



SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

2012 ECOSOC Youth Forum

“Creating a Sustainable Future: Empowering Youth with Better Job Opportunities”

4 May 2012

The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) hosted its first Youth Forum under the theme, “Creating a Sustainable Future: Empowering Youth with Better Job Opportunities” on 4 May, 2012 at the United Nations Headquarters. The Forum was jointly organized by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and the Department of Public Information (UNDPI). The Forum was attended by youth representatives from around the world as well as Member States, the academic community, and civil society organizations that are engaged on youth issues.

The Forum provided a platform for young people to voice their needs and concerns in an informal dialogue format. The main objectives of the Forum were to: (i) engage young people to explore solutions for creating a sustainable future; (ii) propose concrete actions to effectively address youth employment issues within the context of current global economic and financial situation; (iii) enhance the visibility and voice of young people in decision making on issues that affect them; and (iv) exchange best practices from various countries and regions.

The Youth Forum was convened as a part of the preparatory process for the high-level segment of the ECOSOC to be held in New York In July 2012 which will address the challenge of increasing productive capacity, while promoting employment and decent work. Key messages and recommendations arising from the Forum will be presented at the opening session of the ECOSOC High-Level Segment in July 2012, as well as at the Rio+20 Conference in June 2012.

Background

Young people continue to be the hardest hit by the jobs crisis. In both developed and developing countries, youth unemployment and underemployment rates have reached alarming levels. Various studies and analyses, moreover, indicate that there will be little improvement in their near-term employment prospects. According to *Global Employment Trends 2012*, 74.8 million youth aged 15 - 24 were unemployed in 2011, 4 million more than in 2007. Globally, young people are nearly three times as likely as adults to be unemployed and more likely to be in vulnerable jobs as well. In addition, gender inequality has been exacerbated by recession and ongoing financial crisis, increasing the risk for young women.

The slow and job-poor economic recovery, stubbornly high youth unemployment and volatile food and energy prices not only wreak havoc on the lives of young people, but also significantly affect their long-term employability and income potential. In addition, the existence of a large number of jobless and frustrated youth further increases social tensions, threatening stability and cohesion.

Addressing the many challenges facing today's youth requires a comprehensive, inter-generational, and cross-sectoral approach, with the participation of governments, youth, and all other segments of society. The United Nations has focussed its attention over the recent past on the challenges faced by young people, especially the widespread shortage of job opportunities. The Secretary-General, in his new five-year action agenda, has announced his intention to scale up the youth focus of the UN's work.

Summary of discussions

OPENING SESSION

The session opened with a welcoming address by **H.E. Mr. Luis Alfonso de Alba, Vice-President of ECOSOC and Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations**, who spoke on behalf the **President of the ECOSOC, H.E. Miloš Koterec**. The Vice-President underscored the need for collectively constructing a strategy and global agenda to tackle youth unemployment challenges. He emphasized the need for incorporating the views of young people into the work of ECOSOC as part of the Council's efforts to become more open and inclusive. He further noted that upcoming United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in June and the ECOSOC Substantive Session in July will benefit from the input of young people at the Forum.

Dr. Asha-Rose Migiro, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, in her opening address reinforced the importance of the Rio+20 Summit, as well as the need to empower youth to create a sustainable future. She affirmed that the United Nations is striving to connect more often and more meaningfully with the planet's youth. Future initiatives will thus include: developing a system-wide action plan for youth; appointing a new Special Advisor on Youth; and creating a UN youth volunteers initiative. Discrimination against young women was emphasised. She also pointed out that informal education, such as peer-to-peer networking, should be valued. While access to education and skills for women should be improved, Dr. Migiro stressed that root causes of discrimination must, likewise, be tackled.

Mr. Ronan Farrow, Special Adviser to the Secretary of State for Global Youth Issues and Director of the State Department's Global Youth Issues office, delivered the keynote address. He underlined the fact that young people hold the key to unlocking solutions for future security and prosperity. He stressed the need for new innovative ideas coming from young people, especially in the developing world where youth have the opportunity to shape a better future. Mr. Farrow shared key US policies that have proven successful in reducing youth unemployment, including making education affordable and creating apprenticeship/training programs. The importance of sharing best practices and experiences between governments was also highlighted. He further called on governments to strengthen labour laws and create an open business environment, where young entrepreneurs can bring innovative entrepreneurial solutions. Maintaining close ties with the business sector was also encouraged.

SESSION ONE: Training and Education to Facilitate Access to Job Market

Mr. Rishi Jaitly, Program Director for John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, moderated the discussions. Among the key challenges to emerge were *skills shortages* of young people. Several speakers observed a growing skills mismatch between education young people received and the needs of the labour market.

Another obstacle described by participants was the *inadequacy of job qualifications*. It was stressed by a number of students that job qualifications are often set unrealistically high for recent graduates, with technical and vocational education undervalued.

Multiple speakers further mentioned the barrier of *insufficient funding*, as widespread funding deficits persist for projects and organizations run by – and for – youth, especially in developing countries. Moreover, it was noted that for young entrepreneurs with little credit history, accessing capital was another major roadblock.

Furthermore, a *paucity of job information* was identified during the discussions. It was noted by youth representatives that young people frequently have difficulty accessing reliable information on available job opportunities, particularly those with online screening processes.

Other concerns raised by the audience included fear of racial discrimination, as well as language barriers, which can have a disproportionate effect on the job hunting practices of the most marginalized groups.

SESSION TWO: Promoting Youth Employment – Creating Jobs for a More Sustainable Future

Dr. Gernot Wagner, Economist for the Environmental Defense fund, Adjunct Professor at Columbia University and author of "But Will the Planet Notice?", moderated the discussions. The dialogue began by raising the issue of *what makes a job 'green'*. Entrepreneurs and other advocates from the audience shared experiences and business models. While initiatives and definitions were diverse, eco-friendly jobs were found largely in small and medium-sized enterprises – particularly with a 'social' goal. Participants agreed that all jobs can be "green jobs" but a more precise working definition is needed.

Interventions from the audience emphasized the importance of *government support*. In particular, it was noted that insufficient government funding for green projects limits the development and spread of green jobs.

Another key challenge identified by contributors was the need for *sustainable development education*. Speakers agreed that changing consumption patterns demands more instruction on the virtues of sustainable development. Creating a culture that takes environmental issues more seriously was also stressed as a key starting point for a more sustainable future.

Several speakers furthermore encouraged greater *corporate commitment*. It was emphasized that business can help advance the green agenda by taking their environmental responsibilities above and beyond simple compliance agreements.

Finally, the importance of *intergovernmental knowledge sharing* was highlighted by a number of contributors, who reinforced that green jobs can be an engine for development and growth. They stressed that sharing best-practices and lessons learned can speed up the process.

REPORTING BACK ON THE OUTCOME OF THE SESSIONS

Moderated by **Dr. Nancy Mezey, Director for the Institute for Global Understanding at Monmouth University**, members of the UN Academic Impact (UNAI) presented conclusions from earlier preparatory events.

Key issues identified from the ***Graduate Institute of Peace Studies at the Kyung Hee University in the Republic of Korea*** included the need to improve the development and dissemination process of the labor market index; the importance of restructuring global education and training curricula; the need to provide more employment opportunities in all sectors for young people in the region and the need to mesh youth employment issues with green initiatives.

Key issues noted by the UNAI student group from the ***School of Development Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa*** included insufficient government focus on youth; the skills mismatch between graduates and employers and government inertia in implementing pro-youth policies.

Conclusions of the preparatory meeting at the ***Monmouth University in the United States*** were presented by **Dr. Mezey**. She raised the issues of improving student-faculty relationships and making education more affordable and improving curriculum to meet the needs of today's global economy.

Key messages and recommendations from the first session were summarized by **Mr. Jaitly** and **Ms. Vivian Onano, student, Carthage College**. Conclusions from the second session were then presented by **Dr. Wagner** and **Ms. Dora Tuz, graduate student, WU Vienne University of Economics and Business, and Queen's School of Business**.

CLOSING SESSION

Ms. Danielle Fong, Chief Science Officer and Co-Founder of LightSail Energy, delivered a closing address, encouraging youth to "make a difference" by making the most of their own initiative while taking advantage of recent advances in social media — and the internet, more generally. Using her own experiences and citing examples of other enterprises she pointed out that it is not a lack of resources, education, institutions or information which creates obstacles for starting world changing initiatives. To build a more sustainable future, she urged that the current "green paradigm" be expanded to an even broader "blue-green" model.

Mr. Sha Zukang, Under-Secretary for Economic and Social Affairs, discussed the urgent challenge of youth unemployment. He added that ECOSOC's Annual Ministerial Review in July would focus on employment issues and that the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) will continue to accord top priority to youth initiatives. The link between intergenerational equity and sustainable development was emphasized, as was the importance of green jobs. He concluded with the proposal that the ECOSOC Youth Forum be made an annual event.

Mr. Maher Nasser, Acting Head of the Department of Public Information, reiterated the seriousness of current youth unemployment challenges. He noted that better partnership between governments, the private

sector and young people themselves are a necessary precondition for progress. As a potential model to emulate, UN Academic Impact (UNAI) achievements were highlighted.

The **Vice-President** concluded by restating the Forum's objectives and achievements, while also welcoming Mr. Sha's proposal to organize it annually. Key messages and recommendations arising from this year's Forum, he added, will be presented at the Rio+20 Conference in June, as well as at the Council's own High-Level Segment in July.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS ON THE DIALOGUE SESSIONS

Dialogue Session I: “Training and Education to Facilitate Access to Job Market”

Key issues addressed by youth:

- Most young people lack skills and experience to match the job market requirements, as academic education they acquired is often not relevant for many existing jobs.
 - Disconnect between education systems and labour markets;
 - Predominant focus on academic discipline as opposed to practical and skill- training;
 - Narrow focus on a few academic fields, rather than opening various possibilities for each individual to explore his/her talent and interest;
 - Lack of inter-personal skills because of the pervasiveness of ICTs;
 - Lack of support for young people once they leave schools;
 - Job qualifications that require work experience;
 - Lack of organized global curriculum and experiences
- Lack of access to necessary information on diverse job opportunities.
 - Absence of mentoring/inadequate career guidance at college and after graduation;
 - Lack of knowledge on how to filter online information to suit their needs;
 - Lack of knowledge on the resources, people, and organizations to approach for jobs opportunities.
- Insufficient support (financial or other) for projects/programmes targeting youth, youth organizations and youth entrepreneurs.
 - High interest rates on loans which discourages youth entrepreneurs.
- Fear of discrimination (age-based, gender-based, and other types), racism, language barrier, nepotism, when looking for jobs.

Key recommendations:

Young people:

- Must themselves act as resource persons and mentors, so that young people can help each other at every step of their career path.
- Change stereotypes of certain occupation and open minds to all possibilities.
- Make best use of social media as a useful and inexpensive tool.
- Be equipped with soft skills to explore all categories of jobs, as market needs are constantly shifting.

Education systems:

- Improve its quality, but also be more ‘practical’ and tailored to suit the needs of both job seekers and job providers.
- Provide educational resources such as variety of teachers, teaching materials, and course curriculums, counseling, so that each individual can have a wide variety of choices for his/her carriers.
- Integrate STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) and management concepts into their teaching with a focus on early education.
- Provide opportunities for internship, informal apprenticeship, specific skills training in new and growing sectors.
- Build more collaborative and active partnerships with employers and recent graduates to clarify labor market needs and adjust the curriculum and skills-training.
- Prepare students to work and live in a diverse global world, through increasing opportunity to learn global issues and interact with heterogeneous groups of people.

Government:

- Better manage a balance between labor supply and demand.

- Create more jobs, in particular, entry-level jobs;
- Adjust an oversupply of human resources in certain jobs/areas.
- Create an enabling environment to support young entrepreneurs and would-be entrepreneurs access capital.
- Increase the flexibility of labor laws so that young skilled workers are able to gain employment more easily.
- Ensure an easy access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) for everyone, in particular information resources on the job market.
 - Improve the development and dissemination process of the labour market index (LMI) analysis to schools, universities and colleges to understand the global trend of supply and demand for jobs.
 - Maximize the use of the internet by creating easily-accessible and user-friendly databases for job seekers and job providers.
- Enhance the status of vocational schools.
 - Advocacy and provide incentives (i.e. scholarships and job-guarantees in affiliated companies).

Key messages

In the current economic environment, young people fear that they won't have jobs after graduation from college, as they are unsure if their education systems are equipping them sufficiently for the job market. Young people are also concerned about being trapped in the "wrong job" that will lead to a "wrong/unwanted" career-path.

Young people are fully aware of the challenges, and ready to take charge of their lives. Young people do not need "charity", but need "actions" that can empower them to pursue their dreams.

A better future is possible but only if young people work together towards the "future we want". "We have the power to create a change. Lets all be committed to make the world a better place for the future generations"

Dialogue Session II: "Promoting Youth Employment – Creating Jobs for a More Sustainable Future"

Key issues addressed by youth:

- Every job should be "green", but also "go-beyond" to be sustainable, aiming for the "triple-bottom line" (environmental and social improvements, while maintaining economic gains).
- Actions are needed from all sides, including "right policies" that are internationally coordinated at all levels, global, national and local, and bottom up initiatives from the grass-roots level.
- Adequate government funding for green projects without which the development and spread of green jobs would be limited.
- Need for sustainable development education to create a culture that value sustainability.
- Corporate commitment: Business can help advance the sustainable development agenda by taking their environmental responsibilities above and beyond simple compliance agreements.
- Knowledge sharing: Green jobs can be an engine for development and growth. Sharing best practices and lessons learned can accelerate the process.
- The costs of sustainable development should be born more equitably through many different ways.
 - A way to make polluters pay for the cost of their pollution (i.e. market-based regulatory framework).
 - A way to level the playing field for the next generation (i.e. access to education, job markets, the global economy).

Key recommendations:

Young people:

- Actions have to come from the youth themselves, with the support of their governments.

Governments

- Create jobs that facilitate the transformation to a green economy, while investing in appropriate education facilities so that students are equipped for those jobs.
- Promote an exchange of information/knowledge, through sharing good practices and lessons learned, in order for policy-makers, especially in developing countries, not to repeat the same mistakes the developed countries made in the past.
- Policy-makers at all levels should provide active support to youth-led actions:
 - Give youth an opportunity to present their ideas, set up a pilot programme, and if it works, give them funds to expand.
 - Seed funding of projects or good ideas to help young entrepreneurs, particularly in developing countries, to start their business.
 - Support youth-led co-operatives that are seen as one of the business models enabling the transition to a green economy.
- Give young people room to create, but also to fail, by providing adequate social protections so that they can turn good ideas into actions, while not risking livelihood when they fail.
- Create an enabling environment for the private sector to reshape the way they are doing business (i.e., give incentives to create “green” jobs and penalize “polluting” activities).

The private sector:

- Integrate sustainable development into the heart of corporate activities – moving from marketing strategy or corporate social responsibility to civic responsibility.
- Learn from small and medium-size enterprises that have initiated innovative approaches towards sustainable development and widely disseminate those successful initiatives.
- Encourage young people to actively participate not only in the labor market, but also in the market of ideas to create jobs -- social entrepreneurship.

Education system:

- Incorporate specific values for sustainable development at the core of education systems (pre-school, elementary, middle and high school and university), both in subjects/studies and in the way they operate.
- Actively explore partnerships with “green” companies, including internships and future job opportunities.
- Maximize the potential of creativity and innovation, through promoting entrepreneurial values and making funds available to create socially and environmentally sustainable enterprises
-

The United Nations:

- Serve as a global megaphone for the voices of the young and marginalized – a facilitator to have the youth’s voice heard.
- Be a sustainable development “watch dog” through effective monitoring.
- Further integrate youth employment issues with sustainable development initiatives.

Key Messages

Two of the largest challenges of our time are unemployment and a planet in peril. Both disproportionately affect the young and marginalized. Moving the economy onto a cleaner, more sustainable path also means more opportunities and jobs for young people. “Sustainable development,” “going green,” “living sustainably” or “taking global warming seriously” -- is part of the DNA and culture of the young generation.

Young people are willing to “sacrifice” and have an altered consumption behavior compared to the “older” generation, taking on commitments for at least the next 20 years to come and feeling responsible for the decisions that are being taken, for example at Rio+20, as youth embody the future.

“Give us a space and we show you what we can!” “Let’s talk, exchange, engage, and share! Keep on, or start doing something that leaves impact. At the end of the day, it is going to be our responsibility, if not even legacy to create the future we truly want.”