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**Working with adolescents and youth to achieve the
Sustainable Development Goals**

Background paper prepared jointly by UNDP, UNFPA (co-coordinator),
UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women (co-coordinator) and WFP

I. Introduction

1. Today's generation of adolescents and youth present a major force for social, economic and demographic change, contributing to a competitive labour force, sustained economic growth, improved governance and vibrant civil societies. Realizing their rights and investing in their development is an effective and efficient way to support countries in their efforts to address emerging challenges, achieve the demographic dividend, consolidate global development gains and accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

2. The Sustainable Development Goals represent, to some extent, a contract between world leaders and this generation of young people. Strong partnerships between young people and all stakeholders are required; their contributions must be recognized and included at all levels of decision-making, including through new spaces for online participation. Young people experience first-hand the issues the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development seeks to address, and its implementation, with the participation of young people, will transform the world they will inherit.¹

3. The well-being and meaningful participation of young people is therefore fundamental to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals; the implementation of these Goals will need to be responsive to the needs and voices of adolescents and youth, especially the most marginalized. Investments in their empowerment and education, particularly at the critical juncture of adolescence, have lasting effects throughout their lives, and contribute directly to the overall development of communities and countries.

4. This paper examines the specific priorities of adolescent and youth within the context of the Sustainable Development Goals, and examines key responses of the United Nations that promote an emphasis on young people and their participation in development processes, humanitarian action and efforts to sustain peace.

II. Key issues

5. Young people, it is worth recalling, were at the heart of the process leading up to the 2030 Agenda, with youth actively engaged in shaping the discussions at all levels. In the 2015 “MY World” survey – the United Nations effort to engage the global public in voicing their priorities for a better world – the majority of the 10 million votes cast came from young people aged 16 to 30 years. Flagship endeavours on the post-2015 development agenda were the global and regional consultations, hosted by UNDP, and the crowdsourcing initiative on youth priorities, facilitated by the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, UNFPA and the International Telecommunication Union, in close collaboration with United Nations system partners and international youth organizations and networks.

6. United Nations entities worked collaboratively to inform the 2030 Agenda from a youth perspective and ensure youth participation at all levels by partnering with youth organizations, movements and networks, in particular through the United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth at the global and regional levels, and with youth mechanisms at the national level (Bangladesh, Brazil, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam, among others). The crowdsourcing platform offered a concrete vehicle for engaging youth and youth organizations around the world in the debate; and fed into the formation of the Global Youth Call: Prioritizing Youth in the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

¹ UNDP Fast Facts on Young People as Partners in the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda (2016). See www.undp.org/youth.

7. The Global Youth Call, which reflected a global consensus for target areas on youth in the 2030 Agenda, was endorsed by major global youth-focused alliances and networks, intergovernmental organizations, national youth councils, and over 1,250 youth organizations from over 140 countries. The Global Youth Call includes priority targets on universal access to high-quality secondary and tertiary education; access to decent work and livelihoods; inclusive participation in decision-making; improving health, including HIV, mental health and non-communicable diseases; sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights; modern methods of contraceptives; and comprehensive education on human sexuality, with a particular focus on adolescent girls; promoting human rights and gender equality; and eliminating all forms of violence and discrimination against adolescent girls and young women, including child, early and forced marriage and harmful practices.

8. With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015, Member States agreed to include youth development-related targets under many of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The 2030 Agenda critically recognizes the key role that today's youth generation plays in ensuring its achievement, by stating that "young women and men are critical agents of change and will find in the new Goals a platform to channel their infinite capacities for activism into the creation of a better world".

9. While the Sustainable Development Goals do not include a stand-alone goal on youth, several goals and targets include one or various targets in support of youth empowerment, participation and well-being. The 2030 Agenda is also ground-breaking in its emphasis on accountability; it requires Governments and development actors to pay closer attention to producing better-quality data and knowledge and to engaging people in implementing and monitoring the Goals. Capacities to collect, analyse and share data are needed for policy-making, monitoring and oversight by citizens, in particular young people, to empower them as agents of their own development. Indeed, the priorities of adolescents and youth are reflected throughout the 2030 Agenda.

Poverty and inequality

10. Young people constitute a quarter of the world's population, yet more than half of all people living in poverty are between the ages of 15 and 24. Today, 209 million young people live on less than \$1 per day and 515 million young people live on less than \$2 per day. It is often during this vulnerable period in life when poverty extends from one generation to the next. Poverty catapults young people prematurely into adulthood by pulling adolescents (particularly girls) out of school and pushing them into the labour market, often forcing adolescent girls to marry young before they are ready. Adolescents and youth are disproportionately represented among people living in poverty and often denied access to economic resources. And even within this demographic, adolescent girls and young women are unequally affected. Children and adolescents are also among the most vulnerable to climate-related extreme events and other disasters, and should be a focus of programmes on resilience.

11. Investments in adolescents are crucial for developing countries to grow their economies and reap the demographic dividend. Policies that empower adolescent and youth, coupled with efforts to actively engage them in decisions that affect their lives and shape their future, can mean the difference between a demographic trend that weighs economies down and one that lifts them. To realize this demographic dividend, investments need to build institutional capacity, strengthen human capital and pursue economic models that ensure that all young people enjoy the dignity and human rights to

expand their capabilities, secure their sexual and reproductive health and realize their reproductive rights, find decent work and contribute to economic growth.²

12. Hunger, food security and nutrition. Poor nutrition often starts before birth and extends, particularly for girls and women, well into adolescent and adult life. Undernourished mothers are more likely to give birth to low-birth-weight infants who then often experience poor health throughout their life. On reaching adulthood, they are often at increased risk of complications in pregnancy and childbirth – a leading cause of mortality, particularly for adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 years. School meals programmes are a social protection intervention aimed at ensuring children, adolescents and youth have access to education, health and nutrition.

Health and well-being

13. Mortality rates for adolescents are still unacceptably high, with 1.3 million dying every year, undermining much of the progress made in reducing under-five mortality. In the younger age group (10-14 years), the top killers are road injuries, HIV/AIDS and intestinal infections.³ Over 430 million adolescents lack access to improved sanitation while 114 million lack access to improved drinking water sources.⁴ In the older age group (15-19 years) the leading causes are self-harm and road injuries, as well as HIV/AIDS for girls and interpersonal violence for boys. HIV/AIDS remains the single biggest killer of adolescents in sub-Saharan Africa where girls account for 7 in 10 new HIV infections in the 15-19 age group.⁵

14. For millions of young people around the world, the onset of adolescence brings not only changes to their bodies, but also new vulnerabilities to human rights abuses, particularly in the arenas of sexuality, marriage and childbearing. Millions of girls are coerced into unwanted sex or marriage, putting them at risk of unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, and dangerous childbirth. Adolescent girls are at higher risk of maternal mortality and morbidity; while AIDS-related deaths have fallen for every other age group, they have risen dramatically for adolescents. Moreover, adolescence represents a period of vulnerability for mental health, with many mental health disorders having their onset in adolescence.

15. Access to appropriate health information and services is at the core of the ability of young men and women to realize their right to health – including their sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. Tragically, despite all the recent attention to their needs, most adolescents and young people are still not getting what they need in the way of information and services. Access to high-quality comprehensive sexuality education remains elusive for most adolescents.⁶ Furthermore, not only do adolescents have the least access to health information and services, particularly on sexual and reproductive health, but the primary risk factors for non-communicable diseases (tobacco use, alcohol abuse, unhealthy diet and insufficient exercise) are behaviours that begin in adolescence.⁷ Therefore, a focus on adolescents is crucial for achieving the health goal.

² The power of 1.8 billion – Adolescents, youth and the transformation of the future – State of World Population, UNFPA 2014.

³ “Global burden of diseases, injuries, and risk factors for young people’s health during 1990-2013: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2013”. Lancet 2016.

⁴ Estimates based on population level data from the Joint Monitoring Programme 2015.

⁵ “Global burden of diseases, injuries, and risk factors for young people’s health during 1990-2013: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2013.” Lancet 2016.

⁶ The power of 1.8 billion – Adolescents, youth and the transformation of the future – State of World Population, UNFPA 2014.

⁷ UNICEF GMT paper on adolescent programming, 2016.

Education and learning

16. While significant gains have been made in primary education and child health, gaps widen and barriers grow as children become adolescents and youth, setting the stage for long-term costs that extend into the adult life and ageing. Over 30 per cent of lower-secondary school-age children in low-income countries are out of school, while many of those in school are learning very little. Poverty and location (rural/urban settings) are the greatest drivers of exclusion, with the poorest rural girls least likely to access education.⁸ In order to build on the gains made in primary education and ensure a successful transition to secondary education for all, a stronger focus must be on early adolescence (10-14 years), where the most drop-outs occur, particularly for girls. There are 63 million adolescents of lower-secondary school age (12-15 years) who are out of school – twice as likely as children of primary school age (6-11 years).

17. Considering that adolescents undergo rapid physical, emotional and social development, high-quality education, including comprehensive sexuality education, is especially important for young people so that they have a viable basis for sustainable livelihoods and learn how to access services on sexual and reproductive health, gender-based violence and HIV, including family planning. This enables adolescents and youth to be active participants in development processes, regardless of the setting they may be in. Similarly, knowledge of information and communication technologies is an increasingly crucial dimension for young people's education, socialization and broader engagement, yet many adolescents have limited or no access to the Internet and those that do have access, have partial understanding on how to use these new technologies constructively.

Gender equality and empowering girls and women

18. Millions of girls and young women across the world face significant barriers to developing their full potential, and continue to experience alarming rates of sexual and physical violence. They are at risk in both public and private spaces – almost half of all sexual assaults target girls under the age of 16. Girls are also burdened with levels of unpaid work within their families that far exceed those for boys, whether cooking, cleaning, caring for family members, or collecting water and firewood. A recent UNICEF study showed that girls aged 5-14 years spend 40 per cent more time than boys on chores, meaning less time spent on education. Girls and young women are often systematically denied their right to education and face disproportionate barriers to achieving economic empowerment and independence across all levels.

19. In many parts of the world, girls are forced into child marriage and early pregnancy, using modern contraceptives at rates far below the global average; as a consequence, reproductive life starts early, without access to adequate health care, and is sustained for many years, at high risk to health and life. Almost one quarter of girls aged 15 to 19 years worldwide (almost 70 million) report having experienced some form of physical violence. Among women aged 20 to 24 worldwide, one in four were child brides (married below the age of 18). More than 700 million girls and women alive today were married as children; if there is no reduction in child marriage, up to 280 million more girls alive today are at risk of becoming brides before they turn 18. Adolescent girls face discrimination due to age and gender, and are among the least empowered to negotiate safe sex and, at the same time, among the most likely to be subjected to harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage.

⁸ *Global Education Monitoring Report, Gender Summary, 2015.*

They are almost entirely absent from decision-making in the political, economic and public life of their communities.

Decent work

20. Young people face high levels of job insecurity, limited chances for advancement and a lack of social protection. Besides being unemployed or underemployed, youth often can find only unproductive or hazardous jobs, leaving them vulnerable. In 2012, over 95 million adolescents under the age of 18 worldwide were estimated to be engaged in child labour, with some 67 million engaged in hazardous work. Additionally, globally, unemployment among young women exceeds that of young men by nearly 20 per cent; in some regions, it is nearly 30 per cent.⁹ Creating jobs requires reviving the economy and creating employment and self-employment opportunities. Easing the transition of young people into the workplace or helping them to obtain a secure livelihood demands a variety of approaches tailored to different categories of young people, embedded in the socio-economic context of each country (the aspirations, opportunities and challenges of a primary school drop-out differ from those of an unemployed or underemployed tertiary graduate).

21. Evidence shows that the highest returns come from investing throughout the education system, from early childhood to secondary education, developing strong foundational skills in literacy and numeracy, as well as transferable, job-specific skills,¹⁰ which provide young people with the knowledge and abilities they need to benefit from future labour market opportunities. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development states that 65 per cent of today's children will have jobs that have not yet been invented.¹¹ A focus on transferable skills (such as problem solving, communication, creativity and leadership) will help young people adapt to labour market changes, including new technologies, as well as assist young people in the informal sector to become successful entrepreneurs.¹²

22. Peaceful and inclusive societies, justice and good governance. In many societies, there are immense constraints to young people's participation and involvement in decisions that affect their lives and their communities. Traditional values, norms and hierarchies can limit adolescent and youth engagement in families, schools and communities, and are often compounded by a lack of policies that promote participation in school activities and governance, and in national and local decision-making. Yet, where effective representational spaces are provided, the idealism, resourcefulness and creativity of young people allow them to excel for their own advantage and for the benefit of their societies. This dynamic tends to be compounded in emergency situations. Despite the precarious environments many young women and men live in, when given the opportunity, young people can be extremely resilient and resourceful in times of crisis. They work hard to promote social cohesion and reconciliation within their communities, often without support or recognition from the Government or the international community. Their dynamism and energy provides them with essential assets to become active, important agents of positive change, able to drive the reconstruction and development of their communities.

23. In the face of intolerance and violence, we often see young people come up with new forms of interaction and solidarity. Young people are usually more open to change, feedback and learning, and tend to be more future-oriented, idealistic and innovative. In conflict settings, young people are commonly perceived as either perpetrators or victims, their status often compounded by their age and

⁹ World Employment and Social Outlook 2016: Trends for Youth.

¹⁰ *Global Education Monitoring Report, Youth and Skills*, 2012.

¹¹ UNICEF GMT paper on adolescent programming, 2016.

¹² *Global Education Monitoring Report, Youth and Skills*, 2012.

gender. Yet evidence suggests that most young people resist violence and, in many cases, lead efforts to build peace. Even though children, adolescents and youth, especially young men, have been the foundation on which countries and armed groups have built their armies, they are frequently excluded from decision-making processes, despite their large numbers. Further, interpersonal violence is among the leading causes of death of adolescents.

24. In order to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and to build a strong base for economic growth, it is necessary to build the health, social and economic capacities of adolescents. Giving young people, especially adolescent girls, economic assets and preparing them for decent livelihoods helps to tackle poverty where it usually begins. Educating adolescents, preventing unwanted pregnancies and providing opportunities for political participation are among the most effective development interventions to form and enhance human capital, increase economic returns and fulfil human rights. Ensuring that young people have equal access to labour markets translates into billions of dollars added to the gross domestic product in the world's poorest countries.

III. The United Nations response: Delivering as one for young people

25. In July 2016, ahead of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, the United Nations Secretary-General's inaugural annual progress report on the Sustainable Development Goals¹³ – while noting the enormous challenges young people are facing in terms of poverty, education, employment and violence – again emphasized the important role of young people as agents of change and partners in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. This was echoed by the Ministerial Declaration issued by the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in July 2016, which pledged to “strive for a world where young women and young men are key agents of change”. The General Assembly, in its latest youth-focused resolution 70/127 (17 December 2015), urged Member States and United Nations entities to “explore and promote” participation of young people, including in designing and implementing policies, programmes and initiatives, while implementing the 2030 Agenda. Member States have repeatedly called for the intensified efforts of the United Nations system towards youth development, and stressed that increased coordination and collaboration among United Nations entities as well as with other regional and international organizations working on behalf of youth contribute to making the youth-related work of the United Nations system more effective.

26. In response to these concerns, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres demonstrated his leadership and commitment to youth issues, calling on the Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development to develop a United Nations strategy on adolescents and youth in April 2017, building on the United Nations system-wide action plan on youth, and aimed at enhancing further the coherence and synergy of United Nations system-wide activities in key areas related to youth. There are already examples of joint efforts of United Nations system agencies working together to address priority issues for young people; some of those efforts (by no means an exhaustive listing) are described below.

27. Considering the importance of effectively monitoring the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals from the perspective of young people, UNDP, UNFPA and the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth co-convened an expert group meeting on “Measuring the state of youth in the Sustainable Development Goals”, aimed at mobilizing technical expertise and guidance from all parts of the United Nations system and beyond in support of the possible

¹³ [The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2016](#).

establishment of a global instrument for measuring progress on youth development and well-being, tracking data over time against youth-relevant indicators that are contained in the global framework of Goal indicators.

28. Furthermore, in support of this effort, a coalition of United Nations agencies and partners – including the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Global Pulse, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal Action Campaign and the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, UNICEF and WFP – have launched the “We the Peoples” pilot initiative to collect robust perception data from people, including marginalized and hard-to-reach youth populations. The immediate objective is to advocate for the inclusion of perception data in Sustainable Development Goals country reports and national voluntary reviews, and to show that perception data can be used to improve service delivery and shift social norms. The long-term objective is to increase the political space for using perception data, together with official data, to improve programmes, policies and decision-making. The primary mobile tools deployed for survey dissemination and data collection will be the youth-focused U-Report of UNICEF and the WFP mobile Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping project. This builds on previous experiences where the U-Report was used to reflect the voices of adolescents and youth; for example, the U-Report was used to bring in the voices of young people to inform the report prepared by the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children where young people discussed bullying in a safe space.

29. UNDP has led, with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and other United Nations partners, the first-ever global survey on the United Nations work on Youth (report to be published in May 2017). UNDP also co-chairs the Inter-agency Working Group on Youth and the Sustainable Development Goals with the Office of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, which co-convenes the Economic and Social Council Youth Forum annually. Over the past years, the level of engagement of the Forum has continued to grow, reflecting the important need for a regular global convening and multi-stakeholder dialogue on youth issues.¹⁴

30. To address the issues of youth employment, the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth emerged as the first-ever comprehensive United Nations system-wide effort for the promotion of youth employment worldwide. The strategy for the Global Initiative was developed by the High-level Committee on Programmes under the leadership of the International Labour Organization, and subsequently endorsed by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination in November 2015. Twenty-two entities and agencies of the United Nations system (UNDP, UNFPA, UN-Women and others) have influenced the design of the Global Initiative, and expressed support for its expansion and operationalization. The Global Initiative is aimed at facilitating increased impact and expanded country-level action on decent jobs for youth through multi-stakeholder partnerships, dissemination of evidence-based policies and scaling-up of effective and innovative interventions. Devised around a strategic alliance of multiple engagement groups within and beyond the United Nations system, the Global Initiative is aimed at maximizing the effectiveness of youth employment investments and assisting Member States in delivering on the 2030 Agenda.

31. To strengthen innovation in entrepreneurship and livelihoods, a global innovation programme was launched by UNOPS to set up innovation centres around the world. Together with global innovation partners from education, incubation, investment and government, these UNOPS global innovation centres are aimed at fostering entrepreneurship, educational programmes and innovative initiatives in promotion of the Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goal 9, on innovation.

¹⁴ <https://www.un.org/ecosoc/sites/www.un.org.ecosoc/files/files/en/president/2017/ecosoc-presidential-statement-2017.pdf>.

UNOPS has engaged, in collaboration with other agencies, such as the United Nations Environment Programme, UNICEF and UN-Women, to reach out to youth, particularly young female entrepreneurs. UNOPS has had a long, impactful collaboration with other United Nations agencies and development partners in constructing schools to enable education for local children, for example, in Jordan, Serbia, South Sudan and Sri Lanka. UNOPS also focuses on youth and gender considerations in infrastructure and social services assets, such as providing separate toilets for girls and boys in schools (as sharing is often cited as a reason for drop outs of girls in many countries) as well as incorporating gender and youth demographics within infrastructure modelling to assist Governments in adopting better processes and decisions for sustainable infrastructure planning and development.

32. Addressing gender disparities in education, UNESCO, UNFPA and UN-Women launched the Joint Programme on Empowering Adolescent Girls and Young Women through Education, aimed at promoting girls' education and empowerment through a multisectoral approach. Under the Global Partnership for Girls' and Women's Education (Better Life, Better Future), the Joint Programme aims to invest in the education sector, but also to strengthen linkages with health and other relevant sectors to better empower women and girls and contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. Over an initial period of five years (2016-2021), it aims to reach adolescent girls (10-19 years) and young women (20-24 years) in as many countries as possible where challenges to their education remain significant.

33. Recognizing adolescents as transformative agents of change today, with unique needs and challenges, the new Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescent's Health 2016-2030, as part of the Every Woman Every Child campaign, now includes a special focus on adolescents' health – a key component of the strategy's life-course approach. By placing women, children and adolescents at the core of the sustainable development agenda, the strategy provides a roadmap for countries to begin implementing the Sustainable Development Goals, ensuring that these groups not only survive but also thrive, transforming, in turn, their communities. Taking a comprehensive, life-course approach, the Global Strategy recognizes the multidimensional nature of human development and accounts for the socio-economic determinants of health and well-being to help unlock the full potential of individuals and build resilient societies.

34. In 2016, UNFPA and UNICEF launched the Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage, aiming to reach more than 2.5 million girls in 15 countries. The programme identifies opportunities within health, education and social protection systems to tackle the main drivers of child marriage, such as school drop out, early pregnancy and poverty, and enable more girls to fully enjoy their childhood free from the risk of marriage and to experience healthier, safer and more empowered lives, making decisions about their education, relationships, sexuality, marriage and childbearing. In 2016 the Global Programme reached over 1 million girls through life skills and school attendance support, and supported over 7,550 schools to improve the quality of education for adolescent girls.

35. The important role of young people in peacebuilding is reflected in Security Council resolution 2250, adopted in December 2015, which recognizes that a large youth population presents a unique demographic dividend that can contribute to lasting peace and economic prosperity if inclusive policies are in place, with young women and men able to play an important and positive role in the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security.

36. UNFPA co-leads, with the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office, the progress study on youth, peace and security, as mandated by Security Council resolution 2250 (2015). The study, based

on independent, evidence-based research, will be an operational report proposing a forward-looking agenda for the international community. The study is led by an independent author, supported by an advisory group of experts and a Steering Committee, including partners from the United Nations and non-governmental organizations. To support the study, UNDP and UNFPA are co-convening a series of regional and national consultations with young people active in peacebuilding around the world.¹⁵

37. In a 2016 UNDP-administered survey, 93 per cent of the UNDP country offices reported engaging young people in promoting and supporting development and peace. Goal 16, which calls to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”, is an enabling goal for the success of the 2030 Agenda as a whole, and represents a critical opportunity to advance youth empowerment by guaranteeing fundamental freedoms, ensuring accountability and opening up decision-making processes to the participation of young people.¹⁶

38. The Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action – launched in 2016 at the World Humanitarian Summit by UNFPA and the International Federation of the Red Cross, along with 49 organizations, including UNDP, UNICEF, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, UN-Women and the Office of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth – is an unprecedented collective humanitarian commitment to ensure that the priorities, needs and rights of young women and men, and girls and boys, affected by disaster, conflict, forced displacement and other humanitarian crises are addressed, and that young people are informed, consulted and meaningfully engaged throughout all stages of humanitarian action. The Compact streamlines, for the first time, the collective work of the United Nations agencies working for young people in humanitarian action and provides a platform for young people to engage with the major humanitarian actors at global and local levels.

IV. Conclusion

39. Productive healthy adults – capable of living to their full potential – are the bedrock of development. Transition into adulthood requires focused investment, as increasingly recognized by Governments, researchers and civil society. High-quality education, training, health information and health services, as well as other human rights protections and opportunities to meaningfully participate in decision-making, are the essential stepping-stones for developing from childhood to adulthood.

40. The United Nations system is committed to working with Member States and other stakeholders to support national efforts to invest in adolescents and youth to achieve sustainable development, enabling countries to reap the demographic dividend and promote human rights as well as peace and security. The United Nations works together with Member States in partnership with young women and men in a number of ways:

(a) Supporting Governments as they integrate the Sustainable Development Goals into their national and local strategies, and supporting adolescents and youth by creating formal spaces for their engagement, such as national youth platforms, to provide viable opportunities for young women and young men to participate in discussions, gather evidence, inform decisions and influence development priorities and budget allocations;

¹⁵ <https://www.youth4peace.info/ProgressStudy/RegionalConsultations>.

¹⁶ Youth Global Programme for Sustainable Development and Peace – Youth-GPS (2016-2020).

(b) Identifying obstacles to accelerate progress on goals and targets, and to define effective interventions that help achieve outcomes on a number of fronts, such as those focusing on adolescents and youth inclusion, or on promoting enhanced adolescent and youth participation and civic engagement;

(c) Providing effective, demand-driven, context-specific and evidence-based policy advice and technical assistance, drawing on the depth and breadth of knowledge and long-standing programming experience across the world;

(d) Supporting Governments and other stakeholders in their efforts to produce the high-quality data needed to capture the underlying development realities of young people, and measure and track the progress made in improving adolescent and youth development and well-being – working with parliaments, youth groups and relevant institutions to support oversight and accountability;

(e) Generating evidence on approaches that demonstrate cost-effective results and lasting impact on adolescent and youth civic and economic participation, learning and health and well-being;

(f) Partnering with academia and civil society organizations to produce innovative research towards new insights on youth, connecting local, national and global knowledge to address gaps in emerging areas of adolescent and youth participation and development, such as research on youth and peacebuilding and on financing for adolescents and youth;

(g) Supporting specific spaces for national dialogue, consultations and social media campaigns, reaching out to those most marginalized, and promoting young people's role as agents of change;

(h) Increasing age- and gender-responsive programmes that contribute to the protection, health and development of young women and men, and girls and boys, and realize the rights and needs of the hardest-to-reach adolescents and youth, in particular adolescent girls;

(i) Supporting systematic engagement, political participation and partnership with adolescents and youth, including in humanitarian action and peacebuilding.

41. Numerous countries have adopted or are in the process of adopting programmes and policies to optimize investments in adolescents and youth. However, most countries are yet to formulate holistic policies and funded programmes that can reach those adolescents who are furthest left behind. More efforts need to be directed towards advocating for the priorities of young people: using age- and sex-disaggregated data; influencing government policies; strengthening national institutions to respond to the priorities of young people in development, humanitarian and peacebuilding contexts; investing national resources to build young people's capacities; and empowering communities to include young people.

42. Adolescents and youth will thrive when they can benefit from such investments. They will be able to develop the values, competencies and healthy behaviours that provide them with the resilience they need to be able to contribute fully to their societies and help to build and sustain national and global peace. In turn, that new generation will support the preceding one as it ages and also nurture the next one, so that they, too, may reach their full potential and participate effectively in their communities, affected by a rapidly changing globalized world. Taken together, these investments will ensure that countries are able to unlock the potential of a young generation, which can accelerate national development, spur economic growth, promote human rights, end discrimination, and build sustainable and peaceful societies.

43. Underpinning the United Nations system approach to engaging and partnering with youth as critical agents of change is the belief that meaningful youth participation is not merely a right in and of itself – when empowered, young people will accelerate progress and make development results sustainable. Within an enabling environment, young women and men can have a transformative impact on development and peace, ensuring that effective, responsive and accountable institutions deliver on all the Sustainable Development Goals.
