sr. Elsa Muttathu at the UN.

The conversation throughout the forum controversially revolved around the point that "youth are an important part of the implementation of the SDG's", and considered even more controversial was the fact that the main contributors to the conversation were over the age of 30 years. The controversy was sparked by an initial speech given by Special Envoy on Youth to the UN, Ahmad Alhendawi, where he passionately expressed the fact that youth are the present, not the future and that at this point we should not be saying that youth are important, because we know this already, but rather discussing ways in which member states and democrats can invest in the youth so that the youth themselves can begin the implementation process. Mr. Alhendawi has been influential in the inclusion of youth delegates to the 2016 ECOSOC Youth Forum and he continues to actively advocate for youth participation at the UN, during other sessions such as the Commission for Social Development.



As many UN officials can attest, any change in structure at the headquarters is an impossibly slow process, so that means even if delegates and/or member states identify a problem within the system, change will not occur unless there is strong resistance over a long period of time. The nature of the Youth Forum was revealing of the exclusive nature of the UN itself and many comments made from delegates on the floor shed more light on the fact that the UN's statements and actions occasionally contradict each other; for example, the UN officially launched its "Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth" which is the first UN initiative to actually tackle the issue of youth unemployment and they have promised to help facilitate preparation for the work of the future. On the other hand, it is a known fact that the UN does not pay their interns, therefore making these young people economically vulnerable in a city with high costs of living and marginalized within the scheme of the workplace.



This being said, during the regional breakout session on North America & the European Union, we heard from a member of the UNDP who happened to be a youth moderator at the first annual ECOSOC Youth Forum. In the session, we were discussing the fact that hardly any youth were able to actively participate in the general discussions and panel sessions. The UNDP member was able to guide the youth delegates and participants in the session through the developmental path that the Youth Forum has taken since the first one. Although slight, development had certainly occurred. He told the room that in order for youth to be active participants at the UN and to also be the ones who personally help implement the SDG's, that we must continue to ask questions, speak out, and be proactive.

One of the main purposes of NGO and Youth representatives attending sessions such as the ECOSOC Youth Forum and the Commission for Social Development that I can gather other than to speak out, are so that they can relay information regarding policies made by the UN and about what others groups and member states are currently doing on the ground, to their various grassroots organizations and schools. The most effective first step towards implementing the 2030 Agenda is to spread awareness of the 17 SDG's and to educate civil society, especially youth, on exactly what we need to accomplish in fifteen years time. In my opinion, the UN has



done well in presenting the goals in a very accessible and attractive manner. In it's simplest form, the SDG's are presented in 17 coloured blocks, one for each goal, with a simple white graphic depicting the general theme of each goal; for example, Goal 16, Peace & Justice, features a silhouette of a dove sitting on a judge's gavel. This is the perfect tool to use in a classroom setting especially full of younger children because it is so eye

catching, well organized and uses extremely clear and direct language. Once your community knows that there even is a fifteen-year plan, that's when plans of action can start developing.

A topic of conversation that spread from the 2016 ECOSOC Youth Forum, over to the 54th Commission for Social Development, and the one that was discovered to be the most pressing concern amongst all youth delegates and participants at the forum, was the lack of youth participation due, in hand, to lack of engagement and investment in youth by member state officials and government officials at every level. Coming from a Canadian youth myself, I can say first hand that it is a fact that young people are interested in politics on a local, national and international level and about foreign affairs, current events and the United Nations. In Canada, programs in high schools such as Model UN, Youth Parliament, Encounters with Canada, and even International Relations/Development Programs in Canadian Universities are largely to thank for actively engaging youth in these areas and sparking an interest. Another example of

youth engagement that was shared during the ECOSOC Youth Forum that actually yielded an extremely important and relevant result was the 2015 Canadian Election. Elections Canada held a nationwide social media campaign to engage youth and encourage them to vote by using hashtags to easily follow coverage telling people to post an "#IVoted" selfie. According to Elections Canada, there were 17,559,353 ballots cast (not including those who registered on Election Day), compared to 14,823,408 ballots in 2011 and



Elections Canada was able to report that the difference in voter turnout consisted largely of new voters and youth. The result was stripping Harper of Power once and for all and the election of the second youngest prime minister in the history of Canada. This is historical and concrete proof that engaging youth to participate is worth every bit of time and financial investment.



I've learned a lot over the past two weeks. I've learned about the structure of the United Nations, about the role of NGO's in the UN general assembly, who our leaders in high places are, about the SDG's themselves, I've engaged with other youth who are excited about bringing the SDG's back home and starting the education process, and perhaps most importantly, I've learned just how crucial young people are in the implementation process of the 2030 Agenda. Youth now more than ever need a platform to express themselves and have someone truly listen to them and take them seriously. There are youth in our midst who are incredibly dedicated to changing the world and the passion, imagination and motivation that young people can possess is hard to find matched in anyone over 30. Youth need to be trusted with more responsibility and input in decision making and in doing that, would have a chance to prove what we can do. The Social Development Goals are without a doubt an ambitious set of goals to achieve in only fifteen years; however, harnessing the imagination, passion, dedication and ambition that youth possess, is exactly what the UN needs to have a successful and historic year 2030.

