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## "SUMMIT OF THE FUTURE: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES"

## COMPILATION OF GROUP WORKS

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# Foreword

This volume is a compilation of group works of the 53 participants of the 62nd Graduate Study Programme of the United Nations Office at Geneva, which was held at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland from 1 to 12 July 2024.

Opinions, positions, statements, and conclusions expressed in the five reports included in this compilation are exclusively of their authors – graduate students who participated in the Programme. They do not necessarily represent or reflect the views of the United Nations, the group facilitators, or the facilitators' respective organizations.

# Table of Contents

# Financing Sustainable Development: Challenges and the Way Forward

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# 1. Introduction

The last decade has been defined by a series of crises with an immediate and far-reaching impact on a global scale. The accumulation of these crises in quantitative terms, the exponentially increasing negative impact in the long term, and the strong interconnection between the distinct issues impede social development and economic growth at every national level (despite the differing degree of impact). This highlights the urgent necessity for collective action, encompassing all pivotal stakeholders at the international level. The transition from commitment to implementation of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 necessitates, at its core, the establishment of a sustainable financing system that aligns with present demands at the international level.

The Summit for the Future, scheduled to be held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on 22-23 September 2024, seeks to foster enhanced international collaboration on pivotal global issues by proposing a novel vision of global governance and a multilateral system based on existing commitments. A principal chapter of the Pact for the Future, which will be negotiated at the intergovernmental level on this occasion, addresses sustainable development and the financing of development.

Against this backdrop, authors of this report have conducted an in-depth analysis for a sustainable financing of the UN SDGs. The report is divided into three main chapters focusing on resources for sustainable development, financing for SDGs, and climate finance. Each chapter introduces the associated challenges and presents recommendations.

# 2. Resources for Sustainable Development

The pursuit of sustainable development, especially in Developing Countries, requires a comprehensive and multifaceted approach to resource mobilization, given the ultimate significance of finance in achieving these goals. As countries strive to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it becomes increasingly clear that both external and domestic resources play a critical role. Effective resource mobilization should, therefore, encompass a wide range of strategies. These could range from securing external financing to fairer monetary policies that protect poorer countries as well as donor parties. Another important strategy is to enhance domestic resource mobilization to complement external sources of funds in the short to medium term while deploying long-term strategies to rely on domestic resources as the main source of finance for sustainable development given the complexities regarding external finance.

In order to secure considerable external financing, reduce public debt, and generate resources at the domestic level, long-term planning will be required. This can be achieved by combining the expertise of the developed countries with the rigor for sustainable change found in the developing countries. This chapter discusses the challenges that developing and, in some cases, least developed countries (LDCs), face in funding sustainable development. It explores the areas of external financing (FDIs and international investments), public debt (sovereign debt owed by governments) and domestic resource mobilization and taxation within the context of sustainable development while identifying challenges and proposing solutions.
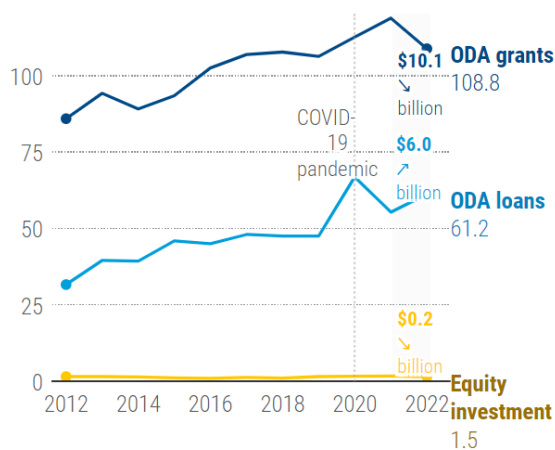
## 2.1. External Financing

Financing for development is a key aspect to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. However, the current financing gap for the SDGs is estimated at almost USD 4 trillion (UNDP, 2023). Furthermore, financing for development is one of the key aspects in the upcoming Summit of the Future, which aims to put the pace for SDGs back on track. The conditions for external financing have become more stringent with the passing years owing to multiple factors, including, but not limited to, the COVID-19 pandemic. The field of stakeholders has also grown to include philanthropists, development financing institutions, the private sector, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The presence of

these actors has been indispensable to financing SDGs for development. Although their presence adds complexity to the international financial architecture, their role is crucial to secure additional external SDG financing.

Official Development Assistance (ODA) has reached record levels in 2022 (287 billion USD) even though it continues to fall short of the SDG 17 aid target of 143 billion USD. However, aid flows to developing regions fell by 4 billion USD (2%), affecting majorly the African, Asian, and Oceanian continents. Furthermore, while the share of soft loans increased in the total amount of ODA, the share of grants kept falling, reaching 63% in 2022 against 68% on average in 2012-2021. This represents the smallest share in two decades. Meanwhile, debt relief and related financial instruments have dropped from USD 4.1 billion in 2012 to USD 300 million in 2022 (UNCTAD, 2024d).

## Grants and loans move in opposite directions

ODA disbursements by instrument for the period 2012-2022



**ODA grants**
$10.1 billion
108.8 billion

COVID-19 pandemic

**ODA loans**
$6.0 billion
61.2

**Equity investment**
$0.2 billion
1.5

*Note:* Sum of ODA grants, ODA loans and equity investment at constant 2021 USD.

*Source:* UN GCRG based on OECD (Dec. 2023)

Developing financing involves developing country governments obtaining loans from diverse sources. These sources include other governments via bilateral agreements, multilateral development banks, various multilateral or regional institutions, and private lenders such as banks and bondholders (UNDP, 2023). Foreign Direct Investment levels went down owing to the global debt risks in the wake of the 2008-09 financial crisis. This decline in FDIs created issues for financing for developing countries that depended on external poorest financing (United Nations, 2021).

### 2.1.1. External Financing

### 2.1.1.1. Challenges to External Financing

● Foreign Direct Investment
Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) has slowed down in the past decade. First the 2008 financial crisis took its toll and FDI almost stalled during the COVID-19 pandemic (UNCTAD SDG Pulse, 2024a). This trend can be attributed to the rise of protectionism in the context of labor costs, growing complexities in international financial architecture and mistrust in the global community regarding development goals (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2024). Furthermore, this decrease in FDIs also spilled over into the stagnation of global trade and of global value chains (Polanco, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic pushed the LDCs into extreme poverty. It is estimated that an extra 15 million people are living in poverty since the pandemic (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2023).

In 2023, global FDI flows totaled approximately $1.37 trillion, marking a 3% rise from the previous year. However, without a few European conduit economies global FDI flows would have been 18% lower due to increasing interest rates. At the same time, FDI to developing nations dropped by 9%, reaching $841 billion, with most regions experiencing reductions or stagnation. The number of international investment projects in developing countries related to the SDGs remained steady, while SDG-relevant international project finance deals decreased by 27% (UNCTAD, 2024b).

● Inadequate Risk Protection Measures
In many developing and LDC, external financing faces issues such as high investment costs, driven by macroeconomic risk perceptions rather than project-specific risks. This risky perception of the market inflates the cost of capital, making it difficult for developing countries and LDCs to secure long-term

financing. This leaves loans from private and international lenders as one of the few options for these countries (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2024).

The volatility of financial markets contributes to the dearth of long-term financing in countries with weaker economies. For example, in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, the developing economies were strained with capital flight and reduction in investments (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2024). This volatility of financial markets leaves these markets underdeveloped in terms of size, liquidity, and maturity. As a result of this lack of maturity, external investors find it difficult to enter the market because of low confidence in the risk protection system in the event of a crisis (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2024).

- International Taxation

International taxation is hindering better venues for external financing. Multinational corporations use tax mismatches to avoid taxation by shifting profits to low- or no-tax countries and losses to high-tax jurisdictions (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2024). Furthermore, countries that have a high need for sustainable financing may not be included in international tax norms, so their effectiveness is limited. This absence of inclusion results in the countries that need financing not benefiting from the new developments in the international financial architectures (United Nations, 2023).

The lack of regulation in the digital economy enables businesses to operate without having a physical presence. This provides opportunities to avoid taxation or find loopholes in regulations (Record & Pemberton, 2018). For example, a World Bank study found that 72% of Facebook users in Malaysia are linked to small businesses that operate outside of Malaysia and these businesses do not pay any sales tax (Record & Pemberton, 2018). Countries requiring new options of external financing could regulate their digital economies to generate finances to fund their sustainable development. The UN Tax Committee helps increase the capacity of developing countries in combating international tax avoidance (United Nations, 2021b). There is an imbalance in weightage of opinion in international decision making. For instance, the LDCs possess a total of 4% voting rights in the World Bank, which constrains their voice in the decision making where these countries are usually at the receiving end of decisions (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2023).

2.1.1.2. Recommendations

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**Enhance risk mitigation to attract Foreign Direct Investment**
Developing countries should implement strategies to mitigate macroeconomic risks and improve investor perceptions by introducing policy reforms, ensuring political stability, and developing risk-sharing mechanisms with international partners.
Private sector involvement in delivering quality results is becoming increasingly important within the development context. The risk mitigation efforts should be coupled with attracting the private investors to find new venues of getting involved in developing markets via sustainable initiatives such as the renewable energy market.

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**Strengthen Financial Stability and Governance**
Sustainable finance should be integrated within broader economic policies by strengthening regulatory frameworks, improving transparency and accountability, and aligning policies with national and international sustainability goals. For example, Mongolia has advanced reforms through its integrated national financing strategy wherein it aligned its budget with the SDGs and launched an SDG finance taxonomy for private investment among other measures. Developed countries should aid where required (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2024).

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> **Support Development of Local Financial Markets**
> Fostering financial infrastructure, improving legal and institutional frameworks, and supporting the growth of local currency financing is required to attract external financing for developing and LDCs. National development banks can play a pivotal role in providing long-term funding and promoting capital market development. For example, Uzbekistan's SDG budgeting reforms have resulted in a $4 billion increase in SDG-aligned expenditure and a $1 billion reduction in harmful expenditure (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2024).

### 2.1.2. Public Debt

Debt is playing an increasingly important role in the external financing of States, despite a growing systemic debt crisis expected to peak in 2024-2025 (Focus 2030, 2023). For the least developed states, whose domestic revenues are hampered by a small tax base and largely informal economies, external debt to public, international, or private creditors is an easy way to free up financing for the future of their people and country as described in the SDGs. An uncontrolled debt trajectory, however, can lead to fiscal slippage and a debt trap that is detrimental to achieving these goals by 2030.

In 2023, global public debt reached a record level of 97 trillion USD: if only ⅓ of it - 29 trillion USD - is held in developing countries, their share has been growing twice as fast as in developed countries since 2010 (UNCTAD, 2024a). Far from being recent, this trend confirms the data observed since the early 1970s that has seen global public debt triple from about 30% of GDP to over 90% in 2023 (IMF, 2023). This upward trend in the volume of public debt has been accompanied by an explosion in debt servicing costs, particularly in developing countries afflicted by higher interest rates: their debt service on external public debt thus reached a total of 365 billion USD in 2022, representing 6.3% of their export earnings. The crushing cost of their debt is increasingly confronting developing countries with a liquidity dilemma, forcing them to sacrifice necessary investments in their development or even the financing of their social services. Over the period 2020-2022, for example, 15 developing countries spent more on interest on their public debt than on education, and 46 more than on their healthcare systems.

This unstable situation, which is particularly incapacitating for the least developed countries, is exacerbated by the systematic failure of the major bodies in the international financial architecture to reform themselves and put in place more flexible and ambitious mechanisms to increase the financial mass of loans and respect the socio-economic needs of creditor countries. A reform of the governance of the international financial architecture thus seems an essential prerequisite for a renewed global approach to the global public debt system, followed by the use of new institutional mechanisms to release global financing for the SDGs and an acceleration of debt relief.

#### 2.1.2.1. Adapting the international financial architecture's governance

In December 2023, the Board of Governors of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved a 50% increase in the fund's quota resources, with members' contributions proportional to their current share holdings. While increasing the Fund's permanent resources, this reform did not resolve the intrinsic inequity of quota distribution. Despite accounting for 18% of the world's population, the African continent only has access to 6.5% of IMF quotas (Tran, 2024). These determine not only the voting rights of each country, but also the nominal ceilings on resource access - beyond which countries begin to pay additional borrowing rates - and the rate of Special Drawing Rights (SDRs). The underlying idea of this system, that the distribution of voting rights and fund allocations should follow countries' capacity to pay, has paradoxically led to a situation today where traditional IMF funds are channeled more towards the countries that need them least.

World Bank governance is not free from bias, insofar as additional voting power - above a fixed threshold of equitably distributed voting rights - is also proportional to countries' shares based on their financial contributions in line with the Lima Principles established in 2015. As a result, the United

States, Canada, and the countries of the European Union still hold around 70% of the voting power of the World Bank Group (WBG), even though their share of the world's GDP or population remains lower than that of the United States (Mohseni-Cheraghlou, 2022a). Restructured approaches to the distribution of votes would enable a democratization of the World Bank Group, which would ultimately benefit confidence in its institutions and the achievement of the SDGs.

### 2.1.2.2. Mobilizing additional fundings through new mechanisms

Several financial and institutional solutions already exist and have proved successful in facilitating access to capital for developing countries: these deserve to be democratized and exchanged across the intergovernmental development landscape. Foremost among them, hybrid capital is a useful tool to modernize MDBs capital structures, build resilience to financial stress and increase capacity lending. Combining the properties of equity and debt, it is sold to investors as a fixed-income instrument but has a perpetual maturity: benefiting from their triple-AAA rating from the rating agencies, MDBs can borrow three to four times their equity value on the capital markets and increase their lending capacity (Sala & Plant, 2022). In 2024, the African Development Bank successfully launched and priced 750 million US dollar hybrid capital notes as green, social and sustainability bonds, which will be reinvested in developmental projects in the continent.

Similarly, the reallocation of Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) at the IMF would provide a technical and accessible solution to developing countries' lack of access to capital. Constituting an international reserve asset distributed between members in proportion to their quota, they are therefore mainly accessible to the richest and best-represented countries in the institution (as seen above): of the USD 650 billion allocated in 2021 by the IMF to the global fight against the global economic consequences of Covid-19, only USD 275 billion have been directed to the most vulnerable countries (Shalal, 2021). While mechanisms for redistributing SDRs are currently being put in place, notably via MDBs - as is the case with the hybrid development mechanism implemented by the AfDB described above - these are incomplete and still face opposition from certain central banks for reasons of compliance with financial legal rules (Focus 2030, 2023).

### 2.1.2.3. Speeding up debt relief without affecting socio-economic wellness and development

The G20 Common Framework for Debt Treatment, launched in 2020 to help the most indebted countries correct their insolvency trajectory, and bringing together the Paris Club, the G20 and private creditors, has so far been able to support only 4 countries - Chad, Zambia, Ethiopia, and Ghana - with many indebted countries excluded from the procedure by the length and complexity of the application. More generally, the general architecture of debt restructuring needs to be reformed, to speed up IMF debt restructuring procedures and ensure that funds redistributed for development are not directed towards debt servicing, but towards financing social services and sustainable investment.

At the Summit for a New Global Financing Pact in 2023, the World Bank announced the introduction of several new instruments for crisis preparedness, response, and recovery, including debt suspensions. These instruments constitute payment deferrals in case of an exogenous shock (up to two years) that would enable affected countries to focus on meeting the urgent needs of their population instead of servicing their debt at a crucial time. A fee of 5 basis points will be charged to the borrowers for subscribing to this option - mainly to cover additional World Bank costs - which could be bought by donors in case of a blended financing programme. The principal payments post the deferral is structured so that the weighted average maturity of the original loan is maintained. The fact that the loan repayments stay NPV-neutral[1] and that the final maturity of the original loan is not extended renders the attractivity of this solution close to the one of their traditional counterparts (Focus 2030, 2023).

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[1] Net Present Value, the difference between the present value of cash inflows and cash outflows over a determined period.

### 2.1.2.4. Recommendations

**Adapt the international financial architecture's governance to the current international socio-economic realities and needs.** At the IMF, aligning Actual Quota Shares (AQS) more closely with Calculated Quota Shares (CQS) would be an important first step towards making the institution more representative; adding a variable reflecting national CO2 production to the CQS calculation formula would also be a powerful way of encouraging public climate activism (Andres Arauz & Ivana Vasic-Lalovic, 2022). Within the WBG, the implementation of a "double majority" voting system would likewise be beneficial to the democratization of the Bretton Woods institutions: while the first criterion would remain economic, the second could reflect a country's national population (Mohseni-Cheraghlou, 2022b).

**Better integrate the notion of vulnerability into the Debt Sustainability Analysis (DSA) drawn up by the IMF to establish borrowing rates for concessional loans.** The over-representation of fiscal concerns in DSAs undermines a country's socio-economic and climatic realities and prevents them from providing long-term support for development policies aimed at the SDGs. Similarly, IMF borrowing limits should be decoupled from quotas and based on an assessment of a country's real needs, incomes, and vulnerabilities, using a Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI) that would make debt sustainability analyses determining concessional resource delivery rates more flexible.

**Democratize the use of hybrid capital across all MDBs, in a coordinated manner, to increase the volume of credit available for international development.** The AfDB's successful experience deserves to be replicated in other institutions under World Bank patronage, and their expertise needs to be exchanged between them.

**Accelerate institutional reforms within the IMF and MDBs to enable SDRs to be reallocated to the most vulnerable countries.** Pending a more general reform of the SDR allocation system, the richest countries should voluntarily set themselves ambitious reallocation targets of at least 100 billion (as they did in 2021 and finalized in 2023). Similarly, the maximum capacity of 80 billion of the two funds via which these redistributions are made - the Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust (PRGT) and the Resilience and Sustainability Trust (RST) - should be increased, and their use democratized to more countries.

**Simplify and streamline debt restructuring procedures for countries in debt crisis and bring them into line with the Common Debt Framework.** New mechanisms need to be found and implemented collegially by the Bretton Woods institutions, MDBs, creditor and indebted countries and the private sector to ensure the segregation of funds directed towards debt servicing and those directed towards necessary socio-economic services and investments. In addition, the creation of a user manual on debt restructuring specified by the G20 and the Paris Club could be a decisive factor of conviction for many countries trapped in a debt trap.

**Democratize debt suspension clauses (DSCs) for exogenous shocks.** Allowing countries to suspend their repayments for a predefined period following a natural disaster, these clauses have proved in the past to be an effective means of providing liquidity to the countries that need it most, and easily reducing the economic and social impact of a climatic event with few medium-term consequences for creditor countries, companies, and institutions. To be effective, DSCs should cover several types of exogenous shock, whether climatic, pandemic, or migratory...

*2.2. Domestic Resource Mobilization*

Domestic resource mobilization (DRM) is a vital source of financing for developing member countries (DMCs). With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, this has become even more critical, underscoring the urgent need for significant investments in public services, such as healthcare, and for governance reforms to address rising income inequality (Nagata, 2021).

Sustainable development financing is a collective effort involving public and private resources, mobilized by governments, companies, and families. For sustainable development financing to be effective, a significant proportion must be generated internally within countries, primarily through a fair and efficient tax system (Bodiguel, 2023). Using domestic resource mobilization, developing countries can create a more sustainable and autonomous path to achieving the SDGs, reducing their vulnerability to external economic shocks, and building a more resilient foundation for future development.

2.2.1. <u>Domestic Resource Mobilization and its relevance in advancing development in developing countries</u>

Domestic resource mobilization is an essential strategy to enhance sustainable public investment, enabling countries to allocate funds to vital public services like healthcare, education, and infrastructure. These sectors are crucial for achieving the SDG-related targets (Fall, 2022). Moreover, by increasing domestic revenue, countries can reduce their dependence on external aid and loans which are usually accompanied with extremely high interest rates and conditionalities, leading to more sustainable and autonomous development.

The 2015 report by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and other regional development institutions, such as the African Development Bank, highlights the critical importance of domestic funding sources, describing them as the most substantial source of financing for development. This confirms the essential role that domestic resources play in accelerating progress towards the SDGs (World Bank Group, 2015)

According to Nnadozie, Munthali, Nantchouang, and Diawara (2017), African countries face significant challenges in domestic resource mobilization. These challenges include weak tax administration, inefficiencies in tax collection within the agricultural and informal sectors, low levels of savings and financial inclusion, and substantial illicit financial outflows. Taxation should be equitable, charging individuals and companies according to their ability to pay, and should support robust economies where industries thrive, and people can find decent jobs. Additionally, coordination and fiscal regulation between countries are essential to combat tax evasion, ensuring that the necessary resources are effectively directed towards sustainable development. This process requires the mobilization of entire economies and societies, where individuals also play a vital role by paying taxes and demanding quality services in return. Only through this integrated and collaborative approach can sustainable development be achieved (Bodiguel, 2023).

There is a crisis of insufficient financing, where both the private and public sector lack access to an adequate pool of savings. This forces them to rely excessively on external sources of funding such as aid, foreign loans, and private capital flows. This dependence not only limits the political space of countries but also makes them more vulnerable to factors and developments beyond their control, such as financial crises. Despite the significant potential to mobilize domestic resources in developing countries, most international discussions on development policy focus excessively on external sources of funding. However, financial crises, such as the 2008 global financial crisis, exacerbate the vulnerability of developing countries that depend on foreign investment for their development and can serve as a wake-up call to the urgency of the issue (Kapoor, 2009).

### 2.2.2. Enhancing the efficiency of tax administration systems as an instrument for achieving the SDGs in DCs

Key capacity challenges for domestic resource mobilization in developing countries are weak tax administration, inefficient tax collection in agriculture and informal sectors, low savings and financial exclusion, and high illicit financial outflows (Fall, 2022).

For instance, Steenekamp (2007) employs a static performance measure to assess whether tax levels in South Africa are high or low in financing developmental projects compared to other African countries. This approach, known as the representative tax system, calculates average effective tax rates for a sample of countries. These effective rates are then applied to a set of tax bases to determine the yield of the representative tax system. The tax effort index is derived by comparing the actual tax yield to the representative yield. The findings indicate that South African revenue authorities perform better than those in comparable countries with the analysis of different tax categories revealing that South Africa relies heavily on personal income tax and corporate income tax to generate a greater proportion of its domestic revenue. This suggests that developing countries should intensify their efforts to increase revenue mobilization through these forms of taxation.

Developing countries can enhance their tax systems by implementing reforms that broaden the tax base, close loopholes, and improve tax administration (Le et al., 2008). Implementing progressive tax policies is crucial for ensuring that individuals and corporations with higher incomes contribute a fairer share of public revenue. Currently, in many developing countries, the tax system lacks progress due to low marginal tax rates at the higher end of the income spectrum and poorly designed income exemption thresholds. This often results in a nearly flat tax rate structure, undermining the principles of equity in taxation. To address these issues, a better design of Personal Income Tax (PIT) reliefs is necessary. The current system often disproportionately benefits those who are already well-off, exacerbating income inequality. Potential solutions to create a more equitable tax system include capping the benefits that higher-income individuals can receive and replacing deductions with tax credits. (World Bank Group, 2021). These measures can help ensure that tax reliefs are distributed more fairly across different income groups. By reforming tax policies in this manner, developing countries can enhance their revenue generation while promoting social equity. Progressive taxation not only helps in redistributing wealth but also in funding essential public services that benefit society.

Another key factor in ensuring effective revenue mobilization through taxation is combating tax evasion (World Bank Group, 2021). Enhancing measures to address tax evasion and illicit financial flows is vital for optimizing revenue collection. Proper tax administration and investment systems play a crucial role in addressing capital flight, which involves the significant movement of financial assets out of a country due to economic or political instability or in pursuit of higher returns elsewhere. Effective tax administration can curb capital flight by ensuring transparency, accountability, and fairness in the tax system. When taxpayers have confidence that tax laws are applied uniformly and that their contributions are used effectively for public goods and services, they are less likely to move their capital abroad. Measures such as closing loopholes, reducing tax evasion, and implementing international tax agreements to share information can significantly reduce illicit capital flows. By fostering a stable tax environment, governments can encourage businesses and individuals to invest domestically, retaining capital within the country. (World Bank Group, 2021)

To enhance the sustainability and efficiency of a better tax system in developing countries, there must be a deliberate effort to provide comprehensive technical assistance. This assistance should aim at strengthening the capacity for efficient tax collection by modernizing tax administration systems, adopting advanced technologies, and ensuring compliance. Additionally, training local experts is essential for sustainable management of the taxation system (Nnadozie et al., 2017). Building a skilled workforce capable of handling complex tax issues will lead to better enforcement of tax laws, reduced tax evasion, and increased public trust in the system that will transcend generations. By focusing on these areas, developing countries can enhance their revenue mobilization and support economic growth and development.

Complementing robust tax administration, effective investment systems can further mitigate capital flight by creating attractive opportunities for domestic investment (Kedir, 2014). Governments can enhance these systems through policies that improve the investment climate, such as ensuring political stability, protecting property rights, and reducing bureaucratic red tapes. Additionally, investing in infrastructure, education, and technology can boost productivity and offer higher returns on domestic investments. Governments can retain and even attract capital that might otherwise flow out of the country by providing incentives for both local and foreign investors to channel their funds into productive sectors. These combined efforts will help maintain a healthy flow of resources for domestic economic growth and development, thus countering the negative impacts of capital flight.

### 2.2.3. Recommendations

> **Modernization of tax administration systems as an instrument to prevent capital flight and thus achieve the SDGs**
> To improve tax systems, developing countries must implement reforms to broaden the tax base, close loopholes, and enhance tax administration, ensuring that higher-income individuals and corporations contribute their fair share. Progressive taxation and robust measures to combat tax evasion are crucial for optimizing revenue collection and promoting social equity. Additionally, comprehensive technical assistance and capacity building are essential for efficient tax collection and sustainable management. By fostering a stable tax environment and creating attractive domestic investment opportunities, governments can mitigate capital flight and retain capital within the country to be invested in healthcare, education, and infrastructure, supporting economic growth and development. These combined efforts will enable developing countries to generate the necessary resources internally, reducing dependency on external aid and building a more resilient foundation for sustainable development.

# 3. Conditionality and New Actors: Financing the SDGs

The previous chapter highlighted external financing, public debt, domestic resource mobilization and taxation. In this chapter, an in-depth analysis is given on two pivotal emerging trends in the field of financing the SDGs, namely considerations on conditionality and new actors.

The nature of aid conditionality has recently evolved beyond the traditional economic realm. External financing for development is increasingly conditioned on making progress in areas such as human rights, good governance, and gender equality. Additionally, more attention is drawn towards making the aid more effective and efficient. Another emerging trend is the evolving landscape of new actors in financing the SDGs, in particular, philanthropy. On the one hand these new actors have increased the scale of available resources, strengthened the advocacy, and raised awareness on SDGs. Whereas on the other hand, they cause dependency, are difficult to harmonize and to hold accountable. The following sections of this chapter will address these trends in detail and provide some recommendations.

### 3.1. Conditionality

#### 3.1.1 Explanation of conditionality

Conditionality is a method used to enhance the effectiveness of aid and to foster the development of the recipient country (Guillaumont et al., 2023). Positive (promotional) conditionality rewards compliance with continued or increased aid, while negative (punitive) conditionality reduces or withdraws aid if conditions are not met (Tostensen, 2023). Aid conditionality manifests in three primary forms: economic, political and climate. Public external financing that is tied to economic conditionality is often related to macroeconomic policies. This is a common feature in aid programmes from the World Bank and the IMF such as their Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (Tostensen, 2023). Political conditionality

has expanded from its initial focus on human rights and democracy to include security issues and global public goods. Climate conditionality links cooperation to the adoption of pro-climate measures, such as reducing $CO_2$ emissions. These conditionalities can be further categorized as instrument-based or result-based.

Aid conditionality can be viewed as a "tool of power exertion", using aid to export particular political, social, and economic models to developing countries (Olivié, 2022, p. 1509). This approach allows donors to shape policies in aid-dependent states according to their own ideological models (Olivié, 2022). Hence, critical views on aid conditionality describe it as an intrusive tool that poses an infringement on the recipient country's sovereignty (Tostensen, 2023). Another negative outcome of aid conditionality is that withholding aid due to unmet conditions could cause immediate hardship for vulnerable populations. Finally, countries might focus on superficial changes to meet the conditions attached to the external financing rather than implement meaningful reforms.

There are also significant positive aspects linked to aid conditionality. For example, conditioning aid on human rights, good governance, and equality improvements can motivate countries to enact positive reforms they may otherwise deprioritize. Additionally, these aid conditions often align with broader development objectives, potentially leading to more sustainable and equitable growth.

### 3.1.2. Effectiveness of political conditionality

Research by Douch et al. (2022) suggests that making aid conditional on adherence to democratic values contributes to its effectiveness. Their econometric analysis reveals that aid becomes significantly more impactful when human rights are upheld. Conversely, the study identifies corruption and repression as key elements that diminish aid effectiveness. These findings underscore the importance of aligning aid with fundamental human rights and democratic values to enhance its overall impact.

The failure of sanctions to improve human rights conditions led to the adoption of the Human Rights-Based Approach to Development (HRBA), which integrates human rights principles into development aid, shifting the perspective from charity to entitlement (Tostensen, 2023). Implementing HRBA requires adapting to specific socio-political and economic conditions, facing challenges such as local corruption, entrenched power structures, and resistant political cultures. While traditional aid conditionality remains influential, it seems insufficient. Instead, non-economic dimensions, particularly human rights, are critical to enhancing aid effectiveness (Douch et al., 2022). Countries with better human rights protections experience more positive growth outcomes from aid, as stronger institutions and frameworks reduce corruption and repression, leading to more effective use of aid resources. Improving human rights provisions also reduces inequalities and enhances per capita income growth.

However, aid conditionality does not inherently guarantee political influence or dialogue between donors and recipients. Its effectiveness can be hampered by factors such as the lack of political will, insufficient involvement of local actors, mis-selection of individuals involved, and the scale of the project (Douch et al., 2022). For example, despite mechanisms and efforts in gender equity and migration projects, conditionalities have not significantly transformed Senegal's political approach to these issues. Success relies on the political will of recipient countries, deep contextual knowledge, and aligning HRBA with local traditions while ensuring genuine participation and empowerment of communities (Tostensen, 2023).

### 3.1.3. Mismatch between conditions & state capacity

One of the main problems with these conditions is the capacity of the recipient state. This can lead to a phenomenon that Lant Prichett and colleagues (2013) describe as "Isomorphic Mimicry". Countries take actions that improve the donor-defined criterion while the project has been a failure on the ground. Andrews and others (2017) use the case of public financial management in Mozambique that has

received one of the best assessments in Africa. However, when assessed on the de facto outcomes they did not perform well at all. Pritchett and De Weijer (2010) explain that this gap between the implementation and goals has been a major reason for failure of development projects. These strands of research suggest that in an effort to get the financial resources necessary, developing countries have been stuck in a capability trap, in which they have to adopt measures that they cannot implement. They recommend that if the conditions matched the current level of state capacity in these countries, they could gradually build the capabilities to solve their complex developmental problems. This is in line with the recommendations regarding ownership of the projects (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2023). The more the aid-receiving country can participate in the articulation of the project and the more the conditions are context-specific, the higher the probability of success.

Khan (2010) explains that development work should focus on areas where it is feasible and can produce the most developmental impact. This, he argues, comes from an analysis of the power and capabilities of the actors affected. Khan and Roy (2022) argue that in each economic sector it is possible to identify the specific actors with proper levels of power, capability, and interests that if provided with support, can produce the most effective developmental outcomes. Therefore, conditional aid should be sector-specific and informed by an analysis of the actors and power distribution within the sector. Whitfield and Buur (2014) show how these factors work in a comparative study of the sugar industry in Mozambique and the cocoa sector in Ghana. They argue that establishing markets, macroeconomic stability, and providing infrastructure and utilities are not enough and explain how the interests of the ruling elite and their alliances with capitalists and state bureaucrats shape the different paths toward the evolution of this industry among the two countries.

Another concern is that the conditions on foreign aid are not actually tied to the capacities necessary for the development of the countries. Sundaram and Chowdhury (2012) argue that the sets of capacities recognized as good governance are not necessarily the same characteristics distinguishing between the converging and diverging developing countries. They argue for "growth-enhancing" capacities, which are distinct from the good governance agenda. They also support targeted reforms to improve governance rather than wholesale reform, which may be more effective in accelerating economic growth. One of the growth-enhancing reforms mentioned by Khan (2009) are the reforms carried out in Malaysia during the 1980s and 1990s, including the public sector technology acquisition strategies using public enterprises with subcontracting for domestic firms and targeted infrastructure and incentives for multinational corporations with conditions on technology transfer.

### 3.1.4. Different lending institutions

Research indicates that the effectiveness of aid conditionalities is most potent when recipient countries lack alternative aid sources (Li, 2017). This scarcity enhances the donor's ability to credibly enforce conditions, as recipients are more likely to implement democratic reforms when faced with limited options. The absence of competing aid sources strengthens the donor's leverage, allowing for more convincing threats of aid withdrawal if aid conditions are not met. This highlights the complex relationship between aid conditionality, donor credibility, and recipient alternatives in shaping democratic outcomes in aid-recipient nations (Li, 2017).

The emergence of new lending institutions such as the BRICS New Development Bank (NDB) and the Asian Infrastructure Bank (AIIB), led by emerging economies, is reshaping the landscape of international development aid. These institutions provide alternatives to Western-led financial bodies like the World Bank and IMF, often without the stringent conditionalities typically imposed by these Western institutions. South-south cooperation (SSC) is grounded in principles such as respect for national sovereignty, national ownership, non-conditionality, and non-interference in domestic affairs (Chaturvedi et al., 2021). This shift challenges the effectiveness of traditional aid conditionality, as developing countries now have more options to secure funding without adhering to strict political or economic conditions (Hernandez, 2017).

New donors like China and India have evolved into major lenders, practicing alternative forms of conditionality (Guillaumont et al., n.d.). The presence of these new donors and their weaker levels of conditionality make it increasingly difficult to apply stringent conditions to traditional donor assistance, as it decreases recipients' dependence on traditional donors and weakens the ability of the traditional donors to credibly enforce aid agreements (Watkins, 2022). Qualitative evidence demonstrates the significant impact of alternative donors on traditional aid conditionality. For instance, a 1% increase in Chinese official finance as a percent of GDP is associated with an 11.8% decrease in the probability of satisfactory compliance with World Bank project conditions in African countries (Watkins, 2022).

The promise of unconditional aid is not fully realized, as the arrival of new donors often brings new forms of conditionality (Guillaumont et al., n.d.). However, development aid without the traditional conditionalities can have hidden strings attached to it. Donor countries might use the lack of conditionalities as a tool to gain political influence or to demand political alignment from the recipient country in the international political arena (Raess et al., 2022). Furthermore, aid allocation without traditional conditionalities can be instrumentalized by the donor country as a tool to gain access to the recipient country's market and resources (Jingdong et al., 2022).

### 3.1.5. Recommendations

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**Increase the level of country ownership in relation to aid conditionality.**
Temple (2010, p. 4481) suggests the "floating tranche" conditionality. While loans would still only be disbursed if the conditions have been met, this type of conditionality differentiates itself from more traditional approaches as the conditions are not evaluated at a specific date. Instead, the recipient government has the authority and flexibility to bring forward or delay the reforms as it sees fit (Temple, 2010). This also brings advantages for the donor's objectives as there is reduced pressure on the donor to disburse the loan on a given date with unmet conditions.

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**Base aid conditionalities on a nuanced and context-specific approach.**
Applying the HRBA to aid interventions is most successful when it is tailored to the specific political economy context of the recipient country. Adapting the programming to local conditions makes the protection and promotion of human rights possible by operating in politically informed ways (Tostensen, 2023, p. 472). This requires extensive country knowledge, special technical and political insights, commitment to building long-term relationships and political acumen to navigate context-specific constraints.

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**Establish a platform for regular dialogue between traditional donors and new donors as well as the recipient nations.**
This multistakeholder forum would promote transparency in aid practices and conditionalities. Furthermore, it would encourage the sharing of best practices and lessons learned to work towards developing common standards for responsible lending and conditionalities. The participation of the traditional donors in new lending institutions such as the AIIB is a first step and may lead to convergence of the new donors' aid programmes with the traditional model of conditionalities (Li, 2017, p. 217).

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**Conditions should be in line with the receiving state capacities.**
Premature load bearing and wishful thinking leads to getting stuck in a low capability trap. It is through the successful implementation that developing countries can increase their capacity to solve complex developmental problems.

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**Conditions should be sector-based and take into the account the distribution of power and interests of the actors.**
Actors in each economic section might support the reforms or resist them. A precise analysis of the power in each section can help identify the most effective interventions. These sectoral reforms can facilitate the next steps of reforms in the sections that currently might resist change.

**One size does not fit all.**
Aid conditions based on the pre-defined measures like quality of state or good governance indices might lead to regulations and policies that are irrelevant to the development of the receiving country.

### 3.2. New Actors

Philanthropic foundations and individuals have the financial bandwidth and disposition to finance development projects that often surpass institutional and governmental capabilities. New actors, such as NGOs and philanthropic foundations, have been playing a crucial role in financing the SDGs and development projects. However, there are some challenges due to lack of clear data on how much SDG-focused funding has been raised internationally. Nevertheless, there are some available data that serve as a clear indication of the important role of these new actors in financing the SDGs. For the purpose of this paper, the philanthropic sector is used as an example to highlight the role of new actors. For example: based on the 2023 Global Philanthropy Tracker (2023 GPT), 47 countries combined have sent a combined total of $70 billion in cross-border philanthropy in 2020. Additionally, research on mainly US-based foundations found that SDG-focused funding has totaled $217 billion between the years 2016 to 2020 (Vos, 2023)

On the international level, "the total SDG Funding worldwide in 2016 reached over USD $112 billion." (United Nations, 2019). Ghana as an example, philanthropic institutions have not only provided funding for the SDGs but have also demonstrated greater influence on development strategies. This was done by promoting transformative approaches to country-level development challenges, intended to ensure inclusive and sustained development. These strategies have made philanthropic institutions a major catalyst in advancing the SDGs and Ghana's development landscape (Kumi, 2019) "The SDG Foundation Giving Estimates Paper opined that a total of $651 billion from philanthropic foundations alone could be unlocked between 2016–2030 for the SDGs." (Vos, 2023)

There are several advantages and disadvantages to the role of new actors and in particular the philanthropic sector in financing the SDGs. The following section will highlight some of these advantages and disadvantages such as earmarking aid, advocacy and awareness, dependence, lack of coordination, and accountability.

### 3.2.1. Earmarking Aid: Financing specific SDG targets

A substantial amount of funding from the philanthropic sector is directed toward projects addressing specific SDGs. Certain SDGs, such as those related to health, education, and poverty alleviation have received the most attention and resources from the philanthropic sector. This targeted funding approach highlights the priorities of the philanthropic sector in addressing certain global challenges. For example: "[the] SDGs that receive the most philanthropic funding [in Indonesia] are SDG 8 (economic growth), followed by SDG 3 (health) and SDG 4 (education)" (Maudisha, 2022) This trend has advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, it is beneficial as significant amounts of funding and resources are going towards some of the SDGs leading to substantial progress in those areas. On the other hand, it is problematic as it means that other SDGs are being neglected. If all funding and resources are concentrated on certain SDGs, it creates a gap. Leaving other critical goals underfunded and hindering overall balanced progress toward sustainable development.

Foundations that provide restricted or earmarked funding such as financing specific SDG projects aim to exert greater control over how their resources are used, ensuring alignment with specific, pre-determined objectives and outcomes and although this method enhances the alignment between the donor's intentions and the grantee's implementation, reducing the risk of deviations from the desired goals to establish clear objectives and accountability. However, this means that all the resources and funding are directed towards specific goals. (OECD, 2024b)

### 3.2.2.  Advocacy and Awareness

Actors such as the philanthropic sector can play a major role in advocating and raising awareness on the SDG targets. According to a working paper by the Nation Bureau of Economic Research, a fundraising experiment was conducted "with an international development nonprofit organization in which a matching grant offered by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation raised more funds than one from an anonymous donor." (Karlan & List, 2012) Based on the results shown from this research it can be concluded that the platform of philanthropists can be leveraged for awareness to raise more funding for financing the SDGs.

Furthermore, philanthropic foundations can support and enhance awareness by incorporating the SDGs into their programmes and leading collaboratively on various platforms "as impact drivers, they can catalyze change and generate impact through big bets, collective action, cross-SDG partnerships; and as innovators, they exhibit a great willingness to test new ideas, adopt innovative approaches, forge new coalitions, and help de-risk investments. Yet, there is significant potential to further scale up philanthropic engagement in SDG implementation" (United Nations, 2019). As part of their work on the SDGs, the advisors of Rockefeller Philanthropy have created publications to provide donors practical advice on the planning, assessing, reporting, and acting upon these goals. (Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, 2024) Another example is the launch of "the SDG Philanthropy Platform, in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Foundation Center (now Candid), with seed funding from Conrad N. Hilton-, Ford- and Mastercard Foundations. The Platform can help foundations access useful country-specific information; locate allies within a country's development system; build stronger relationships and find good entry points for grantmaking; share strategies with other funders; and more easily track progress." (Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, 2024)

### 3.2.3.  Dependence

The reliance on philanthropic funds has increasingly become a critical issue, profoundly impacting the economic, political, and social frameworks within developing communities. Economically, such dependence can overshadow local businesses, stifle innovation, and sustain an economy overly reliant on external support. As communities grow accustomed to external aid, they often fail to develop independent economic strategies, resulting in a cycle of dependency that inhibits local entrepreneurial initiatives and long-term economic growth (Kinsbergen et al., 2022) Politically, reliance on philanthropy shifts local leaders' focus from long-term development to short-term aid, often aligning with donor preferences and leading to prioritization of donor-driven projects that undermine national interests and effective governance (OECD, 2023a). Socially, the continuous expectation of aid erodes community resilience by discouraging self-reliance and fostering dependence on inconsistent external support, which may be misaligned with local needs. This dependence not only stifles community initiatives but also creates barriers to social mobility for the poor by reinforcing income inequalities (Barchi et al., 2016)

### 3.2.4.  Lack of Coordination

Coordination among philanthropic organizations and aid agencies has historically been a persistent issue in the development field. Over the decades, numerous initiatives and agreements have been established to harmonize and enhance the effectiveness of aid delivery. Notably, the Paris Declaration

on Aid Effectiveness, the Accra Agenda for Action, and the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation have all aimed to streamline approaches and strengthen partnerships between donors and recipient countries. These initiatives sought to ensure that aid is delivered more efficiently and aligned with the strategic goals of the nations receiving support. (Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-Operation, 2011; OECD, 2005, 2008). Despite these concerted efforts, the implementation and awareness of these agreements remain uneven across the sector. For instance, within the context of the Busan Partnership, which was reinforced in 2011 in Busan, Korea, only a select few philanthropic actors, including the Gates Foundation, actively participate or are even aware of these frameworks (Grady, 2014) This limited engagement underscores a broader issue: many philanthropic organizations operate in silos, often disconnected from international efforts that aim to coordinate and optimize development aid.

However, even with these frameworks in place, the duplication of efforts remains a significant challenge. This redundancy not only wastes resources but also complicates the execution of development projects, leading to inefficiencies that hinder the overall impact of aid. Furthermore, the philanthropic sector often operates independently of these structured agreements and frameworks. Many philanthropic organizations overlook macro-level indicators and national statistics, focusing instead on delivering quick, visible results that can be directly attributed to their funding (Camargo et al., 2023) This approach frequently aligns with the interests of their boards or founders rather than the broader development goals, such as those outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically Partnership Goal 17 which aims to revitalize global partnerships for sustainable development (*Goal 17: Revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development*, n.d.)

### 3.2.5. Accountability

Philanthropy's role in global development is hampered by a lack of robust data and standardized reporting practices, making it challenging to measure its true impact. Despite efforts to adopt international standards like the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), the adoption rates remain low, especially among smaller foundations, with only 78 foundations listed on the IATI website, as of July 2024 (*IATI Registry*, n.d.) Even with frameworks like the Global Philanthropy Data Charter developed by WINGS, these guidelines are not binding and lack widespread acceptance within the philanthropic community, resulting in inconsistent transparency and reporting practices. (Philanthropy, 2016)

Monitoring and evaluation within philanthropy are further complicated by the sector's focus on immediate outputs rather than long-term systemic change, with independent evaluations being rare and most assessments failing to account for broader developmental contexts. According to the Center for Effective Philanthropy, although many foundations publicly share their funding strategies and goals, they remain less transparent about their own performance evaluations and the lessons learned from their initiatives. (Buteau et al., 2016) This lack of deep, actionable insight contributes to the sector's struggles with effectively measuring and demonstrating the impact of philanthropy.

Moreover, the fundamental challenge in philanthropic accountability lies in the governance structure of foundations, which are primarily accountable to their Boards rather than to the broader public or the beneficiaries of their funding. (Philanthropy, 2016) This internal focus on board-level accountability limits a broader societal understanding of philanthropy's impacts and undermines efforts to align philanthropic actions with global development goals. There is a critical need for a shift towards more comprehensive accountability practices that include not only financial transparency but also a deeper evaluation of philanthropic efforts in terms of their contribution to sustainable global development.

This issue is further illustrated by the study conducted by Hui-Cheng Yu (2020), which explores corporate philanthropy in controversial industries in China. The study highlights how corporate philanthropy is often strategically used to enhance corporate image and financial performance, raising questions about the transparency of philanthropic motives and the actual impacts of such initiatives. These findings underscore the broader sector's struggle with accountability, as even well-intentioned

philanthropic efforts may mask underlying business-oriented objectives rather than genuine societal improvement.

### 3.2.6. <u>Recommendations</u>

> **Data Gathering to Map and Deploy Philanthropic Efforts:**
> The effectiveness of global philanthropy in financing SDG projects is hampered by the lack of specific data on philanthropic flows across international borders. To optimize philanthropic resources, it is crucial to gather data on the amount of philanthropy that crosses borders, the destinations of these funds, and the causes they support. Through this data, philanthropic efforts can be mapped and deployed in the most effective manner.

> **Flexible Financing as a Substitute for Earmarked Financing:**
> To address the gap created by earmarked funding, flexible financing serves as a potential alternative. Flexible financing encompasses any type of philanthropic funding, whether it is through grants or other financial instruments, that is provided without any specific restrictions which allows for the possibility of the funding to go to any SDG targets rather than only a specific set of the targets.

> **Philanthropic actors in the sustainable development space need to align their work, to achieve UN's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17, "Partnership for Goals",**
> to deliver more than the sum of their parts. (Camargo et al., 2023) A unified approach can enhance the impact, limit duplication, and increase the likelihood of systemic change. Additionally, as philanthropies are very well connected to governments, NGOs, investors, and implementers they can serve as connectors to link these actors among an ecosystem of actors and donors, facilitating collaboration. These partnerships can lead to not only higher impact solutions by combining the strengths of the different actors but can also foster learning, sharing, and resource pooling.

# 4. Climate Financing

Climate financing and development financing are often mentioned in the same sentence. The two, however, are not the same. Climate financing is intended to go beyond development finance, rather than be subsidiary (Eyckmans et al., 2016). Climate financing is important to discuss. In a recent UNCTAD Report (2024c), it was revealed that developing countries are currently spending more on interest payments than climate financing. This section will deal with climate financing. First, the relevant concepts will be introduced. Secondly, a historical background will be provided. Thirdly, an update will be given on the current situation of climate financing. Fourthly, related challenges will be presented. Lastly, recommendations for improvement will be made.

In the simplest terms, climate finance refers to the financial resources needed to deal with climate change. Climate finance can be drawn from various sources, including public and private. Generally, climate financing flows from developed to developing countries (UNFCCC, n.d.-a). and can be categorized as mitigation or adaptation finance. Mitigation finance is related to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Examples of mitigation finance include investments needed for new forms of energy (UNFCCC, n.d.-a). Adaptation finance, on the other hand, pertains to adjusting to the realities of the changing climate. The financing should enable societies to adapt. Unlike development financing, adaptation financing is specifically focused on climate resilience. Not to be confused with the Loss & Damages Fund, which deals with compensation, adaptation financing is about preparation. An example of adaptation funding is the development of drought-resistant crops (Larsen et al., 2022).

## 4.1. Historical Overview

The concept of contemporary Climate Finance originates in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Article 4.4 of the Convention refers to the assistance developed countries shall provide to developing ones, focusing on those "particularly vulnerable" to cover the costs of adaptation. As a result, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) was created and started providing funding to some initiatives. However, even though it was a landmark recognition of the importance of finance in tackling climate change, UNFCCC's wording faced some challenges. "Particularly vulnerable" was not a defined term, nor were distribution criteria established, which led to the unfair allocation of funds (Khan et al., 2020). Additionally, adaptation was given significantly less importance than mitigation, and no references to compensate for the damage produced by the developed countries were included (Ciplet et al., 2015).

Following the COP7 in Marrakech, three Funds were created focusing on LDCs. This landmark was followed by the Bali Action Plan in 2007, which explicitly incorporated the LDCs and SIDS in "particularly vulnerable" countries and made the Adaptation Fund (AF) operational. Still, the distributional criteria were not established, and no goal was set. It was not until the Copenhagen Accord and the Cancun Agreements in 2010 that a specific amount committed to climate finance was established. US$30 billion as a fast-start and an increase to US$100 billion by 2020.

The next big landmark after adopting those agreements is the 2015 Paris Agreement, which further established several obligations for developed countries. Article 9 presents not only the importance of finance by developed countries but also highlights the relevance of counting on a wide variety of sources, especially public ones, balancing adaptation, and mitigation financing, supporting country-driven strategies, and even providing information on the contribution countries make.

The aftermath of the Paris Agreement, however, came with some progress but also with multiple challenges. Before addressing such challenges, the current situation of climate finance will be presented.

## 4.2. Current Situation

On the occasion of the COP15 of the UNFCCC in Copenhagen (2009), the developed countries set the collective goal of mobilizing USD 100 billion per year by 2020 in order to provide financial support to developing countries for the mitigation and adaptation to climate change. At COP21 in Paris this commitment was extended to 2025 with its full achievement in 2022 thanks to a mobilization of USD 115.9 billion in climate finance, which represented an increase of 29% in comparison to the previous year (OECD, 2024a). While financing is provided at various levels, including regional, bilateral, and multilateral sources, the largest contribution is guaranteed by the latter (Independent Expert Group on Climate Finance, 2020). Conversely, private investments in climate adaptation remain insufficient.

According to the Financing for Sustainable Development Report 2024 (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2024), the frequency of extreme weather events and climate-related catastrophes has increased significantly over the last two decades. From an annual average of around 310 between 2000 and 2020, the number of incidents has risen to over 340 since 2020. The majority are occurring in low-income countries and affecting their populations. The economic and social costs associated with climate-related events are predominantly borne by countries that are already grappling with significant socio-economic challenges, impeding their progress and development. Furthermore, the majority of LDCs are striving to achieve a multitude of SDG targets simultaneously. This is compounded by the fact that central banks are heavily reliant on other financial institutions, which hampers the implementation of effective climate policy (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2023). Notwithstanding the empirical evidence, climate finance is characterized by inconsistency, insufficiency, and geographical differentiation. A clear imbalance in climate finance has a significant impact on the LDCs and SIDS, who received only 14% and 2% respectively of total climate support in 2018 (Independent Expert Group on Climate Finance, 2020). In 2015-2016, the ten largest climate

finance recipients were "India, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Kenya, Turkey, Ethiopia, [and] Myanmar" (Timperley, 2018). In the same period, the ten most vulnerable countries to climate change were "Chad, Central African Republic, Eritrea, Guinea-Bissau, The DRC, Sudan, Afghanistan, Somalia, Liberia, [and] Niger" (Chen et al., 2023). Although too simplistic to jump to conclusions, this could indicate a mismatch between supply and demand.

In addition to the primary financing mechanisms already in place, a new fund known as the Loss and Damage Fund was established at COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh (2022) and operationalized on the first day of the COP28 in Dubai (2023) to provide further support for developing countries in offsetting the costs of economic losses incurred by extreme weather events. Nevertheless, to the present day the fund remains unimplemented with only a preliminary recommendation regarding the structure and procedures to be enforced.

What are the next steps? In order to achieve the target outlined in Article 2 of the Paris Agreement (2015), which concerns the consistency between financial flows, a pathway towards low greenhouse gas emissions and climate-resilient development, it is estimated that an annual five-fold increase of climate finance will be required by 2050 (Buchner et al., 2023).

### *4.3. Challenges*

Despite significant progress, since the adoption of the UNFCCC, climate finance, as well as sustainable development finance, has not been exempt from challenges. In fact, many of the original challenges remain unaddressed. In the following part, a synthesis of the current main challenges for Climate Finance will be presented.

#### 4.3.1. Fragmentation

The climate finance architecture is extremely fragmented, with between 100 and 500 funding channels between bilateral, multilateral, public, and private sources (G20, 2015). This fragmentation can be considered positive as it increases funding options and the possibility of getting the funds needed for adaptation or mitigation efforts. Yet, this fragmentation implies that accounting for climate finance becomes extremely difficult, with challenges in tracking contributions (Watson & Schalatek, n.d.). This massive number of funding channels also multiplies transaction costs, as well as administrative burdens on recipient countries to access those funds (Robinson & Dornan, 2017). Indeed, different mechanisms have different eligibility criteria, review processes, and mostly, they are not adapted to the needs of SIDCs and LDCs (OECD, 2023b).

#### 4.3.2. Accounting and Monitoring Climate Finance

Accounting for climate finance presents multiple challenges. There are no uniform criteria for instruments to be considered when addressing the US$100 billion goal, whether loans and grants, only grants, or even private sector contributions. This means that countries report on what they think is best, and there is no uniformity, which affects the accuracy of the data (Pauw et al., 2022). In fact, this lack of accounting criteria led, in 2012, to 80% of climate finance composition being made of Official Development Assistance (ODA), which meant that they were not new resources but rather funds already allocated before (Nakhooda et al., n.d.).

Additionally, the list of countries required to provide climate finance has not been modified since 1992, which means that many contributions to Climate Countries by countries such as China go unreported unless voluntarily done so by countries. Thus, the list should be extended to include those countries that are currently capable of committing funds for Climate Change efforts (Pauw et al., 2022).

### 4.3.3. Loans over Grants

As with sustainable development finance, climate finance is predominantly based on loans. According to the OECD (2024), in 2022, 69% of Climate Finance took the form of loans, whereas 28% took the form of grants. A similar imbalance was also seen in 2019 (OECD, 2021), which calls attention to the consequences that unsustainable levels of debt may have on development and effective climate change adaptation efforts (Carty et al., n.d.). It is interesting to note that MDBs are the largest providers of climate financing.

In fact, none of the international instruments define what types of funding are more desirable or whether there should be a balance on funding sources. On the contrary, they highlight that funding may come from various sources, paving the way for loan prioritization.

### 4.3.4. Technical Capacity and Knowledge of Developing Countries Governments

Developing countries receiving climate financing face numerous challenges in terms of planning for climate change adaptation, including data collection, technical knowledge on adaptation strategies, and administrative deficits to deal with the massive financial architecture and demands of funding requests and reporting (OECD, 2023b; Watson & Schalatek, n.d.). This means that they either face difficulties in accessing funds or that when they do, they do not have the mechanisms to apply them to current ongoing data-driven climate change local policies.

Furthermore, the diversity of national instruments for climate finance also demands solid institutions to work and meaningfully contribute to finance demands. Indeed, sources such as targeted lending, green bonds, loan guarantees, weather-indexed insurance, tax credits, feed-in-tariffs, National Development Banks or National Climate Funds, and demanding companies' information disclosure all require highly trained personnel and robust policies and legislation that many countries struggle to achieve (Bhandary et al., 2021).

### 4.3.5. Adaptation vs. Mitigation Funding Imbalance

Despite the Paris Agreement's commitment to balance mitigation and adaptation actions, finance does not reflect this commitment. In fact, between 2017 and 2021, between 20% and 30% of the total amount of Climate Finance was allocated to adaptation efforts, with 14% of the total allocated to cross-cutting (mitigation and adaptation) and the rest to mitigation (United Nations Environment Programme, 2023). It should be noted that adaptation funding is needed by vulnerable communities to address their increased exposure and sensitivity to climate change and enhance their adaptive capacity (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Ipcc), 2023).
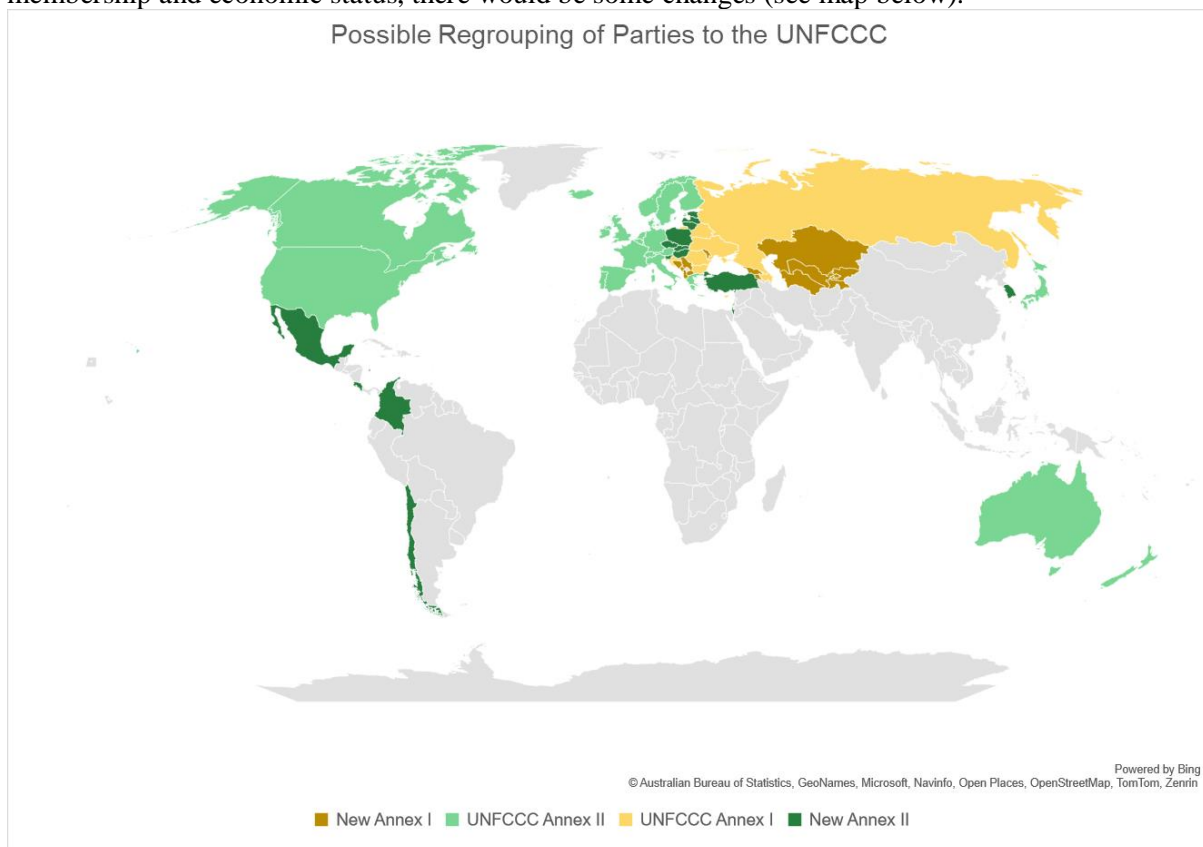
### *4.4. Recommendations*

**Regrouping donor and recipient countries**
The current division of donor and recipient countries for climate financing is based on the 1992 UNFCCC. A regrouping of the UNFCCC Parties can generate extra climate finance as more countries will be required to generate funding for developing countries (Annex II). Equally, an expansion of Annex I means fewer countries are in need to receive climate finance. However, using the 1992 UNFCCC criteria could lead to unfair and/or obsolete results. Some countries, although current OECD members, could not reasonably be expected to provide climate finance for other countries. As such, a new classification system should be developed. Any new classification should be comprehensive and encompass several metrics e.g., GDP/capita, (historical) emissions, vulnerability, etc.

Under the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, parties are separated into three groups: Annex I, Annex II, and Non-Annex I (UNFCCC, n.d.-b). Each of the three groups has its own obligations and commitments. Annex I countries are the OECD members of 1992 and the Economies in Transition at the time. Under the Convention, these countries are required to limit their emissions. The Annex II countries are similar, but only include the OECD members. Countries in this group are obliged to financially support developing countries (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 1992, Article 4.3). The Non-Annex I parties are all remaining member states. The financial commitment of Annex II countries was further underlined a few years later under the Kyoto Protocol (Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 1997). The grouping of states under these conventions has a large effect on determining the direction of climate-related financial flows.

A lot has changed since 1992. If the UNFCCC's Parties were to be regrouped based on today's OECD membership and economic status, there would be some changes (see map below).



Possible Regrouping of Parties to the UNFCCC

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Powered by Bing

■ New Annex I   ■ UNFCCC Annex II   ■ UNFCCC Annex I   ■ New Annex II

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**Invest in Training and Domestic Capacity Building**
To navigate the complex funding landscape, countries should be supported. The goal of such support should be the strengthening of domestic capacity. To achieve this, knowledge sharing Programmes could be established to learn from best-in-class solutions, methods, and applications. Where necessary, external support should be offered to assist communities in procurement and use of climate financing. By building domestic capacity, communities are better able to apply climate financing to successfully improve mitigation and adaptation independently. This, in turn, can free the capacity to help other communities, and promote ownership in the use of climate financing for local needs.

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**Design and Implement an Official Unified Platform for Climate Funding**
To address the fragmentation of the financial aid architecture as well as accounting and monitoring mechanisms, a unified official platform for climate funding can be created. The platform would be voluntary for States and Non-State actors to charge information on 1) Types of funds available, 2)

Purpose of the funds, 3) Requisites for applying, 4) Allocation mechanisms, 5) Funds already allocated indicating country, project/programme, and progress. In this way, the existing fragmentation can be navigated by countries in need of funding, understanding which fund satisfies their needs better and thus helping them make better decisions, and which overlapping funds would exist between funding mechanisms. In fact, an Artificial Intelligence (AI) tool can be created so that countries in need of funding may charge their needs and the system informs which are the best funding options available. At the same time, this tool would allow for more accurate monitoring of climate finance and determine if goals are reached or if efforts need to increase. As a result, the Platform will lower the administrative burden of countries, the transaction costs, avoid overlapping, enhance coordination, and facilitate the access to finance sources. Indeed, it may even help donors to design their strategies based on identified actors and needs.

**Offer more climate grants instead of climate loans**
Given the international scale of climate change, it is in all countries' interest to mitigate, and successfully adapt to, its effects. In other words, country A spending money to help country B mitigate GHG emissions benefits both countries. Because both countries benefit, it could be considered unfair for country A to charge country B for their assistance. As such, climate financing should be grant-based as much as possible. To help achieve this, more attention should be given to the co-benefits of offering grants. This line of reasoning can be applied to both mitigation and adaptation financing. Mitigation, with a reduction of GHG emissions, speaks for itself. The benefits of adaptation grants are less tangible. However, as the Global Commission on Adaptation (2019, p. 9) showed, "investing $1.8 trillion globally in five areas from 2020 to 2030 could generate $7.1 trillion in total net benefits.". This means that it is still economically beneficial to offer grants.

**Balancing adaptation and mitigation funding**
Current imbalances between climate mitigation and adaptation funding must be addressed. To do so, it is fundamental to illustrate the benefits of long-term adaptation funding and, thus, how it reduces future costs and enhances community resilience. Accurate data and models should be produced by States to illustrate the dire consequences on adaptation deficits even in huge mitigation investment scenarios, and vice versa to stimulate adaptation funding without reducing mitigation funds. Additionally, orienting reconstruction and damage reparation efforts to resilience can serve as a good entry point for enhancing adaptation efforts. In the implementation of the Loss and Damage Fund, for example, a precise allocation in percentage terms of damage reparation can be defined (e.g., 60%) and, at the same time, a specific amount for adaptation and climate change resilience can be allocated (e.g., 40%). Consequently, countries most severely impacted by extreme climate events are enabled to implement actions that allow them to prevent similar events in the future.

# 5. Conclusions & Recommendations

In a nutshell, financing sustainable development in the wake of 2030 is a multifaceted challenge. The upcoming Summit of the Future has the potential to lay the path towards securing adequate finances for developing countries and align the chase for achieving the SDGs with renewed efforts. As discussed earlier, financing sustainable development depends upon multiple angles: resources for sustainable development which depend upon external financing measures such as foreign direct investment, addressing the issue of compounding public debt, and mobilization of domestic resources to advance development. Furthermore, it is also required that new actors (NGOs and philanthropists) have certain strengths such as advocacy and awareness but are limited by lack of coordination and accountability. Also, the aspect of tying funding with conditionalities such as social development is often misused as a leverage tool against developing countries. Moreover, climate financing is presented as an example to demonstrate how sustainable development can be financed to achieve SDG targets.

Risk mitigation measures such as political stability should be enhanced to attract private sector investment. It should also be complemented by strengthening financial stability and supporting the development of local financial markets through improved legal and institutional frameworks and by strengthening local currency. Furthermore, the international financial architecture should be reviewed to adapt to socio-economic realities to address the issue of compounding public debt. The debt vulnerability of developing countries should be considered by lending bodies such as the IMF when releasing loans and DSCs should be democratized for exogenous shocks. In order to improve domestic resource mobilization, the tax administration systems should be modernized to prevent the flight of capital.

As stated earlier, identifying new actors, and addressing conditionalities is also crucial to securing sustainable financing. Increasing the level of country ownership and basing aid conditionalities on context-specific approaches should be employed to bring a nuanced approach to securing sustainable financing. Furthermore, the conditions attached should be in-line with the receiving state's capacities and a "one size does not fit all" should be observed. Moreover, new actors such as NGOs and philanthropist have certain advantages such as earmarking aid, advocacy and awareness and disadvantages of being dependent, lacking coordination and accountability which should be addressed.

In the end, climate financing has been facing issues despite being a focus point for developing countries. It could be addressed by regrouping the donor and recipient countries according to new dynamics, investing in training and domestic capacity building, designing, and implementing an official unified platform for climate funding. Furthermore, offering more grants rather than loans could take the pressure off developing countries as well.

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# Gender, Youth and Civil Society Inclusion in UN Peacekeeping Missions

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**Introduction**

The present paper aims to examine inclusive practices in peacekeeping operations, with a particular focus on gender, youth, and civil society engagement. By analysing current practices within United Nations operations, it seeks to provide comprehensive recommendations for enhancing inclusivity in peacekeeping processes. Peace operations, as defined by the UN, involve deploying troops and personnel to conflict zones, monitoring ceasefires, protecting civilians, and supporting the delivery of humanitarian aid. These operations are underpinned by three fundamental principles: consent of the parties, impartiality, and the non-use of force except in self-defense and defense of the mandate.

This paper's analysis is structured to first address gender inclusivity, then youth involvement, and finally, the role of civil society. It considers various challenges and impacts associated with peacekeeping operations, such as navigating complex political environments and ensuring adequate funding and personnel to carry out missions effectively. Through this structured approach, the paper highlights the importance of inclusive practices in achieving sustainable peace and security in conflict-affected regions.

**Gender**

*Preface and Definitions*

UN Peace Missions are mandated by the Security Council to implement the directives outlined in the Security Council resolutions on Women, Peace and Security across all peace functions. Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) was groundbreaking in recognising the disproportionate and unique impact of armed conflict on women and girls. This resolution acknowledged the crucial contributions women and girls make to conflict prevention, peacekeeping, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding.[2] It underscored the importance of their equal and comprehensive participation as key agents in achieving and maintaining peace and security. As well as stressing the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.

Resolution 1325 urges all actors to increase the participation of women and incorporate gender perspectives in all UN peace and security efforts. It also calls on all parties to the conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, in situations of armed conflict.[3] The resolution provides several important operational mandates with implications for Member States and the entities of the UN system. Nine subsequent resolutions on Women, Peace and Security (1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, 2122, 2242, 2467, 2493) have since been adopted, stressing the importance of women's leadership and meaningful participation in the prevention and resolution of conflicts; addressing the impact of sexual violence; promoting the development and use of measures and standards for monitoring the implementation of women, peace and security mandates; training and capacity building on gender equality and women, peace and security for peacekeeping personnel; engaging with civil society more comprehensively and enabling an improved understanding of gender dynamics of conflict.

Implementing Women Peace and Security (WPS) priorities is a political commitment in "the Secretary General's Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) initiative"[4], which reaffirms that women's full, equal, and meaningful participation in peace processes and political solutions is essential for effective peacekeeping.

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[2] WHO, Gender and Health, https://www.who.int/health-topics/gender#tab=tab_1.

[3] Muehlenhard, C.L., Peterson, Z.D. Distinguishing Between *Sex* and *Gender*: History, Current Conceptualizations, and Implications. *Sex Roles* 64, 791–803 (2011). https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-011-9932-5

[4] United Nations Peacekeeping, https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/action-for-peacekeeping-a4p.

UN Support for women's rights began with the organisation's founding charter. Among the purposes of the UN declared in Article 1 of its Charter[5] is "To achieve international co-operations (…) in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion." Ultimately, Gender Equality was made part of the International Human Rights Law by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948 and adopted by the SG. This milestone document recognised that "*All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights*" and that "*everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms outlined in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, ... birth or other status*."

As follows, gender refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls, and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviours, and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl, or boy, as well as relationships with each other. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time. Indeed, the Gender term interacts with but is different from sex, which refers to the biological and physiological characteristics of females, males, and intersex persons, such as chromosomes, hormones, and reproductive organs. *Nevertheless, the current definitions of Gender have become more expansive since SCR 1350." Consequently, United Nations mechanisms and bodies have increasingly noted the importance of including LGBTI individuals in their work against gender-based discrimination[6]. For instance, UN Women defines "gender" as: "the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys... These attributes, opportunities, and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialisation processes. They are context/ time-specific and changeable... Gender is part of the broader socio-cultural context".*

Similarly, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women states: "The term "sex" here refers to biological differences between men and women. The term "gender" refers to socially constructed identities, attributes and roles for women and men and society's social and cultural meaning for these biological differences resulting in hierarchical relationships between women and men and in the distribution of power and rights favouring men and disadvantaged women. This social positioning of women and men is affected by political, economic, cultural, social, religious, ideological, and environmental factors and can be changed by culture, society, and community"[7].

*Gender Inclusion in UN Peace Missions*

Over the past decades, the United Nations has increasingly recognised the critical importance of gender inclusion in peace missions. Historically, these missions were male dominated, with minimal female participation and gender perspectives often overlooked. However, UN Security Council resolution 1325, adopted in 2000, marked a pivotal shift, emphasising the necessity of integrating women into peacekeeping efforts. This resolution laid the groundwork for subsequent policies and actions promoting gender equality within UN operations.

In the years following resolution 1325, the UN has made concerted efforts to enhance women's representation and participation in peace missions. Establishing the UN Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda further reinforced these commitments, aiming to ensure that women's perspectives and

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[5] Charter of United Nations, Repertory of practice of United Nations Organs, Chapter 1 Purposes and principles, Article https://legal.un.org/repertory/art1.shtml?_gl=1*1wsgmhg*_ga*MTQ5MDc2OTIyNy4xNzE4MjkxNzM4*_ga_TK9BQL5X7Z*MTcyMDAxMTk0Ni40LjAuMTcyMDAxMTk0Ni4wLjAuMA...

[6] For more details, as a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time. Indeed, The Gender term interacts with but is different from sex, which refers to the biological and physiological characteristics of females, males, and intersex persons, such as chromosomes, hormones, and reproductive organs

[7] Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). General Recommendation No. 28 on the Core Obligations of States Parties under Article 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. 2010.

contributions are adequately integrated into all peace and security initiatives. Critical resolutions such as 1820, 1888, 1889, and 1960 have built on the foundations of 1325, addressing issues such as sexual violence in conflict and the need for accountability and protection measures.

Even though these new resolutions represent a significant normative advancement, it is essential to highlight that they can also be interpreted as less ambitious than 1325. In addition to the eight-year hiatus it took for the UNSC to implement new resolutions on the theme, they once again focused on the issue of sexual violence. This indisputably relevant topic represents only one portion of the Agenda. Some specialists explain this interpretation by pointing out that the WPS Agenda represents an attempt of the UN to respond to the critiques it received regarding cases of sexual abuse involving blue helmets and authorised personnel in peace operations.

Furthermore, although we can note some advances in the training established to improve the implementation of the WPS Agenda, "the same cannot be said about the development of guidelines to integrate gender perspectives as part of mission planning, for mission chiefs and leaders and military contingents and police units"[8]. As perhaps an example of this, of all the speeches made by high-level UN officials in 2019, only 28% referred to the participation of women in peace processes, and only 18% of peace agreements signed between 1990 and 2015 made mention of women, girls, and gender.[9]

The status of gender inclusion in UN peace missions reveals both progress and ongoing challenges. As of 2023, women constitute approximately 11% of troops and 21% of police personnel in peace operations.[10] While these numbers reflect an improvement, they fall short of the UN's targets and underscore the persistent gender gap. In 2021, the Secretary-General's commitment to gender parity led to women achieving equal representation in leadership roles for the first time across all UN missions. However, this progress has not been sustained, and women's representation in leadership positions declined to 36% by the end of 2023, highlighting the ongoing global struggle for gender equality in power and leadership roles.[11] Moreover, women in peacekeeping roles often face significant obstacles, including discrimination, lack of support, and limited resources and opportunities for leadership positions.

To address these challenges and further advance gender inclusion, the UN has implemented various initiatives and frameworks. The Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy (2018-2028) aims to increase the proportion of women in military and police components to 15% and 25% respectively by 2028.[12] Additionally, the Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations seeks to identify and overcome barriers to women's participation through targeted funding and innovative approaches. These efforts are essential in ensuring that peace missions are more effective, inclusive, and reflective of the diverse populations they serve.

The analysis and recommendations provided in this report are driven by the identified gaps and challenges in achieving gender parity in UN peace missions. These recommendations are formulated from the perspective of young professionals and in the representation of diverse cultures and nationalities, emphasising the need for inclusive and equitable peacekeeping practices.

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[8] Saint-Pierre, Kristine. *Implementing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Peace Operations: Overview of Recent Efforts and Lessons Learned*, PPC, 2011.

[9] WGWPS. *Working Group on Women, Peace and Security*, 2020. Available in: https://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/publications/

[10] United Nations Peacekeeping. Gender Parity Target Achievers: Troop-Contributing Countries achieving gender parity targets. Available in: https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/gender

[11] United Nations. Women, Peace and Security Highlights of UN Peacekeeping in 2023. *Navigating Challenges and Driving Change,* 2020. Available in: https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/dpo_wps_report_2023-may24-digital.pdf

[12] United Nations Peacekeeping. *Women in Peacekeeping*. Available in: https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/women-peacekeeping

*Current Practices and Challenges*

Gender-specific initiatives/activities are pursued by 5 of the 11 peacekeeping missions, including UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), UN Organization Mission in Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), UN Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS), UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), and UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). The following paragraphs detail the gender-specific initiatives and challenges faced by various United Nations peacekeeping missions, highlighting both internal and external efforts to integrate gender perspectives and promote gender equality and the challenges connected to them.

MINUSCA's internal gender-specific initiatives focus on integrating gender perspectives into its operations and enhancing staff capabilities regarding gender issues. The mission has successfully developed and disseminated a comprehensive Gender Strategy (2019-2022), supported by the appointment and training of gender focal points within various components and sections. This strategy ensures that gender considerations are central to all mission activities, fostering a culture of inclusivity. Additionally, the mission has implemented a robust monitoring and evaluation system to track progress on critical Women, Peace and Security (WPS) indicators, such as participation (percentage of women in peacekeeping missions), protection indicators (incidence of gender-based violence), etc., producing quarterly data to inform strategic decisions.

MINUSCA collaborates with government institutions, civil society organisations, and international partners to promote gender equality and women's participation in peace processes and political life. The mission has been instrumental in mobilising and training Central African women leaders, significantly increasing their representation in peace negotiations and political advocacy. For instance, the Khartoum talks saw the participation of eight women in the delegation, with one woman being a signatory to the 2019 Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation.[13] Additionally, the mission has increased the inclusion of women in local committees for peace and reconciliation, reaching 35% in 2023, representing a 15% rise within the last 4 years. The mission also provided technical and institutional support to women's organisations that resulted in the establishment of 12 "Circles of Peace". Through these circles, 300 trained women work to promote peace and social cohesion within their communities.[14] Furthermore, MINUSCA's advocacy efforts have led to a notable presence of women in the monitoring mechanisms of the peace agreement and the adoption of a new Electoral Code favouring gender equality.

Despite the significant strides made by MINUSCA's gender-specific initiatives, several challenges hinder the full realisation of their objectives. Internally, one of the primary obstacles is the persistent need for comprehensive gender mainstreaming across all mission components and sections. While the Gender Strategy (2019-2022) has been developed and disseminated, ensuring its effective implementation requires continuous training and capacity building of mission staff, which can be resource intensive. MINUSCA faces several challenges in promoting gender equality and women's participation in the Central African Republic (CAR). Cultural and societal norms that traditionally marginalised women and limit their roles in political and public life are significant barriers. These deep-rooted attitudes require sustained advocacy and education efforts to change. Furthermore, the security situation in CAR, characterised by ongoing conflict and instability, poses a considerable challenge to implementing gender-specific initiatives effectively. Women leaders and activists often face threats and violence, deterring their active participation. Limited resources and coordination among international, national, and local actors also complicate efforts to support and scale up gender-focused programmes.

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[13] MINUSCA. "Gender Section," August 19, 2021. https://minusca.unmissions.org/en/gender.
[14] United Nations Peacekeeping. "Women's Participation in Peace Processes Is Not Only a Right, It's," n.d. https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/womens-participation-peace-processes-is-not-only-right-its-way-to-lasting-peace.

Secondly, MONUSCO has internally implemented several initiatives to promote gender parity and inclusivity within its workforce, aligning with the UN System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity launched in 2017. The mission has set annual targets for increasing the representation of women among international staff and has developed guidance on recruitment, promotion, and creating a supportive work environment. By December 2021, women comprised 20.6% of the national and international civilian staff, 26.5% of Individual Police Officers, and 16.7% of Formed Police Units. Despite these efforts, the representation of women in the MONUSCO Force remains low at 5.4%, although this marks an increase from previous years. Challenges persist in achieving gender parity, including the need for continuous education on the benefits of inclusivity for operational effectiveness and peacebuilding.

Externally, MONUSCO faces significant obstacles in promoting full women's participation and representation in peace, justice, and political processes in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Cultural and socio-economic barriers, coupled with the persistent threat of sexual and gender-based violence, hinder women's involvement in these critical areas. MONUSCO works to assist the Congolese government and other stakeholders in creating an environment conducive to women's participation, particularly for survivors of sexual violence. However, the limited representation of women in national and local peace processes reflects the broader societal challenges and the mission's ongoing need to lead by example. Efforts to engage more women in disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration activities, as well as security sector reform, are crucial but face resistance from entrenched traditional views that marginalise women. Addressing these challenges requires sustained advocacy, capacity-building initiatives, and collaborative efforts with local communities to shift cultural norms and ensure the protection and empowerment of women in the DRC.[15]

Third, UNMISS's internal gender-specific initiatives have focused on enhancing the capacities and awareness of its staff regarding gender mainstreaming, gender equality, and sexual- and gender-based violence (SGBV). The Gender Section provides systematic technical and operational support per the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) Gender Equality Policy and the mission's strategic plans. This includes the integration of gender perspectives into conflict analysis, mission planning, and reporting. The Gender Section also offers capacity development through training programmes, such as those provided to the UNMISS Military component and the Ceasefire Transitional Security Arrangement Monitoring Mechanism (CTSAMM), enhancing the skills and readiness of Force Gender Focal Points and Advisors on gender and SGBV issues. Despite these efforts, challenges persist in ensuring consistent gender mainstreaming across all mission components, overcoming resistance to change, and maintaining robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track progress and impact.

Externally, UNMISS has been actively engaging with various stakeholders, including government institutions, civil society organisations, and UN agencies, to promote women's participation in peace and security processes. The mission has facilitated dialogue processes, such as the Global Open Days, allowing women leaders from civil society to discuss their experiences and concerns with senior mission leadership. Through partnerships with UN Women and other UN entities, UNMISS has implemented bottom-up, inclusive approaches like Women Peace Forums to enhance women's engagement in peace initiatives. Notable successes include the increased representation of women in peace agreements, such as the historical participation of women in the South Sudan peace processes and ensuring significant female participation in local peace initiatives. However, these external efforts face substantial challenges, including cultural and societal barriers that limit women's roles in public

[15] ACCORD. "Advancing Gender Equality and Women's Participation in Peace Processes in the Democratic Republic of Congo: The Experience of MONUSCO – ACCORD," March 10, 2022. https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/advancing-gender-equality-and-womens-participation-in-peace-processes-in-the-democratic-republic-of-congo-the-experience-of-monusco/#:~:text=To%20increase%20women's%20representation%2C%20and,a%20conduci ve%20work%20environment%20to.

life, security threats to women leaders, and resource constraints that hinder the scaling up of gender-focused programmes.

Fourth, internally, UNFICYP has made significant strides in promoting gender equality within its ranks, achieving a milestone by having women's top three leadership positions: the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the Force Commander, and the Police Commissioner. This internal leadership structure sets a strong precedent for gender representation in peace missions globally.[16] Additionally, UNFICYP has integrated gender perspectives into its operations through dedicated training on gender-responsive peacekeeping. Military troops undergo pre-deployment training that includes WPS-sensitive issues, ensuring that gender considerations are woven into daily activities. Despite these advances, challenges persist. The military component faces difficulties operationalising the WPS agenda due to the hierarchical nature of military command and control structures and the limitations of the mission's mandate.[17] Additionally, out of approximately 1,000 peacekeepers, only 5% are women, highlighting the ongoing challenge of achieving gender parity within the mission.[18]

Externally, UNFICYP actively engages with civil society organisations to foster peacebuilding initiatives that emphasise gender equality. By supporting programmes that bring together women from Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities, the mission aims to bridge the long-standing divide and promote inclusive peacebuilding. For example, the mission has facilitated peacebuilding programmes that provide youth, particularly young women, with skills in inclusive peacebuilding. Establishing the Technical Committee on Gender Equality and launching the joint Action Plan in 2022 underscore these efforts. However, significant challenges remain. The absence of a comprehensive security-led agenda within the WPS framework limits the effectiveness of these initiatives. While there is robust engagement with civil society, the mission's focus on grassroots activities often overlooks integrating WPS principles into formal security and defence institutions. This oversight creates scepticism among officials and hampers the holistic implementation of the WPS agenda. Additionally, only 30% of the peacebuilding initiatives specifically target women, underscoring the need for more focused efforts to ensure gender considerations are fully integrated into peace and security frameworks.

Lastly, UNIFIL has implemented various internal practices to promote gender equality and mainstream gender perspectives. The Gender Section provides systematic technical and operational support to mission components, aligning with the DPO Gender Equality Policy and mission-specific strategies. This includes integrating gender perspectives into conflict analysis, mission planning, and reporting and offering capacity development through training programmes. For example, the Gender Section provides regular induction training on gender and Sexual- and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), enhancing the readiness and skills of personnel, particularly the military component. Notably, 4,921 UNIFIL military and civilian personnel have received gender mainstreaming training, including 452 women. However, challenges remain in ensuring consistent gender mainstreaming across all mission components. Resistance to change and ingrained biases among some staff members can impede the effective implementation of these initiatives. Additionally, maintaining robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the impact of gender mainstreaming efforts is logistically challenging and resource intensive.

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[16] "Cyprus: First Time in UN History a Mission and Peace Force Is Led by Women | Security Women," n.d., https://www.securitywomen.org/post/cyprus-first-time-in-un-history-a-mission-and-peace-force-is-led-by-women.

[17] Brook Morrison, "Beyond Gender Advice: NATO's Implementation of the Women Peace and Security Agenda" (University of York, 2023), https://www.york.ac.uk/media/law/yorklawreview/vol4/Morrison-Beyond-Gender-Advice.pdf.

[18] Veronika Hornyák, Petros Petrikkos, and PRIO Cyprus Centre, "Women Between War and Peace in Cyprus: The Security Sector as the Missing Link," *POLICY BRIEF*, 2022, https://www.unic.ac.cy/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/03-2022-Women-between-War-and-Peace-in-Cyprus-2.pdf.

Externally, UNIFIL collaborates with various stakeholders, including government institutions, civil society organisations, and UN agencies, to promote women's participation in peace and security processes. The mission facilitates dialogue processes such as Global Open Days, enabling women leaders from civil society to voice their experiences and concerns to senior mission leadership. These initiatives, like the Women Peace Forums, employ bottom-up, inclusive approaches to enhance women's engagement in peacebuilding activities. Partnerships with UN agencies, such as UN Women, have been pivotal in scaling these efforts. Specific achievements include supporting the participation of 20 women delegates in presenting the report "Peace and Justice for Women in South Sudan " to the SG's Special Representative. Despite these proactive measures, several challenges hinder the effectiveness of external gender-specific initiatives. Cultural and societal norms that marginalise women and limit their public roles are significant barriers that require sustained advocacy and education to overcome. Security threats and violence against women leaders further exacerbate these challenges, deterring their active participation in peace processes. Additionally, limited resources and coordination among international, national, and local actors complicate gender-focused programmes' implementation and scaling up. [19]

*Recommendations*

Recognising that gender equality is essential not only for conflict prevention but also for promoting sustainable peace and development, following are recommendations:

- Quantity is not enough: The UN and the Member States should address and guarantee women's participation more broadly. It is not sufficient for women to be physically present in peace operations; they must have space and means to participate in all aspects of conflict resolution and the peacebuilding process.
  - Formal: Documents monitoring the implementation of the WPS agenda must extend beyond the percentage of women formally included in the peace operations. They should include the role those women play and the resources they are given to carry out their work. That would offer more complete data to follow up on the levels of this participation, and to better identify good practices that could be replicated.
  - Informal: Establish communication channels between women who are employed in the various UN peace operations.

- Women are diverse: It is equally important to recognise that a woman's presence does not necessarily guarantee representativeness. The UN should not treat women and girls as a homogeneous group. It is essential to acknowledge the diversity among women and girls in peace operations, including aspects such as race, sexual identity, religion, family status, people with disabilities, and income.
  - Formal: To ensure diverse representation in decision-making roles within peace operations, states and relevant parties should adopt policies that mandate gender diversity in leadership and key operational roles. Additionally, the development and implementation of National Action Plans (NAPs) on Women, Peace and Security should explicitly recognise and address this diversity, ensuring these plans are not merely about increasing the number of women but also about including women from all backgrounds. Regular reviews and updates of NAPs are essential to maintain their relevance and inclusivity, reflecting the diverse needs of women in different communities.
  - Informal: Grassroots engagement can promote diversity and inclusivity in peace processes. Support should be provided to grassroots organisations that represent diverse groups of women, giving them platforms to voice their specific concerns and

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[19] "Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of Security," UNIFIL, March 19, 2024, https://unifil.unmissions.org/report-secretary-general-implementation-security-council-resolution-1701-2006-during-period-21-1.

needs. Community dialogues and forums should be facilitated to allow women from various backgrounds to share their experiences and contribute to peacebuilding efforts. Additionally, capacity-building programmes and advocacy support are essential to empower women from diverse backgrounds to participate in peace processes effectively. Informal networks and coalitions of women from different communities should be supported to strengthen their collective voice and influence in peacebuilding.

- Including local women: Beyond the participation of foreign women in peace operations, whether as military personnel, observers, or specialists, the UN and the states must consider ways to incorporate the local population into these processes. Focusing participation solely on women from outside these regions can reinforce colonial relations, perpetuate marginalisation, and silence other types of violence beyond physical ones.
    - Formal: Employ local women with employment that matches their unique capabilities to help comprehend the violence they are suffering and also to gather practices that could be addressed to reduce gender-based violence, inequalities, and marginalisation.
    - Informal: Promote informal talks and community consultations with local women so they can speak about their needs securely and anonymously, such as the pilot project within UNMISS.

- Training and Capacitation: Troop-contributing countries and teams involved in peace operations must consider gender equality. This includes incorporating and/or reinforcing gender training and capacity-building programmes on the WPS Agenda. They should also receive better training on how to behave and incorporate popular consultations.
    - Formal: States and relevant parties should formally incorporate gender equality training and capacity-building programmes as mandatory components for all personnel involved in peace operations. This includes integrating the WPS agenda into national military and police training curricula, ensuring that gender-sensitive practices are taught and reinforced throughout the training process. Governments should allocate resources for developing and implementing these programmes and establish monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess their effectiveness. Furthermore, formal partnerships should be established with gender experts and local organisations to ensure training programmes are context-specific and responsive to the needs of the populations in deployment areas.
    - Informal: Affected civilians and civil society organisations should be engaged informally to provide practical insights and feedback on the gender training and capacity-building programmes. This can be achieved through community-led workshops and training sessions, where local gender experts share culturally relevant perspectives and practical guidance. Informal forums and networks should facilitate continuous dialogue between peacekeepers and local communities, allowing for ongoing learning and adaptation of training programmes. Civil society organisations should advocate for the inclusion of grassroots perspectives in the design and delivery of training programmes and work to raise awareness about the importance of gender-sensitive approaches in peace operations.

- Broader concept of peace: It is necessary to expand the concept of "peace" on the agenda.
    - Formal: States and relevant parties should formally adopt a broader concept of "peace" in their policies and operational frameworks. This includes recognising peace as the absence of conflict and the presence of social justice, economic stability, and gender equality. Governments should ensure that holistic peacebuilding initiatives address underlying social, economic, and political inequalities that contribute to conflict. Formal policies should integrate the principles of the WPS agenda, emphasising the importance of women's participation in all aspects of peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction. Additionally, states should collaborate with international organisations and civil society to create comprehensive peacebuilding strategies that include diverse groups, particularly women and marginalised communities.

- Informal: Affected civilians and civil society organisations should play a crucial role in expanding the concept of peace through grassroots advocacy and community-driven initiatives. Informally, they can organise and participate in local peacebuilding activities that promote social cohesion, gender equality, and economic development. Civil society should engage in dialogue with local authorities and international actors to share insights and propose inclusive peacebuilding practices that reflect the needs and aspirations of the community. By creating informal networks and support groups, civil society can foster a culture of peace that transcends formal political agreements and addresses everyday issues such as domestic violence, economic disparity, and social exclusion.

- Gender from the beginning: Currently, the mandates passed by the Security Council of each peace operation are based on reports prepared by the Secretariat, so gender perspectives and proposals on how to include women must already be included in these documents.
    - Formal: The composition of the Secretariat's expert teams sent to the field must be gender balanced. These teams must have training regarding women's participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes. The final part of these reports usually comes from where the UNSC takes information to write the peace operations mandates, so that section must include data about gender-based violence, propose ways to overcome gender inequalities and promote women's participation. Also, all the reports about peace operations should include data about the goals of the WPS Agenda.
    - Informal: Include popular consultation sessions asking local women what they understand as peace, what practices they think are appropriate to achieve peace, and how they see themselves and their societies in the future.

- Secure Financial Support: Women and gender focal points must have sufficient resources to implement their goals.
    - Formal: A percentage of the budget for every peace operation must be specifically destined for promoting the WPS Agenda goals.

**Youth**

*Introduction & Background*

The United Nations defines youth as individuals aged 15 to 29 years, although this definition can vary depending on resolutions and contexts. For example, UN Security Council resolution 2250 adopts an age range of 18 to 29 years. This commonly used international definition often fails to capture the full range of young people affected by conflicts.

In peace operations, youth are generally defined as individuals aged 15 to 29.[20] This broader definition includes younger adolescents, who are often significantly impacted by conflicts and post-conflict situations and can play a crucial role in peacekeeping and reconciliation. Recognizing individuals from the age of 15 acknowledges that formative events in conflict contexts shape their perceptions of peace and security.

Youth play a crucial role in peacekeeping processes for several reasons. They bring new and innovative perspectives essential for conflict prevention and peace promotion. Their active participation can stabilise communities and prevent radicalisation and violent extremism. Resolution 2250 emphasises that marginalising youth hinders sustainable peace, and the resolution urges their inclusion at all decision-making levels.[21] In many conflict-affected countries, young people make up a significant

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[20] United Nations. *International Youth Year: Participation, Development, Peace*. New York: United Nations, 1981. https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/27015.

[21] United Nations Security Council. *Resolution 2250 (2015) on Youth, Peace, and Security*. New York: United Nations, 2015. https://undocs.org/S/RES/2250(2015).

portion of the population. Failing to include them in peace processes implies the marginalisation of most of the population that could positively contribute to society. Recognising this demographic reality is crucial for developing inclusive and effective policies.

Youth are often at the forefront of social movements and community initiatives. Their energy, creativity, and commitment can drive positive and lasting changes. They can key actors in promoting tolerance, reconciliation, and the reconstruction of post-conflict societies.[22] Inclusive policies offering education, employment, and civic engagement opportunities are essential to divert youth from violence. Resolution 2250 encourages member states to create environments conducive to youth inclusion, thus mitigating factors that lead to extremism.[23]

Youth represent an essential force in shaping a more inclusive, peaceful, and sustainable future. The Summit of the Future offers a unique opportunity to strengthen global cooperation and address emerging threats and opportunities, particularly through the inclusion of young people. Youth are directly affected by current global challenges such as climate change, conflicts, food security, pandemics, and health crises. Their opinions and engagements are crucial for designing solutions that fully meet their needs and aspirations. Young people can bring innovative ideas and renewed energy, which are vital for accelerating efforts to meet existing international commitments and address new challenges. The inclusion of youth in the Summit of the Future can help restore trust that has been eroded in international institutions and cooperation. Young people, often marginalised in decision-making processes, can bring a new dynamic and strengthen the legitimacy of undertaken actions. By actively engaging them, the summit can demonstrate that international cooperation is capable of achieving common goals and effectively tackling global challenges. For this pact to be truly inclusive and representative of all segments of the global population, it is imperative to include young people in the process of negotiating and implementing peace.

Most of the actions for the inclusion of youth in peacekeeping conducted by the UN stem from several key initiatives and departments. The Department of Peace Operations (DPO) plays a crucial role in promoting the inclusion of youth in peacekeeping efforts. In 2015, the UN Security Council adopted the landmark resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security, acknowledging the important role youth play in conflict prevention and resolution, and in the sustainability of peacekeeping efforts. This resolution emphasises five pillars: Participation, Protection, Prevention, Partnerships, and Disengagement & Reintegration, thereby setting the framework for youth involvement in peacekeeping.

Through various peacekeeping missions, the UN has actively promoted youth engagement. For example, in Mali, MINUSMA has strengthened the capacity of youth civil society organisations and established 'Peace Ambassadors,' who are involved in local governance and peace consolidation efforts. In South Sudan, UNMISS has created juvenile reformatory centres and launched the Police Community Relations Committee Network to involve young people in local security discussions. In the Central African Republic, MINUSCA supports Community Violence Reduction (CVR) programmes, engaging youth in disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration efforts. These programmes offer economic opportunities and prevent youth recruitment into armed groups, thus contributing to social cohesion and peace.

UN peacekeeping missions such as UNFICYP in Cyprus and UNIFIL in Lebanon have initiated programmes that empower youth through environmental campaigns and cultural activities, fostering collaboration and understanding among diverse communities. Additionally, in Kosovo, UNMIK's

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[22] United Nations. *Youth Participation*. New York: United Nations, 2013. https://social.un.org/youthyear/docs/youth-participation.pdf.

[23] United Nations Security Council. *Resolution 2250 (2015) on Youth, Peace, and Security*. New York: United Nations, 2015. https://undocs.org/S/RES/2250(2015).

internship programme for young lawyers has reduced court case backlogs while providing valuable legal experience.

Despite these efforts, the implementation of actions for youth inclusion in peacekeeping faces challenges. UN Security Council resolution 2535 (2020) called for enhanced coordination and engagement in implementing resolutions 2250 and 2419 to ensure youth capacities are integrated into peacekeeping operations.[24]

However, systematic follow-up and evaluation mechanisms are often lacking, which hampers the full realisation of these commitments. The lack of concrete implementation of proposed actions for youth in peacekeeping operations is particularly concerning as it prevents fully harnessing the potential of young people as agents of change. Youth, with their energy, creativity, and desire to positively transform their societies, are often best positioned to identify local needs and propose appropriate solutions. However, in the absence of robust mechanisms to implement actions aimed at their inclusion, this potential remains largely untapped.

Youth-led local initiatives can be powerful drivers of peacekeeping and reconciliation. These initiatives, whether educational programmes, community development projects, or cultural activities, play a crucial role in promoting social cohesion and reducing post-conflict tensions. However, without the necessary support from international and national bodies, these initiatives often lack resources, visibility, and influence to achieve their full impact. Adequate institutional and financial support is essential to strengthen these initiatives and ensure their sustainability and effectiveness.

The absence of inclusive policies tailored to the needs of youth can leave a significant portion of this population vulnerable to extremist ideologies and violent actions. Marginalised youth, often deprived of access to education, employment, and economic opportunities can become easy targets for groups that exploit their frustration and despair. This vulnerability not only poses a threat to national and international security but also undermines peace and reconstruction efforts. Inclusive policies that offer positive prospects and integrate youth into the decision-making process are essential to prevent such outcomes. The lack of concrete implementation of proposed actions for youth in peacekeeping operations also results in a lack of meaningful representation of youth in governance structures. Youth must be actively involved in decision-making processes, not only as beneficiaries but also as partners and leaders. This active participation strengthens the legitimacy of peace initiatives and ensures that the policies implemented truly meet the needs and aspirations of young people.[25]

To rectify this situation, it is crucial to develop clear monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to measure progress in youth inclusion. This includes establishing specific indicators to assess the impact of youth policies and creating platforms that allow young people to share their experiences and actively participate in policy development. Additionally, ensuring adequate and sustainable funding for youth initiatives is necessary, recognizing their central role in promoting peace and security.

By including youth in the Summit of the Future, global leaders have the opportunity to address this gap by ensuring that young people are not only heard but also integrated into the mechanisms for implementing and monitoring peacekeeping actions. This can be achieved by establishing clear frameworks and measurable indicators to track progress in youth inclusion. The Summit of the Future thus represents a unique opportunity to redirect the international system towards a more inclusive and sustainable path. Youth inclusion is essential to achieve this goal. Young people bring innovative perspectives, renewed energy, and increased legitimacy to international decision-making processes. However, for their participation to be effective, it is crucial to move from statements of intent to concrete and measurable actions, particularly in peacekeeping operations.

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[24] United Nations. *Resolution 2535 (2020)*. New York: United Nations, 2020. https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n20/182/94/pdf/n2018294.pdf.

[25] United Nations. *Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace, and Security: The Missing Peace*. New York: United Nations, 2018. https://www.unfpa.org/youth-peace-security.

Security Council resolution 2553 established for the first time a direct relationship between Security Sector Reform and Youth Peace and Security, which acknowledged that youth should be engaged in peacekeeping efforts that would ultimately contribute to the country's security sectors. The framework has been centred around five pillars: Participation, Protection, Prevention, Partnerships and Disengagement & Reintegration.[26] It is worth mentioning some of the practices, current and past, that have recognised youth as relevant actors to peacekeeping processes. The strategic inclusion of youth in peace processes is a necessary action for sustainable peace and security. The initiatives and contributions mentioned below demonstrate the significant impact of youth engagement in peacebuilding and environmental sustainability. By continuing to support and amplify the youth voices, it is possible to foster a more inclusive and resilient global community.[27]

First, regarding the participation, UN peacekeeping missions have increasingly recognised the unique perspectives and energies that young people bring to environmental and peacekeeping efforts. The integration of youth perspectives into national policy-making processes has been a significant focus of UN missions. For instance, in Cyprus UNFICYP facilitated youth engagement in developing common positions for UN climate conferences, fostering a shared commitment to environmental sustainability and peace.[28] In Kosovo, UNMIK organised climate awareness activities to enhance social cohesion among youth from various ethnic backgrounds, using environmental issues as a common ground for building peace.[29] UNAMI, for example, promoted youth-government collaboration through consultations on climate change, leading to the development of policy guidance documents addressing climate change and key social and political concerns affecting youth. This integration ensures that youth voices are central to national and international policy dialogues. In collaboration with the African Union, UNOWAS invited young Africans from the region to share best practices in climate action and conflict prevention. This initiative, exemplified by the Dakar Call to Action on Climate Change, Peace, and Security, facilitates the exchange of knowledge and strategies, empowering young leaders to take proactive roles in addressing environmental challenges and promoting peace.[30]

Specific local initiatives in Yemen, Colombia, and the Central African Republic have demonstrated the tangible impact of youth engagement on peacekeeping efforts such as participating in constitution drafting committees and election monitoring, ensuring that their voices are heard in the foundational aspects of governance and democratic processes. The Coalition for Youth, Peace, and Security has played a crucial role in coordinating youth-led climate peace advocacy. A dedicated working group focuses on strategic discussions and intergenerational dialogues, notably at international platforms such as COP 28. These efforts highlight the intersection of climate action and peacebuilding, emphasising the importance of youth leadership in addressing global challenges.[31]

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[26] "Resolution 2553." n.d. http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2553.

[27] "Promoting Youth, Peace and Security." n.d. United Nations Peacekeeping. https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/promoting-youth-peace-and-security.

[28] "UNFICYP." n.d. United Nations Peacekeeping. https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/unficyp.

[29] "UNMIK." n.d. UNMIK. https://unmik.unmissions.org/.

[30] Secretary-General, Un. 2024. "Youth and Peace and Security: Report of the Secretary-General." United Nations Digital Library System. March 1, 2024. https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4042803?ln=en&v=pdf.

[31] ibid.

Second, exclusionary practices and experiences of injustice that affect young people have the potential to exacerbate grievances and fuel conflicts. This issue necessitates inclusive approaches that span various political and economic dimensions. Addressing these grievances involves the implementation of preventive tools and initiatives aimed at fostering inclusivity and mitigating conflict. However, technology, while offering many benefits, also poses significant threats. State and non-state actors can exploit online platforms and surveillance technologies to spread hate speech and disinformation. Media and information literacy emerge as crucial preventive tools in this context. Recognizing that, the missions have made the necessary efforts to protect civilians from the effects of these issues. In Afghanistan, missions focus on providing information on digital security and safety to help individuals navigate the digital landscape safely. Similarly, in Kosovo, youth training initiatives aim to counter hate speech and promote cross-community cooperation. UNESCO's global hackathons further exemplify efforts to use technology positively, bringing together young minds to tackle societal challenges innovatively.[32]

Generally, there is a lack of understanding about the critical connection between youth unemployment and their engagement in illegal activities, between international organisations and countries that are part of the conflict. Without jobs, young people are unable to support their families, and consequently, some turn to dangerous and harmful coping mechanisms such as drug trafficking, crime, and gang activities. To prevent that, the enhancement of education and the increase of job opportunities needs to happen. Programmes like "Peace4education" tackle inequalities to promote a cohesive society. In South Sudan, training programmes offer psychosocial and vocational support to at-risk youth and members of criminal groups, providing them with alternatives to violence. Globally, peer support networks foster leadership and peacebuilding skills among young women peacebuilders from 20 conflict- or crisis-affected countries, demonstrating the impact of educational and vocational opportunities in rebuilding lives.

Access to decent jobs is crucial for integrating young people into society and reducing inequalities. In the Sahel, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) focuses on creating employment opportunities, while in the Central African Republic, the International Labor Organization (ILO) invests in small and medium enterprises to rebuild infrastructure. The African Development Bank's investment in Liberia, supporting youth-led small and medium enterprises, has created 120,000 jobs, highlighting the positive impact of economic inclusion.[33]

Third, Programmes aimed at disengagement and reintegration of ex-combatants are critical for preventing future violence. In South Sudan, the community violence reduction project focuses on reintegrating ex-combatants and preventing violence within communities. Partnerships with local organisations in South Sudan also provide vocational skills and conflict resolution training. In Mali, training sessions on security sector reform and disarmament, as well as initiatives in Somalia aimed at creating financial stability, enhance social well-being and trust among marginalised youth. Colombia's training on gender-responsive conflict resolution reached 298 people, 59% of whom were young women, highlighting the importance of inclusive and gender-sensitive approaches.[34]

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[32] ibid.

[33] Africa Newsroom, APO Group - Africa Newsroom, and African Development Bank Group (AfDB). 2023. "African Development Fund Approves $16 Million for Youth Entrepreneurship Investment Bank in Liberia." *APO Group - Africa Newsroom*, July 20, 2023. https://afdb.africa-newsroom.com/press/african-development-fund-approves-16-million-for-youth-entrepreneurship-investment-bank-in-liberia?lang=en.

[34] UN Verification Mission in Colombia - From words to action: The Experience of UN Special Political Missions in Colombia on Women, Peace and Security https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/Colombia%20Study%20-%20Summary%20report.pdf

In the Central African Republic, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission (MINUSCA) implements sensitisation activities for various stakeholders, including religious and community leaders, local authorities, and youth and women's organisations. These activities aim to address and prevent the escalation of sexual violence, ensuring a safer environment for young people. Global Network of Women Peacebuilders in 2023, this network developed country-specific protection protocols for young peacebuilders in Bangladesh and Myanmar. These protocols are tailored to the unique challenges faced by young people in these countries and provide a structured approach to protection. United Network of Young Peacebuilders: This network has piloted peer support group sessions for young peacebuilders, providing a platform for sharing experiences and strategies for dealing with threats. Additionally, the network continues to strengthen and monitor its protection protocols, ensuring that they remain effective and relevant.

Fourth, preventing the worsening of grievances among young people requires a multifaceted approach. Marginalised youth groups, including those from ethnic or religious minorities, often face additional layers of discrimination and vulnerability. The digital age has introduced new threats, including cyberbullying, online harassment, and the spread of hate speech and disinformation. These threats can exacerbate the psychological distress experienced by young people in conflict zones and can lead to real-world violence and exploitation. The widespread availability of small arms and light weapons contributes to a heightened sense of insecurity and fear among young people. The presence of these weapons increases the likelihood of violent encounters and undermines efforts to build peaceful and stable communities.[35]

Thus in 2023, the Dominican Republic and France, in collaboration with the Global Coalition on Youth, Peace, and Security, the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, and UNFPA, convened the first-ever member states' retreat on youth, peace, and security. This retreat produced an action-oriented outcome document focused on reinvigorating leadership to advance the youth and peace security agenda. New regional platforms and strategic frameworks emerged, emphasising non-military responses to conflict and insecurity through inclusive dialogue and participation. International financial institutions, like the World Bank, are also increasing assistance to young people in conflict-affected regions, addressing financial inequality and promoting economic stability. In addition, the United Nations Youth Office has developed a youth-sensitive online training module focused on engaging safely at the United Nations. This module addresses critical issues such as abuse of authority, discrimination, harassment (both online and offline), and sexual exploitation. By educating young people on these topics, the UN aims to empower them with the knowledge and skills to navigate and respond to these threats effectively.[36]

Lastly, the protection of young people in conflict zones requires a multifaceted approach that addresses both immediate threats and underlying vulnerabilities. International organisations, along with country-specific initiatives, play a crucial role in implementing protective measures and educating young people on how to navigate these challenges. By continuing to develop and refine protection protocols, and by fostering a supportive environment through initiatives, we can enhance the safety and well-being of young people in conflict-affected areas. These efforts are essential for building resilient communities and fostering a generation of young people who are equipped to contribute to peace and stability.

[35] Caton, Peter, Mercy Corps, B. Tesfaye, T. McDougal, B. Maclin, and A. Blum. 2018. *"IF YOUTH ARE GIVEN THE CHANCE" Effects of Education and Civic Engagement on Somali Youth Support of Political Violence*. Mercy Corps. https://www.youthpower.org/sites/default/files/YouthPower/resources/If%20Youth%20Are%20Given%20the%20Chance_LR_FINAL.pdf.

[36] Del Felice, Celina, and Andria Wisler. 2007. "The Unexplored Power and Potential of Youth as Peacebuilders." *Journal of Peace Conflict & Development*, no. Issue 11 (November). https://www.youthpower.org/sites/default/files/YouthPower/resources/PCD-ISSUE-11-ARTICLE-The-Unexplored-Power-and-Potential-of-Youth-as-Peace-Builders_Celina-Del-Felice-and-Andria-Wisler.pdf.

*Challenges*

Despite recent progress toward including youth in peacebuilding missions, in line with the youth, peace, and security agenda, numerous challenges persist at both international and local level. At the international level, the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services noticed the absence of comprehensive information within and across entities, given the lack of a common approach to collecting and monitoring data on youth participation activities.[37] This enforced the difficulty in evaluating the youth projects in place, as narrative information from various entities rather than data were provided for the Secretary-General's biennial report on youth and peace and security requested by the Security Council.

Second, the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth was assigned the role by the SC of enhancing the coordination and coherence of youth, peace, and security activities across the UN system and of tracking the implementation of the various resolutions. However, given the lack of funding and staffing, only advocacy initiatives took place.[38] There is a lack of clarity on the roles and responsibilities that each member of the staff plays when looking at the coordination of the peace and security initiatives for youth.

Additionally, the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services highlights the lack of operationalisation strategy and insufficient and unpredictable resources for implementation of Secretariat-driven youth, peace, and security initiatives. In particular, there is a lack of staff focused on the youth, security, and peace agenda, specifically in the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the Department of Peace Operations. While guidance material was provided for implementing the agenda, there is a lack of training on how to use these materials on the country level.

Also, there is a lack of global support in the implementation of the agenda as Sweden is the one who provided the most resources in terms of training, handbooks, and guides. This is emphasised by the lack of strategic framework for tracking the implementation of the agenda, specifically on youth. In fact, the Secretary-General's Seven-Point Action Plan on Gender-Responsive Peacebuilding; the set of indicators to track the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000); and the UN Strategic Results Framework on Women, Peace and Security: 2011–2020 are used as reference point when tracking the implementation of the youth, peace and security agenda.[39]

Some of these challenges are also reflected at the national/ field level. While out of the 12 peacekeeping missions, several referenced youth engagement in their mandates, and 11 out of 25 special political missions did likewise, only seven between peacekeeping and political missions presented specific strategy into their policy framework.[40] Therefore, also at the national level, there is also a noticeable absence of comprehensive strategies for effectively implementing and supporting youth engagement in peacekeeping operations. This lack of addressing the needs of youth in policy frameworks was also highlighted by the result of the survey carried out by the Office of Internal Oversight Services. While 42% of mission respondents agreed that their entity can effectively understand the needs of young people in these operations, only 8% agreed that the activities carried responded to those needs.[41]

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[37] United Nations, Economic and Social Council. *Thematic Evaluation of the Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda: Youth Participation*. Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, E/AC.51/2023/7, New York, NY: UN Headquarters, 2023, 13.

[38] United Nations, Economic and Social Council. *Thematic Evaluation of the Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda: Youth Participation*. Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, E/AC.51/2023/7, New York, NY: UN Headquarters, 2023, 15.

[39] Ibid., 22.

[40] Ibid., 8.

[41] Ibid.

The difficulty in implementing strategies for youth at the national level also comes from the lack of funding to youth led organisations. In particular, only 3% of direct funding recipients of the Youth Promotion Initiatives from the Peacebuilding Fund consisted of local youth-led and civil society organisations. Even though Youth Promotion Initiatives required all funded projects to allocate at least 40% of their grants to national or subnational civil society partners, specifically on youth-led organisations, this was not tracked, thus being unclear whether the projects follow this guideline.[42] When local youth-led organisations do receive funding this does not exceed more than 5000 dollars annually and can be used only for project-based, short-term and inflexible opportunities.[43] The peacekeeping building mission in Somalia has highlighted another issue regarding funding for youth-led organisations. Specifically, due to corruption within the government and aid agencies, a significant portion of funds intended for peacebuilding projects never reached their designated recipients affecting youth inclusion but also the trust among young people towards institutions.[44] Without adequate funding, youth-led organisations struggle to provide tools and platforms to enhance youth inclusion in peacekeeping missions.

Despite youth inclusion, there is a noticeable lack of formal, meaningful inclusion and understanding of the different ways youth can participate. In the case of UNMISS, the limited participation of youth delegates led them to advocate for more significant involvement in the peace processes, not only as young individuals but also as active members of civil society and political parties.[45] Viewing youth merely as young people without recognizing their diverse roles in various aspects of society oversimplifies their contributions and hinders effective youth inclusion. This is enhanced by the perception of youth as inexperienced, as unable to take an active role in determining the future.[46] Thus, there is a neglect of the valuable experiences of young people. This issue is amplified by gender, sexual orientation and caste discrimination making it more difficult for young girls to make their voice heard.

Participation in peace processes for young people can be a security risk. Specifically, in CAR, the DRC, Mali, and South Sudan, local community members sharing information regarding current or potential threats and human rights violations with the various stakeholders in peacekeeping missions such as non-governmental organisations and UN humanitarian agencies have suffered attacks from armed groups.[47] Among these missions, civilians in Mali are enduring the majority of attacks, frequently experiencing killings, kidnappings, and torture.[48] These situations discourage young people to be an active actor of the peacekeeping missions. Additional protection mechanisms must be established to ensure the safe inclusion of youth.

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[42] United Nations, Economic and Social Council. *Thematic Evaluation of the Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda: Youth Participation*. Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, E/AC.51/2023/7, New York, NY: UN Headquarters, 2023, 18.

[43] United Nations. *Youth and Peace and Security: Report of the Secretary-General*. S/2024/207. New York: United Nations, 2024, 17.

[44] Ahmed, Abdiaziz Abukar. "Youth Participation in Peacebuilding in Somalia: Challenges and Opportunities." *Multidisciplinary Journal of Horseed International University (MJHIU)* 2.1 (2024): 139.

[45] United Nations Population Fund and United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office. *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace, and Security*, 72 and Ozcelik, Asli, Yulia Nesterova, Graeme Young, and Alex Maxwell. *Youth-led Peace: The Role of Youth in Peace Processes*. University of Glasgow, 2021 17.

[46] Ozcelik, Asli, Yulia Nesterova, Graeme Young, and Alex Maxwell. *Youth-led Peace: The Role of Youth in Peace Processes*. University of Glasgow, 2021, 13.

[47] Henigson, Harley. *Community engagement in UN peacekeeping operations: a people-centered approach to protecting civilians*. International Peace Institute, 2022, 21.

[48] Ibid.

Lastly, insufficient capacity building opportunities are a great challenge for young people in peacekeeping missions. Unemployment, poverty, limited access to education and lack of leadership skills reduces the chance of young people to be involved in peace processes. Opportunities to develop those skills and acquire the necessary knowledge to engage with partners and stakeholders should be enhanced in order to foster youth inclusion. In Somalia, limited access to education, employment, and political participation highly impacts the ability to contribute to peace processes for young people.[49] 60% of young people are unemployed in the country, one the highest rates in the world.[50] Youth unemployment is one the risks for re-escalation of the conflict as young people can be easily recruited by terrorist groups.

*Recommendations*

Given the various challenges in including youth in peacekeeping missions, recommendations are provided for both the international and national level.

- At the international level, follow is advice for the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the Department of Peace Operations, the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy with the collaboration of the member states and their official:
  - to establish a motoring common framework, implemented in all peacebuilding missions to evaluate the progress towards the youth, peace, and security agenda, given the difficulty in acquiring data.
  - to increase the number of staffing and funding working in the Office of the SG's Envoy on Youth on youth, peace, and security and to assign formal roles for coordination mechanisms, including defining agreed terms of reference for these mechanisms.
  - to develop a strategic framework for the implementation and funding of Secretariat-driven youth, peace, and security initiatives with the involvement of multinational actors and various member states.

- At the national level, we advise the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the Department of Peace Operations, the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy with the collaboration of the member states and their officials:
  - to develop a formal framework of sustained inclusion of youth within peace-making through post-agreement implementation for the facilitation of formal structure for youth engagement in peacekeeping missions.
  - to increase resources allocated to support and build the capacity of civil society organisations and youth-led organisations operating in conflict and post-conflict settings with the introduction of flexible earmarked funding for youth-led organisations implementing projects related to education, vocational training, and political participation.
  - to develop national and local advocacy campaigns specifically on the different notions of youth as members of civil society, political parties, and other influential groups, and on their relevance in the peacekeeping mission on an informal and formal level.
  - to establish additional protection mechanisms in order to ensure the safety of youth involvement in peacekeeping missions, specifically when interacting with various stakeholders at the local level.

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[49] Ahmed, Abdiaziz Abukar. "Youth Participation in Peacebuilding in Somalia: Challenges and Opportunities." *Multidisciplinary Journal of Horseed International University (MJHIU)* 2.1 (2024): 144-145.
[50] Ibid., 137.

# Preface

The complexities and challenges of modern peace missions necessitate a comprehensive and multifaceted approach. Local civil society actors, including women and youth, are often foundational to peace operations, especially in conflict-affected societies and areas undergoing significant economic, social, and political transition. They play crucial roles in fostering trust and confidence, promoting cooperation, creating collective action incentives, and ensuring that initiatives are tailored to both local and national contexts. Their contributions span a wide range of activities, from delivering basic services and enhancing social cohesion and stability, to enabling communities to influence social norms and facilitating dialogue between the government and citizens through mechanisms that promote state accountability.

# Definitions

There is no concrete definition for civil society. Due to the varying historical, theoretical, and pragmatic contexts, it can be challenging to arrive at a conclusion to find a shared definition of civil society.[51] However, a working definition of civil society appears to have developed from within United Nations missions wherein '*civil society*' includes any and all organisations and individuals that claim to speak on behalf of the local population. Along the same lines, the UN developed a broad definition that defines civil society as *"A civil society organisation (CSO) or non-governmental organisation (NGO) is any non-profit, voluntary citizens' group which is organised on a local, national or international level".*[52]

In many societies, it can be easy to be dismissive of marginalised groups such as women, elderly and disabled persons etc. As such, it is important to note that civil society is an umbrella term that refers to a host of entities[53]. Within the raging philosophical and political arguments, the central tenet remains that civil society protects individual from violence and intolerance[54]. Understanding civil societies and their respective functions are extremely pivotal when it comes to including them in the peacekeeping process. Civil society actors are the cornerstone for enhancing the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations. It helps to bring in a multi-sectoral approach by bringing in relevant stakeholders that otherwise might not be included in the peace process. Lastly, as shown in this section later, civil society actors can be a buffer between local actors and peacekeepers.

It is essential to understand that civil society actors consist of groups led by primarily subjugated group such as religious minorities, women, disabled, children rights and non-governmental institutions working for the rights of certain groups. With all the possibilities available for a non-exhaustive definition. According to a UN expert, civil society can be defined as a certain group of people or an organisation working for the rights of the most vulnerable group.

Civil society actors mentioned here play important roles equally in an active conflict zone and post-conflict zone. In the realm of peace operations, UN peacekeepers must engage with these local grassroots' civil society actors not only to properly contextualise the problem but also to remove the perception bias.

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[51] Mark N. Jensen, "Concepts and Conceptions of Civil Society," *Journal of Civil Society* 2, no. 1 (May 2006): 39–56, https://doi.org/10.1080/17448680600730934.

[52] United Nations, "The UN and Civil Society," www.un.org (United Nations, n.d.), https://www.un.org/en/get-involved/un-and-civil-society.

[53] James Kennedy, "Civil Society: History and Possibilities," *Contemporary Political Theory* 3, no. 2 (2004): 238–41, https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.cpt.9300131.

[54] John Keane, *Democracy and Civil Society* (London/New York: Verso, 1988).

Their urgent priority is to work for the immediate victims of the conflict. In the context of a post-conflict zone, civil society plays an important role in the peacebuilding process by addressing past grievances, root causes of the conflict and the eventual conflict transformation. Civil society actors and activists help empower the marginalised groups by bringing the unheard voices to the forefront. And by bringing these voices forward, it is easier to address the structural violence that is deeply embedded within the society and   understand the source of the conflict. In conflict transformation, understanding the very source of the conflict and addressing past grievances is important to prevent the conflict from breaking out again.

Civil society actors can be the key catalysts to enhance governance and accountability structures within the post-conflict zone. One of the common factors leading to conflict has been lack of governance and accountability mechanisms[55]. Within the purview of that, civil society actors come together to not only call out the perpetrators of violence, but also enact in places practices that empower and rebuild a post-conflict society from the ground-up. Also, to add to that, during the time of the conflict civil society actors are proactively working to hold the perpetrators of the conflict accountable. They act as whistleblowers and primary source of data for international organisations.

As such, it is of utmost importance for peace operations to engage civil society actors in both an active conflict zone and in the post-conflict peace process. Civil society actors not only help peacekeepers by locally contextualising the problem but also accelerate the ongoing process by bringing the voices of the most marginalised to the forefront on the global forum. However, as we will see in the next sections, the element of civil society is often missing in many peace missions. Lastly, we will also see how the inclusion of civil society in peace operations helps to tailor the practices appropriate for the given context.

# Background

## *The Role of Civil Society in Peacekeeping*

Early civil society forms emerged as advocacy groups and charitable organisations during the Enlightenment era.[56] After a while, civil societies become advanced, swaying major social and political movements, such as human rights and anti-apartheid movements in different parts of the world.[57] After World War II, the establishment of the League of Nations, superseded by the UN, became an important turning point for civil societies, since they received formal recognition as an important stakeholder in global governance. The UN Charter and subsequent international conferences, such as the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993, marked the significance of civil societies in advocating for human rights and social justice on a global scale. These historical turning points demonstrate the civil society's continuing strength and importance in creating a just and democratic world.[58]

Civil societies, as the aggregate of non-governmental organisations and institutions that manifest the interest, feeling and will of the people or citizens, play a crucial or significant role in sustainable development and global governance. According to John Keane in *Global Civil Society* "civil societies serve as a buffer between the individual and state"[59] meaning civil society has been serving as mediators, advocators, capacity builders, improving lives and trying to promote democratic

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[55] Hegre, H., & Nygård, H. M. (2015). Governance and Conflict Relapse. Journal of Conflict Resolution, 59(6), 984-1016. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002713520591

[56] Alison Van Rooy, *Civil Society, and the Aid Industry* (London: Routledge, 1999).

[57] W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg, "The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics," Information, Communication & Society 15, no. 5 (2012): 739–68, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118x.2012.670661.

[58] John Keane, Global Civil Society? (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[59] ibid.

participation and accountability to bring a fair and just society for all. These organisations are an instrument to advocate human right protection, giving lifesaving services, guaranteeing that marginalised voices are heard and valued in the policy making and other decision-making processes. Alison Van Rooy in *Civil Society and the Aid Industry* states that civil societies play crucial roles in the distribution and impact of international aid, ensuring that it reaches marginalised populations and fosters sustainable development.[60]

Civil societies are vital in the realm of peace and conflict prevention. These organisations are often at the forefront of efforts to create sustainable peace by addressing the root causes of conflict, such as social inequality, political exclusion, and economic disparity. Through grassroots initiatives and community-based programmes, civil societies foster dialogue, understanding, and reconciliation among conflicting parties. This ground-level engagement is crucial for rebuilding trust and repairing the social fabric in post-conflict societies, aligning with the UN's emphasis on sustaining peace through comprehensive and inclusive approaches.[61]

Within the context of the UN Summit for the Future, understanding the dynamics and influence of civil societies is important for establishing a sustainable and global future in the framework of the UN summit for the future. Civil societies not only facilitate grassroots participation but also act as an agent for social innovation, bridging the gap between citizens and governments in addressing global challenges.

Moreover, civil society actors significantly contribute to developing and implementing inclusive peacekeeping strategies. They actively engage with marginalised and vulnerable groups, including women, youth, and ethnic minorities, ensuring their perspectives and needs are incorporated into peace processes. This inclusive approach helps build a more equitable and just society, essential for achieving long-term peace and stability. By advocating for the inclusion of all societal segments, civil societies help prevent the recurrence of conflict and support the establishment of durable peace.[62]

This role of civil societies aligns directly with the principles outlined in key UN peacebuilding resolutions. For instance, resolution 2282(2016) highlights the importance of civil societies as essential partners in the international community's efforts to sustain peace. By addressing the root causes of conflict, promoting social cohesion, and ensuring the inclusion of diverse voices, civil societies embody the comprehensive and collaborative spirit of these resolutions.[63]

In addition, civil societies play a crucial role in monitoring and holding governments accountable to their commitments made under international agreements and UN mandates. They often act as watchdogs, ensuring transparency and advocating for policies that promote peace, security, and human rights. This accountability function is vital for the legitimacy and effectiveness of international peacebuilding efforts, as it fosters trust and confidence among stakeholders.

By championing these principles, civil societies contribute significantly to the UN's broader security and peacebuilding agenda. Their work reinforces the importance of multilateralism and the collective effort needed to address complex global challenges. As the UN Summit for the Future seeks to shape a sustainable and inclusive global future, the engagement of civil societies will be indispensable in achieving these goals and ensuring the international community's efforts are both comprehensive and effective. The continuous support and recognition of civil societies in global governance structures will be crucial for fostering resilient, peaceful, and inclusive societies worldwide.

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[60] Alison Van Rooy, *Civil Society, and the Aid Industry* (London: Routledge, 1999).

[61] Thania Paffenholz, *Civil Society and Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009).

[62] John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997).

[63] UNGA Res. 70/252 (12 May 2016) UN Doc A/RES/70/262; UNSC Res. 2282 (27 April 2016) UN Doc S/RES/2282

*Growing Recognition of Civil Society*

Over the past two decades, the critical role of civil society has been acknowledged and formalised through various multilateral initiatives, frameworks, and Security Council resolutions emphasising the pivotal role of civil society in local peacekeeping efforts and addressing conflict drivers to foster long-term, sustainable, positive peace.

The 2016 twin resolutions on the review of the UN peacebuilding architecture, adopted by the General Assembly and Security Council (A/RES/70/262[64] and S/RES/2282[65] respectively), acknowledged the evolving scale and complexity of peacebuilding challenges. These resolutions marked a pivotal shift in the UN's long-term focus from merely responding to crises towards actively building and sustaining peace. This strategic redirection aims to "prevent the outbreak, escalation, continuation, and recurrence of conflict by addressing root causes, assisting parties in conflict to end hostilities, ensuring national reconciliation, and facilitating recovery, reconstruction, and development" through comprehensive and coherent strategies. Importantly, the resolutions emphasised the need for strategic and operational partnerships with civil society organisations, women's groups, and youth-led organisations, echoing the 2015 High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) report, which strongly advocates for a transformation in the UN peacekeeping paradigm towards a more "people-focused" approach.[66] This was further supported by the joint UN-World Bank study, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict,* which highlighted the increasingly complex nature of violent conflicts, characterised by intricate drivers and the involvement of numerous non-state actors.[67] The study stressed the critical role of inclusive participation by domestic actors, particularly civil society, in conflict prevention efforts. Concurrently, the inclusion of underrepresented groups in peace processes has been gaining traction since the year 2000, starting with a resolution 1325 (S/RES/1325)[68] that constitutes the Women, Peace and Security agenda, and subsequent, the more recent resolution 2250 (S/RES/2250)[69] outlining the Youth, Peace, and Security agenda.

To foster meaningful inclusion through extensive partnerships, the Secretary-General's 2018 report on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace[70] advocated for enhanced and systematic engagement with civil society, encompassing women's and youth groups, as well as local communities. Reflecting on the UN's interaction with civil society, the Secretary-General outlines various engagement methods, including capacity building, sharing best practices, creating practical tools, fostering an enabling environment for a vibrant civil society, and active involvement in analysis, planning, programming, and monitoring and evaluation. He has called for the development of "guidelines on system-wide engagement with civil society for sustaining peace" in consultation with civil society. Furthermore, he has urged UN peace operations and UN Country Teams (UNCT) to formulate community engagement strategies in collaboration with national and local stakeholders, particularly youth and women's groups, ensuring these strategies are shared, monitored, and reviewed with local actors. The new comprehensive UN approach to conflict prevention, response, and sustaining peace necessitates enhanced operational and policy coherence. It also requires a strategic and holistic approach across all UN efforts in peace

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[64] UNGA Res. 70/252 (12 May 2016) UN Doc A/RES/70/262

[65] UNSC Res. 2282 (27 April 2016) UN Doc S/RES/2282

[66] United Nations, "Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Uniting Our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnership and People" (United Nations, 2015).

[67] United Nations and World Bank, "Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict." (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2018).

[68] UNSC Res. 1325 (31 October 2000) UN Doc S/RES/1325

[69] UNSC Res. 1325 (9 December 2015) UN Doc S/RES/2250

[70] UNGA "Report of the Secretary-General Concerning Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace" (18 January 2018) UN Doc A/72/707–S/2018/43

and security, development, human rights, and humanitarian action, to support nationally owned initiatives before, during, and after conflict.

In response to the Secretary-General's recommendations, the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) has spearheaded an UN-Civil Society working group to formulate the UN system-wide Community Engagement Guidelines on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace (UNCEG).[71] Initiated in 2018, this endeavour has employed an innovative, inclusive, and consultative process. The working group encompasses contributions from the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) and Department of Peace Operations (DPO), alongside other UN agencies working on international development and human rights. This collaborative effort has involved extensive consultations, including an online survey completed by over 300 stakeholders from both the UN and civil society sectors who are actively engaged in peacebuilding. Additionally, the process featured 42 consultations focusing on six countries—Burundi, Cambodia, Guatemala, Liberia, Mali, and Somalia—and culminated in a three-day global consultation that engaged over 400 participants, predominantly local peacebuilders.

Although primarily designed for engaging communities and civil society actors within peacebuilding scenarios, the UNCEG is also applicable to peacekeeping operations. Similar to other UN documents that provide guidance on community engagement within peacekeeping contexts, the UNCEG has emphasised the necessity for conflict-sensitive engagement methods, a comprehensive understanding of local contexts, community-level capacity building, and inclusive engagement with all community stakeholders. Despite the shared goals and similar conceptualizations of community engagement articulated in both the peacekeeping guidance and the UNCEG, there remains a lack of integration between community engagement initiatives conducted by peacekeeping missions and other UN entities.

In 2023, the UN launched nine policy briefs, including the *New Agenda for Peace*,[72] as part of the Secretary-General's *Our Common Agenda* vision for the future of global cooperation,[73] which highlights the importance of engaging civil society in shaping global policies.[74] Presently, civil society consultations and contributions are actively solicited for the *Pact for the Future*, a key outcome document from the forthcoming UN Summit of the Future scheduled for September 2024.[75] These efforts demonstrate an ongoing commitment to integrating civil society perspectives into the multilateral decision-making process, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and inclusivity of global governance.

In 2025, the UN is scheduled to undertake the fourth comprehensive review of its peacebuilding architecture, as mandated by the 2020 resolutions of the General Assembly (A/RES/75/201)[76] and the Security Council (S/RES/2558).[77] This review will provide the UN with an opportunity to assess its position and influence within the dynamically evolving field of peacekeeping and to deliberate on the extent of its leadership role in shaping the future trajectory of global peacekeeping efforts. Through this introspective analysis, the UN aims to identify strategic adjustments and innovations that will enhance its capacity to support sustainable, positive peace and address the complexities of contemporary conflicts effectively.

*Early Civil Society Engagement Structures*

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[71] United Nations, "United Nations Community Engagement Guidelines on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace" (United Nations, 2020).

[72] United Nations, "Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 9: A New Agenda for Peace" (United Nations, 2023).

[73] United Nations, "Our Common Agenda," United Nations, n.d., https://www.un.org/en/common-agenda.

[74] United Nations, "Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 9: A New Agenda for Peace" (United Nations, 2023).

[75] United Nations, "Summit of the Future," United Nations, n.d., https://www.un.org/en/summit-of-the-future.

[76] UNGA Res. 75/201 (21 December 2020) UN Doc A/RES/75/201

[77] UNSC Res. 2558 (21 December 2020) UN Doc S/RES/2558

Historically, peacekeeping operations have collaborated with civil society organisations to enhance their information acquisition and situational awareness, as well as to forge relationships with community members. In more recent developments, missions have increasingly recognized community engagement as a crucial component of their mandates to protect civilians.

The inception of modern civil society engagement in peacekeeping operations is traceable to initiatives undertaken in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The UN Organization Mission in the DRC (MONUC), the precursor to the current UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), instituted three principal mechanisms for community engagement following high-profile failures to prevent violence against civilians. The first mechanism, Joint Protection Teams (JPTs), was established in response to a tragic incident in North Kivu, where over 150 civilians were massacred near a UN base.[78] These teams, comprising military, police, and civilian personnel, were tasked with conducting context-specific protection analyses and responses in volatile areas. The inclusion of civilian personnel enabled the integration of expertise from various mission sections such as human rights, child protection, civil affairs, political affairs, disarmament, and rule of law.

Realising the necessity for a more pervasive and sustained interaction with local communities, MONUC subsequently introduced Community Liaison Assistants (CLAs).[79] These national staff members were embedded within UN battalions, serving as intermediaries between the mission and the local communities, thereby enhancing the dialogue and responsiveness to civilian needs.[80]

Despite improvements in community engagement through JPTs and CLAs, gaps remained, particularly in areas where these mechanisms were not present. This deficiency became painfully evident following the inability of MONUSCO to foresee or halt a campaign of systematic rape in and around the town of Luvungi in 2010.[81] In response to this critical shortfall, the mission developed Community Alert Networks (CANs).[82] These early-warning systems consist of networks of community focal points equipped to report imminent or ongoing threats to civilians via phones, radios, or toll-free numbers provided by the UN.

*Recognition & Expansion of MONUSCO's Structure*

The efficacy of community engagement mechanisms within peacekeeping operations quickly garnered recognition from the UN Secretariat, UN member states, and various large peacekeeping missions. This acknowledgment led the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (C-34) to progressively incorporate references to community engagement in its annual reports, emphasising that "interacting with the local population is necessary for the efficient and successful action of peacekeeping operations."[83] As strategies for community engagement continued to evolve, so too did

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[78] United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations and United Nations Department of Field Support, "DPKO/DFS Lessons Learned Note on the Protection of Civilians in UN Peacekeeping Operations: Dilemmas, Emerging Practices and Lessons," 2010.

[79] Janosch Kullenberg, "Community Liaison Assistants: A Bridge between Peacekeepers and Local Populations" (Local communities: first and last providers of protection (Forced Migration Review 53), 2016).

[80] United Nations Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support and United Nations Department of Field Support, "Community Liaison Assistants in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations" (United Nations, 2016).

[81] United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Final Report of the Fact-Finding Missions of the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office into the Mass Rapes and Other Human Rights Violations Committed by a Coalition of Armed Groups along the Kibua-Mpofi Aix in Walikale Territory, North Kivu" (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2011).

[82] Harley Henigson, "Community Engagement in UN Peacekeeping Operations: A People-Centered Approach to Protecting Civilians" (International Peace Institute, 2020).

[83] UNGA "Report of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations and Its Working Group" (20 March 2009) UN Doc A/63/19

the language and focus of the C-34's annual reports: by 2011, the Committee's report highlighted the critical role played by JPTs, CLAs, and civil affairs officers. It noted these entities were pivotal in enhancing the missions' ability to conduct "local-level analysis" and effectively manage the expectations of local communities.[84]

MONUSCO was tasked with continuing to develop and expand its community engagement strategies, leading to the formation of local protection committees and local security committees, aimed at enhancing regular interactions between local communities and national security forces.[85] In a similar vein, the 2013 mandate for the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) called for an improvement in communication with local communities, notably through the utilisation of CLAs.[86] Likewise, the foundational mandates for the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), established in 2013 and 2014 respectively, highlighted the need for robust community engagement activities designed to foresee, prevent, mitigate, and resolve conflicts.[87] Importantly, these mandates fell short of directly addressing engagement of civil society, or specifying the particular tools for community engagement and articulating their potential impact on achieving missions' objectives.

# Current Practices and Challenges in Integrating Civil Society within UN Peacekeeping Missions

*Internal Mission-Civil Society Operations and Interactions*

In their seminal report *Understanding and Improving Engagement with Civil Society in UN Peacekeeping: from Policy to Practice*, the United Nations Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support (DPKO-DFS) revealed diverse levels of coordination in engaging with civil society actors across peacekeeping missions. Thirty-four percent of peacekeepers surveyed for this study indicated that engagement with civil society actors was 'systematically coordinated' within their missions. In contrast, 55% reported it was 'somewhat coordinated,' and 11% said it was 'not coordinated at all.' The primary entry points for civil society engagement were the components of civil affairs, human rights, and political affairs, each of which identified and sustained partnerships based on their thematic needs. Notably, the Joint Mission Analysis Centre (JMAC) was often involved in liaising with civil society actors to identify threats that could undermine the mission's work and to conduct early warning analysis.[88]

Survey results revealed that most missions have a designated focal point, typically within the civil affairs component, to support senior leadership engagement with civil society. These focal points undertake mapping, database, identification, and analysis functions on behalf of other sections. For example, in UNMIL, a dedicated officer within the civil affairs component serves as the official entry point for civil society and supports senior-level engagement. Although this officer does not coordinate each mission component, they provide a strategic overview of all components' interactions with civil society actors. Inputs from various mission components suggest a preference for devolved programme responsibility within each mission component rather than a central focal point for civil society coordination. This flexibility, however, risks a lack of coordination, information sharing, and strategic

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[84] UNGA "Report of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations" (12 May 2011) UN Doc A/65/19

[85] UNSC Res. 1906 (23 December 2009) UN Doc S/RES/1906; UNSC Res. 1925 (28 May 2010) UN Doc S/RES/1925

[86] UNSC Res. 2109 (11 July 2013) UN Doc S/RES/2109.

[87] UNSC Res. 2100 (25 April 2013) UN Doc S/RES/2100; UNSC Res. 2149 (10 April 2014) UN Doc S/RES/2149

[88] United Nations Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support, "Understanding and Improving Engagement with Civil Society in UN Peacekeeping: From Policy to Practice" (United Nations, 2016).

engagement with civil society. Each component might deliver different messages to civil society, leading to overlap and duplication in responsibilities rather than achieving efficiencies of scale.[89]

A minimum requirement noted was the need for a mission roadmap or strategy for engaging with civil society at national and sub-national levels.[90] This roadmap should align with mandated priorities to ensure more strategic and focused engagement. For instance, MINUSMA developed a civil society engagement strategy and created a Support to Civil Society and Confidence Building Unit within the civil affairs component to support its implementation. This unit, while not formally coordinating other components' work with civil society, convenes monthly coordination meetings and supports the creation of mapping and database tools used mission wide.[91]

Coordination between national and local-level engagement was also highlighted, particularly the need for improved coordination and information sharing between mission headquarters and field offices. Civil society actors have emphasised the necessity for a mapping of the UN system in-country to navigate it effectively and identify contacts for support or resources. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have produced guides for civil society on partnering with them, explaining their requirements and criteria for establishing partnerships and the types of support they offer. While these resources can help manage expectations and provide a self-selection mechanism, reducing the need for external identification and selection of partners, this approach assumes a certain level of pre-existing knowledge and capacity among civil society organisations, which may not always be present. Smaller or less-experienced organisations might find it difficult to interpret and meet the criteria outlined in these guides, potentially limiting their ability to engage effectively with the mission. Additionally, the reliance on self-selection mechanisms might inadvertently exclude those civil society actors who are most in need of support but lack the capacity to navigate the complexities of the partnership criteria. This could lead to a concentration of support among more established organisations, exacerbating existing inequalities and limiting the diversity of voices and perspectives involved in peacekeeping missions.[92]

The frequency and modality through which Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (SRSGs) meet with civil society varies significantly across missions and contexts. Feedback from peacekeeping personnel underscores the importance of mission leadership, setting a tone that prioritises engagement with civil society as a critical component of successful mandate implementation. In some missions, SRSGs issued circulars emphasising the importance of civil society engagement and designating focal points for this purpose. For example, in UNMISS, the SRSG formed a consultative group of respected South Sudanese elders, intellectuals, and civil society actors to provide advisory and consultation functions for the mission. In UNMIL, the SRSG hosts quarterly meetings with civil society actors on specific thematic mandate priorities, with participation determined in consultation with the National Civil Society Council.[93]

The degree to which a mission priorities and values civil society engagement is said to often depend on the personality and profile of the SRSGs and their personal priorities and preferences.[94] Interview- and survey-based research suggest that having mission leadership with non-governmental

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[89] ibid.

[90] Sébastien Babaud et al., "Improving the Understanding and Use of Participatory Approaches in EU Security-Building Programmes" (IFP Security Cluster, 2010).

[91] United Nations Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support, "Understanding and Improving Engagement with Civil Society in UN Peacekeeping: From Policy to Practice" (United Nations, 2016).

[92] ibid.

[93] ibid.

[94] Nina Wilén and Vincent Chapaux, "Problems of Local Participation and Collaboration with the UN in a Post-Conflict Environment: Who Are the 'Locals'?," *Global Society* 25, no. 4 (2011): 531–48, https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2011.605838.

experience can enhance the appreciation of civil society engagement.[95] Where such engagement occurs, it can provide senior mission leadership with alternative views and perspectives on the peace process, the legitimacy of the government, key challenges and risks facing the country, and the role and efficacy of the peacekeeping mission itself. However, senior-level engagement risks being superficial if not supported by careful mapping and planning to ensure the appropriate civil society actors are involved. Furthermore, prescriptive language in the mission mandate could institutionalise civil society engagement, ensuring regular, systematic dialogue regardless of the SRSG's personal inclinations. Such mandated language could provide leverage for SRSGs supportive of civil society engagement or create a requirement for those less inclined, making progress subject to monitoring and reporting. A key consideration remains how civil society engagement feeds into integrated mission analysis and decision-making and the weight these inputs should carry.[96]

*Identification and Recognition of Civil Society Actors*

DPKO-DFS personnel in the field prioritise selecting local civil society partners based on their comparative advantage in affecting local communities, rather than their relationship with or influence on the host government. The most valued characteristics when choosing civil society actors as interlocutors or partners are, in order of importance, their degree of representativeness, their influence over communities, and their willingness to engage with the mission. Conversely, the characteristics deemed least important are the potential to act as a spoiler, influence over the government, and familiarity with working with international actors. It is important to note that the internal process for determining which civil society actors to engage is primarily based on ad hoc considerations and local information networks, heavily relying on the institutional memory within the UN mission's field offices.[97]

*The Role of Civil Affairs in MINUSCA and UNMISS*

The Civil Affairs component is one of the largest civilian elements in UN Peacekeeping, with nearly 1,000 authorised posts worldwide. Deployed at the local level in field offices across host countries, Civil Affairs components facilitate peacekeeping mandates sub-nationally and strengthen the social and civic conditions necessary for peace. Civil Affairs Officers often serve as the primary interface between the mission and local interlocutors.[98]

A policy directive from the DPKO-DFS outlines three core roles for Civil Affairs components, varying by mission mandate and ground situations.[99] The first role involves cross-mission representation, monitoring, and facilitation at the local level. This includes monitoring peace process progress, providing mission leadership with local environment information, conducting conflict analysis and early warning, integrating regional and local considerations into national negotiations or priority-setting processes. The second role focuses on confidence-building, conflict management, and support for reconciliation. This involves developing political space and social and civic conditions conducive to sustainable peace, in partnership with other mission components, UN agencies, and local and international partners. The third role is supporting the restoration and extension of state authority. This involves stabilising weak states, supporting state institutions, promoting good governance practices at the sub-national level, supporting the restoration of state authority at the local level involves

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[95] United Nations Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support, "Understanding and Improving Engagement with Civil Society in UN Peacekeeping: From Policy to Practice" (United Nations, 2016).

[96] United Nations Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support, "Understanding and Improving Engagement with Civil Society in UN Peacekeeping: From Policy to Practice" (United Nations, 2016).

[97] ibid.

[98] United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, "Civil Affairs," minusma.unmissions.org, n.d., https://minusma.unmissions.org/en/civil-affairs.

[99] United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations and United Nations Department of Field Support, "Policy Directive. Civil Affairs." (United Nations, 2008).

increasing access to administrative and social services while promoting transparency and accountability. Immediate tasks include logistical support for civil servant deployment, rehabilitating administrative offices, and building the capacity of redeployed personnel. The broader strategy for restoring state authority requires increased coordination and integration of programming across various government levels and international partners.[100]

Civil Affairs further supports conflict management mechanisms, encouraging community dialogue, reconciliation, and peace consolidation. This includes implementing local peace agreements and addressing challenges in hotspot areas through income-generating activities and incentives to promote the return of IDPs and reduce tensions among religious communities. Importantly, the approach emphasises the role of women and youth in the peace process through local mediation and conflict resolution mechanisms.[101] In the interests of brevity and relevance, the following section will not comprehensively examine the operations of every peacekeeping mission. Instead, it will focus on the missions in the Central African Republic and South Sudan to serve as illustrative examples.

In the Central African Republic, the Civil Affairs team within MINUSCA (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic) bridges gaps between the Mission, UNCTs, the central government, local authorities, civil society, and vulnerable communities. With 117 staff across 12 field offices and 40 other locations, the Civil Affairs Section focuses on three critical areas: protection and community liaison, community dialogue and social cohesion, and the restoration of state authority.[102] Similarly, in South Sudan, the UNMISS (United Nations Mission in South Sudan) Civil Affairs Division operates across 10 field offices and two team sites, acting as a vital link between the Mission, local authorities, and communities. Under the guidance of the SRSG, their work is driven by three strategic priorities: conflict management, social cohesion, and reconciliation initiatives, reflecting a vision to protect civilians and build durable peace.[103]

In MINUSCA, the core mandate focuses on developing local networks and strategic partnerships to access crucial information and provide early warnings about conflict dynamics. This approach aids in assessing and responding to local perceptions and expectations regarding the political process, including the Accord Politique pour la Paix et la Réconciliation (APPR) peace process and the implementation of the Dialogue Republican's main recommendations. Civil Affairs enhances Early Warning and Response mechanisms for civilian protection through the CLA programme, serving as intermediaries between authorities, communities, and the MINUSCA Force, conveying protection needs and concerns. This effective collaboration helps mitigate security risks and protect civilians from threats, particularly from armed groups. Additionally, Community Protection Plans and CANs are developed to improve Early Warning and Response systems for at-risk communities.[104]

The UNMISS Civil Affairs Division's efforts align with conflict management by assisting local stakeholders in preventing, mitigating, and resolving communal conflicts. Their initiatives support pastoral migration processes, manage specific communal conflicts across various states, and improve civil-military relations. Furthermore, the UNMISS Civil Affairs Division supports the peace process at the subnational level, organises awareness forums, facilitates dialogue, and ensures the nexus between subnational and national stakeholders in peace process implementation. Their collaboration with all levels of government, NGOs, civil society, international organisations, faith-based organisations, traditional authorities, women's groups, and youth groups is crucial to the sustainability of their

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[100] United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, "Civil Affairs," minusma.unmissions.org, n.d., https://minusma.unmissions.org/en/civil-affairs.

[101] ibid.

[102] United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in The Central African Republic, "Civil Affairs," minusca.unmissions.org, n.d., https://minusca.unmissions.org/en/civil-affairs.

[103] United Nations Mission in South Sudan, "Civil Affairs," unmiss.unmissions.org, n.d., https://unmiss.unmissions.org/civil-affairs.

[104] United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in The Central African Republic, "Civil Affairs," minusca.unmissions.org, n.d., https://minusca.unmissions.org/en/civil-affairs.

initiatives. Empowering traditional leaders, state authorities, women, youth, and IDPs ensures their involvement in conflict management, reconciliation, and social cohesion.[105]

As such, Civil Affairs Divisions within MINUSCA and UNMISS play vital roles in fostering sustainable, positive peace and stability in the Central African Republic and South Sudan. By engaging a variety of civil society actors through building strategic partnerships, these teams ensure that local voices are heard and integrated into the peace process. Their comprehensive and context-specific approaches significantly contribute to their missions' goals of protecting civilians, promoting dialogue and reconciliation, and restoring state authority. This integrated strategy highlights the importance of local involvement in peace processes and the need for robust mechanisms to support these efforts at every level, and thus serve as examples for best practices for civil society inclusion in UN peacekeeping missions.

*Information Communication Technology (ICT) and Media*

Advancements in technology are profoundly transforming the operational scope, nature, and context of civil society. The advent of information and communication technologies (ICT) has created new arenas of power, influence, and association, reshaping the landscape of civil society actors. This shift has significantly expanded the online presence of the civil society ecosystem, facilitating the formation of a broader array of informal, digitally connected networks that transcend geographical, social, and physical barriers.[106] Such networks enable a diverse range of societal actors, often difficult to identify and map, to come together and collectively address societal challenges.

Moreover, networked citizens are reshaping the dynamics and expectations of civil society empowerment. Informal networks and social movements, facilitated by mobile and social technologies, such as the For Fair Elections protests in Russia and the Arab Spring revolutions, represent a new conceptualization of civil society and herald a new era of civil society engagement. Concurrently, traditional civil society institutions have expanded their roles as supporters, facilitators, and intermediaries in broader political processes. However, these roles are often complex and not always transparent.[107]

The prospect of digitalisation of peacekeeping practices has the potential to fundamentally alter our approach to conflict transformation. Various civil society actors and organisations are already leveraging digital tools to bridge the digital divide, ensuring that all stakeholders can participate on an equal footing. For example, ICT is being increasingly employed to enhance feedback mechanisms to the mission. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), text messaging has been piloted as an early warning system to inform MONUSCO about protection threats.[108] In Mali, radio has served as a vital communication medium for disseminating information regarding MINUSMA's mandate and objectives.[109] While such digitisation of normative tools democratises access to critical information and resources, enabling broader participation in peacekeeping efforts, challenges persist in areas where communities have limited access to ICT and media outlets.

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[105] United Nations Mission in South Sudan, "Civil Affairs," unmiss.unmissions.org, n.d., https://unmiss.unmissions.org/civil-affairs.

[106] Agathe Sarfati, "New Technologies and the Protection of Civilians in UN Peace Operations" (International Peace Institute, 2023).

[107] Manuel Castells, "The New Public Sphere: Global Civil Society, Communication Networks, and Global Governance," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616, no. 1 (2008): 78–93, https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207311877.

[108] SciDev.Net, "Tech for Peace: Facts and Figures," SciDev.Net, 2016, https://www.scidev.net/global/features/tech-for-peace-facts-and-figures/.

[109] Natasja Rupesinghe, "How Can Peacekeepers Strengthen Their Engagement with Local Communities? Opportunities and Challenges in the Field" (Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2016).

# Recommendations

The following recommendations are designed to assist UN field presences at the country level, as well as a variety of stakeholders, in crafting civil society engagement strategies tailored to specific national contexts. Importantly, said strategies should be informed by a human rights-based approach and adhere to the fundamental principles of conflict sensitivity, inclusive and diverse representation, respectful and meaningful participation, flexibility and accessibility, transparency, and accountability, as well as safety and protection. Additionally, these recommendations should be interpreted in alignment with broader UN system-wide efforts aimed at enhancing the coherence of the UN's approach to civil society engagement.

1. *In-Depth Understanding of Local Context Via Respectful, Consistent, and Adaptable Engagement*
    a. As a prerequisite, the fundamental and inalienable human rights of civil society actors should be acknowledged by all parties involved, both individually and collectively.
    b. Given the dynamic nature of social contexts and interactions, thorough, community-specific conflict analyses and peacekeeping needs assessments should be conducted regularly. This approach is essential to gain a comprehensive understanding of communities and their unique characteristics and interests, which encompass language, ethnic groups, belief systems, religious practices, as well as cultural and traditional norms. Such context-specific insights and understanding of local civil society actors will facilitate identification of the most effective strategies for engagement.
    c. Drawing on guidelines for community engagement in peacebuilding missions,[110] it is crucial to conduct regular, gendered conflict-sensitive and risk-informed joint community contextual analyses and mappings of local civil society actors to ensure that the latest peacekeeping needs and priorities are accurately assessed. Such contextual analyses should explore the overall environment of the relevant community, while the mappings should identify specific local civil society actors to be involved in peacekeeping efforts.[111]
        i. Contextual analysis and mapping should incorporate trauma sensitivity.[112] This process should involve collaboration with mental health and psychosocial support professionals to identify and aid individuals and groups who have experienced conflict-related trauma and may require psychosocial support.
        ii. The mapping of local civil society actors should engage a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including all relevant UN entities and partners at international, regional, national, and local levels, such as think tanks and academic institutions. Contexts, such as cross-border areas or locations with safety concerns, UN regional configurations, along with regional and national organisations, as well as established local civil society networks, are ideally positioned to conduct consultations, and gather information. Crucially, the UN must allocate adequate resources and time to foster partnerships, as the mapping process necessitates development of trust in advance.
    d. To effectively address community-specific conditions that may influence the execution of peacekeeping interventions, it is crucial for UN agencies to adopt operational flexibility and implement risk mitigation strategies. This includes identifying suitable alternative spaces and mechanisms for community engagement, such as online groups, as well as adjusting programming parameters, to optimally support the activities of

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[110] United Nations, "United Nations Community Engagement Guidelines on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace" (United Nations, 2020).

[111] Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, "Conflict-Sensitive Development Co-Operation: How to Conduct a Conflict Analysis" (Edita Communication AB, 2004).

[112] Mediators Beyond Borders, "Trauma-Informed Peacebuilding & Development Assistance," mediatorsbeyondborders.org, n.d., https://mediatorsbeyondborders.org/what-we-do/trauma-informed-peacebuilding/.

local civil society actors. These strategies should be devised with a deep understanding of both national and local contexts and should be periodically reviewed to ensure they remain pertinent and efficacious.

2. *Operational and Strategic Alignment of Civil Society, UN Peacekeeping Missions, Other UN Agencies and Stakeholders*
   a. The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, along with the Deputy Special Representative and the Resident Coordinator (RC) and their Office (RCO), should actively work to streamline and coordinate sustainable civil society engagement across UN agencies and other stakeholders at the country level (i.e. international and local non-governmental organisations).[113] It is crucial to adopt a coherent and strategic approach that avoids duplication of efforts and leverages existing engagements by each UN entity and agency.
      i. For example, it may be feasible to consolidate perception surveys or focus-group discussions conducted by various members of the UNCT with initiatives run by other UN agencies present in the country (e.g., UN Women).
   b. It is recommended that an UN-mandated, designated civil society coordinating body within the country's presence be established to develop and maintain a secure, centralized, and comprehensive database of civil society organisations. This database should be constructed based on the contextual analysis, local civil society mapping, and internal assessments, and be regularly updated and shared with pertinent UN entities. The responsibility for managing this database could be assigned to existing staff within each respective mission.
      i. Within this recommendation, data privacy and security are of paramount importance. Key measures could include, but are not limited to, data encryption, access control, regular audits, staff training, and a robust incident response plan. These steps will ensure the secure management of sensitive information, fostering trust and confidence among civil society stakeholders.
   c. The establishment of a joint UN-civil society committee at the country level could serve as an effective mechanism for enhancing internal UN system coherence and coordination. This body could facilitate targeted communication, training, knowledge management, and information exchange at both national and local levels.
      i. For example, a joint committee could conduct training sessions for incoming UN and civil society staff, focusing on conflict-sensitive and effective methods for engaging with local civil society actors. This centralised coordination, led by senior leadership in both mission and local contexts, should be supported by various UN entities and agencies and is essential to ensure that a broad array of context-specific concerns and local perspectives are integrated into the mission's strategic decision-making, political processes, and programme design at the country level.
   d. In integrated, cross-national UN missions, it is advisable that the centralised database on local civil society actors and their communities be managed collaboratively to promote sustainability and operational coherence. Such joint management could help avoid duplication and continuously strengthen local partnerships, particularly during transitional phases. As noted above, data privacy and security would remain a priority.

3. *Assured Protection and Safety of Civil Society Actors in Restricted Civic Space via Conflict-Sensitive and Risk-Aware Strategies*
   a. A contested environment, whether politically, legally, socially, or culturally, can hinder the capacity of local civil society actors to effectively engage in peacekeeping missions

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[113] Han Dorussen and Marian de Vooght, "Putting Civilians First: NGO Perceptions and Expectations of UN Peacekeeping" (Folke Bernadotte Academy, 2018).

and sustaining peace efforts.[114] Vulnerable groups, including women, youth, indigenous peoples, individuals with disabilities, and those facing discrimination due to caste, sexual orientation, or gender identity, among other marginalised communities, are especially vulnerable in such settings. Such contraction of civic space frequently serves as a precursor to fragility, conflict, and violence. Recognizing the preventive potential of civic space, including its critical role in facilitating the peaceful resolution of grievances, active promotion, protection, and enhancement of civic space is paramount to effective civil society engagement.[115]

b. In adopting a conflict-sensitive approach, it is crucial to recognize that engagement with UN agencies and other UN-affiliated bodies in a restricted civic space can pose significant risks to local civil society actors, making them vulnerable to accusations of acting against national interests, serving as agents of foreign states, or supporting violent and criminal elements. Such awareness is crucial to efforts in mitigating these risks and ensuring the safety and credibility of civil society participants.

c. To maintain a conflict-sensitive approach at all stages of civil society engagement, it is crucial to discuss detailed elements of the engagement strategy in advance with local civil society actors, ensuring that they are not exposed to undue risk. Preventive measures should be formulated in consultation with local civil society and their communities, with particular emphasis on including women, youth, and other marginalised groups to address their unique risks and challenges.

d. Following from Recommendation 1, the protection and safety of local civil society actors should begin with a thorough community contextual analysis and mapping of local civil society actors. By identifying context-specific protection needs and key safety issues, constructive initiatives can be developed to address these concerns, involving, where possible, collaboration with national and local authorities, as well as armed groups where applicable.

e. Advocacy goals for the safety and protection of local civil society actors should be integrated into broader partnerships with national and regional stakeholders. Support for local civil society protection networks should involve strategically identifying, advocating for, and advancing local safety and protection issues in a manner complementary to the national context.

f. Flexibility and adaptability to continually evolving conditions should be demonstrated, with engagement activities organised based on risk mitigation measures and necessary conditions for safety, security, and protection of civil society actors. Regular risk assessments and early-warning mechanisms should be established in consultation with local civil society actors, their communities, and relevant regional and subregional organisations.

   i. Echoing prior recommendations, the development, enhancement, and dissemination of gender-sensitive and youth-inclusive safety and security policies and protocols, applicable both online and offline, are of particular importance. Consequently, a flexible and adaptable approach involves ensuring the secure handling of information pertaining to local civil society actors, integrating conflict-sensitive approaches in all meetings and communications, and facilitating access to existing protection and emergency support mechanisms established by regional, national, and local stakeholders. Additionally, conflict-sensitive peacekeeping training should be mandatory for all staff and partner organisations involved in engaging with local civil society actors and their communities.

4. *Meaningful and Inclusive Engagement of Civil Society Actors*

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[114] United Nations Sustainable Development Group, "Conflict Sensitivity, Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace: Good Practice Note" (United Nations, 2022).

[115] OECD, "The Protection and Promotion of Civic Space: Strengthening Alignment with International Standards and Guidance" (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2022).

a. Acknowledging the intrinsic and inalienable human rights to freedom of opinion and expression, association, and peaceful assembly, as well as the right to participate in public affairs both individually and collectively at all levels, it is essential to prioritise meaningful, inclusive, people-centred and grassroots approach in civil society engagement. This approach must include diverse representation from women and youth-led organisations, ethnic groups, marginalised communities, indigenous peoples, traditional leaders and peacemakers, faith-based organisations and leaders, individuals with disabilities, refugees and internally displaced persons, sexual and gender minorities, and other relevant stakeholders.

b. To embed an inclusive, bottom-up approach within the missions' operational culture, performance management systems should be realigned to incentivize proactive engagement with diverse local civil society actors in order to ensure national ownership and in adherence to the principle of "leaving no one behind." The same principle should guide Programme management, ensuring the meaningful participation of local civil society actors in decision-making, analysis, design, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and reporting of peacekeeping activities. Engagement with local civil society should commence at an early stage and continue throughout the process, incorporating a guaranteed feedback loop and an exit strategy that leverages local resources to achieve sustainable impact upon project completion.[116]

   i. For example, senior leadership could develop and institutionalise civil society engagement modalities, establishing consistent and coherent rules of engagement with a broad spectrum of civil society actors and coordinate with existing community-level instruments, including grievance mechanisms. Such mechanisms should aim at enabling civil society actors to not only share their experiences, grievances and needs, but to also actively engage in facilitating the political process, protect civilians, assist in the disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration of ex-combatants; support the organization of elections, protect, and promote human rights and assist in restoring the rule of law.

   ii. In this context, community-based monitoring (CBM)[117] can play a pivotal role. By empowering civil society to assess the effectiveness, quality, accessibility, and impact of peacekeeping activities, CBM ensures that the voices of those directly affected by said activities are heard and heeded. As such, the community regains local ownership to assess whether their expectations are being fulfilled and offer informed recommendations for potential strategic adjustments. The system utilises various data collection methodologies, including brief standardised surveys, rapid SMS surveys, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions, among others.

c. Clearly articulating the UN peacekeeping missions' role and operations is paramount in ensuring a conflict-sensitive and effective outreach and communication to civil society. Such communication should encompass the organisation's general limitations and specific challenges within various contexts, as well as clearly outline the concrete objectives of civil society engagement, along with the criteria and processes for selecting local civil society partners on behalf of communities, where applicable. Clear and transparent communication is essential to prevent mismanaged or unfulfilled expectations.

   i. To facilitate this, the missions should identify the most appropriate communication channels for reaching diverse groups, particularly women, youth, and marginalised populations. Utilising centralised local civil society databases where helpful, the missions should develop user-friendly communication materials and platforms tailored to community capacities and

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[116] Hickendorff, A., & Van Der Lijn, J. (2021). *Report: Civil Society Workshop on the Future of Peacekeeping Operations*. Virtual Workshop.

[117] The Global Fund, "Community-Based Monitoring: An Overview" (The Global Fund, 2020).

contexts. These could include simplified and translated leaflets, social media, television and radio programmes, or community-level town halls aimed at local civil society actors and communities.

ii. To further furnish effective communication, additional resources should be dedicated to ensuring the safety and security of local journalists and media outlets. This includes providing sensitization and capacity-building programmes focused on conflict-sensitive and risk-informed reporting, as well as hate speech monitoring, particularly during periods of political transition.

d. Regular and systematic consultations between the UN agencies, mission, and local civil society actors, particularly women and youth, should be institutionalised into peacekeeping missions to enhance collaborative engagement.[118]

i. For example, the missions could establish a permanent dialogue and grievance mechanism that functions as a centralised hub, helpline, ombudsman, and physical space, which would enable local civil society actors and communities to interface directly with the UN and, where necessary, be referred to specific topic-focused UN entities. Furthermore, these platforms could serve as venues for informal feedback and knowledge-sharing, in turn promoting robust networks among stakeholders and enhance the efficacy of peacekeeping efforts but also ensure that they are more inclusive and representative of local constituencies.

ii. The UN Office of the Special Envoy for Syria (OSE) Civil Society Support Room (CSSR)[119] exemplifies a best practice model. Initially established by three organisations—the OSE, Swisspeace, and NOREF—the CSSR serves as a platform designed to foster dialogue and collaboration among civil society and various stakeholders involved in the Syrian peace process. Since 2016, CSSR participants have significantly contributed by sharing their extensive knowledge of the Syrian context, advocating consistently for a political solution to the conflict, and providing unique perspectives on various thematic issues in the political process. They have also established networks among organisations and actors across different geographical and political divides, fostering social cohesion. Through their contributions and advocacy, CSSR participants have generated more space and future possibilities for the meaningful inclusion of civil society in the Syrian political process. Peacekeeping missions can thus adopt a similar model to better address local realities and ensure more comprehensive and enduring outcomes.

e. To the fullest extent feasible, UN agencies and peacekeeping missions should prioritise local peacekeeping initiatives and solutions, as well as actively participate in community events organised by local civil society actors to build trust and rapport within the relevant communities.[120] Such local gatherings can also serve as critical outreach opportunities to align expectations and provide platforms for in-depth discussions on peacekeeping objectives, needs, and challenges. This approach will enhance the effectiveness, inclusivity, and sustainability of peacekeeping efforts, ensuring they are responsive to local contexts and needs.

i. Echoing prior recommendations, this can be achieved through partnerships with UN agencies present in the country of mission, that are mutually beneficial, respectful, and transparent, with the success of these partnerships depending on the missions' thorough understanding of its local civil society partners and their respective communities.

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[118] Hickendorff, A., & Van Der Lijn, J. (2021). *Report: Civil Society Workshop on the Future of Peacekeeping Operations*. Virtual Workshop.

[119] United Nations Office of the Special Envoy for Syria, "The Civil Society Support Room (CSSR)," cssrweb.org, n.d., https://cssrweb.org/en/.

[120] Arne Strand et al., "Community-Driven Development in Contexts of Conflict," *CMI CHR. Michelsen Institute*, 2003.

    f. As advancements in technology and media space are profoundly transforming the operational scope, nature, and context of civil society, ICTs such as videoconferences, social media, online consultations, and mobile texts, should become regular components of the missions' communication strategy, tailored to local contexts, and conducted in a conflict-sensitive and risk-informed manner. This would ensure real-time, two-way communication with a broader range of local actors.

        i. The missions could work with local civil society networks to support and utilise existing local communication platforms to facilitate peacekeeping operations, foster participation, promote interactive reporting, and share information on peacekeeping developments and best practices. A variety of social media platforms could serve as informal channels for local civil society actors to report on initiative implementation, encompassing opportunities and challenges, best practices, and lessons learned, enabling real-time information sharing and feedback.

        ii. Where needed, investment in building ICT capacity in hard-to-reach areas is essential for fostering effective two-way communication. Social media platforms could also be used for informal reporting on project implementation and local situations, including opportunities, challenges, best practices, and lessons learned. For example, establishing community ICT centres managed by youth groups could allow rural actors to participate in consultations and dialogues through video technology. Where ICT capacity is already present, the missions, supported by other UN agencies, should strengthen existing capacities rather than duplicating efforts.

  *5. Capacity Building and Adaptive Funding*

    a. Regular conflict- and gender-sensitive inclusive guidance, tools, and capacity-building opportunities should be provided to local civil society actors. This should encompass the concept of peacekeeping and positive peace, as well as related frameworks (e.g., Women, Peace and Security and Youth, Peace, and Security), and their practical application in local contexts.

        i. Specific financial resource allocations should be directed to civil society engagement, covering costs such as travel for consultations, training, learning exchange opportunities, institutional support, and basic management training. This training should include fundraising, financial management, grant writing, and reporting, tailored to the context-specific needs of local civil society actors, which are essential for sustaining local capacity.

    b. Financing peacekeeping initiatives at the local, grassroots level is crucial but remains insufficiently explored. Although current funding mechanisms have facilitated the involvement of local civil society actors in peace processes, there is a significant need for more tailored funding solutions that address the unique requirements at mission level. To enhance understanding of these specific needs, perception surveys[121] could be utilised to collect detailed information regarding the experiences and particular funding requirements of local civil society actors seeking UN agency-funded financial support.

    c. Local civil society actors engaged in peacekeeping could benefit from smaller-scale funding to explore, test, and implement local initiatives. Consequently, introducing innovative, predictable, flexible, and risk-tolerant funding modalities[122] that enable local initiatives to achieve measurable impacts contributing to long-term and structural change.

        i. Currently, UN grant application procedures and associated administrative requirements are often complex and prohibitive, particularly for new and smaller organisations operating in conflict-affected settings. Therefore, efforts

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[121] United Nations Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support, "Understanding and Integrating Local Perceptions in Multi-Dimensional UN Peacekeeping" (United Nations, 2013).

[122] OECD, "Managing Risks in Fragile and Transitional Contexts: The Price of Success?" (OECD Publishing, 2012).

should be undertaken to simplify these processes and develop innovative grant application templates and selection/reporting criteria, with a particular focus on supporting women and youth-led local civil society actors.

d. In cases where sufficient capacity or funding modalities to directly support local civil society actors are lacking, the intermediary role of international and national civil society organisations should be further explored. For example, intermediary civil society actors with greater capacity could be funded to support smaller organisations.

e. While this funding modality is proposed as a way forward, continuous exploration of sustainable funding avenues that effectively support local civil society actors is critical. Such modalities, in partnership with intermediary civil society organisations, should be regularly monitored and evaluated to ensure they align with the specific visions and needs of local civil society actors.

f. Recognising that the UN alone cannot change existing funding modalities to meet the needs of local civil society actors, missions' senior leadership and UNCTs could foster meaningful partnerships with relevant stakeholders, including regional and subregional organisations, the private sector, international financial institutions (IFIs) such as the World Bank, and regional development banks, to collaboratively explore innovative funding modalities. Such collaborative efforts aim to narrow the funding gap for local civil society actors and scale up their initiatives and impact.

**Limitations**

Despite the comprehensive approach to examining inclusive practices in peacekeeping operations, several limitations hinder full inclusivity in these efforts. Firstly, navigating complex political environments often poses significant challenges. Peacekeeping missions operate in regions with deeply entrenched conflicts, where political factions may resist inclusive practices due to historical grievances or power dynamics. This resistance can impede the effective implementation of gender, youth, and civil society engagement strategies.

Second, ensuring adequate funding and personnel to carry out missions effectively is a persistent challenge. Budget constraints and limited resources often force peacekeeping operations to prioritise certain priorities over others, potentially devaluing initiatives aimed at inclusivity. Additionally, the recruitment and retention of personnel with the necessary expertise in gender and youth issues can be difficult, limiting the capacity of missions to fully integrate these perspectives. Moreover, the diversity and complexity of local contexts require tailored approaches that are not always feasible within the standardised frameworks of UN operations. Cultural differences, local power structures, and varying levels of civil society development mean that a one-size-fits-all approach to inclusivity may not be effective. This necessitates flexible and context-specific strategies which can be difficult to design and implement within the constraints of a peacekeeping mission.

Finally, the principle of impartiality, while fundamental to peacekeeping, can sometimes conflict with the goal of inclusivity. Efforts to engage marginalised groups may be perceived as biased by other parties, complicating the mission's ability to maintain neutrality. Balancing the need for inclusivity with the requirement to remain impartial is a delicate and often challenging task. In summary, while the paper aims to provide a thorough analysis and recommendations for enhancing inclusivity in peacekeeping operations, the realities of political resistance, resource constraints, diverse local contexts, and the imperative of impartiality present significant limitations to the full realisation of inclusive practices.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, this paper has underscored the critical importance of upholding the principles of Resolution 1325 and Resolution 2250 to enhance the meaningful participation of women and youth, alongside civil society, in peace and security efforts. By recommending inclusive practices and strategic frameworks at both international and national levels, it seeks to address significant challenges such as

the lack of operational strategies, insufficient resources, and the absence of comprehensive data and formal strategies The paper made recommendations to foster meaningful partnerships and dialogue with civil society organisations in line with relevant Security Council resolutions that amplify their respective voices in peacebuilding processes to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of peace initiatives.

In addition, prioritising the development of formal frameworks and sustainable funding mechanisms will amplify youth engagement in peacekeeping missions, ensuring their meaningful inclusion and participation in decision-making processes. Similarly, advancing gender equality beyond mere representation metrics to encompass diverse roles and experiences will foster more inclusive and effective peace operations worldwide. Moreover, enhancing coordination and dialogue with civil society organisations, coupled with increased resource allocation and support, will strengthen their capacity to contribute effectively to peacebuilding efforts at local and global levels. With these three pillars—gender, youth, and civil society—as guiding principles, the paper explored and co-created best practices for more inclusive peacekeeping operations.

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**Annex**
**Table 1. Evolution of Gender Guidelines in the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda[123]**

| Year | Resolution | Main Themes Addressed |
|------|-----------|----------------------|
| 2000 | Resolution 1325 | Highlights the importance of women's participation in conflict prevention and resolution processes |
| 2008 | Resolution 1820 | Recognises sexual violence in armed conflicts as a tactic of war |
| 2009 | Resolution 1888 | Strengthens the Security Council's provisions to prevent and combat sexual violence in conflict situations and establishes the position of Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict |
| 2009 | Resolution 1889 | Emphasises the importance of women's participation in all stages of peace processes |
| 2011 | Resolution 1960 | Requests the inclusion of data on sexual violence in the reports of the United Nations Secretary-General, along with the names of conflict parties suspected of involvement in these crimes |
| 2013 | Resolution 2106 | Aims to strengthen efforts to end impunity for sexual crimes in conflict situations |
| 2013 | Resolution 2122 | Establishes more robust measures to ensure women's participation in peace processes, attributing this responsibility to the Security Council, UN Member States, and regional organisations |
| 2015 | Resolution 2242 | Calls for the creation of new strategies and resources in the implementation of the WPS Agenda |
| 2019 | Resolution 2467 | Reiterates the demand to eliminate all acts of sexual violence in armed conflict contexts, recognising that men and boys are also targets of such violence in conflicts |

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[123] Prepared by Kimberly Digolin based on United Nations' Resolutions (2000, 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2011, 2013a, 2013b, 2015, 2019a, 2019b)

| 2019 | Resolution 2493 | Calls for the appointment of gender advisors, along with provisions to facilitate the full and effective participation of women in processes related to UN peace operations |

# Youth Shaping the Future of Science, Technology, and Education at AI for Good

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**Introduction**

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has in recent years a constant topic that brought tremendous revolutions in myriads of sectors such as business, journalism, education, and health to mention a few. The year 2022 was indeed a pivotal point for artificial intelligence, especially after the introduction of new models of AI such as GPT-3 by open AI.[124] While AI has been widely defined, a more holistic definition was curated by scholars who designed a conceptual framework in communication research having analyzed different definitions of AI as "*tangible real-world capability of non-human machines or artificial entities to perform, task solve, communicate, interact and act logically as it occurs with biological humans.*"[125]

The potential of AI to revolutionize numerous industries has generated significant excitement globally, while concerns about the ethical implications and the widening digital gap have also dampened this enthusiasm. According to the 2024 Artificial Intelligence Index Report from Stanford University, the number of new language models introduced worldwide in 2023 has doubled, with countries like the United States, China, the EU, and the UK being the primary contributors to this growth.[126]

AI has the potential to significantly advance global development and contribute to the achievement of sustainable development goals (SDGs). However, it is crucial to address the issue of equitable access to this technology, particularly because over 3 billion people worldwide lack access to technological tools. Effective global governance of AI is essential to ensure that it is grounded in principles of social justice and to prevent it from exacerbating existing inequalities.

Young individuals appear to be among the demographics that are being overlooked in the current era of extensive AI expansion. According to a recent study on youth and AI, despite an anticipated 40% surge in the need for jobs that necessitate AI or machine learning expertise over the next five years, the prevailing sentiment among young people towards AI is one of uncertainty regarding its potential impact on job opportunities. The report indicates that over 50% of young individuals possess minimal to no comprehension of AI, and at least 70% are not being educated in AI within the school system.[127]

The United Nations plays a crucial role in addressing these challenges on a worldwide scale by organizing the Summit for the Future in September 2024, where member states will come together to discuss and ratify the Pact for the Future. One of the key topics of these discussions will be the involvement of youth. Additionally, it is anticipated that the member states will also endorse two annexes, namely the Declaration of Future Generations and the Global Digital Compact, alongside the Pact for the Future. Specifically, the Declaration for Future Generation reiterates the commitment to "*harness the benefits of new and emerging technologies…through effective and equitable governance at the global and regional levels, through capacity building and promoting transfer of technology…to eliminate digital and innovation divide*."[128] The world is a home of at least 1.2 billion youth today whose contribution is much needed to deliver the promise for the 2030 agenda. AI developments therefore cannot afford to miss the potential of this unique, yet marginalized group.

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[124] Forbes, The 7 Biggest Artificial Intelligence (AI) Trends in 2022, https://www.forbes.com/sites/bernardmarr/2021/09/24/the-7-biggest-artificial-intelligence-ai-trends-in-2022/.

[125] Hemelo Gil de Zuniga, A Scholarly Definition of Artificial Intelligence (AI): Advancing AI as a Conceptual Framework in Communication Research, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/10584609.2023.2290497?needAccess=true

[126] Stanford University Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence (HAI), Artificial Intelligence Report 2024, https://aiindex.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/HAI_AI-Index-Report-2024.pdf

[127] Onside, Majority of Young People Confused and Unprepared for AI Opportunities, https://www.onsideyouthzones.org/news/young-people-unprepared-for-ai/.

[128] See Para 29 of Rev 2-Declaration of Future Generations.

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU), a United Nations Specialized Agency, has recognized the potential of AI at the sector level. In 2017, ITU established the AI for Good Team as a flagship event focused on advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in partnership with 40+ UN Sister Agencies. The primary goal of this platform is to discover practical applications of AI that can contribute to the achievement of SDGs and to expand these solutions for global impact. It serves as a collaborative space where various stakeholders come together to explore and implement AI solutions that can help address some of the most critical challenges facing the world. Additionally, this platform features a robust neural network and hosts the AI for Good Summit.

The platform has enabled young delegates and artificial intelligence specialists of the 62nd Graduate Study Programme, the longest educational programme of the UN to discuss and propose the framework for the Youth Network on AI, a project aimed at promoting inclusive and efficient involvement of young individuals in the field of artificial intelligence. This brief presents rigorous research and a set of recommendations by the 62nd Graduate Study Programme working group 3 focusing on the theme "***Youth Shaping the Future of Science, Technology, and Education at AI for Good***" centered on the involvement of youth in AI and proposes a comprehensive Youth Network Initiative.

**Methodology**

Working Group 3 conducted a comprehensive survey to examine and evaluate the utilization of artificial intelligence (AI) across seven global regions, to identify the needs, challenges, and opportunities for youth involvement in AI development. This survey served as a foundational element, informing the components, vision, and mission of the proposed AI Youth Network. Responses were garnered from a diverse cohort of young individuals, representing 19 countries across regions including Asia-Pacific, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, Africa, Latin America, and Northern America. The ages of respondents ranged from 22 to 31 years, with a mean age of approximately 25.88 years. This diversity ensures a broad spectrum of perspectives and experiences, thereby enhancing the understanding of the AI landscape.

**Findings**

   **i.    AI Development and Government Support**
Respondents rated the current level of AI development and deployment in their countries, with ratings ranging from 1 to 4 on a scale of 5. **The average rating was 2.42**, *indicating a moderate level of AI development. This suggests that while some countries have made significant strides in AI,* **there is still considerable room for growth and improvement**.
Government support for AI development was also assessed, with ratings ranging from 1 to 5. **The average rating was 3.32**, reflecting a moderate to high level of support. *This indicates that while some governments are actively supporting AI initiatives, others may need to enhance their efforts to create a more conducive environment for AI advancement.*
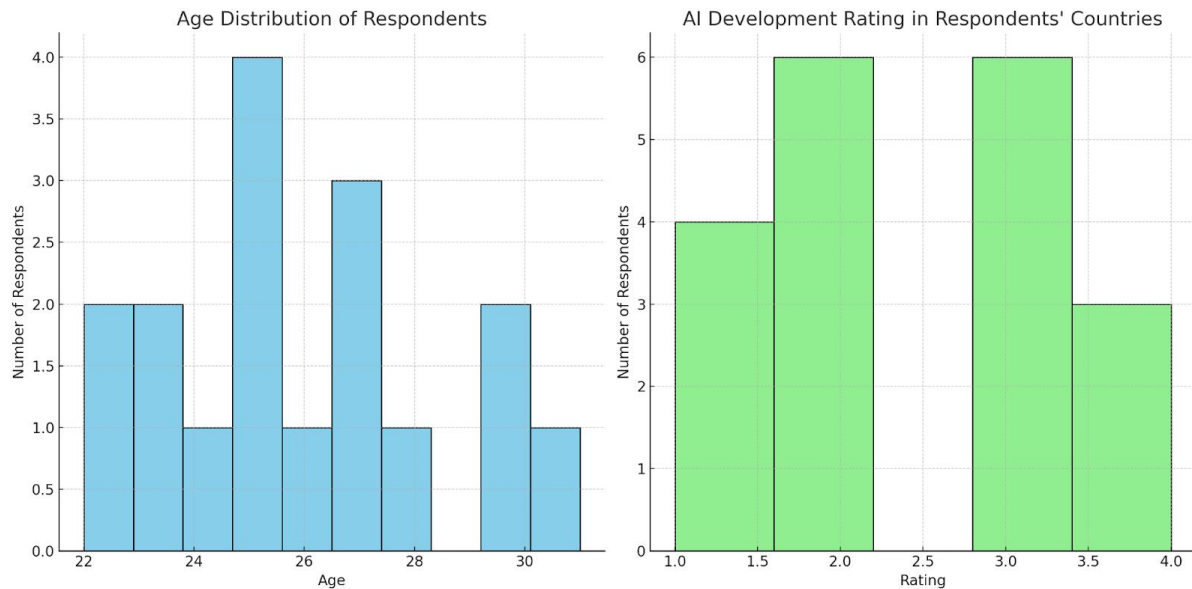
- **Figure 1.** *Left Chart: Age Distribution of Respondents, showcasing the diverse age range (22 to 31 years) with the majority around the mid-20s.*
- ***Right Chart****: AI Development Rating in Respondents' Countries, indicating a moderate level of AI development with an average rating of 2.42.*

**ii.    Key challenges and emerging issues.**

The Survey identified several challenges and emerging issues as listed below:

- **Financial Investment**: 50% of the respondents highlighted the need for increased financial investment in AI research and development.
- **Educational Programmes**: There is a strong demand from the youth i.e. 78% of the respondents propose educational programmes that can equip young people with the necessary skills and knowledge to contribute to AI development.
- **Barriers to Accessing AI Technologies**: More than 50% of the respondents highlighted the high cost of technology as the main barrier to accessing AI technologies in their countries.
- **Research Institutions**: Strengthening research institutions and fostering collaboration between academia and technology industry is crucial for advancing AI. 75% of the respondents identified research institutions as the most needed to advance AI development in their countries.
- **Government Policies**: Clear and supportive government policies are essential for driving AI initiatives forward as supported by 89% of the respondents.
- **Interdisciplinary collaborations for AI development:** One problem in interdisciplinary collaborations for AI development is the difficulty in effectively integrating diverse expertise and perspectives, leading to communication barriers and potential misalignment of goals.


**Recommendations**

**Policy Recommendations for Advancing AI Development**

**1. Increase Financial Investment in AI Research and Development**

- It is essential for stakeholders such as governments to allocate a significant portion of national budgets to AI research and development. This could involve creating dedicated AI funding programmes, grants, and incentives for both the public and private sectors. This can be achieved through for example establishing public-private partnerships to co-fund AI projects, ensuring that funds are directed towards high-impact research and innovative applications of AI.

**2. Implement Comprehensive Educational Programmes**

- As AI rapidly advances and AI knowledge and skills among youths and other demographics lacking, it is imperative for states to develop and integrate AI-related curricula in educational institutions, from primary schools to universities, to equip young people with essential AI skills and knowledge. States should also provide scholarships and financial support for students

pursuing AI and related fields. States can partner with tech companies to offer internships, workshops, and training programmes that provide practical experience.

**3. Address Barriers to Accessing AI Technologies**

- States should implement measures to reduce the cost of AI technologies and make them more accessible. This could include subsidies, tax incentives for technology providers, and promoting the development of low-cost AI solutions. Moreover, states can establish community AI hubs that provide shared access to expensive technologies and resources, ensuring that smaller organizations and startups can also benefit from AI advancements.

**4. Strengthen Research Institutions and Foster Collaboration**

- It is highly recommended by experts for states to increase funding in Research & Development (RD) to curb the limitations of AI. States can enhance the capabilities of research institutions by increasing funding, providing state-of-the-art facilities, and encouraging collaboration between academia and industry. Create joint research programmes that bring together academic researchers and industry professionals to work on AI projects. Promote the sharing of knowledge and resources through conferences, symposiums, and collaborative platforms.

**5. Develop Clear and Supportive Government Policies**

- States should formulate and implement policies that support AI innovation while addressing ethical, legal, and social implications. This includes data protection regulations, ethical AI guidelines, and frameworks for AI governance. Establish a dedicated governmental body responsible for overseeing AI development and regulation. This body should work closely with stakeholders to ensure that policies are practical and forward-looking.

6. **Strengthen collaborations beyond:** Establish structured communication protocols and regular interdisciplinary workshops to ensure clear understanding, alignment of goals, and effective integration of diverse expertise in AI development projects.

With this policy brief and findings, Working Group 3 recommends the following youth network initiative plan: **AI Youth Network Initiative Plan.**
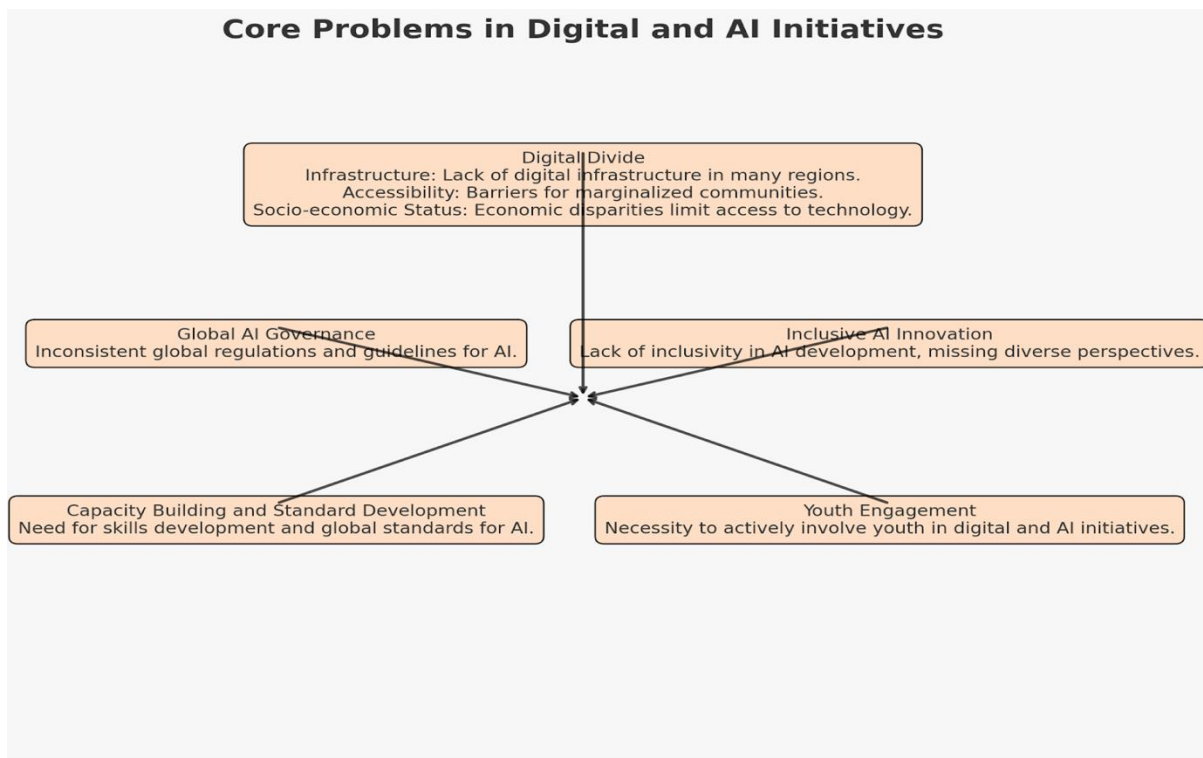
The AI Youth Network is dedicated to empowering young individuals to lead the AI revolution by providing equitable access to technology and fostering social impact through ethical standards. This initiative offers free AI courses, workshops, and training programmes globally, ensuring comprehensive AI education for youth. By organizing hackathons, innovation challenges, and mentorship opportunities, the community supports youth-led innovation and creativity. It also builds a strong, interconnected global network through local and international chapters, regular meetups, and online forums.

The community advocates for responsible AI development, and compliance with data protection laws, and raises awareness about AI security risks, ensuring that AI technology is used ethically and effectively to address pressing social issues such as poverty, inequality, and climate change. **Our seven key programmes include** *the AI Education and Training Programme, AI Olympics, Youth-Led AI Innovation Lab, AI Playground, AI for Social Impact, the Ethical AI Advocacy and Awareness Campaign, and Global Youth Community Building*. These programmes offer structured learning, competitive challenges, hands-on innovation labs, a virtual sandbox for experimentation, and initiatives to harness AI for social good while promoting ethical AI practices and building a robust global network of young AI enthusiasts.

| Vision |
| --- |
| Empowering youth to lead the AI revolution with equitable access to technology, driving social impact while upholding ethical standards. |

| Missions |
| --- |

| | |
|---|---|
| **1. Provide Accessible AI Education:** | <ul><li>Develop and offer free AI courses, workshops, and training programmes for youth globally.</li><li>Create and distribute comprehensive AI curricula for schools and universities.</li></ul> |
| **0. Advocate for Ethical AI:** | <ul><li>Ensure all projects comply with data protection laws and the AI Act.</li><li>Promote responsible AI development and usage among youth.</li><li>Prioritize obtaining informed consent for data usage in all AI technology applications.</li></ul> |
| **0. Support Youth-Led Innovation:** | <ul><li>Organize hackathons, innovation challenges, and competitions to stimulate creativity.</li><li>Connect youth with experienced AI professionals for guidance and mentorship.</li></ul> |
| **0. Build a Strong Community:** | <ul><li>Establish local and global AI Youth Network chapters for networking and support.</li><li>Host regular meetups, conferences, and webinars to foster connections and share knowledge.</li><li>Create online forums and social media groups for continuous engagement and collaboration.</li></ul> |
| **0. Promote Social Impact Projects:** | <ul><li>Encourage and support AI initiatives that address social issues such as poverty, inequality, and climate change.</li><li>Highlight and celebrate successful youth-driven AI projects making a positive impact.</li><li>Facilitate partnerships between youth, NGOs, and other stakeholders for collaborative social impact projects.</li></ul> |
| **0. Raise Awareness of AI Security and Risks:** | <ul><li>Raise awareness about the risks of AI such as but not limited to exacerbating gender-based violence.</li><li>Educate youth on the potential security risks and dangers associated with AI.</li><li>Develop and distribute resources and training on AI safety and risk management.</li><li>Advocate for responsible AI usage and the importance of security measures in AI development.</li><li>Educate the community on privacy, ethics, and responsible AI practices.</li></ul> |

The mission of the AI Youth Network is to democratize AI education and foster innovation among young people globally by offering free AI courses, workshops, and comprehensive curricula, along with scholarships to support aspiring youth. We advocate for ethical AI by ensuring compliance with data protection laws, promoting responsible AI practices, and educating on privacy and ethics. We support youth-led innovation through funding, mentorship, and organizing hackathons, connecting young talents with experienced professionals. By establishing local and global chapters, hosting events, and fostering continuous engagement through online forums, we build a strong community. We promote social impact projects addressing issues like poverty and climate change, facilitating partnerships for collaborative efforts. Additionally, we raise awareness about AI security risks, providing resources and training on AI safety and advocating for responsible AI usage. Our aim is to empower the next generation of AI leaders with the knowledge, skills, and ethical grounding to create a better future for all.

**Core Problems in Digital and AI Initiatives**

**Digital Divide**
Infrastructure: Lack of digital infrastructure in many regions.
Accessibility: Barriers for marginalized communities.
Socio-economic Status: Economic disparities limit access to technology.

**Global AI Governance**
Inconsistent global regulations and guidelines for AI.

**Inclusive AI Innovation**
Lack of inclusivity in AI development, missing diverse perspectives.

**Capacity Building and Standard Development**
Need for skills development and global standards for AI.

**Youth Engagement**
Necessity to actively involve youth in digital and AI initiatives.

<u>Why the AI Youth Network Community Should Exist</u>

The AI Youth Network Community addresses critical issues hindering the equitable development and deployment of AI. The platform is essential to tackle the following core problems:

1. **Digital Divide:**
   o **Infrastructure:** Many regions lack the necessary digital infrastructure, creating significant gaps in access to AI technology and knowledge. The platform will work to bridge this divide by promoting the development and deployment of digital infrastructure in underserved areas.
   o **Accessibility:** Marginalized communities often face barriers to accessing digital technologies. The AI Youth Network Community will ensure that these communities receive the support and resources needed to overcome these barriers, fostering inclusivity.
   o **Socio-economic Status:** Economic disparities limit access to technology for many individuals. The platform will provide free or subsidized educational resources, tools, and technologies to make AI accessible to youth from all socio-economic backgrounds.
   o **Gender Digital divide:** The AI for Good Youth Network can close the gender digital divide by providing targeted digital literacy and AI training for marginalized populations such as young women and girls, people living with disabilities and many more by equipping them with the skills needed to thrive in the digital age. The network will foster inclusive communities and mentorship programmes that will be a supportive environment that encourage girls to pursue tech-related careers. Additionally, promoting positive narratives and role models through social media campaigns can inspire more young women to engage with and excel in technology fields.
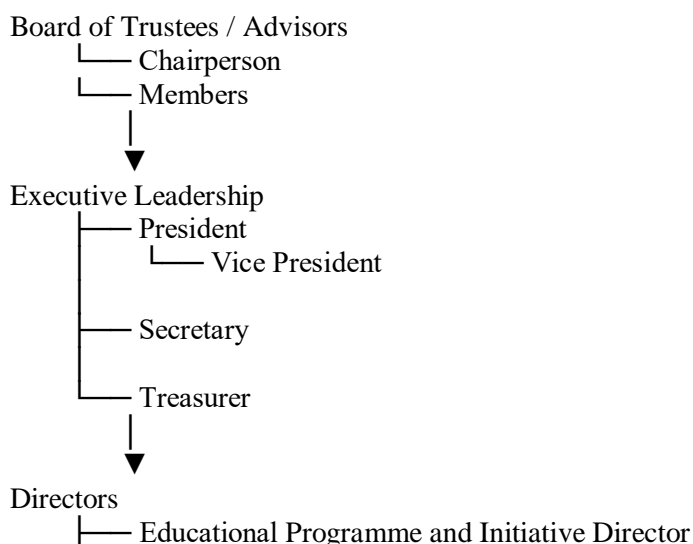
2. **Global AI Governance:**
   o **Inconsistent Regulations:** There is a lack of consistent global regulations and guidelines for AI development and usage. The platform will advocate for harmonized global AI governance frameworks and educate youth about the importance of adhering to these regulations, promoting ethical and responsible AI practices.

3. **Inclusive and equitable AI Innovation:**
   o **Diverse Perspectives:** The development of AI often lacks inclusivity and misses diverse perspectives. The AI Youth Network Community will actively promote the involvement of underrepresented groups (such as girls, LGBTQI+, young people living with disabilities, minorities) in AI innovation, ensuring that diverse voices contribute to the development of AI solutions.

4. **Capacity Building and Standard Development:**
   o **Skills Development:** There is a pressing need for skills development and the establishment of global standards for AI. The platform will offer comprehensive training programmes, workshops, and resources to build AI capacities among youth, equipping them with the skills required to thrive in the AI field.
   o **Standard Development:** The platform will work with international organizations to develop and promote global standards for AI, ensuring that young people are trained in line with these standards.

5. **Youth Engagement:**
   o **Active Involvement:** It is crucial to actively involve youths of diverse backgrounds in digital and AI initiatives. The AI Youth Network Community will create opportunities for young people to participate in AI projects, research, and policy discussions, empowering them to take leading roles in the AI revolution.

**Organizational Structure:**

**Executive Team**
1. Board of Trustees / Advisors
2. President
3. Vice President
4. Secretary
5. Treasurer
6. Educational Programme and Initiative Director
7. Advocacy and Policy Director
8. Legal Affairs Director
9. People Engagement Director
10. Information System and Technology Director
11. Public Relations and Communication Director
12. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Director

Board of Trustees / Advisors
└── Chairperson
└── Members

Executive Leadership
├── President
│   └── Vice President
├── Secretary
└── Treasurer

Directors
├── Educational Programme and Initiative Director

```
├── Advocacy and Policy Director
├── Legal Affairs Director
├── People Engagement Director
├── Information System and Technology Director
├── Public Relations and Communication Director
└── Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Director
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Description of Roles

Board of Trustees / Advisors
- **Chairperson:** Leads the board, ensuring effective governance and strategic direction.
- **Members:** Provide oversight, strategic guidance, and support to the organization.

Executive Leadership
- **President:** Overall leader of the organization, responsible for setting vision and strategic goals.
- **Vice President:** Supports the President and steps in when the President is unavailable.
- **Secretary:** Handles documentation, meeting minutes, and records.
- **Treasurer:** Manages financial aspects, budgeting, and fiscal planning.

Directors
- **Educational Programme and Initiative Director:** Oversees educational programmes and initiatives.
- **Advocacy and Policy Director:** Leads advocacy efforts and policy development.
- **Legal Affairs Director:** Manages legal issues and compliance.
- **People Engagement Director:** Focuses on staff and volunteer engagement and development.
- **Information System and Technology Director:** Oversees IT infrastructure and digital strategy.
- **Public Relations and Communication Director:** Manages external communications and public relations.
- **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Director:** Ensures organizational commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

**Regional Chapter: Community Champion**

**Audience Target**
**Primary Audience:**
- Youth aged 15-35 with an interest in AI, technology, and positive social impact.
- Students, recent graduates, and young professionals in interdisciplinary backgrounds that intersect with AI (e.g., Social Sciences, international relations, gender, Humanities, Business, Law, etc.).
- Aspiring and current young entrepreneurs focused on AI and technology.
- Youth activists and leaders are passionate about using AI for social good.

**Secondary Audience:**
- Educators and mentors interested in supporting youth in AI.
- Non-profit organizations and NGOs focused on youth development and technology.
- Technology companies and startups seeking to engage with and support young talent.
- Policymakers and advocates for youth involvement in technology and AI policy.

*Criteria for Joining the Board of AI Youth Network Community*

**1. Age and Experience:**
- Must be between the ages of 18-35.
- Demonstrated experience or strong interest in AI, technology, social impacts, or related fields.

**2. Education Qualifications:**
- Minimum of a bachelor's degree in any field, with a preference for those with interdisciplinary backgrounds that intersect with AI (e.g., Social Sciences, Humanities, Business, Law, etc.).
- Advanced degrees (Master's, Ph.D.) or certifications related to AI, technology, ethics, or social impact are preferred but not mandatory.
- Relevant coursework or training in AI, ethics in technology, or social impact projects is highly valued.

3. **Commitment to the Mission:**
- Passionate about democratizing technology and knowledge.
- Committed to ethical and interdisciplinary AI development and addressing social issues through AI.
- Supportive of youth-led innovation and community building.

**4. Skills and Expertise:**
- Proven leadership skills and ability to work collaboratively.
- Strong communication and organizational skills.
- Expertise in areas such as AI research, development, education, or advocacy.

**5. Diversity and Inclusion:**
- Representation from diverse backgrounds, including gender, region, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.
- Commitment to promoting diversity and inclusion within the community.

**6. Professional and Personal Qualities:**
- Integrity, accountability, and a strong ethical compass.
- Ability to dedicate time and effort to board responsibilities and meetings.
- Strong network and connections in relevant fields that can benefit the community.

**7. Vision and Innovation:**
- Ability to contribute visionary ideas and innovative solutions.
- Proactive in identifying opportunities for the growth and impact of the community.

**Application Process:**
- Submit a detailed resume and a statement of interest.
- Provide references or letters of recommendation from relevant professionals.
- Participate in an interview process with existing board members.
- Demonstrate a clear understanding of and commitment to the community's vision and missions.

SWOT ANALYSIS

| Strengths | Weaknesses | Opportunities | Strengths |
|-----------|-----------|---------------|-----------|
| ● Embracing diversity and interdisciplinary approaches to empower youth innovators<br>● Provides comprehensive training & mentorship encourages inclusive AI sustainable social solutions Fosters creativity and innovation | ● Limited funding opportunities<br>● High dependency on external funding Limited technology infrastructure<br>● Rapid technological changes Limited scalability opportunities | ● Emerging opportunities for deep technical training<br>● Potential areas for expansion through partnerships and collaborations beyond disciplines and borders<br>● High potential of positive social impact | ● Intense competition from well-established tech labs and the cooperate sector<br>● Rapid technology advancement<br>● Foreign policy controls and regulations |

## 7 Programmes and Initiatives for the AI Youth Network Community

### 1. AI Education and Training Programme

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| **Name of Programme** | AI Education and Training Programme<br> |
| **Description of Programme** | The AI Education and Training Programme aims to equip young people with the knowledge and skills necessary to excel in the field of artificial intelligence. This programme offers a wide range of educational opportunities, from introductory courses to advanced workshops, ensuring that youth have access to the resources they need to become proficient in AI. |
| **Objective** | To provide comprehensive AI education and skill development for youth by developing and offering online courses, workshops, and boot camps covering various AI topics, and partnering with schools, universities, and educational platforms to integrate AI curricula. |
| **Key Performance Indicator (KPI) Measurement** | **1. Enrollment and Participation**<br>. **Number of Participants Enrolled**: Measure the total number of individuals enrolled in the programme. |

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| | **Completion Rate**: Percentage of enrolled participants who complete the courses and workshops.<br>**Participant Demographics**: Track participant age, gender, and geographic location to ensure diversity and inclusion.<br>**2. Course and Workshop Metrics**<br>**Course Completion Rate**: Percentage of participants who complete each course or workshop.<br>**Participant Satisfaction Rate**: Measure satisfaction through post-course surveys, aiming for a satisfaction rate of 85% or higher.<br>**Knowledge Gain**: Assess knowledge improvement through pre- and post-course assessments.<br>**3. Certification and Accreditation**<br>**Certificates Awarded**: Number of AI Fundamentals, AI Practitioner, AI Specialist, and Capstone Project certifications awarded.<br>**Capstone Project Success Rate**: Percentage of participants who successfully complete capstone projects.<br>**4. Partnership Metrics**<br>**Number of Partnerships**: Track the number of partnerships established with schools, universities, and online educational platforms.<br>**Integration Success Rate**: Measure the success rate of AI curriculum integration into partner institutions.<br>**Teacher Training Participation**: Number of teachers trained and their satisfaction rates with the training.<br>**5. Mentorship and Support**<br>**Mentorship Engagement**: Number of participants matched with mentors and frequency of mentorship interactions.<br>**Support Forum Activity**: Measure activity levels in online forums and discussion groups (e.g., number of posts, active users).<br>**Career Counseling Utilization**: Number of participants utilizing career counseling services and their success in job placement. |
| **How does it work?** | 1. **Online Courses and Workshops:**<br>　1. **Introduction to AI and Machine Learning:** Basic concepts, history, and applications of AI. No prerequisites required.<br>　1. **Python for AI and Data Science:** Essential programming skills in Python tailored for AI and data analysis.<br>　1. **Deep Learning Fundamentals:** Introduction to neural networks, deep learning models, and frameworks like TensorFlow and PyTorch.<br>　1. **Natural Language Processing (NLP):** Techniques and applications for processing and analyzing human language data.<br>　1. **Computer Vision:** Understanding and developing AI models for image recognition, classification, and analysis.<br>　1. **AI Ethics and Bias Mitigation:** Exploring ethical considerations in AI development and methods to mitigate bias.<br>　1. **AI in Robotics:** Basics of robotics and the integration of AI for control and automation.<br>　1. **AI in Public Policy:** Application of AI to analyze and improve public policy decisions and governance.<br>　1. **AI and Gender Studies:** Examining how AI impacts gender issues and developing gender-sensitive AI solutions. |

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| | 1. **AI for Social Good:** Leveraging AI to address social challenges such as poverty, inequality, and climate change.<br>2. **Partnerships with Educational Institutions:**<br> 1. Partner with schools, universities, and online educational platforms to integrate AI curricula into their programmes.<br> 1. Offer teacher training and support to help educators effectively deliver AI content.<br> 1. Provide access to AI resources, including textbooks, software, and datasets, to partner institutions.<br>2. **Certification and Accreditation:**<br> 1. **AI Fundamentals Certificate:** Awarded upon completion of introductory courses such as Introduction to AI and Machine Learning and Python for AI and Data Science.<br> 1. **AI Practitioner Certificate:** Awarded after completing intermediate courses like Deep Learning Fundamentals, NLP, and Computer Vision.<br> 1. **AI Specialist Certificate:** Awarded for advanced courses and projects, including AI Ethics and Bias Mitigation, AI in Public Policy, and AI for Social Good.<br> 1. **Capstone Project Certification:** Participants complete a capstone project to demonstrate their practical skills and knowledge. Successful projects earn a special certification.<br>2. **Mentorship and Support:**<br> 1. Connect participants with mentors from academia and industry for guidance and support.<br> 1. Create online forums and discussion groups for participants to collaborate and share knowledge.<br> 1. Offer career counseling and job placement assistance to help participants transition into AI-related careers. |
| **How Will This Programme Benefit the Audience?** | 1. **Comprehensive AI Education:**<br> 1. Provide a structured learning path from foundational knowledge to advanced skills in AI.<br> 1. Offer a variety of learning formats to cater to different learning preferences and schedules.<br><br>2. **Hands-On Experience:**<br> 1. Enable participants to gain practical experience through interactive projects and real-world applications.<br> 1. Equip participants with the skills needed to develop and implement AI solutions.<br><br>2. **Access to Resources:**<br> 1. Provide access to high-quality educational materials, tools, and technologies.<br> 1. Ensure that participants have the resources needed to succeed in their AI learning journey.<br><br>2. **Recognition and Career Opportunities:**<br> 1. Recognize participants' achievements with certifications that enhance their resumes and job prospects.<br> 1. Offer networking opportunities and career support to help participants enter the AI workforce. |

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| | 2. **Mentorship and Community:**<br>    1. Foster a supportive community of learners, mentors, and industry professionals.<br>    1. Encourage collaboration and knowledge sharing among participants. |

**Set of Recommended Courses: Understanding AI**

| Introduction to AI and Machine Learning | Programming for AI | Data Science and Analytics | Deep Learning |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Basics of AI and machine learning concepts<br>• History and evolution of AI<br>• Overview of AI applications | • Python for AI and machine learning<br>• R programming for data analysis<br>• Introduction to TensorFlow and PyTorch | • Data preprocessing and cleaning<br>• Exploratory data analysis<br>• Data visualization techniques | • Introduction to neural networks<br>• Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) for image recognition<br>• Recurrent Neural Networks (RNNs) for sequence modeling |
| **Natural Language Processing (NLP)** | **Computer Vision** | **Reinforcement Learning** | **AI Ethics and Bias** |
| • Basics of NLP and text processing<br>• Sentiment analysis and text classification<br>• Machine translation and language generation | • Image processing techniques<br>• Object detection and recognition<br>• Image segmentation and classification | • Introduction to reinforcement learning concepts<br>• Markov decision processes<br>• Q-learning and policy gradient methods | • Understanding ethical considerations in AI<br>• Identifying and mitigating bias in AI systems<br>• Regulatory and compliance aspects |

II. **Thematic Areas**

| AI in Healthcare | AI in Finance | AI in Marketing | AI in Robotics |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Applications of AI in medical imaging and diagnostics | • Algorithmic trading and financial modeling | • Customer segmentation and targeting | • Introduction to robotics and automation |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ● Predictive analytics in healthcare<br>● AI for personalized medicine | ● Risk management and fraud detection<br>● AI-driven financial forecasting | ● Predictive analytics for marketing strategies<br>● Personalization and recommendation systems | ● AI for robotic perception and navigation<br>● Human-robot interaction |
| **AI for Social Good** | **AI Hardware and Infrastructure** | **Advanced Machine Learning Techniques** | **AI Research Methodologies** |
| ● AI applications in environmental sustainability<br>● AI in education and accessibility<br>● AI for disaster response and humanitarian efforts | ● Overview of AI hardware (GPUs, TPUs)<br>● Cloud computing for AI<br>● Building and scaling AI infrastructure | ● Ensemble learning methods (bagging, boosting)<br>● Dimensionality reduction techniques (PCA, t-SNE)<br>● Advanced optimization algorithms | ● Designing AI experiments<br>● Evaluation metrics and performance analysis<br>● Writing and publishing AI research papers |
| **AI in Gaming** | **Quantum Computing and AI** | **AI-driven Cybersecurity** | **AI Startups and Entrepreneurship** |
| ● Game AI development and techniques<br>● Procedural content generation<br>● AI-driven game analytics | ● Basics of quantum computing<br>● Quantum machine learning algorithms<br>● Potential applications and future trends | ● AI for threat detection and prevention<br>● Anomaly detection in network security<br>● AI in identity and access management | ● Building AI-based products and services<br>● AI business models and market strategies<br>● Funding and scaling AI startups |
| **AI in Public Policy and Global Affairs** | **AI Youtubers & Content Creators** | | |
| ● Role of AI in shaping public policy<br>● AI for global governance and international relations<br>● Ethical and legal implications of | ● Partner with or support young YouTubers and content creators who are passionate about AI. Provide them with resources, training, and mentorship to develop engaging | | |

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| • AI in public policy<br>• Case studies on AI-driven policy initiatives | content that educates and inspires their audience about AI for good. | | | |

**2. AI Olympics**

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|---|---|
| **Name of Programme** | **AI Olympics.**<br> |
| **Description of Programme** | The AI Olympics is a global competition for young minds, inspired by the Olympic spirit, to use AI to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Participants from around the world will form teams to tackle specific SDG challenges. Each challenge will focus on using AI to address a particular SDG, like AI-powered solutions for clean water (SDG 6) or climate change mitigation (SDG 13). Teams will compete by developing innovative AI solutions, judged on creativity, effectiveness, and alignment with the SDGs. The competition will be designed with the Olympic spirit in mind, fostering collaboration, innovation, and a drive for excellence. The AI Olympics aligns with the AI for Youth Initiative by empowering young people to become responsible AI developers and problem solvers and by providing a platform to showcase their AI skills and contribute to a better future. |
| **Objective** | The "AI Olympics" project is a global initiative designed to empower young minds (ages 13-30) to tackle UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through AI. This collaborative game design fosters international teams to address real-world challenges like disease detection or disaster management, while simultaneously nurturing responsible AI development through workshops, mentorship, and online resources. The project aims to ignite a wave of SDG-focused AI innovation, empower young people, build a global network of changemakers, and ultimately champion responsible AI for a sustainable future. |
| **KPI Measurement** | 1. **Objective 1: Stimulate SDG-focused AI Innovation**<br>    1. **Metric 1:** Number of teams participating in the AI Olympics, categorized by region and SDG focus area.<br>    1. **Metric 2:** Number of innovative AI solutions submitted, categorized by SDG and level of technical complexity.<br>    1. **Metric 3:** Media coverage and public engagement related to the AI Olympics and SDG-focused AI solutions.<br>    1. **Target:** Increase in all metrics year-over-year, indicating growing interest and participation in tackling SDGs with AI.<br><br>2. **Objective 2: Empower Young People in AI Development**<br>    1. **Metric 1:** Number of participants who complete pre-competition workshops and online training modules. |

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|  | 1. **Metric 2:** Improvement in participants' AI knowledge and skills assessed through pre- and post-competition surveys. |
|  | 1. **Metric 3:** Number of participants actively using the online platform for collaboration and knowledge sharing. |
|  | 1. **Target:** Increase in all metrics year-over-year, demonstrating that the AI Olympics effectively equips young people with AI skills. |
|  | 2. **Objective 3: Build a Global Network of Changemakers** |
|  | 1. **Metric 1:** Number of international teams formed for the competition. |
|  | 1. **Metric 2:** Level of collaboration and knowledge sharing on the online platform, measured by metrics like forum discussions, resource downloads, and team communication tools usage. |
|  | 1. **Metric 3:** Post-competition surveys to gauge participants' intent to collaborate on future projects addressing SDGs. |
|  | 1. **Target:** Increase in all metrics year-over-year, reflecting a growing and connected network of young changemakers. |
|  | 2. **Objective 4: Champion Responsible AI** |
|  | 1. **Metric 1:** Integration of responsible AI principles (fairness, transparency, accountability) into submitted solutions, assessed by judges during the evaluation process. |
|  | 1. **Metric 2:** Public perception of the AI Olympics' commitment to responsible AI, measured through social media sentiment analysis and surveys. |
|  | 1. **Metric 3:** Number of educational resources and workshops focused on responsible AI development offered to participants. |
|  | 1. **Target:** Increase in all metrics year-over-year, signifying a growing emphasis on responsible AI practices within the competition. |
| **How does it work?** | **The AI Olympics is a transformative initiative.** It ignites a passion for innovation in young minds, empowers them to become responsible AI developers, and fosters a global community united in its commitment to tackling the world's most pressing challenges through the power of AI. It's a call to action, inviting young people to become the architects of a brighter, more sustainable future. |
|  | **Structure and Events:** |
|  | 1. **The Games:** The AI Olympics will be a multi-event competition, with each event directly linked to a specific SDG. These events will serve as a platform for teams to showcase their AI-powered solutions aimed at tackling these critical global challenges. |
|  | 1. **Example Events:** |
|  | 1. **SDG 3: Good Health and Wellbeing: Design Challenge:** Developing an AI-powered system for early disease detection and diagnosis. |
|  | 1. **SDG 4: Quality Education: Coding Challenge:** Creating an AI-driven personalized learning platform to optimize educational outcomes. |
|  | 1. **SDG 13: Climate Action: Hackathon:** Developing an AI solution to optimize renewable energy production and distribution. |
|  | 2. **Team Formation and Participation:** National teams are encouraged, fostering a spirit of international collaboration. Cross-border teams will be |

celebrated, reflecting the global nature of the SDGs and the power of international cooperation in tackling them.

3. **Training and Support:** To ensure fair competition and empower all participants, pre-competition workshops and comprehensive online resources will be available. These resources will equip teams with the necessary AI knowledge, project management skills, and a deep understanding of the chosen SDG they aim to address.

4. **Judging and Recognition:** A distinguished panel of experts will evaluate submitted solutions based on predefined criteria. These criteria will emphasize the AI solution's impact on the chosen SDG, its technical innovation and merit, and the team's commitment to responsible and ethical AI development. Winning teams will be awarded gold, silver, and bronze medals within each event, mirroring the traditional Olympic structure.

5. **Beyond the Competition:** The AI Olympics is more than just winning medals. A virtual platform, akin to an "Olympic Village," will foster collaboration and networking among participants. This platform will be a space for teams to share ideas, build relationships, and contribute to a global network of young changemakers dedicated to harnessing AI for positive social and environmental impact.

| **How Will This Programme Benefit the Audience?** | The AI Olympics benefit audiences in several ways. Young participants gain valuable AI skills, problem-solving experience, and a global network through workshops, competitions, and collaboration. The virtual audience witnesses the power of young minds tackling SDGs with AI, learns about various AI applications, and experiences the excitement of the competition. Overall, it empowers young people, educates the public on AI for good, and promotes global collaboration for a sustainable future. |
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### 3. Youth-Led AI Innovation Lab

| **Name of Programme** | Youth-Led AI for good Innovation Lab<br> |
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| **Description of Programme** | ● The Youth-Led AI Innovation Lab is an initiative designed to empower young innovators to develop AI solutions that address social and environmental challenges. By fostering an inclusive environment, the lab |

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| | promotes diversity by ensuring that underrepresented groups have equal opportunities to contribute to and benefit from AI advancements. This initiative aims to harness the creativity and perspectives of youth to drive positive change and ensure that AI technologies serve the broader good of society. |
| **Objective** | • Empower Diverse Youth Innovators: To provide training, resources, and mentorship to young individuals from diverse backgrounds, equipping them with the skills and knowledge necessary to develop impactful AI solutions.<br>• Foster Inclusive AI Solutions: To encourage the creation of AI technologies that address social and environmental challenges, ensuring these solutions reflect the diverse needs and perspectives of different communities for a more equitable and sustainable future. |
| **KPI Measurement** | Objective 1: Empower Diverse Youth Innovators<br>**KPI 1: Number of Participants from Diverse Backgrounds**<br>• **Description**: Track the number of youth participants from various demographic backgrounds, including gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and geographic location.<br>• **Target**: Aim for a minimum of 50% of participants to come from underrepresented groups.<br>**KPI 2: Skill Development and Certification Completion Rate**<br>• **Description**: Measure the percentage of participants who complete training programmes and receive certifications in AI-related fields.<br>• **Target**: Achieve an 80% completion rate for all enrolled participants.<br>**KPI 2: Innovation developed to contribute to social good**<br>• **Description: Measure the number of innovative initiatives**<br>• **Target**: 50 AI innovations supporting social impact such as gender equality, social inequalities etc. |
| **How does it work?** | 1. **Outreach and Recruitment**<br>• **Targeting Diverse Youth**: The lab conducts outreach programmes in schools, universities, and community centers, focusing on underrepresented groups to ensure a diverse cohort of participants.<br>• **Application Process**: Interested youth submit applications showcasing their interest in AI and social innovation. Selection criteria prioritize diversity, creativity, and potential for impact<br>0. **Training and Mentorship**<br>• **Structured Training Programmes**: Participants undergo a series of training sessions covering fundamental and advanced AI topics, ethical considerations, and project management skills.<br>• **Expert Mentorship**: Each participant is paired with a mentor from academia, industry, or the non-profit sector to provide guidance, support, and expertise throughout their project development.<br>**Project Development**<br>• **Identifying Challenges**: Participants collaborate to identify pressing social and environmental challenges in their communities that can be addressed through AI.<br>• **Developing Solutions**: Using the skills and knowledge gained from training, participants work in teams to design, develop, and prototype AI solutions aimed at these challenges.<br>**Testing and Implementation** |

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| | ● **Prototyping and Testing**: Teams create prototypes of their AI solutions and conduct testing to refine their functionality and effectiveness.<br>● **Pilot Programmes**: Successful prototypes are launched as pilot programmes in real-world settings to evaluate their impact and gather feedback for further improvements.<br>**Evaluation and Scaling**<br>● **Impact Assessment**: The lab conducts regular evaluations to measure the success and impact of the AI projects, using predefined KPIs.<br>● **Scaling Successful Projects**: Proven solutions receive additional support to scale their impact, including potential partnerships with NGOs, government ager entities.<br>**Showcase and Recognition**<br>● **Annual Innovation Fair**: The lab hosts an annual event where participants showcase their projects to stakeholders, including potential investors, policymakers, and the broader community.<br>● **Awards and Recognition**: Outstanding projects and participants receive awards and recognition, highlighting their contributions and inspiring others to engage in AI for Good initiatives<br>**Organize Hackathons and Competitions:**<br>● Host regular hackathons, innovation challenges, and competitions to foster creativity and problem-solving.<br>● Encourage participants to develop AI solutions addressing various social, environmental, and technological issues.<br>● Recognize and reward outstanding projects with prizes, funding, and opportunities for further development. |
| **How Will This Programme Benefit the Audience?** | **Empowerment and Skill Development**<br><br>● Provides participants with cutting-edge AI skills and knowledge, empowering them to become future leaders in technology and innovation.<br>● **Promoting Diversity and Inclusion:** Ensures diverse voices and perspectives are included in AI development, leading to more equitable and socially responsible technological solutions.<br>● **Addressing Global Challenges:** Develops AI-driven solutions that tackle pressing social and environmental issues, contributing to sustainable development, and improving the quality of life in various communities.<br>● **Fostering a Culture of Innovation;** Inspires a new generation of socially conscious innovators who prioritize ethical considerations and societal impact in their technological endeavors.<br>● **Contribution to the Summit of the Future showcase of Youth-Led Innovations:** Presents successful AI projects at the summit, demonstrating the potential of youth-driven innovation to address global challenges and inspiring other initiatives.<br>● **Policy Influence and Advocacy:** Provides concrete examples of effective AI for Good projects, influencing policymakers and stakeholders to support similar initiatives and prioritize AI in sustainable development agendas.<br>● **Global Collaboration and Networking:** Fosters connections between young innovators, industry leaders, and global policymakers, promoting collaboration and knowledge exchange to scale impactful solutions.<br>● **Setting Future Agendas:** Contributes to shaping the agenda of the summit by highlighting the importance of youth involvement, diversity, and ethical considerations in the future of AI and technology. |

### 3. AI Playground

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| **Name of Programme** | AI Playground  |
| **Description of Programme** | AI Playground is a virtual sandbox environment where young people can experiment with pre-trained AI models for tasks like image recognition, text generation, or basic robotics control. This allows them to test their ideas with real AI capabilities in a safe and user-friendly space. |
| **Objective** | The AI Playground for the AI for Youth Initiative aims to ignite a passion for artificial intelligence (AI) in young people by providing an engaging platform that demystifies core concepts, fosters creative problem-solving through hands-on exploration of AI tools, and builds a foundation for future AI literacy. This initiative will promote inclusivity and diversity within the field, fostering a collaborative community of young AI enthusiasts who will be responsible and informed participants in a world increasingly shaped by intelligent technologies. |
| **KPI Measurement** | 1. **Engagement and Interest:**<br> 1. **Number of active users:** Tracks how many young people are participating in the programme.<br> 1. **Time spent on platform:** Measures user engagement and the level of immersion in the AI Playground activities.<br> 1. **Completion rate of tutorials and activities:** Indicates the effectiveness of learning materials and user motivation.<br> 1. **User surveys and feedback:** Provides qualitative insights into user experience and satisfaction.<br>0. **Learning and Skill Development:**<br> 1. **Pre- and post-programme assessments:** Measures knowledge gain regarding AI concepts and terminology.<br> 1. **Number and complexity of AI projects undertaken:** Shows the application of acquired skills and user initiative.<br> 1. **Participation in challenges and competitions:** Tracks the application of learned skills in a competitive setting.<br>0. **Community Building and Impact:**<br> 1. **Number of collaborations and group projects:** Measures the fostering of teamwork and knowledge sharing.<br> 1. **Participation in workshops, events, or mentorship programmes:** Indicates deeper engagement with the AI community. |

| | 1. **Number of youths pursuing further education or careers in AI:** Measures the programme's long-term impact on career choices. |
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| **How does it work?** | 1. **Virtual Sandbox Environment:**<br>   1. Provide access to a variety of pre-trained AI models in an easy-to-use online platform.<br>   1. Allow users to experiment with AI tasks such as image recognition, text generation, and robotics control.<br>   1. Ensure a safe and user-friendly interface for young innovators to explore AI capabilities.<br>2. **Interactive Learning Modules:**<br>   1. Develop tutorials and interactive learning modules to guide users through various AI tasks.<br>   1. Provide examples and case studies to demonstrate the practical applications of AI.<br>   1. Encourage users to experiment and iterate on their ideas in a risk-free environment.<br>2. **Community and Support:**<br>   1. Create forums and discussion boards for users to share their experiments and collaborate on projects.<br>   1. Offer support and troubleshooting assistance through online help desks and chat support.<br>   1. Organize periodic challenges and events to encourage continuous engagement and learning. |
| **How Will This Programme Benefit the Audience?** | The AI Playground programme empowers young people by equipping them with the foundational knowledge and skills to understand and interact with AI, preparing them for a future shaped by this technology. It hones their problem-solving skills, fosters creativity and innovation, and cultivates a collaborative community of young AI enthusiasts who will be the future drivers of responsible AI advancements. |

## 5. AI For Social Impact

| Name of Programme | AI for Social Change<br> |
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| **Description of Programme** | AI holds immense promise as a tool for driving social good. |

|  | The *AI for Social Change* programme pioneers the transformative potential of AI in addressing critical social issues, such as poverty, inequality, and climate change.<br><br>It serves as a dynamic platform empowering youth, social change makers, and activists to harness AI for positive impact.<br><br>By fostering a community-driven approach, the programme aims to cultivate the right attitude towards AI adopting, ensuring it is used ethically and effectively to advance social justice and environmental sustainability,<br><br>This programme seeks to demystify AI's potential, equipping youth and changemakers with the knowledge and skills needed to leverage these technologies responsibly.<br><br>By bringing together expertise, resources and innovative solutions, the programme aims to amplify the impact of social initiative worldwide |
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| **Objective** | 1. **Empower Youth and Changemakers:** Inspire and empower youth, social change makers, and activists to adopt AI technologies responsibly and ethically for social good.<br>2. **Support Innovative Projects:** Identify, support, and scale innovative AI-driven projects that directly contribute to solving issues such as poverty, inequality, and climate change.<br>3. **Facilitate Partnerships:** Forge partnerships with NGOs, governmental bodies, academic institutions, and other stakeholders to collaborate on impactful AI solutions.<br>4. **Showcase Impactful Initiatives:** Showcase successful AI-powered social impact projects to inspire and educate others, fostering a culture of innovation and collaboration in the intersection of AI and social change.<br>5. **Build Capacity and Awareness:** Provide educational resources, training, and knowledge-sharing opportunities to build AI expertise within the social impact sector and raise awareness about AI's potential for positive societal impact. |
| **KPI Measurement** | 1. **Number of Projects Supported:** Measure the number of AI-driven social impact projects identified, funded, and supported through the programme.<br>2. **Impact Metrics:** Quantify the societal impact of supported projects, such as reduction in poverty rates, increase in access to education or healthcare, carbon emissions reduced, etc.<br>3. **Partnership Engagement:** Track the number of partnerships established with NGOs, governmental bodies, academic institutions, and private sector organizations to scale AI solutions.<br>4. **Youth Participation:** Measure the number of youth and changemakers engaged in the programme activities, including workshops, training sessions, and project submissions.<br>5. **Knowledge Sharing and Adoption:** Monitor the dissemination of best practices and successful case studies through publications, conferences, and online platforms, and track the adoption of AI technologies in social impact projects. |

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| | 6. **Ethical AI Practices:** Assess the adherence to ethical guidelines and principles in AI application within supported projects and partnerships.<br>7. **Media and Public Engagement:** Evaluate the programme's visibility and influence through media coverage, social media engagement, and public awareness campaigns.<br>8. **Long-term Sustainability:** Monitor the sustainability of AI solutions implemented, including ongoing impact measurement and continuation beyond initial funding. |
| **How does it work?** | 1. **Empowering Youth:** Inspiring and empowering young leaders to adopt AI as a force for positive change, equipping them with the skills and mindset necessary to navigate AI's ethical and societal implications.<br><br>0. **Project Identification and Support:** Identifying and supporting innovative AI-driven projects that directly address societal issues, providing funding, mentorship, and technical expertise to amplify impact.<br>0. **Partnerships and Collaboration:** Collaborating with NGOs, governments, and tech innovators to scale impactful AI solutions, fostering cross-sector partnerships to maximize effectiveness.<br>0. **Knowledge Sharing and Showcase:** Showcasing successful AI-driven initiatives that have created tangible social impact, inspiring others and fostering a culture of innovation and collaboration.<br>0. **Capacity Building:** Offering training programmes, workshops, and educational resources that empower individuals and organizations to effectively leverage AI for their social projects. This includes technical training in AI tools and methodologies tailored to the needs of social impact initiatives. |
| **How Will This Programme Benefit the Audience?** | 1. **Empowerment:** Empowering social change makers and activists with the knowledge, tools, and resources needed to integrate AI into their projects, thereby enhancing their effectiveness and scalability.<br>2. **Inspiration:** Showcasing real-world examples of AI-driven social impact projects to inspire and motivate individuals and organizations to explore innovative solutions to societal challenges.<br>3. **Collaboration Opportunities:** Facilitating partnerships and collaborations among diverse stakeholders including NGOs, governments, and tech innovators to collectively address complex social issues using AI.<br>4. **Education and Awareness:** Raising awareness about the potential of AI to drive positive social change and providing accessible education and training opportunities to build AI expertise within the social impact sector. |

## 6. Ethical AI Advocacy and Awareness Campaign

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| **Name of Programme** | **Ethical AI Advocacy and Awareness Campaign**  |
| **Description of Programme** | The Ethical AI Advocacy and Awareness Campaign is a targeted initiative designed to educate and empower young people about the ethical implications and responsibilities associated with artificial intelligence (AI). This campaign aims to foster a generation of tech-savvy youth who are not only proficient in AI technology but also deeply aware of its ethical dimensions and societal impacts. |
| **Objective** | The primary objective of this campaign is to raise awareness among youth about the ethical considerations in AI development and usage, promoting responsible and inclusive practices. By educating young people on the potential biases, privacy concerns, and societal impacts of AI, the campaign aims to cultivate a culture of ethical AI usage and innovation. |
| **KPI Measurement** | 1. Awareness and Reach: <br> **a. Impressions:** The number of times the campaign content is displayed. <br> **b. Website Traffic:** Number of visitors to the campaign website or specific landing pages. <br> **c. Social Media Reach:** The number of people who see the campaign on social media platforms. <br> **d. Media Coverage:** Number of mentions in news articles, blogs, and other media outlets. <br> 2. Engagement: <br> **a. Social Media Engagement:** Likes, shares, comments, and retweets. <br> **b. Content Interaction:** Click-through rates on emails, banners, or ads. <br> **c. Event Attendance:** Number of participants in webinars, workshops, or other events. <br> **d. Video Views:** Number of views and average watch time of campaign videos. <br> 3. Advocacy and Support: <br> **a. Petition Signatures:** Number of signatures on related petitions. |

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| | **b. Pledge Participation:** Number of individuals or organizations pledging to support ethical AI practices.<br>**c. Partnerships Formed:** Number of partnerships with other organizations or influencers.<br>**d. Volunteer Engagement:** Number of volunteers or advocates actively participating in the campaign.<br>4. Education and Awareness:<br>    **a. Resource Downloads:** Number of downloads of educational materials like whitepapers, toolkits, or guides.<br>    **b. Webinar Attendance:** Number of attendees in educational webinars or training sessions.<br>    **c. Survey Responses:** Feedback from surveys on awareness and understanding of ethical AI issues.<br>5. Policy Impact:<br>    **a. Policy Changes:** Number of policies influenced or created because of the campaign.<br>    **b. Legislative Actions:** Number of legislative actions or endorsements supporting ethical AI.<br>6. Sentiment and Perception:<br>    **a. Public Sentiment:** Analysis of sentiment in social media and public forums.<br>    **b. Stakeholder Feedback:** Direct feedback from key stakeholders through interviews or focus groups.<br>7. Conversion Metrics:<br>    **a. Email Sign-Ups:** Number of new subscribers to campaign newsletters.<br>    **b. Membership Growth:** Increase in membership for supporting organizations.<br>    **c. Donations and Funding:** Amount of donations or funding received in support of the campaign.<br>8. Content Performance:<br>    **a. Article Reads:** Number of reads or downloads for articles, blogs, or research papers.<br>    **b. Podcast Listens:** Number of listens or downloads for campaign-related podcasts.<br>9. Long-term Impact:<br>    **a. Behavioral Change:** Evidence of changes in behavior among target audiences regarding AI ethics.<br>    **b. Sustained Engagement:** Long-term engagement metrics such as repeat visits or continuous participation in advocacy efforts.<br>10. Qualitative Metrics:<br>    **a. Case Studies:** Documented case studies demonstrating the impact of the campaign.<br>    **b. Success Stories:** Anecdotal evidence or testimonials from individuals or organizations affected by the campaign.<br>By tracking these KPIs, an organization can measure the effectiveness of their Ethical AI Advocacy campaign, understand their audience's engagement, and adjust their strategies for better impact. |
| **How does it work?** | 1. **Workshops and Seminars:** Interactive sessions led by AI experts, ethicists, and educators to discuss real-world AI applications, ethical dilemmas, and best practices. |

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| | 2. **Online Courses and Webinars:** Accessible, engaging, and flexible learning modules that cover topics such as AI ethics, data privacy, and the societal impact of AI.<br>3. **Hackathons and Competitions:** Encouraging innovation through events where youth can create AI solutions that address ethical challenges, fostering hands-on learning and problem-solving.<br>4. **Collaborative Projects:** Partnerships with schools, universities, tech companies, and non-profits to develop projects that integrate ethical AI principles into practical applications.<br>5. **Awareness Campaigns on Social Media:** Utilizing platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube to share informative content, success stories, and interviews with experts to reach a broader audience.<br>6. **Mentorship Programmes:** Connecting youth with mentors from the AI industry to provide guidance, support, and real-world insights into ethical AI practices. |
| **How Will This Programme Benefit the Audience?** | **Benefits to the Youth:**<br>● **Enhanced Knowledge:** Provides comprehensive understanding of AI technology and its ethical implications.<br>● **Critical Thinking:** Encourages youth to critically analyze the impact of AI on society and consider ethical dimensions in technology development.<br>● **Skill Development:** Equips young people with valuable skills in AI, ethics, and responsible innovation, enhancing their employability and future career prospects.<br>● **Empowerment:** Empowers youth to become informed advocates for ethical AI, driving positive change in their communities and beyond.<br>● **Networking Opportunities:** Offers opportunities to connect with industry professionals, peers, and thought leaders in the field of AI and ethics.<br>● **Awareness and Inclusion:** Promotes an inclusive approach to AI development, ensuring that diverse perspectives are considered and marginalized voices are heard.<br>By fostering a deep understanding of ethical AI, this campaign aims to shape a future where technology serves the greater good and is developed with a strong ethical foundation. |

## 7. Global Youth Community Building

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| **Name of Programme** | **Global Youth Community Building** |

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| **Description of Programme** | The Global AI Youth Network Community Building programme aims to establish a cohesive and supportive international community for young AI enthusiasts. This programme will foster networking, collaboration, and knowledge sharing among young individuals passionate about artificial intelligence by creating local and global chapters, organizing regular events, and facilitating continuous online engagement. |
| **Objective** | The objective of the Global Youth Community Building programme is to create a strong, connected, and supportive global community of young AI enthusiasts. This will be achieved through local and global chapters, regular events like workshops and hackathons, continuous online engagement, networking opportunities with professionals and peers, and promoting collaborative projects and knowledge sharing in an inclusive environment. |
| **KPI Measurement** | **Metric:**<br>1. **Membership Growth Rate:** The number of new members joining the programme on a monthly and annual basis.<br> o **Target:** Achieve a 20% monthly growth rate in membership for the first year.<br>2. **Event Participation Rate:** The percentage of members actively participating in organized events (meetups, conferences, webinars).<br> o **Target:** At least 70% of members participate in at least one event per quarter.<br>3. **Online Engagement:** The level of activity and interaction on online platforms and social media groups.<br> o **Target:** Average of 50% of members actively engaging (posting, commenting, collaborating) on online platforms monthly.<br>4. **Member Retention Rate:** The percentage of members who remain active participants over time.<br> o **Target:** Maintain a 90% retention rate of members over a 12-month period.<br>5. **Collaborative Projects:** The number of collaborative projects initiated and completed by members.<br> o **Target:** Initiate and complete at least 10 collaborative projects per year involving members from multiple regions.<br>**How to Measure:**<br>1. **Membership Database:** Track the number of new and active members through a membership management system. |

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| | 2. **Event Attendance Records:** Record attendance and participation in all organized events.<br>3. **Online Platform Analytics:** Use website and social media analytics tools to monitor activity and engagement levels.<br>4. **Surveys and Feedback:** Conduct regular surveys to gather feedback on member satisfaction and areas for improvement.<br>5. **Project Reports:** Document the initiation, progress, and completion of collaborative projects. |
| **How does it work?** | **How Does It Work?**<br>1. Establish Chapters:<br>    .   Form local chapters in various regions to bring together young AI enthusiasts in their respective areas.<br>    .   Create a global chapter to connect all local chapters and provide a platform for international collaboration.<br>2. Organize Events:<br>    .   Host regular meetups, both in-person and virtual, to encourage networking and knowledge sharing (local, regional, and international level).<br>    .   Organize conferences and webinars featuring expert speakers, panel discussions, and workshops to provide insights and learning opportunities.<br>3. Online Platforms:<br>    .   Develop online platforms, such as websites and forums, for members to engage, share resources, and collaborate on projects.<br>    .   Create social media groups on platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn, and Discord to facilitate continuous interaction and community building. |
| **How Will This Programme Benefit the Audience?** | **How Will This Programme Benefit the Audience?**<br>1. Members will have the chance to connect with like-minded peers, industry experts, and potential mentors, fostering professional relationships that can lead to collaborations, internships, and job opportunities.<br>2. Regular events and online platforms will provide members with access to the latest trends, research, and developments in AI, enhancing their learning and professional growth.<br>3. Workshops, webinars, and collaborative projects will help members develop both technical and soft skills essential for careers in AI.<br>4. The programme will create a supportive environment where members can share challenges, seek advice, and receive encouragement from peers and mentors.<br>5. Connecting with a diverse international community will give members a broader perspective on AI applications and challenges, fostering a more comprehensive understanding of the field. |

# Catalysts for Change:
# The Role of Youth Participation in Shaping the Future

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# Context

Youth are often understood as the "torchbearers" of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) as the previous United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon highlighted throughout his time. Of the many indicators for the SDG around 90 are related to youth, making it crucial for the United Nations (UN) to see these goals come to fruition (United Nations, 2023). In order to achieve this, it is imperative to empower youth to ensure that their diverse perspectives are considered in decision-making processes at all levels. Young people play a crucial role in identifying innovative solutions that will bring about the advancements the world urgently requires. As the future custodians of the planet, they also have the most to lose if societies become more insecure and unequal and if the triple planetary crisis (the three main interlinked issues that humanity currently faces: climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss) continues unchecked. In recent years, youth have emerged as a driving force for effecting societal change through social mobilization—advocating for climate action, pursuing racial justice, championing gender equality, and demanding dignity for everyone. The impacts of numerous young individuals have not been limited; in fact, they have spearheaded pioneering changes across various sectors, including business, technology, and science (United Nations, 2023).

Currently, there is no universal consensus on the definition of "youth" as a group. Definitions of the term "youth" tend to focus on the age range that defines them, but all the existing definitions differ in the range they consider. For example, the United Nations defines "youth" as persons aged between 15 and 24 (United Nations, n.d), while the African Charter defines youths as people between the ages of 15-35 years (African Union, 2006). For this report, however, confining the definition of youth as a specific age category is a limitation that fails to consider other realities relevant to youth involvement in the international system. Therefore, for the sake of inclusion, we have opted to add the following definition to delineate the youth category in this report, "Youth is a phase during which young people "experience enormous changes due to physical maturation, which is accompanied by cognitive, social/emotional, and interpersonal changes" (Juárez et al., 2013, p.7).

The formal representation of the youth, who comprise a fifth of the global population between the ages of 15 and 25, is essential in national political institutions. Although they often engage in informal, politically relevant processes, their formal representation ensures high-quality democratic governance (UNDP, n.d). The absence of this representation undermines the trust that youth have in institutions, intensifies feelings of powerlessness, and hinders parliaments' capacity to address critical youth-related issues. Moreover, the international community has increasingly recognised the political exclusion of youth as a potential factor contributing to their involvement in violent activities (Yvonne Kemper, 2015).

Advancement toward providing high-quality education was already not as fast as required before the pandemic hit. However, COVID-19 has severely affected education, reducing learning outcomes in four of the 104 countries examined. If no additional actions are taken, it is projected that 84 million children and young individuals will be out of school by 2030, and approximately 300 million students will lack the fundamental numerical and literacy skills necessary for success in life (Education - United Nations Sustainable Development, n.d.). This data shows a significant setback that will hinder youth from effectively participating in society due to a lack of education.

In recent decades, efforts to achieve universal education have increased primary school enrolment and demand for secondary education. However, secondary and tertiary education enrolment remains low in many developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia. Many educational systems in these regions are characterized by insufficient infrastructure, limited opportunities, and concerns about affordability and accessibility. In other places, many education and training systems are not adequately preparing students to meet the demands of a globalized world. Insufficient or poor-quality education, training, and employment exacerbate young people's social and economic

vulnerability (United Nations, n.d.). Formal education and training systems often fail to reach marginalized youth or meet the needs of young women, rural or Indigenous youth, or youth with physical, sensory, or cognitive disabilities, leaving them without the skills necessary to actualize their potential or fulfill their aspirations. This emphasizes the importance of ensuring that no young person is left behind and finding new and innovative ways to provide all young people with the technical and interpersonal skills and training necessary for today's labour market (United Nations, n.d.).

Ensuring access to high-quality education is crucial to attaining many Sustainable Development Goals especially while considering translating youth energy into real change. It is a core foundation upon which successful transitions to the workforce, decent work relies, and access to decision-making spheres. (United Nations, n.d.). Economic constraints, along with issues related to learning outcomes and dropout rates, persist in marginalized areas, highlighting the need for sustained global dedication to ensuring inclusive and fair education for all. Low levels of information and communications technology (ICT) skills also pose a significant obstacle to achieving widespread and meaningful connectivity (Education - United Nations Sustainable Development, n.d.). All these reasons contribute to reduced effectiveness of youth participation due to issues related to access and availability of education, which can directly impact the quality of their work and the conscience of the youth.

In recent years, there has been a noticeable shift in civil society. Demonstrations on the streets and online campaigns have sparked creativity, captured attention, grabbed headlines, and influenced the agenda. Movements advocating for climate action, racial justice, and gender equality have rapidly altered perspectives and opinions. Mass mobilizations have confronted and occasionally altered governments. A significant number of these movements have been driven by a new generation of young activists who have injected new life into established social movements and established their own methods of participation, adopting innovative strategies and leveraging new technologies. They represent the fresh face of civil society, and they are expanding its boundaries, questioning assumptions about what civil society encompasses, its appearance, and its operations (CIVICUS, 2018).

Activism has traditionally been associated with youth culture. From the protests in May 1968 in France and demonstrations against the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement in the US to the worldwide Occupy movement and the Arab Spring in the late 2000s, young people have a history of propelling social change. Generation Z represents the most recent instalment in the extensive history of young activists. However, this group seems to communicate, mobilize, and garner support in a way that distinguishes them from previous generations (Gen Z, n.d.).

Global data from the public relations and research firm Edelman reveals that 70% of Generation Z individuals are engaged in a social or political cause. Even though not all 10,000 respondents labelled themselves as fully-fledged activists, they are still highly involved in social matters, advocating for causes they believe in through their consumption and earning activities (Unleashing the Power of Gen Z, 2021). According to a report from the Centre for the Future of Democracy at the University of Cambridge, in nearly every global region, satisfaction with democracy is declining most rapidly within the 18-34 age bracket.

Through the unanimous adoption of resolution 2250 (United Nations Security Council, 2015), the Security Council has urged Member States to consider establishing mechanisms that would facilitate the meaningful participation of young people in peace processes and dispute resolution. The resolution defines youth as aged 18 through 29 (Security Council Resolution 2250, 2015). The Summit of the Future presents an opportunity to reach a consensus on multilateral solutions for a better future, thus strengthening global governance for current and forthcoming generations (General Assembly resolution 76/307). Youth are crucial change agents, and their enthusiasm, inventiveness, and innovative mindset are pivotal in addressing global challenges. By ensuring their involvement in governance, providing quality education, and supporting their activism, we can harness their potential to build a more equitable and sustainable future for everyone.

The following report will delve into various challenges, opportunities, and case studies in order to translate youth energy into change through policy and governance, education and empowerment, and grassroots activism followed by recommendations.

## Focus Areas

*1. Decision-making Processes*

*Addressing lack of youth representation*

**a.      Context**

Youth empowerment and participation in decision-making processes have become pivotal areas of concern for policymakers, educators, and social activists worldwide, with youth comprising 1.2 billion people globally (United Nations, 2021). This significant population segment is increasingly recognized as a critical stakeholder in shaping the future. However, their involvement in political, economic, and social decision-making processes remains limited. Despite various international commitments, such as the UN's SDGs, which emphasize the need for inclusive and participatory societies, young people often find themselves marginalized in key decision-making forums (UNDP, 2016). This marginalization can lead to disillusionment, social unrest, and a loss of potential innovation and energy that young minds can bring to societal development.

**b.      Challenges: Lack of Spaces for Youth**

One of the primary challenges in empowering youth to participate in decision-making processes is the lack of adequate platforms and opportunities. Many traditional decision-making bodies and processes are predominantly adult-centric, often excluding young voices either deliberately or inadvertently. This exclusion is further exacerbated by socio-economic barriers, educational disparities, and cultural norms that undervalue the contributions of young individuals. For instance, in many countries, educational systems and societal structures do not encourage critical thinking or civic engagement among youth (World Bank, 2018). Additionally, political and economic instability in certain regions hinders the establishment of stable and inclusive platforms for youth engagement. Another significant challenge is the scepticism and resistance from older generations who may perceive youth as inexperienced or incapable of contributing meaningfully to complex decision-making processes. This generational bias can create an environment of mistrust and hinder intergenerational collaboration, which is crucial for holistic and sustainable policy development. When youth are represented, there is also the all-too-common risk of *tokenism* when young people are included as more symbolic than true meaningful integration.

**c.      Opportunities**

Despite these challenges, there are numerous opportunities to enhance youth empowerment and participation in decision-making processes. One of the most promising avenues is the integration of digital technologies and social media platforms, which have already proven to be powerful tools for youth mobilization and advocacy. For example, the Arab Spring demonstrated how young people could leverage social media to influence political change (Howard & Hussain, 2013). By creating online spaces that are public, accessible, and geared for youth dialogue and activism, policymakers can engage youth in more dynamic and accessible ways. Educational reforms that prioritize critical thinking, leadership skills, and civic education can also play a crucial role in preparing young people for active participation in decision-making processes. Programmes like the Model UN and youth parliaments provide practical experiences and foster a sense of agency among participants (MUN Impact, 2020). Furthermore, institutionalizing youth advisory councils and ensuring youth representation in

governmental and non-governmental organizations can bridge the gap between young people and decision-making bodies. Countries like Finland and Norway have successfully implemented youth councils that advise local governments, thereby ensuring that the perspectives of young citizens are considered in policy making processes (Youth Policy Labs, 2017). Finally, fostering partnerships between governments, educational institutions, private sector entities, and civil society organizations can create a supportive ecosystem for youth engagement.

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*2. Youth Empowerment*
*Addressing global education challenges*

### a. Context

Young people today will become leaders of tomorrow; therefore, providing them with relevant skills and inclusive education is essential in translating their energy and passion into real change. Quality education, a key driver of social and economic development, is a fundamental human right that must be made available to everyone, regardless of race, gender, religion, or socioeconomic status. However, despite significant progress in recent decades, global education systems face numerous challenges that hinder their ability to provide quality education to all. According to the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), approximately 258 million children and youth were out of school in 2018, with more than half of these children living in sub-Saharan Africa. Additionally, education systems are under threat, with many countries experiencing a decline in students' math and reading skills. Sadly, the COVID-19 pandemic was a major setback in achieving goal 4 of the SDGs. UNESCO reported that at the peak of school closures in April 2020, over 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries were affected. For young people residing in countries without universal Internet access and lacking the resources to facilitate online learning, such as smart devices and computers, the pandemic has broadened the existing learning gap, putting them at a global disadvantage.

Furthermore, civil unrest in multiple countries, preventing young people from accessing education, has led to significant setbacks in achieving the goal of inclusive education for all. This situation is critical, particularly for young girls, who are more likely to drop out of school and become victims of harmful practices like child marriage (International Rescue Committee, 2024). According to data from the World Bank, girls in regions affected by conflict are 2.5 times more likely to be out of school when compared to those in non-conflict areas. Education serves as a protective factor for young girls giving them opportunities to engage meaningfully in the workplace and on a global level. It is important to note that getting young people into the four walls of formal intuitions is not enough; all involved stakeholders must work together to ensure inclusive and relevant education is provided to them. Furthermore, formal and informal education must include relevant skills to prepare young people to engage meaningfully in various sectors, including governance and decision making.

### b. Challenges: Inclusion and Education

With only about six years left to achieve SDG 4 and fulfill the commitment to inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all (UNESCO, 2020), various global challenges still need to be addressed in the educational sector. If not addressed urgently, the effects of poor educational systems and the literacy gap will continue for decades, leaving millions of young people unemployed. Today's youth deserve to be equipped with the skills and knowledge they need to thrive in an increasingly demanding, complex, and dynamic world. However, various challenges pose a threat to achieving this goal. Some of these challenges are discussed below.

Francisco de Matos, the co-founder of ABA Global Education, which focuses on promoting inclusive and equitable education, underscores that the main obstacle to inclusion in education is the absence of explicit educational legislation on the learner's right to be treated with dignity in all school contexts. Just 11% of 71 countries had formulated a comprehensive tertiary education equity strategy (UNESCO, 2020). Laws and policies set the framework for achieving inclusion in education. The UN, in cooperation with regional organizations, has influenced national legislative and policy actions on which

progress towards inclusion hinges. However, governments often do not take the follow-up actions necessary to ensure implementation (GEM Report, 2020).

Laws on inclusion tend to focus on students with disabilities, often neglecting other marginalized groups such as LGBTQ+ individuals, asylum seekers, racial and ethnic minorities, economically disadvantaged students, indigenous peoples, girls, and migrants. The broader vision of inclusion in the education of all learners still needs to be improved in legislation worldwide. Five countries (Chile, Italy, Luxembourg, Paraguay, and Portugal) out of 194 countries have inclusive education laws covering all learners, and 11 countries have inclusive education laws that only cover people with disabilities (GEM Report, 2020). Even with the enactment of laws and the announcement of policies, the implementation of measures to achieve inclusion relies heavily on the specific national context. An analysis of 85 country reports on CRPD implementation regarding inclusive education programmes and services highlighted a common theme: a striking disconnect between laws, policies, and practice (UNICEF, 2017).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, while teachers follow individualized teaching strategies, role modelling, peer support, and group strategies to promote the inclusion of students with intellectual and developmental disabilities, a lack of human and material resources for inclusive education is a concern (Okyere et al., 2019). In a recent report from UNESCO, Jordan acknowledged that most schools needed to be better prepared to practice inclusion, as insufficient measures had been taken for transport, access, safe use of the physical environment, and curricula harmonization (UNESCO, 2020).

###    c.   Opportunities

Investments in education systems have demonstrated intergenerational impacts. Inclusive education equips young people with the skills and knowledge required to participate actively in the workforce, thereby increasing a country's economic development. According to the World Bank, each additional year of schooling raises earnings by an average of 10% globally. In addition, studies have found a positive correlation between education and health. Educated individuals are more likely to understand and adopt healthy behaviours and seek medical care when needed. UNESCO reports that if all women completed primary education, child mortality could fall by one-sixth, saving nearly 1 million lives annually. Furthermore, educated individuals are more likely to support and engage in efforts to protect the environment.

Investing in digital inclusivity and innovative learning methods is a step towards advancing education for all. The rise of EdTech platforms offers new ways to deliver content and engage learners. Mobile phones and other portable devices can be leveraged to complement traditional schooling and can also be used in cases with little or no access to traditional education methods, such as in the case of children on the move.

Funding young people-led education initiatives is also essential for involving the affected population in the solutions. Access to education has long been a focus of activism for many young people. Despite the challenges and sometimes life-threatening situations, many education initiatives have been created by young people to tackle the disparities in education. An example of this type of initiative is Slum 2 School, an educational initiative to support the education of children living in slums and underserved communities across Africa. This organization, founded by Otto Orondaam, has recorded massive success, and has the ability to do more. Another example is LEARN, which focuses on providing education to Afghan children and women and was founded by Pashtana Durrani in 2018. These two organizations are ways youths have translated energy into real change, and they should be supported to reach more target populations and improve access to education.

Investing in educators is another opportunity that stakeholders can plug into to achieve optimum results. Teacher training and support are crucial in developing highly skilled educators and maintaining a high-quality education system. Investing in pre-service and ongoing professional development for teachers can improve teaching quality, retain teachers, and ultimately improve the delivery of quality education.

Research has shown that teachers who feel supported and confident in their ability to transfer knowledge are more likely to remain in the teaching field.

Addressing global education challenges requires a multifaceted approach that involves governments, international organizations, the private sector, and communities. By leveraging innovative solutions, increasing investments, and fostering inclusive policies, we can ensure that all children and youth have access to quality education and the opportunity to succeed.

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*3. Grassroots Activism*

*Addressing Sustainability and Diversity in Youth Movements*

### a. Context:

Grassroots movements and activism have been instrumental throughout history in changing societies, challenging the established norms, and sparking significant social change for social justice. Youth, particularly, has a critical role to the success and dynamism of these efforts which is highlighted by the global data from public-relations and research firm Edelman which reveals **70% of Gen Zers are involved in a social or political cause** (Cooper, 2021). Youth-led grassroots social movements arise locally when youth choose to create change in their local-contexts pushing for change at community, national or international levels. It has been documented that most younger generations prefer informal (Orb Media, n.d.) to formal political engagement. Notably, youth are concerned (Amnesty International USA, 2019) with the climate issues and actively developing and participating in climate activism but their involvement extends beyond environmental issues addressing multiple areas such as poverty, discrimination, access to justice, and other issues concerning social justice. It is common that those involved in these spaces represent marginalized identities and communities that are not accepted or reflected within formalized avenues. As such, youths from marginalized communities tend to lead initiatives that focus on structural issues that directly relate to their lived experiences and create new and distinct challenges for ensuring that their work is recognized.

### b. Challenges

#### 1) Discrimination and Bias

*Issue:* Discrimination, in its many forms, continues to be a pervasive issue within youth grassroots activism. It can be based on race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or other factors, and it hinders the potential of young activists to effect meaningful change. While many youths may identify more closely as student counselors, climate activists, or peacebuilders, the scope and challenges of their work must also be understood as human rights defenders. Youth-led movements such as *Ni una menos* (Not one more), the March for Our Lives, and Dalit Lives Matter have demonstrated the powerful role young people play in addressing societal issues. Despite their enthusiasm and innovative approaches, they often face systemic barriers that undermine their efforts and marginalize their voices. Discrimination within these movements not only affects the individuals involved but also weakens the broader social and political impact of activism, as they are also faced with threats and attacks. However, the internal dynamics of these movements often mirror the broader societal inequalities they seek to challenge. As seen in India, Dalit (*untouchables*) youth activism, inspired by the social justice ideologies of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, has emerged in response to the caste discrimination (Kumar, 2021), humiliation, and exclusion faced by Dalit students in universities across the country (Kumar, 2023). This alarming situation has raised serious concerns about student suicides (BBC, 2016). This activism seeks to reclaim autonomy in academic spaces, challenge the entrenched caste hierarchy in academic and professional institutions, and ensure fair representation for Dalit students (Kumar, 2021). However, their efforts are often criminalized, leading to suspensions from universities, discriminatory behavior, (Mahanada, 2023), and attacks or assaults (The Wire, 2023). The systemic discrimination and resistance they encounter are intrinsically linked to the caste-based and social justice nature of their activism.

***Opportunity to create protection networks****:* The United Nations can be an integral actor in countering the entrenched ageism and additional forms of systematic discrimination within the international human rights movements that heighten the risk of threats and attacks weakening social movements globally through further engaging the Committee on the Rights of the Child (OHCHR, n.d.). The CRC should increase engagement with civil society organizations, including those working with youth human rights defenders, in order to address exploitation and ageism within civil society organizations to create better space for child and youth human rights defenders. The CRC, in combination with the other committees focused on discrimination, including the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (OHCHR, n.d.). Specifically, the creation of a special procedure mandate holder that systematically engages with youth human rights defenders and movements with their thematic work, consultations, and country visits. As well as dedicating one of the Days of General Discussion (DGD) to specific themes related to children's rights to the situation and protection of youth human rights defenders. Addressing discrimination against and within youth grassroots activism is crucial for fostering inclusive and effective movements. Furthermore, when movements from marginalized groups attempt to challenge the dominant status quo, they often face discrimination, and their activism is sometimes criminalized.

### 2) Resources

*Issue:* Youth grassroot movements often operate on minimal budgets, with roughly 49% of youth-led organizations operating on less than $5,000 annually (Office of the Secretary General's Envoy on Youth and United Network of Young Peacebuilders, 2023). There is limited access to traditional funding sources such as government grants or private donations, which are frequently less accessible to young activists, who may lack the networks and formal organizational structures needed to secure such resources. Marginalized youth movements face difficult challenges in securing funding due to the inherent complexities of their activism which are interpreted as threats to established norms or power structures; these movements frequently confront reluctance from state and private funders who prefer to avoid controversy or maintain control over narratives to practice overall risk aversion to supporting initiatives that challenge existing socio-cultural norms or address structural discrimination. As a result, marginalized youth movements encounter barriers that hinder their ability to sustain operations, expand their impact, and effectively advocate for social change within their communities. For instance, in Malaysia, systemic oppression propels Orang Asal indigenous youth into activism against discrimination, educational exclusion, and barriers to basic services like electricity and clean water. They confront threats from major development projects, which spur their quest for increased representation and self-determination through activism. Despite their efforts, they often feel insignificant, yearning for societal recognition and validation, and struggle with limited research support. Activism is emotionally taxing due to a lack of platforms and understanding, compounded by challenges in legal knowledge. Information about their initiatives often fails to reach rural communities, exacerbating their struggle for accessible means and opportunities (Sambai Usek & Dunlop, 2023).

***Opportunity to provide funding:*** The United Nations can assist in addressing this barrier with the various youth financing programmes across entities that support parallel initiatives on youth involvement in peace, government, and capacity development locally. For example, the Youth Solidarity Fund (YSF) housed within the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations mission is to, "support youth-led organizations that foster peaceful and inclusive societies (UNAOC, n.d.).". However, according to staff processing applications "...young people should be the drivers of fresh and innovative ideas, but we always seem to receive the same kind of project proposals. I would love to be able to encourage innovation for youth-led organizations to test new ideas" (McGill, 2018). The repetitive nature of applications demonstrates that these youth-specific funds it seems they are not fully completing their mandate since the applicant pool is limited to those able to communicate in English, have quantifiable capacities or formalized projects, and has no quota system to ensure that different communities within nations are being represented.

*3) Sustainability within Youth Movements*

*Issue:* Sustainability poses significant challenges for youth activism, more so within marginalized communities. Youth and specifically from the marginalized youth often face barriers to accessing formal platforms where their voices can be heard. Their voices go unheard because either priority has not been set or there is deliberate non-inclusion into the government councils, policy bodies, and even mainstream media. This lack of representation and visibility makes it harder for specifically the marginalized youth activists to sustain their efforts over time because they may feel their efforts are not making a meaningful impact. Decision-makers hold unconscious biases that undervalue the contributions and capabilities of marginalized youth, leading to their leadership potential being overlooked or dismissed. Further, the role of networks in collaboration and learning toward the future leadership development process through activism is very powerful. However, marginalized youth activists face barriers in accessing influential networks due to systemic inequalities, limited social capital, or exclusionary practices within established circles. Without recognition and support, marginalized youth activists experience burnout or disillusionment, impacting the sustainability of their activism efforts.

***Opportunity to build networks:*** The ECOSOC Youth Forum (UN Economic and Social Council, 2024), provides a space for young people (typically aged 18-35) to contribute their perspectives, ideas, and solutions to global development challenges and to have their participation in decision-making processes at the United Nations and beyond. It gathers young leaders worldwide annually at the UN HQ in New York to address global challenges. However, the challenges include ensuring diverse global representation, overcoming language barriers, and follow- up actions translating discussions into actionable policies. It's important to include marginalized youth, such as those from indigenous, minorities, caste-oppressed, and disabled communities, to foster effective and inclusive youth-led initiatives for sustainable development. The youth-led activism and organizations should have consultative status (International Service for Human Rights Academy, n.d) and be allowed continuous participation in the United Nations (UN, 2023).

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# Case studies

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*1. Indian Dalit Youth activism*

a. **Situation**

The caste system is a Hindu social and religious hierarchy (Thorat & Joshi, 2015) which originates from the late Vedic society (1000-500 BCE). Traditionally, a person's caste is determined at birth, dictating their occupation and social standing. At the top of this hierarchy are the *Brahmins*, who are priests and religious scholars. At the bottom are the Dalits, who are technically outside the caste system and are assigned the dirtiest jobs, such as manual scavenging, cleaning sewers, disposing of dead animals, and tanning leather (Sengupta & Guchhait, 2021). These tasks are considered to pollute a person in Hinduism, rendering Dalits "untouchable."

The stigma of caste follows an individual from birth until death, affecting every aspect of life, including education, housing, employment, access to justice, and political participation. This system has led to resource inequity, rights inequity, and various forms of violence due to ingrained caste-based discrimination.

Despite the caste system having been officially addressed by the Constitution and other national laws since 1950, caste-based discrimination is endemic in the country. In rural areas, this inequality is very visible, with caste segregation in the infrastructure of the cities. In urban areas, despite being less visible on the surface, the caste system still influences all spheres of life (Munshi, 2019). Some authors even

argue that the Indian government is aware and partial to maintaining them, willingly or not (Thorat & Newman, 2010). Caste discrimination is not only the problem of India or other South Asian countries, as it is now becoming a global issue. Violent crimes against the lower castes still take place, and justice is seldom attained for these attacks aimed at reinforcing the hierarchy that maintains the Dalit at the bottom. The violence endured by the Dalit is a manifestation and direct result of a complex and old hierarchical system of intersectional struggles, based on gender and caste, which further limits social, economic, and professional advancement, especially for women from the lower castes (Banerjee, 2019). The anti-caste social movement has a long history in India. Through the years, Dalits have consistently risen up to call out the injustices they face, by challenging the caste system, rejecting Hinduism, and promoting their dignity, either individually or through social movements, in the pursuit of social justice. Activism in India was always fraught with dangers, the administration, primarily dominated by the upper caste, cracking down on social movements of any kind. Nevertheless, people are asserting their rights and raising their voices through various means, including education and cultural initiatives.

## b. Case

### 1. Who is taking action?

Today, with the increase in connectivity around the globe, Dalit youth are making the most of the internet to reach people from around the world, resist caste oppression in India and advocate for social justice through social media and online platforms.

Historically, Dalit communities have always expressed themselves in song, drumming and dance. Dalit youth anti-caste activists in India, in Tamil Nadu, are vibrant in creating their counterculture. Young Dalit lyricists, singer-activists, and theatre directors create performance spaces that function as heterotopias (spaces outside of the existing public/private spheres, which can exist physically or not, and are a way to be free from established norms and hierarchy), which allow for oppressive norms to be reversed where Dalit women and men create their political identity.

In recent years, diverse groups of young Dalits have risen to make a change in their communities. Groups such as the Casteless Collective, a group of musicians hailing from and around Chennai. This group, composed of 12 members, uses *Gaana*, a form of funeral singing. Originally these songs were a mix of dirge and eulogy, philosophical songs sung to keep mourners awake at night – the tradition is that loved ones should stay awake till the corpse leaves the house. For Casteless Collective, *Gaana* is a tool to end caste-based discrimination.

### 2. What are they doing?

The Casteless Collective sing about the serious issue of casteism in India, often relating their songs to violent events in the news and use traditional instruments and techniques to bring them to light in a relatable way. The band sings about the realities of caste inequality in India, with songs that discuss manual scavenging, untouchability, violence against women, the LGBTQ+ community and more – the issues are serious, but the collective's style presents the songs in a light-hearted way, often using common phrases and metaphors that are charged with meaning. These songs, such as *I am sorry Ayyappa*, *Quota, Beef,* present relatable elements of the Dalit lifestyle to the public space and make them a part of the mainstream media. This has catapulted caste-issues to the forefront of public discussions and has also put wind in the sails of young activists in India.

## c. Why does it work?

This type of movement works because it pushes back the boundaries of the current socio-political order in India in a way that is accessible to most people, both inside and outside of India, and benefits from international attention. The social impact of such groups is also fuelling wider actions on the ground from activists. In short, it catalyses action and plays a part in transforming public opinion.

Through Casteless Collective, with their culture now reaching wider audiences, it is now easier to talk and express about human rights issues concerning the caste system in India, and the Casteless Collective contributes to doing so in a more accessible way.

For example, Isaivani, the collective's only female singer, was part of BBC's 100 most inspiring women list in 2020. Her existence in the public space as a *Gaana* singer, has successfully broken an age-old tradition, which has led other young female singers to come forward and express themselves. Among other things, her nomination in 2020 has brought on more international recognition for the Casteless Collective and garnered attention from people outside of India. This type of action contributes to bridging the gaps between grassroots activists, the general public and the leaders.

**d. What can we learn from them?**

The important feature of the Casteless Collective is that the artists themselves are from the Dalit community and speak to the system's effect in a very personal way. The youth-led Casteless Collective reveals how media, art and culture can be powerful tools for social change. It provides a platform for the youth those affected by caste discrimination to share their stories and experiences, which can be a model for other marginalized youth around the globe to create their own platforms for expression. Their journey also teaches the importance of persistence and resilience. Despite facing significant challenges, they continue to push forward, which set an example for marginalized youth to remain steadfast in their efforts for justice and equality. International funding for such youth-led cultural movements that challenge deep-rooted forms of discrimination can amplify their issues on a global stage, fostering international solidarity and activism against such injustices.

*2. Irish Youth Parliamentary Participation*

**a. Situation**

Ireland is leading national-level youth representation in the decision-making space worldwide, as the first European country to establish a national strategy on Children's and youth participation in decision-making (European Commission, 2024). The strategy has evolved between 2000 and now, and currently includes bodies that represent children, second and third-level students. According to Leahy & Burgess, Ireland has drastically changed over the latter end of the 20th century, pivoting from a pre-industrial economy to a knowledge-based economy through a capitalistic approach which placed responsibility on individuals to care for themselves. This has led to deep social transformations within the country, effectively individualizing Irish society. The authors posit that parallel to this transition, youth interest in the political sphere dwindled, and indicators, such as low voting participation, showed that the Irish youth felt alienated from their communities (Leahy & Burgess, 2011).

Since the establishment of the National Children's Strategy in 2000, the youth work sector in Ireland has been attempting to overcome such alienation in order to offer young people meaningful participation opportunities, through advocacy and practice (European Commission, 2024). Opportunities such as the National Youth Parliament (Dáil na nÓg), a national forum for youth aged between 12 and 18 years old to participate in the decision-making and policy-making processes of their country with issues that concern them.

Post-primary level students are also represented in two bodies, the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) and the Irish Second-Level Student Union (ISSU), both representational bodies established based on article 12 of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child,* which states that " the child who is capable of forming his or her own views has the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child" (OHCHR, 1989). These bodies ultimately aim to support individual students in voicing their opinions and promote the interests of the young people in the decision-making processes.

b. **Who are the youth taking action?**

Ireland's entire youth population is at least partially involved in this process, which encourages political participation and interest within the age group.

In the case of the Dáil na nÓg, it operates locally in 31 Local Authorities around the country. Every local child and youth council holds an Annual General Meeting (AGM), where children and young people are invited from schools, local youth clubs and other youth related projects to convene and vote on the examined issues, usually in groups of over 100 youth. General invitations are sent to schools, youth groups and a host of other organizations that work with and/or represent young people, including organizations representing seldom-heard young people, in order to ensure that the AGMs reach a maximum of young people in the country (European commission, 2024).

Secondly, ISSU members are in fact entire student councils, and thus include many different youths. When a school's student council joins the ISSU, the school itself is then considered a member of the ISSU (Leahy & Burgess, 2011).

Finally, USI is a democratic organization, which operates on yearly mandates. The USI represents 374,000 students in third level education in Ireland and works to support the rights of students in the country. The Union is managed by the Congress, which is representative of each affiliated students' union, the number of members taking into account the size of the student body in each union. Each union also sends one voting member to the National Council – the executive body of the organization (European Commission, 2024).

c. **Why is it working? (what changed, visible results)**

In order to reverse the individualization of Irish society and the youth's alienation, the strategies and bodies established in the early 2000s have offered meaningful participation opportunities for the Irish Youth. Today, the National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making provides tools and guidance to government, state agencies, and non-governmental organizations to improve their practice in listening to children and young people and in giving them a voice in decision-making (European Commission, 2024). This has led to visible changes, such as an increase in elected members of the lower house of the Irish Parliament (Dáil Éireann) aged between 21 and 35 years old (European Commission, 2024). However, evidence shows that despite the new strategies put in place, change will take time, and that young Irish people still feel disenfranchised with the current system (Leahy & Burgess, 2011).

d. **How could it work at a broader scale?**

This case study is helpful when considering youth's political participation and empowerment to enact positive change, both at a national level in their communities and globally. Indeed, Ireland's strategy takes the first steps in reversing the tokenism of the youth in political institutions, an issue that has been named by young people themselves and institutions alike in recent years. As such, the evolution of youth participation in Ireland provides a clear insight into what countries around the world can do to encourage the youngest generations to participate within their institutions in a way that is meaningful and intergenerational. By giving them power over issues that affect them directly, decision-making institutions around the world can both provide opportunities for youth and facilitate their own work by working alongside youth. Listening to the youngest generations provides a general sense of community that young people notice and appreciate, and inspires them to, in turn, give back their time to enact positive change.

*3. UNESCO Legitimizing Global Youth-led Decision-making*

**a. Situation**

Young people are primary stakeholders in education and are key partners in achieving SDG 4, however, they have continuously been excluded from the discussions and decision-making processes around the education sector's development despite that they
bring unique experiences and perspectives of learning across both formal and informal education settings. To truly transform education, skills training, and lifelong learning, there have been repeated calls for meaningful, diverse, and effective youth engagement by various stakeholders including the young people themselves.

**b. Case**

To enable the active participation of young people as torchbearers of quality education and lifelong learning, UNESCO launched the SDG4 Youth & Student Network in 2021. The network is designed as an open, inclusive, and representative platform to support students and youth education groups in shaping global education policies within the renewed Global Education Cooperation Mechanism (GCM) and the global apex body for education – the SDG 4-Education 2030 High-Level Steering Committee (HLSC). Two equal and representative youth/student seats have now been designated on the HLSC – one at the "Leadership Group" and one at the "Sherpa" technical level. Members of the SDG4 Youth & Student Network are activists, advocates, elected student representatives, leaders, students, school leaders, teachers, and young professionals who are actively working within youth and student organizations in their local and national communities to improve the quality and accessibility of education.

**c. Why it is working**

By supporting and working closely with the SDG4 Youth & Student Network, youth raise the voice of youth and students and guarantee the possibility of real change. UNESCOs efforts of taking the voices of youth and students to the highest levels are making youth-led decision-making a reality. The network has been one of the most successful in its kind, having actively co-developed the Global Youth Initiative, in collaboration with key stakeholders and partners. It is now championing and taking forward the Youth Declaration on Transforming Education, a global initiative aiming to ensure meaningful youth engagement and leadership in education policymaking as well as currently substantively contributing to the development of the Global Youth Engagement Indicator. a one of its kind in the SDG framework.

**d.   What can we learn from them?**

The SDG4 Youth & Student Network is a UNESCO-supported platform that puts youth in the driving seat for education. Provides a platform for youth and students to take action for Education and positions students and youth at the front and centre of SDG4. It also recognizes young people not only as one of the key stakeholders in education but also as key partners in ensuring quality education for all. Being the first UNESCO youth network to have set up a bottom-up nomination system by youth for youth to elect the representatives to form the Network's Executive Committee. It legitimizes the concept of Youth by Youth as the SDG4 Youth & Student Network is championing youth-led decision-making. This initiative proves that young people can deliver at a high level and teaches us to listen and take the ideas and recommendations from young people into action. Create spaces for youth decision-making bodies at all levels by multilateral organizations and governments. The designation of two equal and permanent representative youth and students on HLSC does not only guarantee the participation of young people in decision making spheres, but also ensures that their participation is on an equal footing with other Steering Committee members.

*4. Saudi Arabia's Youth Foundation - Misk Foundation*

### a. Situation

HRH Prince Mohammed Bin Salman founded Misk Foundation in 2011 to discover, develop and empower Saudi youth to become active participants in the future economy. The Misk Foundation is a non-profit organization dedicated to fostering learning and leadership among Saudi youth to ensure a prosperous future for Saudi Arabia. Its primary mission is to discover, develop, and empower Saudi youth through various projects that generate positive impacts in leadership, community engagement, entrepreneurship, and skill development. Saudi Arabia, located in the Middle East, is a youth-centric population with 63% of the population under the age of 30 which leads to much untapped potential in society and in the economy. Misk Foundation has actively placed youth at the center, providing opportunities to fill the gaps and accelerating their growth. The Foundation has 4 focus areas: Leadership, Community, Entrepreneurship, and Skills. Each focus area has active programmes that directly impact youth beneficiaries.

### 1. Leadership

The foundation aims to empower young leaders by equipping them with strategies and skills necessary to navigate a rapidly changing and uncertain world. The focus is on fostering leadership styles that align with Vision 2030. For example, **10x Saudi Leaders** is a hybrid programme designed for newly appointed leaders and managers, offering around 90 hours of training over five months through online evening sessions and in-person meetings in Riyadh. The programme aims to build foundational leadership skills, create successful leadership pipelines, enable strategic and innovative thinking, and cultivate competencies in line with Vision 2030. Another key programme is **Ignited Voices** which is an 8-week programme that prepares Saudi youth to represent the country in international forums. It focuses on unlocking potential, amplifying voices, and facilitating opportunities for growth and impactful experiences.

### 2. Community

The foundation encourages youth to take active roles in shaping Saudi Arabia's future by becoming community leaders both locally and internationally. One of the key programmes is the **NPOs Initiatives Incubator** which is a 14-week programme supporting the launch and growth of non-profit, youth-focused initiatives. It includes mentoring, counselling, and financial support, culminating in a demo day where participants pitch their projects. Another key example is the **Impact Accelerator** which is a 6-week programme that supports mature, youth-focused non-profit organizations to accelerate their growth and enhance their capacity to deliver greater social impact. It involves face-to-face bootcamps, online consultations, and educational resources.

### 3. Entrepreneurship

Misk Foundation provides programmes to help young entrepreneurs grow their ventures through mentorship, startup competitions, and access to fundraising. This track has launched **Startup School Master Classes** which are online classes that introduce foundational entrepreneurship concepts and best practices. Participants learn key skills, create business model canvases, develop MVPs, and gain insights into fundraising and team building. They have also created a project to support youth with ideation. Project **SPARK** is a 6-week programme that supports aspiring entrepreneurs in developing viable business plans. The top 10 finalists pitch their ideas to judges, with the top 5 winning SAR 50,000 each.

### 4. Skills

The foundation's skills programmes help shape career journeys, connecting participants to job opportunities with top-tier employers both locally and abroad. To support high schoolers gain more

exposure on the job market. Misk has launched a **Job Shadowing** programme which provides career guidance and simulates the job market through field experiences in various sectors. It includes interactive virtual trips, job shadowing with experienced employees, and individual career counselling sessions. Misk has also created a programme to bridge fresh graduates and young professionals to the job market. Misk has launched the **Traineeship Programme** which offers local and global traineeship opportunities across various industries, leading to positive employability and entrepreneurial outcomes. This includes partnerships with top organizations across the private, public, and non-profit sectors for example BCG, Mercer, Disney, PepsiCo, L'ORÉAL, BVLGARI, UN, UNESCO, and FIFA

### c. Why is it working?

Misk Foundation has impacted more than a million Saudi Youth across various programme activations. In 2020, Misk launched more than 70 programmes and 50 initiatives, published 24 research papers, and supported 100 startups. The main reason why this foundation is working is because the country leadership has prioritized investing in youth and have dedicated teams to support their advancement. The foundation revises the running programmes every year to assess their impact and their value. Additionally, they regularly research what youth need and discover best practices of youth initiatives from around the world.

### d. What can we learn from them?

This is a success story that other countries can learn from placing youth at the centre and actively thinking about preparing youth for the future. Having one official organization that is focused on youth is helpful as they proactively assess the global evolution of youth, learn from other countries, and develop local projects for their own national youth. They have actively conducted surveys to gain input from nationals which helps them assess the needs, opportunities, and challenges. Additionally, many programmes that are implemented can be replicated for other youth groups to enhance their growth and integration in society.

The Misk Foundation is a nationally significant organization working to equip Saudi youth with essential skills across leadership, community engagement, entrepreneurship, and professional development. By identifying and addressing gaps and challenges faced by the youth, the foundation creates opportunities that are freely accessible to Saudi nationals. It is robustly funded by the government, ensuring sustainability and broad impact without reliance on international support or donations. The funding model is coming from the country's leadership which is similar to how a ministry of youth is usually funded. It is important to notice that a limitation to replicate this case study is the access to funding. To run such programmes requires a solid funding stream to ensure the quality and continuity of the programmes. A potential resort could be to collaborate with national ministries such as the ministry of youth or to get funding from donors or private sector sponsors.

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## Solutions and Recommendations

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The youth Working Group 4 of the 62nd United Nations Graduate Study Programme, addressing these recommendations to world leaders, NGOs, and the United Nations,

DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

1. Insists that world leaders should convene and agree on the immediate establishment of an **official universal definition** of what youth is, in order to represent the reality of a diverse young generation and provide tailored solutions and opportunities to specific groups within it, including but not limited truly and fairly to;
    a. a universal definition of the **age interval** that constitutes "youth",
    b. inclusive subcategories of youth that are:

      i.     age based: teens, young adults, young professionals,

      ii.    schooling-level specific: unschooled, post-primary, undergraduate, graduate, trades professional,

      iii.   consider inequalities: belonging to one or more marginalized groups or not,

   c.  an **intersectiona**l consideration of belonging to multiple groups at once and that some youths are more vulnerable than others,

   d.  the absence of hierarchy in belonging to a specific category,

2. Calls upon United Nations member states, private actors and civil society to **remove barriers to entry** for youth, including but not limited to;

   a.  **facilitating visa obtention** for educational purposes for youth, especially for marginalized and global south youth:

      i.     by centralizing information,

      ii.    by moving the requirement to show prove of transportation and accommodation to after obtaining a visa,

      iii.   by removing unequal and hierarchical passport consideration,

   b.  facilitating and **simplifying application processes** for internships and professional opportunities,

   c.  universally **digitizing** such processes to avoid long waiting times, the waste of paper, and accelerate responsiveness from institutions,

   d.  charging less or making these processes **free of charge** for youth,

3. Suggests an increase in international, regional, and national **institutional communication** catered to youth, in order to raise awareness within youth on why **political participation is important** and how they can participate in political processes that affect them, such as but not limited to;

   a.  social media,

   b.  tv commercials,

   c.  information posters,

4. Recommends an increase in **youth representation** in local and national decision-making bodies, such as parliaments, political parties, and local councils, so as to bridge the hierarchical distance between decision-makers and their youngest population by including them in political processes in a meaningful way;

   a.  through **inter-generational co-leadership** positions, where youth and senior officials hold equal power in decision-making and policy-making roles, including but not limited to political party leadership and civil service promotion opportunities, in order to:

      i.     train and allow young leaders to exist in the same space as experienced senior leaders,

      ii.    implement a shared framework between generations for decision-making and policymaking,

   b.  with age quotas amongst elected officials and/or political parties:

      i.     that **reflect the age distribution** of the country/region, so that political representation is not limited to regional representation but also balanced to the amount of people from each generation in each specific region,

      ii.    that aim to redistribute power equally amongst generations according to their strengths and capacities,

   c.  by implementing additional **inclusive strategies** for youth representation within national and local governments, such as:

      i.     **youth representational bodies**, like a youth parliament or national student unions, that are age-group and schooling-situation specific, and empower youth to have a say in issues and subjects that affect them directly,

      ii.    **mentorship programmes** within political parties for pre-professional youth,

      iii.    **increased consultative transparency** and openness from public servants regarding issues that affect youth, including but not limited to increased communication around consultative processes, reaching out to students in their own environments, or organizing a day where schools can visit the governmental bodies and express their views freely,

   d.  by creating spaces for younger and older generations to **openly discuss challenges**, policies and how to address them, such as:

      i.    consultation at a ministerial level,

      ii.   public social spaces, like on tv and on social media,

5. Recommends **holding space** for youth where they are **under-represented**

   a.  In organizational roles:

      i.    by enacting **affirmative action** policies where young applicants are granted priority consideration for specific roles within the organization,

      ii.   by applying **adapted and targeted** criteria regarding the needed experience for youth candidates in accessing key leadership roles,

   b.  In decision-making roles:

      i.    by removing age restrictions to campaign for such positions,

      ii.   by encouraging political parties to employ more youth in political campaigns to teach them how to go through such processes and support them in their political endeavors,

6. Suggests the implementation of a **mentorship Programme**, called the *30x30 Mentorship Exchange*, a Programme where;

   a.  mentors, individuals who are above 30 are matched with mentees, individuals under 30,

   b.  parties work together for 30 hours quarterly,

   c.  parties learn from each other on the job while incentivising both groups:

      i.    with tax breaks for mentors,

      ii.   with a salary for contribution for mentees,

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

7. Urgently recommends **eliminating unpaid internships** and replacing them with associate roles to ensure fair compensation for young talent and effort;

   a.  by enacting and implementing a **binding labour law** or clause,

      i.    In national and international organizations

      ii.   In national governments

      iii.   In local decision-making bodies,

   b.  by **replacing** unpaid internships with **paid opportunities**, such as:

      i.    more entry-level positions,

      ii.   temporary youth-worker contracts and programmes for workers aged 18-35 years old,

      iii.   co-leadership opportunities,

8. Urge decisive action to be taken to ensure **equal opportunities for marginalized youth** by implementing affirmative action policies aligned with Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) principles;

   a.  by introducing affirmative action measures to address the lack of opportunities for marginalized youth by ensuring fair representation in employment and education,

   b.  by implementing affirmative action policies that include **DEI quotas** for both employment and education to promote fair representation and equal opportunities;

      i.    by creating a comprehensive affirmative action policy framework that aligns with DEI principles,

  ii. through establishing specific DEI quotas for employment and educational admissions to ensure fair representation of marginalized groups,

9. Encourages education ministries to **reform education systems** to provide updated knowledge in order to ensure that youth can participate in society and decision-making spaces more effectively, to provide relevant knowledge to youth;
  a. by rebuilding curricula to incorporate **skills in technological advancements**, ensuring that students are well-prepared for their future careers:
    i. that incorporate skills such as digital literacy, AI For Good, coding, climate change, biodiversity loss, human rights violations, future of work and entrepreneurship into the curriculum,
    ii. by providing professional development for teachers to equip them with the skills and knowledge needed to effectively deliver the updated curriculum,
  b. by rebuilding curricula to **incorporate social skills** in order to ensure that students are well-prepared for to take an active role in society:
    i. with thematic courses on diplomatic skills, negotiation, communication skills, public speaking, critical thinking, climate change, biodiversity loss, human rights violations
  c. through conducting a comprehensive review of existing curricula to identify further gaps and areas needing modernization, including in teaching methods or installations,
  d. by involving educators, industry experts, students, and parents in the curriculum development process to ensure it meets diverse needs and expectations,

10. Calls upon national governments to engage and **include external actors**, such as parents, in providing essential life skills not covered in formal education such as financial literacy, communications skills and emotional regulation skills, to better equip youth to advocate for themselves and their own rights;
  a. by engaging **parents and other non-sector actors** to supplement formal education with the teaching of basic life skills like character building;
  b. through voluntary outreach programmes and initiatives that encourage parental involvement and provide a communal environment where parents can help each other,
  c. while reducing the burden of certain tasks on parents to free their mental space and energy:
    i. by providing meal plans, school breakfasts and lunches for free or at least at a reduced rate,
    ii. by reducing the take-home workload of children that involve parental supervision,

11. Recommends the establishment of a comprehensive definition of **inclusion in education**;
  a. by developing a broader, more inclusive definition of inclusion in education that is universally accepted and implemented,
  b. which explicitly includes asylum seekers, LGBTQ+ individuals, and other marginalized groups, ensuring that educational policies and practices cater to the needs of all students,
  c. through convening a global task force, including representatives from Ministries of Education, UNESCO, and relevant stakeholders, to develop a comprehensive definition of inclusion in education,

12. Calls for the enhancement of **capacity building for educators** through reskilling and upskilling;
  a. by Ministries of Education incentivizing periodic reskilling and upskilling for teachers
    i. by integrating emerging issues, such as climate change, into the teacher training curriculum,

      ii.     by requiring reskilling for certification retention,

      iii.    though introducing frequent salary increases for teachers to undergo periodic reskilling and upskilling, to ensure educators remain current with new developments and emerging issues,

GRASSROOTS ACTIVISM

13. Suggests providing accessible and **diverse funding for youth-led organizations** in order to increase their capacity and to validate their idea and efforts;
    a. by creating a policy that requires budget allocation specifically issued for such initiatives, movements, and organizations,
    b. by allocating funds for protecting youth from marginalized communities as well as those who are from language minorities or rural areas.
    c. by utilizing the Youth Solidarity Fund (YSF) housed within the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations to create quotas to ensure the inclusion of people from diverse backgrounds within the country.

14. Suggests world leaders and international institutions to emphasize a **hopeful message** to the younger generation, in order to invite them to take solution-oriented action for positive change;
    a. by reaching out to influencers and encouraging them to share good practices of successful youth initiatives,
    b. by creating multimedia motivational content which communicates active listening by international institutions and the presence of the United Nations for youth,
    c. by creating a transnational youth pledge that:
        i. includes promises towards oneself, to other youth and the world,
        ii. reminds world leaders and youth the values which need to be held moving forward,
        iii. inspires and responsibilities youth to create real change in the society by placing importance on their actions,

15. Recommends **eliminating all kinds of discrimination** and bias towards the youth involved in grassroots activism
    a. by ensuring the engagement of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and other committees to directly address the intersections of youth discrimination and threats against defenders, by forming an inter-committee task force and by educating civil society to value youth's voices,

16. Recommends implementing a **formal mechanism** akin to ECOSOC accreditation to grant **consultative status** to youth-led movements and organizations by relaxing the requirement for formal registration, thereby providing recognition and partnership by the United Nations.

17. Suggests offering ways in which youth can be **recognized and celebrated** for bringing forth solutions to the current challenges faced by the world, including but not limited to;
    a. conducting **competitions** at local, national, and global levels,
    b. gathering **financial aid** by collaborating with public and private stakeholders,
    c. providing **official recognition** for outstanding young individuals or youth-led initiatives at the national and international levels, such as:
        i. congratulations by the political leaders,
        ii. awards.

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# Transforming Global Governance

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# Executive Summary

The United Nations and the multilateral system were shaped in the past century. Societies have since evolved, yet many global issues persist. As youth, we did our homework, and we wish to propose recommendations for the reform of the systems after a process of literature review, brainstorming, and analysis of local, national, and international initiatives.

For the United Nations System, we recommend the following reforms:
- ➢ **Improving the legitimacy, representativeness, and effectiveness** of the UNSC involves refining and implementing **norms for veto power** while introducing an **override mechanism** for veto usage.
- ➢ Enhancing the **accountability and transparency** of the UNSC through **effective and equitable mandates** on peace and security.
- ➢ **Strengthening the role and capacity** of the UNGA for more effective policy setting and **modernizing the operational efficiency** in the UN System to better address contemporary global challenges.
- ➢ **Ensuring equitable and efficient allocation of resources** for UN mandates and understanding the impact of donations and donor agendas on UN programmes, **increasing transparency,** fostering stakeholder **participation**, and implementing **cost-saving measures** across the UN system to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the system.
- ➢ **Reforming the current multilateral financial architecture** to make it inclusive, just, transparent, and accountable by including vulnerable groups in its investment strategies while considering the development needs of the Global South.

For the broader Multilateral System, we propose:
- ➢ **Rebuilding trust** in the multilateral system, by improving representativeness in the UN system of stakeholders, aligning policy with practice, and creating mechanisms for increased transparency and accountability;
- ➢ Climate change has impacted nations disproportionately, requiring directed efforts to adjust for different contexts and regular monitoring with local stocktakes, considering the **People and the Planet** and existing local solutions;
- ➢ Achieving **green and equitable financing** requires better alignment with the SDGs, regional representativity in leadership of global finance agencies, and a focus in the future, including youth in financial decisions and providing fair pay for effective work;
- ➢ While the **digital transition** is promising for the future, we must account for the needs of the people and the planet, promoting collaboration in the governance of digitalization and increased transparency and accountability;
- ➢ Working towards **peace and prevention** requires acknowledging past events and including all voices, especially children and youth, while providing space for regions to grow sustainably and invest in **anticipatory actions** for a future-proof world.

# Introduction

The global community faces a pivotal moment as we confront unprecedented challenges that defy national borders and traditional solutions. Climate change, pandemics, economic disparities, and geopolitical tensions underscore the urgent need for a robust global governance system that answers to everyone, not just the powerful. At the heart of this effort lies the United Nations (UN) and the broader multilateral framework, institutions tasked with fostering cooperation, peace, and sustainable development worldwide.

The upcoming Summit of the Future represents a critical opportunity to reinvigorate global commitments towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and reforming the multilateral system to meet $21^{st}$ century demands. This summit offers a platform for world leaders, civil society, and stakeholders to address the shortcomings of existing global governance structures and chart a course toward more effective, inclusive, and legitimate multilateralism.

Despite the UN's pivotal role, it faces growing criticism and skepticism regarding its effectiveness and legitimacy. The multilateral system's perceived ineffectiveness in addressing pressing global issues has fueled discontent among member states, non-state actors and the global civil society. Decision-making processes often appear opaque, and power imbalances among member states undermine the system's credibility. Geopolitical tensions, nationalist sentiments, and the uneven distribution of resources and influence within the UN framework exacerbate these challenges.

Building on our understanding of the current complex multilateral system and looking ahead to the Summit of the Future, this report aims to provide concrete feasible changes and practical steps to strengthen, legitimize, and improve the overall effectiveness of the UN and the broader multilateral system. From this framework, we offer reform recommendations on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), the financial architecture of the UN, and the broader multilateral system, making it more inclusive and representative. We hope these recommendations shed light on the current challenges faced by the UN and the multilateral system, while also offering concrete steps to galvanize political will and collective action towards enhanced global governance.

The upcoming Summit of the Future holds significant promise for revitalizing global governance efforts and advancing the SDGs. By addressing the shortcomings of the current multilateral system and fostering a more inclusive and responsive framework, world leaders can pave the way for a more just, sustainable, and resilient future for all. The decisions made at this critical juncture will shape our collective ability to tackle shared global challenges and build a world where peace, prosperity, and sustainability are within reach for future generations.

# United Nations System Reforms
## I.      United Nations Security Council Reform

The UNSC stands as a cornerstone of global peace and security, yet persistent criticisms of its structure and operations have underscored the need for significant reforms. Since the adoption of Resolution 47/62 by the UNGA in 1992, which called for a review of the Council's representation and membership, more than three decades have passed without substantial changes. This prolonged period of stagnation highlights the formidable procedural obstacles that impede meaningful reform efforts. Any modification to the Council's composition or functioning requires the approval of two-thirds of UN member states and unanimous consent from each of the five permanent members (P-5), and as such we recognize the hurdles that inhibit reform. As such we have offered what we believe are feasible reforms that recognize the autonomy of states and allow for fortified global governance.

Despite widespread recognition of the need for reform, divergent positions among member states and the entrenched interest of the P-5 have hindered progress. The Council's current structure, established in 1945, does not adequately reflect the geopolitical realities and power shifts of the contemporary world. Calls for expanding both permanent and nonpermanent membership have been met with resistance yet remain a critical priority for the legitimacy of the UNSC representation.

The norms governing the veto power wielded by the P-5 further complicate reform discussions. While the veto was intended to ensure major powers' commitment to collective security, its use has at times been perceived as obstructing timely and decisive action, particularly in cases involving humanitarian crises or gross violations of human rights. Efforts to reform veto utilization, such as proposing criteria for its application and exploring mechanisms for joint veto usage, aim to strike a balance between safeguarding national interests and promoting collective security objectives.

Moreover, the effectiveness of the UNSC in enforcing its decisions remains a critical concern. Variations in political will, resource availability, and the geopolitical considerations of the P-5 often undermine the implementation of Council resolutions. Strengthening enforcement mechanisms involves enhancing coordination among member states, improving accountability, and exploring avenues for the UNGA to complement the Council's efforts in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

While the road to UNSC reform is fraught with challenges, the imperative to adapt to evolving global realities and uphold the principles of multilateralism remains paramount. By addressing structural deficiencies, refining veto norms, and bolstering enforcement capabilities, the UN can enhance the Council's effectiveness in addressing global peace and security challenges. Achieving these reforms will require sustained diplomatic engagement, consensus-building among member states, and a commitment to revitalizing the multilateral framework of global governance.

## A. Membership

**Enhancing Legitimacy, Representativeness, and Effectiveness of the UNSC**

Recognizing the crucial role of the UNSC in maintaining international peace and security, it is essential to address the structural and membership criticisms it faces. These issues necessitate comprehensive reforms to enhance the Council's legitimacy, representativeness, and effectiveness.

**Recommendations:**

1. **Expanding Membership**
   We call upon increasing permanent and non-permanent membership to better reflect contemporary geopolitical realities.
   **Permanent Members:** The UNSC currently has five permanent members (P-5) with veto power: China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Expanding this category to include permanent members from underrepresented regions such as Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East would enhance the Council's global legitimacy and representativeness.
   **Non-Permanent Members:** The Council currently comprises ten non-permanent members elected for two-year terms. Increasing the number of non-permanent seats would allow for more balanced regional representation and broader participation in UNSC deliberations.

2. **Enhancing Regional Representation**
   Improving regional representation is vital for the UNSC to embody the diverse interests and perspectives of the global community. Specific recommendations include:
   **Africa:** Given Africa's growing significance and the frequent discussion of African issues at the UNSC, adding a permanent seat for an African nation is crucial. The African Union has proposed two permanent seats for the continent.

**Asia and Pacific:** This region requires broader representation to adequately address its cultural diversity and perspectives.

**Latin America and the Caribbean:** This region requires permanent representation to adequately address its issues and perspectives.

**Middle East:** A permanent seat for a Middle Eastern country could address the region's significant geopolitical challenges and conflicts, ensuring their direct representation in the Council's decisions.

In evaluating potential candidates for these seats, the following factors are usefully considered:

**Regional Balance:** The candidate country offers distinct regional perspectives, enhancing the geographic representation of the UNSC.

**Economic and Military Contributions:** The candidate country possesses substantial economic power and military capabilities, crucial for maintaining international peace and security.

**Political and Diplomatic Influence:** The candidate country plays a pivotal role in regional and global diplomacy, making its inclusion valuable for a more balanced UNSC.

Reforming the UNSC to expand its membership and improve regional representation is essential for sustaining its legitimacy and effectiveness in the 21st century. By incorporating diverse perspectives and addressing the evolving geopolitical landscape, the UNSC can more effectively fulfill its international peace and security mandate. Achieving these reforms requires broad consensus among UN member states.

## B. Veto Use

### Enhancing and Implementing Norms of Veto Use

Recognizing that structural reform has reached a diplomatic impasse and is unlikely to progress in the near term, restructuring working methods and changing the council's norms is a valuable complementary reform agenda to pursue. Structural reform, like changes in the council's membership or in the delegation of the veto, requires charter amendments. In contrast, working methods reforms can be agreed to within the UNSC without charter amendments because the council is the master of its procedures (Article 30, UN charter). Concerning the veto prerogative, for example, whereas re-delegation or removal would imply charter amendments, the council could, in principle, agree to codes of conduct on the use of the veto, which is a working method reform towards the creation of a new norm.

**Recommendations:**

1. **Specifying Criteria for Veto Use and Responsibility Not to Veto**
   We recommend ensuring the veto is only exercised in national sovereignty or fundamental security interests and not in cases of humanitarian crises or mass atrocities. This aims to limit the scope of the veto power to essential national security issues, preventing its use in blocking resolutions that address urgent humanitarian needs or mass atrocities. Aiming to establish a new international norm of a '*responsibility not to veto*' (R2NV) to accompany the P-5's responsibility to protect.

2. **Introducing a Delayed Veto Mechanism**
   We encourage the adoption of a delayed veto mechanism in which a vetoed resolution can be reintroduced for a vote after a ten-day period, providing time for diplomatic negotiations and reconsideration. A delayed veto mechanism would allow for a 'cooling-off' period during which diplomatic efforts can be made to address the concerns of the vetoing member. This approach would, therefore, encourage continued dialogue and provide a pathway for reaching a consensus on critical issues after initial veto use.

3. **Veto Suspension in Cases of Genocide and War Crimes**

We call for the suspension of veto power in cases involving allegations of genocide, war crimes, or crimes against humanity, thereby allowing the council to act in protecting vulnerable populations. This would ensure that the international community may respond to prevent atrocities and not be impeded by a P-5 member.

4. **Introducing Requirement for Joint Veto Use**
We request the agreement, and joint use of at least two P-5 members vetoes to prevent unilateral vetoes and encourage multilateral deliberation. By requiring broader agreement, it aims to enhance collective decision-making and reduce the likelihood of using the veto to serve narrow national interests.

5. **Introducing Annual Review of Veto Use**
We call for the introduction of an annual review of the use of the veto by an independent international body, with findings and recommendations reported to the UNGA to promote accountability and adherence to the principles of the UN. An annual review of veto use by an independent body would allow oversight and transparency, holding council members more accountable for their decisions. Aims to ensure that the use of the veto aligns with the UN's mission of maintaining international peace and security.

**Introduction of an Override Mechanism in the UNSC for Veto Usage**

Recognizing the imperative to enhance the efficacy of the UNSC in maintaining international peace and security and acknowledging the limitation of the current veto system, these recommendations seek to introduce a series of reforms aimed at fortifying the council's decision-making processes (Trent & Schnurr, 2018). The current disproportionate reliance on veto power has perpetuated an imbalance in prioritization and decision-making, often hindering timely and decisive action. These recommendations underscore our dedication and commitment to the principles of multilateralism while underscoring the urgency for reforms that create a more balanced, efficient, and representative governance structure within the UNSC.

**Recommendations:**

1. **Introducing a Supermajority Threshold**

   We call upon member states to support the introduction of a supermajority threshold for overriding a veto issued by any permanent member of the UNSC. This mechanism would allow for a two-thirds majority vote of the non-permanent members of the UNSC to override a veto. The current resolution procedure, Uniting for Peace, allowing the UNGA to issue an emergency session of the UNSC to override a veto with a supermajority, has proven largely ineffective in preserving international peace (A/RES/377, 1950). Having only been enacted 11 times since 1950, this procedural resolution has proven insufficient in creating change as all enforcement capabilities reside in the UNSC and require subsequent resolutions to enact as the UNGA remains constrained in providing recommendations, not action (Scharf, 2022). As such, we recommend an expansion in the spirit of the Uniting for Peace resolution that would allow a supermajority in the UNSC to serve a similar purpose.

2. **Implementing Procedural Safeguards**

   We encourage the adoption of procedural safeguards to ensure that any motion to override a veto is submitted within a specified time frame following the veto's issuance. Adequate time for debate and consideration must be provided to ensure that all member states can express their views before the vote.

3. **Applying Limited Scope for Application**

   We recommend that the override mechanism apply to resolutions concerning international peace and security, humanitarian interventions, and other critical issues determined by the UN Charter. This scope will ensure that the mechanism is used judiciously and effectively.

Introducing an override mechanism for veto usage within the UNSC is a crucial step toward enhancing the council's ability to maintain peace and security and respond promptly to international crises. By addressing the current limitations of the veto system, these recommendations aim to remove the ability of P-5 states to influence and manipulate the UNSC agenda and response while creating a more balanced and inclusive governance structure. Implementing a supermajority threshold, establishing procedural safeguards, and defining the scope of application are essential reforms ensuring the UNSC can act pivotally and equitably in the face of global challenges.

### C. Enforcement

**Ensuring Effective and Equitable Enforcement of Peace and Security Mandates**

Recognizing the pivotal role of the UNSC in maintaining international peace and security through binding resolutions, it is essential to address concerns regarding their effectiveness and enforcement. The UNSC's ability to enforce its decisions is critical to its mission; however, various challenges undermine this capability. This section examines the primary obstacles to the successful implementation of these resolutions and explores the potential benefits of redistributing certain powers to the UNGA. By doing so, it aims to enhance the overall efficacy and fairness of the international governance system. A primary challenge lies in the inconsistent implementation of UNSC binding resolutions, attributable to various factors. Political will is a significant issue, as enforcing resolutions often conflicts with the national interests of member states or their powerful allies, leading to a lack of motivation. Additionally, resource constraints hinder some countries from effectively implementing resolutions, as they lack the necessary means to do so. The geopolitical interests of the permanent members (P-5) also play a crucial role, often resulting in the selective application of resolutions based on the interests of these influential nations. Addressing these challenges is vital to ensure that the UNSC can fulfill its mandate and that international peace and security are upheld.

Given the challenges in enforcing binding resolutions, there is a growing debate about redistributing some UNSC powers to the UNGA. The UNGA, with its universal membership, provides a more democratic platform for decision-making.

**Recommendations:**

1. **Empowering the UNGA with Enhanced Decision-Making Authority**
   **Legislative Powers:** Granting the UNGA limited legislative powers to pass binding resolutions on global issues such as climate change, global health, and sustainable development could enhance international cooperation.
2. **Strengthening the Role of the UNGA in Conflict Resolution**
   **Mediation and Diplomacy:** The UNGA could assume a more active role in mediating conflicts and facilitating diplomatic negotiations, mainly when the UNSC is unable to act.
   **Peacebuilding Initiatives:** Empowering the UNGA to lead peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction initiatives could complement the UNSC's efforts.
3. **Enhancing Accountability and Transparency**
   **Periodic Reviews:** Instituting periodic reviews of UNSC resolutions by the UNGA could improve transparency and accountability, ensuring effective implementation.
   **Reporting Mechanisms:** Strengthening reporting mechanisms to require regular updates from member states on implementing UNSC resolutions could enhance compliance.
4. **Strengthening Enforcement Mechanism**
   **Sanctions:** The efficacy of sanctions imposed by the UNSC depends on global cooperation. Some states evade sanctions and undermine their impact. Recommends enhancing global monitoring and cooperation to prevent states from evading UNSC-imposed sanctions.
   **Military Action:** Authorizing military action requires broad consensus and substantial logistical support, which may not always be available. Encourages to foster broader consensus and ensure substantial logistical support to effectively authorize and implement military actions.

Reforming the UNSC and transferring certain powers to the UNGA could significantly enhance the effectiveness and legitimacy of the United Nations in maintaining international peace and security. Redistributing powers to the UNGA would democratize decision-making processes and reduce the P-5's dominance. A more comprehensive approach could foster greater cooperation among member states, leading to more comprehensive and widely supported solutions. Such reforms require careful consideration and broad consensus among member states, reflecting the complexities and nuances of global governance.

### D. Mandate

**Revitalization of the UNSC Mandate through Enhanced Accountability and Transparency**

Recognizing the need to reinforce the effectiveness and legitimacy of the UNSC, we seek to introduce comprehensive reforms to enhance accountability, transparency, procedural efficiency, and mandate implementation. The proposed measures address critical aspects of the UNSC's operations, ensuring that diverse perspectives, transparent processes, and robust accountability mechanisms guide its decisions and actions. These recommendations aim to improve the UNSC's responsiveness to global challenges by fostering a culture of transparency and inclusivity. The UNSC has faced a perceived lack of transparency and effectiveness in recent years. Concerns about undue influence, insufficient transparency, and inefficiencies in addressing global crises have eroded confidence in its ability to function. These recommendations aim to help restore trust and legitimacy by establishing clear accountability measures, enhancing transparency, and implementing procedural reforms to ensure more effective and equitable decision-making.

**Recommendations:**

1. **Enhancing Accountability**
   **Feedback Mechanisms:** Recommends establishing channels for stakeholders, civil society, and affected parties to provide feedback on UNSC operations and decisions. This will ensure that diverse perspectives and insights are considered.
   **Conflict of Interest Norms:** Implement and reiterate conflict of interest regulations for UNSC members to prevent undue influence from external parties and direct engagement of states.
   **Conduct Reviews:** Implement biannual conduct and performance reviews of UNSC member states to assess their adherence to UN resolutions and mandates.
2. **Increasing Transparency**
   **Publication of Meeting Minutes:** Ensure detailed minutes of UNSC meetings are published promptly and made accessible to the public.
   **Public Access to Documents:** Make UNSC documents, including drafts, and working papers, accessible to the public to promote accessibility.
   **Public Consultation:** Conduct public consultations on major UNSC resolutions to gather input from global stakeholders. This includes creating interactive platforms where the public can track UNSC resolutions and their implementation.
3. **Implementing Procedural Reforms**
   **Clear Mandate Criteria:** Establish clear criteria for UNSC mandates to ensure they are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound.
   **Enhanced Cooperation:** Improve coordination between the UNSC and other UN bodies to avoid overlap and duplication of efforts.
   **Improved Emergency Response:** Implement rapid response mechanisms for the UNSC to address crises more effectively and efficiently.
   **Engagement with Regional Bodies:** Enhance engagement and collaboration with regional organizations to leverage their expertise and resources and reduce duplicate action.
4. **Enhancing Mandate Implementation**
   **Capacity Building:** Support capacity-building initiatives in member states to improve their ability to implement UNSC mandates effectively.

**Best Practices Sharing:** Facilitate sharing best practices and lessons learned among member states for mandate implementation.

**Resource Allocation:** Ensure adequate resources are allocated to support the implementation of UNSC resolutions, including peacekeeping missions and humanitarian interventions.

Implementing these recommendations will revitalize the UNSC mandate and effectiveness, ensuring it operates with greater integrity, inclusiveness, and responsiveness to the needs of the international community. Enhanced accountability and transparency are vital for maintaining the legitimacy and efficacy of the UNSC in addressing global peace and security challenges. The proposed measures focus on enhancing the UNSC's accountability and transparency, ultimately leading to more effective and equitable decision-making and action.

### E. Periodic Review

**Fostering Global Governance Integrity and Enhancing Assessments of the UNSC**

Enhancing accountability and effectiveness within the UNSC, these recommendations propose concrete measures to strengthen its operational framework. Establishing independent review mechanisms and fostering transparent feedback channels, these initiatives aim to promote informed decision-making and further the UN's foundational principles of peace and security.

1. **Establishing Independent Periodic Review Mechanism**
   We recommend the establishment of an independent periodic review in order to assess the impact of the UNSC's decisions and the use of the veto. This mechanism should be led by a body composed of international legal experts, former diplomats, and representatives from non-governmental organizations. The review should operate on a biennial basis and be tasked with a comprehensive evaluation of the outcomes of vetoed resolutions and their implications for international peace and security, as well as providing recommendations for improvements. A periodic review best offers a structured approach to analyze and identify patterns of use of the veto, their consequences, and assess their (mis) alignment with the UN's principles and objectives.

2. **Implementing Structured Feedback Mechanisms**
   We recommend the implementation of a structured feedback mechanism based on the findings of the independent periodic review. This feedback should include input from member states, NGOs, and populations of civil society of those affected by UNSC resolutions. The mechanism aims to ensure that the periodic review process translates into actionable improvements in the UNSC's operations and decision-making processes.

3. **Publicizing Review Findings and Public Feedback**
   We recommend the publication of the findings of the periodic reviews together with the input from a public feedback mechanism. These publications should be disseminated widely in the UNGA among member states, to civil society and the public. By making the review and feedback findings publicly available, the UN can promote informed debate and encourage member states to adopt reforms that enhance the effectiveness and legitimacy of the UNSC. Public dissemination can also increase pressure on permanent members to use their veto power responsibly if at all.

By implementing these recommendations, the UNSC can fortify its role as a pivotal global institution, responsive to the evolving challenges of international peace and security. Transparent periodic reviews and inclusive feedback mechanisms will not only enhance accountability but also foster a more equitable and effective governance structure within the UN, ensuring that the voices of all member states and affected communities are heard and respected on the global stage.

*II.      United Nations General Assembly Reform*

**A.  Capacity Building**

The UN, established following the second World War to foster global cooperation and address international challenges, faces pivotal opportunities for reform. Acknowledging the critical importance of enhancing the UNGA to strengthen its role in policy setting and agenda formulation, it is evident that a recalibration is necessary to mitigate the current overreliance on the UNSC. This dependency has perpetuated an imbalance in policy influence, marginalizing the UNGA, the more democratic and inclusive organ of the UN. This imbalance shows the necessity to enhance the legislative authority and agenda setting power within the UNGA. These measures aim to ensure a more balanced and effective global governance structure. Among the proposed reforms are granting the UNGA greater legislative powers to adopt binding resolutions on critical global issues, implementing strategic planning methodologies to prioritize agenda items, adopting outcome-oriented agendas with clear metrics for success, and building the capacity of member states to implement UNGA policies effectively.
By enacting these reforms, the UN can move towards a more equitable distribution of power and influence, ensuring that the voices of all member states are heard and respected. This will lead to the creation of more equitable, democratic policies that better reflect the global community.

**Strengthening the Role and Capacity of the UNGA for More Effective Policy Setting**

Acknowledging the critical importance of bolstering the UNGA to significantly improve its role in policy setting and agenda formulation, it is imperative to address the current overreliance on the UNSC (Blum, 2005). This disproportionate dependence has created and perpetuated an imbalance in policy influence and practice, leading to the marginalization of the more representative organ of the UN. These recommendations reaffirm the commitment to the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations of cooperation in the face of international insecurity and emphasize the need for enhanced legislative authority and strategic agenda-setting processes within the UNGA to ensure more balanced and effective global governance. By implementing these recommendations, we can foster a more equitable distribution of power and influence within the UN, ensuring that the voices of all member states are heard and respected.

**Recommendations:**

1.  **Enhancing Legislative Authority**
    We call upon member states to support granting the UNGA greater legislative powers to adopt binding resolutions on critical global issues, including human rights and international security. This enhancement would elevate the legal status of UNGA resolutions, making them binding and impactful in international law.
2.  **Implementing Proactive and Strategic Agenda Setting**
    We encourage the implementation of strategic planning processes to prioritize and sequence agenda items effectively. This involves utilizing data and evidence-based methodologies to ensure that agenda items and subsequent actions are driven by objective criteria and global needs rather than state interest.
3.  **Adopting Measures for Outcome-Oriented Agendas**
    We recommend designing agendas with clear, outcome-oriented goals and metrics for success. This approach will increase the effectiveness of agenda implementation and ensure that all programmes receive support based on their defined objectives. Currently, the UN SDGs goals remain elusive partly due to their scale. Instead, agendas should be reoriented with specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound metrics.
4.  **Building Capacity for Member States**
    We urge the provision of technical assistance and resource mobilization to member states to enhance their capacity to implement UNGA policies. Adequate resources should be allocated

to support the UNGA's expanded role, including funding for research, policy analysis, and member-state capacity building.

Enacting these recommendations within the UNGA will move the United Nations towards a more balanced and effective governance structure. This will empower the UNGA to fulfill its mandate better, ensuring that it plays a pivotal role in shaping policies that are equitable, and representative of the global community's interests. Ultimately, these reforms will contribute to a more equitable and sustainable world, in line with the core mission and principles of the United Nations.

## B. <u>Operational Reform</u>

**Strengthening and Modernizing Operational Efficiency in the UN System**

Recognizing the expansion of the UN system since 1945, the bureaucratic structure of the UN has shifted dramatically. As such it is necessary to evaluate the operational effectiveness of the system to understand where structures need to be strengthened and perhaps if some need to be dismantled. Acknowledging the critical need to assess the UNs' operational efficiency, it is imperative to address the possible inefficiencies caused by overlapping functions, bureaucratic procedures, and internal mismanagement. By implementing these recommendations, we seek to foster a more agile, resilient, and responsive UN, ensuring that resources are utilized efficiently, and the organization's paramount objectives are achieved.

**Recommendations:**
1. **Implementing Organizational Auditing**
   We call upon member states to support a comprehensive audit by an independent third-party, particularly of organizational psychologists and system engineers, to examine potential redundancies and enhance efficiency. Perform an in-depth audit of all departments and agencies to identify overlapping functions and redundancies. To avoid complication, for instance during the Syrian civil war, where coordination among multiple UN agencies (UNHCR, WHO, UNICEF) led to delays in aid delivery due to overlapping responsibilities and bureaucratic hurdles (Martínez & Eng, 2016).
2. **Merge Overlapping Agencies**
   We recommend combining and streamlining agencies and departments with similar mandates to reduce duplication. For example, the Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Food Programme both address food insecurity and hunger, and often have overlapping projects.
3. **Increase Cross-Agency Communication**
   We call for the development of better communication and coordination between agencies to avoid duplication. During the post-2010 Haiti earthquake, multiple UN agencies launched similar or identical projects, leading to duplication and resource competition as well as leaving some critical needs unmet (Foley, 2010).
4. **Decentralizing Decision-Making**
   We recommend the decentralization of the decision-making process by empowering regional offices, by granting more authority to regional offices, thereby speeding up response times and reducing the burden on headquarters. With the goal of reducing the number of approval layers required for project initiation and implementation to accelerate processes and increase efficiency.

The UN's significant expansion since 1945 requires a thorough evaluation of its operational effectiveness to address inefficiencies from overlapping functions and bureaucratic procedures. Implementing recommendations such as comprehensive audits, merging overlapping agencies, enhancing communication, and decentralizing decision-making will foster a more agile and efficient organization, ensuring the UN's objectives are effectively achieved.

### III. *Financial Reform across the United Nations System*

#### A. <u>Resource Allocation</u>

**Equitable and Efficient Allocation of Resources for United Nations Mandates**

Recognizing the paramount importance of equitable and efficient allocation of resources to ensure the successful implementation of the diverse UN mandates, it is essential to address the disparities in funding priorities among member states. These disparities result in imbalanced support and effectiveness of various UN programmes, agencies, and initiatives. Our recommendations reaffirm the commitment to the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, which emphasize cooperation and mutual support for the collective benefit of not only all member states but also the common and interlinked objectives of the UN System. Furthermore, it emphasizes the need for a centralized budget collection mechanism under a "ONE UN Reform" to allocate resources impartially and per the United Nations' established priorities (Novovic, 2024). The ONE UN Initiative was first presented at the end of 2006 by eight countries (Albania, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Pakistan, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uruguay, and Viet Nam) with the objective of a more effective, efficient, coherent, coordinated, and better performing United Nations country presence with a strengthened role of the senior resident official and a common management, programming, and monitoring framework (UNGA Res. 60/1, 2005).

**Recommendations:**

1. **Establishing a Unified Budget Collection System**
   We call upon member states to support establishing a unified budget collection system that centralizes contributions. This system aims to prevent selective funding that undermines the comprehensive and balanced execution of UN activities. This unified collection system would allow Member States' contributions to not be selective of a particular agenda and would allow the UN to achieve its mandates, objectives, and programmes with broader autonomy.
2. **Creating an Oversight Committee**
   We recommend the formation of an oversight committee to monitor the distribution and utilization of the centralized funds. This committee will ensure that all programmes receive equitable support in line with their respective mandates and needs.
3. **Encouraging Solidarity and Commitment from Member States**
   We urge member states to demonstrate solidarity and commitment by adhering to the new budget collection mechanism. This will foster a more cohesive and effective United Nations capable of addressing global challenges comprehensively.

Implementing these recommendations will enhance the efficiency and equity of resource allocation within the United Nations, ensuring that all programmes are adequately supported to fulfill their mandates. The unified budget collection system, coupled with measures for transparency and oversight, will uphold the principles of cooperation and mutual support, ultimately contributing to a more effective and cohesive United Nations.

#### B. <u>Influence of Voluntary Funds</u>

**Donations and the Impact of Donor Agendas on United Nations Programmes**

Recognizing the detrimental impact of donor self-interest agendas on the impartiality and effectiveness of United Nations programmes and initiatives, it is imperative to address the influence of conditional donations on the UN's mission. Structural change within the United Nations cannot be realized without autonomous movements that are not reliant on conditional donations. Self-interested agendas lead to the selectivity of programmes receiving donations, risking the co-optation and distortion of the UN's

mission (INCITE!, 2007). This report emphasizes the need for a centralized budget collection mechanism to ensure equitable and unbiased funding across all UN activities.

**Recommendations:**

1. **Implementing a Unified Budget Collection System**
   We call for the implementation of a unified budget collection system, as mentioned previously, under a "ONE UN Reform" mandate to centralize contributions and prevent the undue influence of donor self-interests on UN priorities.
2. **Providing Unconditional Aid and Donations**
   We reaffirm that aid and donations to the UN System should be unconditional, ensuring that no hierarchical structures that allow for prioritization of certain affairs over others are created based on the financial contributions of member states.
3. **Ensuring an Impartial and Transparent Allocation Process**
   We wish to stress the importance of an impartial and transparent allocation process within the centralized budget system, ensuring that all programmes receive support based on their needs and mandates rather than donor preferences.
4. **Committing to a Centralized Funding Mechanism**
   We encourage member states to commit to this new centralized funding mechanism, thereby fostering a more autonomous, equitable, and effective United Nations capable of addressing global challenges without external biases.

The implementation of these recommendations will mitigate the influence of donor self-interest on United Nations programmes and initiatives. A unified budget collection system, coupled with unconditional aid and a transparent allocation process, will enhance the autonomy, equity, and effectiveness of the United Nations, allowing it to address global challenges impartially and efficiently.

### B.  Financial Architecture

**Reforming the Current International Financial Architecture**

The current multilateral financial architecture is unsuitable in line with the findings contained in the Pact for the Future (United Nations, 2024b, p. 140). Building on the Secretary-General's remarks in the Policy Brief needs to be updated and tends to perpetuate underdevelopment rather than overcoming it. This practice is against the United Nations Charter, which stipulates in the preamble the need to 'employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples' (UN Charter, 1945).

Accordingly, we agree with the text as proposed. We, however, encourage a more specific, concrete action.

**Recommendations:**

1. **Promoting the Participation of Vulnerable Groups in Financing Mechanisms**
   In terms of vulnerability investment, we recommend an increased focus on vulnerable groups such as refugees to be included in the multilateral financing mechanisms. In this way, refugees are conceptualized as global public goods (GPGs), ensuring that there is a:
   **Dedicated** multilateral development bank (MDB) financing for refugees and host communities in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs);
   **Reform** of the MDBs to ensure a focus on GPGs and the creation of a dedicated GPG Bank with its own balance sheet and governance structure (UNU, 2024, p. 1)
2. **Aligning Debt Servicing with Sustainable Development Goals**
   On the issue of debts, we agree with the text as detailed in the Pact for the Future (p. 141, 142) underscoring the need to recognize the deleterious effects of high-level debts especially on developing countries' developmental efforts. Consequently, we call upon the MDBs to be cognizant of the varying developmental needs of states and to ensure that debts do not intervene in the pathways of sustainable development.

We encourage the MDBs to move away from the current debt structuring characterized by the Special Drawing Rights (SDRs), allocations that have so far proved inequitable and unjust (ActionAid, 2023). An example of this was apparent during the Covid-19 pandemic when the IMF allocated a substantial amount of the SDRs to the Global North countries - who, in most cases, did not lack capital while leaving the rest out, especially the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and the Small Island Developing States (SIDS), considered to be of urgent liquidity needs (Ellmers, 2023). Rather, we advocate for the MDBs to consider lending based on vulnerability indexes.

3. **Aligning the Special Drawing Rights with Countries' Economies**
We also recognize the preexisting SDR structure - tied to the world's major currencies poses growth risks with developmental effects that are far-fetched (i.e., inflationary, and fiscal instability) to the developing world and further destabilize their dwindling currencies. Therefore, reforming the SDRs to better fit the 21st-century realities would be a commendable exercise in light of the ongoing debt distress (Ocampo, 2011).

C. <u>**Transparency and Trust**</u>

**Enhanced Transparency and Participation to Rebuild Trust among Stakeholders**

In recent decades, a robust accountability system has been implemented across the UN system regarding received funding and expenditures. The elaborate machinery of independent oversight and auditing allows member states to monitor the work and budget decisions of the individual divisions and flag potential problems (*UN Transparency Portal*). Additionally, in 2018, the UN High-Level Committee on Management, together with the UN Sustainable Development Group, launched the UN Data Cube, a set of data standards for system-wide reporting on financial data (*UN Data and Statistics*). This initiative allows for the frequent publication of highly disaggregated and verifiable data online about funding sources and allocation choices in line with the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) standards (*UN Data Cube*). The idea behind the Data Cube falls within the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the aspirations of the current UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, for a system-wide reform to make the UN fit for the challenges of the 21st century. At the same time, the Principles on Personal Data Protection and Privacy (*Personal Data Protection and Privacy*) are applied across the UN system in order to promote trust from Member States, private donors, and the whole of society.
The use of digital technology also contributes to this end, allowing for greater precision in monitoring and reporting activities and making system-wide statistics and additional information available to everyone who has digital access. While recognizing the limitations and risks stemming from the use of digital and emerging technologies, as well as the digital divide, it must be acknowledged that they have the potential to enhance transparency and meaningful participation even on financial issues. For this reason, we commend the efforts, including within the framework of the Summit of the Future, to address the necessity for a more responsible and human rights-based use of digital technologies (United Nations, 2023b; United Nations, 2024b).

The brief overview provided above aims to suggest that the mistrust in international organizations and the perceived lack of transparency by public opinion may not be caused by actual opacity in budget management but rather by a lack of public awareness. Consequently, especially in more vulnerable contexts, individuals can be influenced by disinformation and misinformation, and international organizations can be viewed as inefficient and burdensome. This report, therefore, proposes some steps that could contribute to increasing trust in the system.

**Recommendations:**

1. **Improving Dissemination of Statistics and Information on Achievements, Challenges, and Expenditures**
   We recommend involving regional and field offices more extensively, as well as local actors who collaborate with UN agencies, programmes, and funds, and benefit from their support for the dissemination of information on the financial situation of the UN, including statistics and official documents and resolutions. This would contribute to sharing achievements and challenges faced by UN agencies in the implementation of its mandate with the whole of society. The goal is to better communicate the work and values of the UN through online and offline engagement, ultimately counterbalancing the often-dominant narrative of its failures.

2. **Fostering Direct Engagement of Private Donors, Local Governments, and Civil Society in Budget-Related Decision-Making**
   We encourage giving more space during yearly discussions on budget allocation to both non-state actors who contribute greatly through donations and partnerships, and especially to those stakeholders who are most impacted by the operations of UN agencies and who understand the situation on the ground and the priorities. These stakeholders can thus contribute to more efficient management with new ideas and perspectives that may escape policymakers. In an initial phase, this could occur through consultations and working groups, with a view to giving these stakeholders more space towards a better-integrated multilateralism.

D. **Cost-Saving Measures**

**Implementation of Cost-Saving Measures across the UN System**

Since its foundation in 1945, the UN has grown and has expanded its mandate with the creation of new agencies, programmes, and funds to address emerging challenges. The enlargement of the machinery and the growing expenses due to emerging humanitarian crises or development projects have made the organization increasingly complex, leading to growing bureaucratization, which is often criticized (McGreal, 2015). However, for decades now, there have been discussions on the crisis of multilateralism and the need to reform the UN to make it less burdensome in the pockets of member countries and more agile and trustworthy (Mendez, 1997; Luck, 2004). Most recently, this necessity has become more urgent due to the liquidity crisis and a growing number of emergencies and protracted situations. Despite numerous attempts to cut expenses, these objectives are far from being achieved. Thus, this report aims to suggest a reconsideration of the efforts deployed so far and puts forward some recommendations based on existing good practices and system-wide proposals for more effective resource management.

In this context, the indications contained in the preparatory documents for the Summit of the Future and in the Digital Compact—especially regarding the use of digital technologies and artificial intelligence to improve decision-making processes, monitoring, and evaluation, as well as to track costs and waste, or to predict and prevent disasters—are seen as a good starting point for optimizing resources (High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism, 2023).

**Recommendations:**

1. **Implementing Fully Remote Meetings**
   We recommend exploring new avenues to implement the already existing trend of holding some meetings and working groups online. This practice was significantly accelerated by the travel constraints of COVID-19 and could help reduce the direct and indirect costs associated with moving UN staff and delegations of Member States and other stakeholders—for contributors and the planet—while also promoting broader participation, especially of those with fewer

resources. It aims to eventually lead to the reallocation of a portion of the budget towards more urgent matters.

2. **Optimizing Existing Procedures and Mechanisms**
   We call upon member states to reassess the work of existing procedures and mechanisms, such as those mandated by Human Rights Council resolutions, to determine if and where there is potential to leverage those already in place to their full extent instead of establishing new ones, thereby reducing the need for additional resources.

3. **Improving Coordination and Deduplication of Efforts among Different UN Bodies**
   Similarly to the previous recommendation, mandates of offices, agencies, funds, and international organizations should be thoroughly reviewed by an independent monitoring mechanism. This would help identify overlapping areas and facilitate greater communication among stakeholders, promoting increased coordination to deduplicate efforts and resources. In this regard, relying on local actors has often proven beneficial, as they have a better understanding of needs and can establish priorities more swiftly, thereby focusing resources and time where they are most needed.

4. **Boosting Peer-to-peer Learning**
   We encourage furthering the possibility of fostering greater exchanges among personnel, especially across diverse expertise and seniority, as well as between HQ and field offices, to enhance knowledge sharing and continuous learning of staff. Conduct regular online sessions based on the needs and priorities of various offices to promote upskilling, enhancement of existing skills, and increased cooperation among different divisions, which could also lead to joining forces and coming up with innovative solutions.

# Broader Multilateral System Reform

The recommendations made in the following section are based on the High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism (HLAB)'s "A Breakthrough for People and Planet," which defined six overarching areas that require shifting to strengthen the multilateral system.

## *I. Rebuilding Trust in Multilateralism*
Multilateralism, as it functions under present systems, reinforces the status quo, which excludes and marginalizes certain categories of people and states. The HLAB recommends the inclusion of "we the people" - including women, young people, future generations, civil society, public and private sectors, and refugees to rebuild trust and accountability in multilateralism (High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism, 2023).

**Recommendations:**
1. **Walking the Talk**
   This means effectively including non-state actors, civil society, and academia, among others, in decision-making spaces. We recommend creating the underlisted mechanisms for inclusion through meaningful practices and participation for all with visible impact and consequences, rather than tokenism.

2. **Ensuring a Fair Budget Allocation**
   Recognizing the crucial role of financial resources in multilateralism, we recommend a budget allocation that allows supporting different categories of stakeholders at all levels, including citizens, communities, cities, and regions.

3. **Establishing a Transparency Register for Lobbying**
   We recommend developing a public register that's accessible to the public on UN meetings and activities in this regard, including meetings with the private sector, that would increase transparency and accountability. Transnational organizations, such as the European Union,

have also created a transparency register, which allows increased transparency in lobbying activities (Dinan, 2021). This system could be further improved and adapted for the UN multilateral system, with the great involvement of the UN Global Compact in its implementation.

4. **Expanding Multi-Stakeholder Engagement in the UNGA**
   Acknowledging the importance of effective inclusion and engagement, we propose the inclusion of several relevant groups in the UNGA, with consultation and participation in agenda setting. This could be achieved by expanding on the roles and functions of existing organizations, such as the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), UN Academic Impact, and the Academic Council on the United Nations System, and civil society organizations. These different constituents could play a role in developing reports and providing opinions on specific issues that shall be addressed by the UNGA. Cities have a crucial role in tackling climate change (Sancino et al., 2022) and achieving the SDGs (Bilsky et al., 2021), therefore they must be included in the UNGA in a consultation capacity.

5. **Boosting the Role of the UN Resident Coordinator**
   Strengthening the role of UN Resident Coordinator Systems and expanding its structure, functions, and resources to reach grassroots organizations could be beneficial to increasing efficiency and working towards achieving the SDGs. This would require directed capacity building and equitable resources for all teams across the world (Dupont & Skjold, 2022).

6. **Diversifying Citizen Engagement**
   Citizen participation is paramount to successful inclusion and representation (Proedrou, 2022). Besides the expansion of IPU, diversified mechanisms for citizens to engage with the UN are required, which can include consultations and citizen participation initiatives, which could enable meaningful engagement in agenda settings.

7. **Furthering Promotion of Gender Action**
   Considering the low participation of women and youth in parliaments across the world (Figure 1), we recommend striving towards gender equity not only across different levels of the multilateral system but also from a grassroots perspective, promoting a culture of gender equity throughout the life cycle (Clayton, 2021), including intersectional education in schools and gender equity training for representatives and governments.
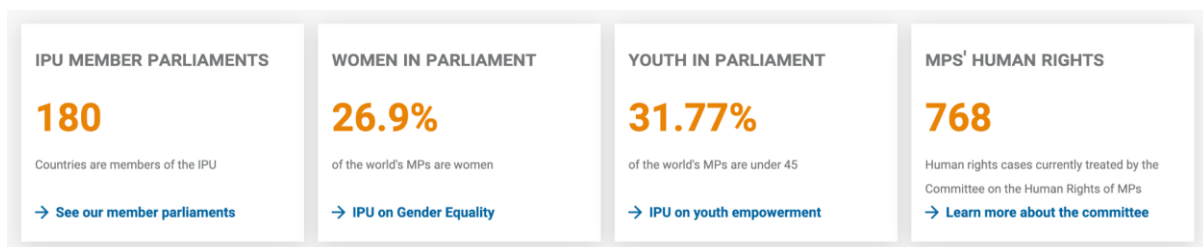
| IPU MEMBER PARLIAMENTS | WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT | YOUTH IN PARLIAMENT | MPS' HUMAN RIGHTS |
|---|---|---|---|
| **180** | **26.9%** | **31.77%** | **768** |
| Countries are members of the IPU | of the world's MPs are women | of the world's MPs are under 45 | Human rights cases currently treated by the Committee on the Human Rights of MPs |
| → See our member parliaments | → IPU on Gender Equality | → IPU on youth empowerment | → Learn more about the committee |

Figure 1 - Statistics of Parliaments across the world (Inter-Parliamentary Union), July 2024.

8. **Creating a World for Future Generations**

   Youth engagement is critical for the success of the United Nations. As such, meaningful and impactful engagement through the creation of participatory platforms, such as a more permanent UN Youth Forum, connecting children and youth across the globe is essential (Berents & Mollica, 2022). Furthermore, strengthening Model UN simulations and replicating them in schools, especially underserved schools, can improve critical thinking, problem-solving, negotiation, and public speaking (Hammond & Albert, 2020) and provide clear outcomes, which could contribute to gathering diverse perspectives for the Youth Forum.

Youth also require more opportunities to engage with the United Nations. UNFCCC has promoted YOUNGO, the official constituency of Children and Youth in Climate Change negotiations (Thew, 2018). Parallelly, the UN Youth Ambassadors Programme could be interlinked with the Youth Forum, presenting a more directed strategy that could encompass all developmental fields within the UN system.

9. **Promoting UN Literacy through Media**
Recognizing the increasing role of media in a digital world and considering the disconnection of communities with the United Nations, we recommend broader communication and increasing public awareness (Mazzarino et al., 2020), catalyzing media coverage of UN activities through the power of storytelling (Jørgensen & Boje, 2020), as well as increasing education and literacy regarding the UN.

10. **Increasing Awareness of Outcomes of Multilateralism**
Evaluating the effectiveness of multilateralism is necessary for accountability, we recommend an increased awareness of monitoring and evaluating outcomes of multilateral agreements (Sand, 2017). As seen with the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals, other UN actions require a thorough methodology for evaluating efforts, serving as a mechanism for continuous improvement.

## II. Pact for People and Planet

Our objective is to regain a balance with nature and provide clean energy for all by developing a "Pact for People and Planet," which will address the ongoing effects of climate change, decrease biodiversity, and establish a more efficient framework for stakeholder accountability (High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism, 2023).

**Recommendations**:

1. **Expanding the Paris Agreement**
We recommend an expansion of the Paris Agreement with a more significant focus on the Nationally Determined Contributions in order to increase responsibility and fairness (Jernnäs, 2024). The current agreement requires all 193 member states to renew their reports every five years to create new goals to cut national emissions and adapt to environmental impacts within their region. However, this requirement does not account for more recent spikes in heat, flooding, and other major weather events around the globe that are caused by the increased effects of greenhouse gas emissions.

2. **Fostering Involvement in Local Stocktakes**
Utilizing NDCs to conduct an annual climate assessment on member-state reports could help develop efficient adaptation and prevention methods. In addition, stimulating annual local stocktakes by cities and regions would increase community engagement and provide a more transparent view of collective progress toward the Paris Agreement Climate goals. Private sector companies and corporations must be involved in global stocktake and corporate sustainability reporting due to their role and ongoing contributions to the global climate crisis (Maak et al., 2021). Active participation in the global stocktake would help align business operations with the SDGs. By doing so, companies would commit to cooperating and functioning responsibly while considering how their presence impacts the environment. Corporate sustainability reporting would assist with measuring the individual carbon footprints of each country and provide an opportunity for countries to use this information to make more effective governance decisions.

3. **Recognizing Efforts Publicly**
Companies that commit to decarbonization and successfully contribute towards the SDGs and a large-scale reduction in greenhouse gas emissions should receive recognition at COP. Incentivizing decarbonization would encourage larger-scale corporations to engage and invest

more effectively in climate initiatives. Moreover, local initiatives should also be showcased as a way to incentivize grassroots work from communities.

4. **Amplifying Climate Voices**

   Climate change disproportionately impacts women, children, youth, individuals with disabilities, and other populations, including indigenous peoples, and migrants and refugees. Therefore, it is also vital that we involve communities in situations of vulnerability in the Conference of Parties (COP) and UN bodies to amplify their voices in decision-making further and advocate for support on how the climate crisis increases pre-existing social, economic and gender-based inequities and threats, affecting several dimensions, such as housing, health, and education. Conducting a local and regional needs-based assessment with member states would create a new framework for better connecting communities with resources.

5. **Building Equitable Climate Goals**

   The information gathered during this assessment would help establish a mechanism to account for the overall need and the available resources across regions. This data could also help create fair goals adapted to countries' development and economic progress. The Global North should have more stringent goals that require them to not only measure their carbon footprints and report, but also to work with the Global South to accelerate the green transition through additional resources and supporting green alternatives.

6. **Financing Decarbonization Towards the Future**

   We recommend that the UN adopt a decarbonization package that would increase funding for renewable energy, move incentives from fossil fuels to sustainable alternatives, and speed up the transition to a post-fossil fuel economy (Rudra et al., 2023).

7. **Including Local Voices in the SDG Hub**

   Boosting the current Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Hub by working with local communities and Indigenous people to incorporate their knowledge and experience in sustainability decisions would be a positive capacity-building effort.

8. **Implementing Green Alternatives**

   Utilizing green alternatives would generate less waste, require fewer resources, and would provide long-term solutions to climate issues. An example is natural resources such as Kakishibu, Bamboo, Neem, and Jatropha, all eco-friendly alternatives globally within local communities. By acknowledging the effectiveness of these resources and partnering with communities, we can empower communities to play a role in combating climate change and further embracing pre-existing practices.

## III. Global Finance

In recent years, multilateral organizations have been providing a larger portion of official development assistance. Despite this, their resources are still far from sufficient to meet the system's always-rising expectations (Jaldi, 2023).

Furthermore, the current financial system has not significantly narrowed the gap between Global North and Global South nations, being unable to allocate the available capital toward long-term, profitable projects at a size and speed fast enough to effectively manage risks in a world prone to shocks (Humphrey, 2022).

**Recommendations**:

1. **Promoting a Fair and Just Funding**

   We recognize the need for a more systematic assessment in funding allocation, adhering to the principles of transparency and equity, and being oriented to the needs of the people and the planet.

   The funding system presents diverse flaws in its risk assessment, requiring the inclusion of the impact on the environment (Güngen, 2023) and a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches that consider communities' needs (Kaiser, 2020).

2. **Ensuring Regional Representativity in Leadership**

Acknowledging the essential role of the World Bank and IMF in shaping the global finance order (Kentikelenis et al., 2022), it is of utmost importance to promote a greater representativity and diversity within its leadership, which allow for the inclusion of all regions, gender, and race, and based on qualifications and professional experiences.

3. **Aligning Global Finance with SDGs**
   Recognizing the importance of alignment of strategies among institutions within the UN system, compacts signed with the United Nations, especially with IMF and the World Bank, shall be guided by principles of transparency and solidarity in conformity with the common goals defined in the SDGs (Kanie & Biermann, 2017).

4. **Boosting Contribution from the Private Sector**
   Understanding that the private sector plays a crucial role in global finance, the global agreement and alignment with SDGs (Van Tulder et al., 2021) and the establishment of the role of the UN Global Compact as global peacemakers and contributing to the delivery of global public goods is paramount to catalyzing global development (Andrews, 2021).

5. **Involving Youth in Finance**
   Youth plays a vital part in shaping the future where they want to live. Providing youth with a space for discussion and contribution to budget allocation allows for increased accountability for a sustainable future and intergenerational justice. This also includes fair pay for work, especially in internships and other programmes directed to youth.

## IV. Digital and Data Governance

Rapid digitalization has fundamentally altered the fabric of our society, impacting various aspects such as access to information, education, businesses, and even peace and conflict. However, the systems governing these spheres are still largely rooted in a pre-digital era. Recognizing the pressing need for change, the HLAB has recommended a just digital transition and establishing an enabling architecture for the data century. This is to address digital poverty, inequality, and harm. The goal is to eliminate all barriers hindering the realization of data's potential for the public good. Furthermore, the Global Digital Compact proposed to close the gap on the digital transition and an improved digital governance, while expanding the benefits of digital economy for all and delineating principles for safe and secure digital spaces (United Nations, 2024a).

**Recommendations:**
1. **Prioritizing People and the Planet in Digital Transition**
   In addition to the above, we propose the set-up of flexible systems and structures with social, political, cultural, and environmental components that guides digital transition and decisions within multilateral organizations (Feroz et al., 2021; George, 2020). Therefore, in our approach to a just digital transition, considerations are made for impacts in these areas (Liu, 2022).

2. **Collaborating with Diverse Stakeholders on Contextually Relevant Digitalization and Governance Systems**
   We propose contextually relevant digital literacy and provision programmes and governance structures (Jarvenpaa & Essén, 2023). This includes programmes such as internet navigation, online safety, and the provision of required digital gadgets that cater to their diverse needs.

3. **Promoting Transparency and Accountability in Data Processing**
   Acknowledging the importance of transparent accountability and data use in private organizations, we recommend involving private organizations in discussing data governance to strengthen inclusivity and accountability. The Global Compact can play a bigger role in connecting the private sector and in defining a common orientation in line with the SDGs (High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism, 2023).

## V. Peace and Prevention

One of the primary reasons for the establishment of the United Nations in 1945 was to "save the succeeding generations from the scourge of war." However, as outlined in the HLAB Report of 2023 the organization's failure to maintain peace and prevent conflict is apparent on a global level. Current

threats to peace and security have grown in both magnitude and character to include several socio, economic, political, and environmental threats. The New Agenda for Peace, part of "Our Common Agenda", also proposes several recommendations for effective multilateralism for peace, which includes addressing strategic risks and geopolitical divisions, taking a preventive stance on peace while also strengthening peace operations. Moreover, it recommends exploring new approaches to peace and reinforcing international governance (United Nations, June 2023).

**Recommendations:**
1. **Promoting Meaningful Participation of Young People**
   While it is necessary for the Security Council to be expanded for equitable participation of nations with growing youth populations, the participation of young people themselves (not just of older people from countries with growing populations) is fundamental. Young people are the generation that needs to be protected "from the scourge of war," and their meaningful participation in peacebuilding and conflict prevention is key to ensuring the sustainability of measures and considering young views for the Future.
2. **Including the Contribution of Unheard Voices**
   The voices of young people and women can also be included through an enhanced alliance between the UN and youth-focused civil society groups. This will allow the meaningful participation of young people within nation-states and on an interstate/regional and or global level. This guarantees that the voices of young people remain strong and are not swallowed by political and national interests that may not be so youth oriented. Other groups, such as women, LGBTQIA+, and indigenous peoples, among others, must also be included.
3. **Empowering Regional Bodies in Peacekeeping**
   According to the HLAB report, regional bodies are paralyzed by their need for UNSC authorization to intervene and enforce peace in times of collective threats. In addition to increased empowerment and improved mandates for regional bodies, they may also need to be granted some form of controlled autonomy to allow them power to intervene without the need for a UNSC authorization, especially in times of security emergencies.
4. **Acknowledging the Past**
   Many conflicts are caused by long-existing grievances, especially of previous conflicts and their settlements. It is essential to recognize and address past conflicts and crimes together with their long- and short-term consequences, and work towards reconciliatory measures, necessary for long-lasting peace and prevention.

## VI. Anticipatory Action

Proactive governance in the face of emerging global risks is paramount for ensuring a Sustainable Future. There is an urgent need to address climate change as a significant security threat and propose improvements to global health governance, including establishing a pandemic threats council. We must also recognize artificial intelligence's transformative potential and risks, calling for the development of a global AI governance architecture. Additionally, there is a need for a comprehensive strategy to combat transnational organized crime, acknowledging its far-reaching impacts on global stability and development. These recommendations collectively aim to enhance the multilateral system's capacity to anticipate, prepare for, and effectively respond to various current and future global challenges.

**Recommendations:**
1. **Strengthening the Regional Governance Hub**
   Regional consensus and collective action are crucial components of effective multilateralism. Security challenges are often regionally interconnected and best addressed through coordinated regional responses. Neighboring countries can leverage their shared understanding of local contexts, cultural nuances, and historical dynamics by fostering regional consensus to develop more targeted and effective solutions to common challenges (Buzan & Waever, 2012). While global frameworks provide overarching guidance, implementing policies and initiatives must be tailored to regional specificities. Creating customized strategies to address both regional specificities and global concerns is recognizing that while some peace and security challenges

are universal, others may be unique to certain regions. By developing tailored approaches, the Regional Governance Hub aims to effectively prevent conflicts and build lasting peace in diverse contexts.For instance, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' consensus-based decision-making process, while sometimes criticized for being slow, has been instrumental in maintaining regional stability and promoting economic integration in a diverse and historically conflict-prone region.

2. **Leveraging Tools for Effective Action**

Incorporating the elements of digital transformation, multi-stakeholder engagement, and capacity building into regional frameworks can further enhance the effectiveness of regional collective action. For example, the African Union's (AU) efforts to establish the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) showcase how regional consensus can drive transformative economic policies. To support this initiative, the AU could implement blockchain technology for transparent cross-border transactions, engage diverse stakeholders, including small businesses and civil society organizations, in policy formulation, and focus on building local digital trade and e-commerce capacity. These actions would strengthen regional collaboration and enhance Africa's position in the global economic system (Tella, 2018).

3. **Integrating Global Action**

Several UN Agencies often act independently in peacebuilding. However, global issues such as climate security are often integrated. Expanding the integration of the responses to climate change with other developmental issues, such as food security and human health, is especially important in a world where climate change is taking a toll on countries with different impacts (Lam et al., 2021).We recommend the development of additional mechanisms to further integrate the work of different UN Agencies with other interregional/global/multilateral organizations and regulatory bodies, avoiding duplication of efforts and promoting an integrated response. One example is the Quadripartite One Health Joint Plan of Action (World Health Organization et al., 2022), which reinforces the interconnection of issues across different sectors.

# Conclusion

As the global community faces unprecedented challenges, the need for a robust, responsive, and representative global governance system is urgent. The UN and the broader multilateral framework offer a key framework for global cooperation and addressing critical transnational issues like climate change. The upcoming Summit of the Future offers a vital opportunity to revitalize global commitments to the SDGs and more broadly multilateralism by reforming our current systems to meet contemporary needs.

Recognizing these complexities, the present report provides concrete and possible changes to strengthen, legitimize, and enhance the overall effectiveness of the UN and the broader multilateral system. Our recommendations for the UNSC and UNGA aim to address some of the current challenges faced by these organs of the UN including crises of legitimacy, accountability, and effectiveness while also offering strategies to increase equity and representation. Similarly, our recommendations on the financial architecture of the UN offer measures to better address UN priorities and increase financial accountability while implementing cost-saving measures. Finally, our recommendations focused on the broader multilateral system aim to rebuild trust in multilateralism while providing detailed suggestions on increasing the efficacy of policy and programmes surrounding climate change, youth engagement, and development.

The global community stands at a critical juncture where the need for an effective and resilient global governance system has never been more pronounced. Moving forward, it is imperative for member states, stakeholders, and the global community to unite in their commitment to these reforms. Crucially, these recommendations emphasize the goal of reshaping a global governance system that recognizes and addressing the needs of marginalized and vulnerable populations and transcends narrow state interests. By ensuring global governance is inclusive and just, we can better address the needs of the most vulnerable and ensure that no one is left behind. Thereby paving the way for a future where collective action and shared responsibility underpin the pursuit of global peace, prosperity, and sustainability.

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