



YOUTH IN ACTION FOR GENDER EQUALITY

AGENCY! LEADERSHIP! ACTIVISM!



IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

YOUTH IN ACTION FOR GENDER EQUALITY

AGENCY! LEADERSHIP! ACTIVISM!



UN WOMEN

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AU	African Union
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
EVAW	Elimination of Violence Against Women
HLPF	High-Level Political Forum
HRC	Human Rights Council
IANYD	Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
LELT	Learn, Earn, Lead and Transform
LNOB	Leave No One Behind
PSH	Peace, Security and Humanitarian Action
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
UN GA	United Nations General Assembly
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
WEE	Women's Economic Empowerment
WPE	Women's Political Empowerment

FOREWORD

The context for the realization of the rights of women and girls and the achievement of gender equality has significantly shifted since 1995. There has been progress, however, no country has achieved gender equality. Over the past decade, feminism has acquired a new dynamic and visibility because of the activism of young people. A new generation of young women are actively involved in different issues that affect their lives personally, reflecting an acute awareness of the limits of legal and social change that has taken place. Young feminist advocacy, activism and mobilization has increased worldwide, gaining momentum, force and support from public and private spheres. Yet, feminist gains are experiencing reversals in many contexts. Young leaders, activists and advocates of gender equality cherish a dream of a better world. Therefore, UN Women’s Youth Plan of Action (2019 - 2021) seeks to empower young women and young men through an intergenerational, intersectional approach, focusing on shifting social norms, supporting policy change, fostering girls’ leadership and amplifying their voices through effective partnerships.



Above: Youth for Gender Equality ©UN Women Asia and the Pacific.

1.

BACKGROUND

Today, young people aged 10 to 24 make up one quarter of the world's population. The aspirations and achievements of these 1.8 billion young people are shaping the future. Approximately 87 percent of them live in developing countries.¹ Of these, 600 million are adolescent girls and young women. They face multiple barriers that include violence and limited and unequal access to resources, knowledge, information, networks and markets. These multiple forms of discrimination are due to persistent inequalities, discriminatory laws, stereotypical cultural norms and unequal gendered social roles that are attributed to them within their communities and families. In a global context of shrinking civil society space and rising conservative governments, the voice of young women and girls is at greater risk of being silenced than ever before.

Despite the challenges, young feminists are mobilizing and challenging implicit hierarchies of power, by fighting for equality and justice. They are pushing policymakers to recognize the multiplicity of young women's roles, identities and their intersections and calling for their needs, interests, and priorities to be incorporated into policies that can transform social and economic structures. They are a driving force in accelerating change for the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. UN Women recognizes the unique capabilities, innovation and dynamic ideas and solutions young people bring to the table.

UN Women's Youth and Gender Equality Strategy is a critical response, enabling increased youth engagement to strengthen gender equality and young women's empowerment. The Youth Plan of Action (YPoA) describes how UN Women intends to address the increased push back on gender equality while creating bridges between older and young generations in a more effective way; harness youth energy, creativity and critical thinking to challenge the status quo; and bring together the next generation of gender equality activists contributing to a stronger feminist movement.

¹ UNFPA. 2014. "The Power of 1.8 Billion: Adolescents, Youth and the Transformation of the Future", The 2014 State of the World Population Report.

2.

UN WOMEN'S YOUTH PLAN OF ACTION

UN Women is uniquely placed to serve as both a source of support for young people and a platform through which their voices, needs and power can be communicated and amplified. The YPoA pursues the engagement of youth in a coordinated, coherent and holistic manner complementing the UN guidelines on Leaving No One Behind (LNOB). It also takes an intergenerational, transformative and intersectional approach that facilitates innovative forms of youth engagement. However, to ensure that the promise to “leave no one behind” is realized, gender-responsive implementation should address the needs of all young women and girls, especially those facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalization, including, but not limited to: sexual and gender diversity, disability, HIV status, rural location, ethnic minority status, class and income, and living in conflict and post-conflict settings.

In accordance with Youth2030: The United Nations Youth Strategy² and UN Women's Youth and Gender Equality Strategy,³ the YPoA will ensure youth's participation and engagement as equal partners in UN Women's coordinated efforts to achieve gender equality. UN Women's joint inter-agency priority areas of Women's Political Empowerment (WPE), Women's

Economic Empowerment (WEE), the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) and Peace, Security and Humanitarian Action (PSH) dovetail not only with the United Nations Youth2030 strategy but also work within the principles of leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind.

YOUTH PLAN OF ACTION'S ALIGNMENT WITH YOUTH2030

UN Youth2030 Strategy	UN Women's Youth Plan of Action
Engagement, Participation and Advocacy	Promoting a shift in social norms, supporting policy change, fostering youth leadership and meaningful engagement
Informed and Healthy Foundations	Supporting quality education and access to youth-friendly health and reproductive services
Economic Empowerment through Decent Work	Supporting young women's economic empowerment and promoting decent work for equal pay
Youth and Human Rights	Advocating for the rights of young people in the public and private spheres of their lives
Peace and Resilience Building	Recognizing and supporting young people's agency, resilience and positive contributions as agents of change in peacebuilding processes including humanitarian action

2 Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth. 2018. Youth2030: The United Nations Strategy on Youth. Available from <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/youth-un/>

3 UN Women. 2017. *Youth LEAP into gender equality*. Available from <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2017/5/youth-leap-into-gender-equality>

3.

WHAT ARE WE TRYING TO ACHIEVE?

The Civil Society Division will support all of UN Women’s work on youth, assist in amplifying the voice of young activists, advocates, leaders, and will support all of UN Women feminists including mobilizing and supporting a cohort of young feminists towards Beijing+25 and beyond.

It will facilitate, catalyse and enable the setting up of a young feminist agenda by establishing a new model that will activate “the Movable Middle” for action on gender equality. Therefore, the implementation plan will:

- Support a dynamic cohort of young activists, advocates, leaders and feminists for gender equality.
- Promote and create opportunities for young women and girls to lead and transform futures.
- Coordinate, support and collaborate with youth-led, youth-serving organizations, youth movements, young feminists, advocates and youth activists at the country, regional and global level.

- Provide internal and external coherence and coordination of youth work within and outside UN Women for collective impact.

The plan will capitalize on UN Women’s convening capacity and effective partnerships with youth-led and youth-serving organizations in countries and regions. Implementation will be through advocacy, supporting and promoting young women’s leadership, and collaborating with suitable partners for maximum impact.

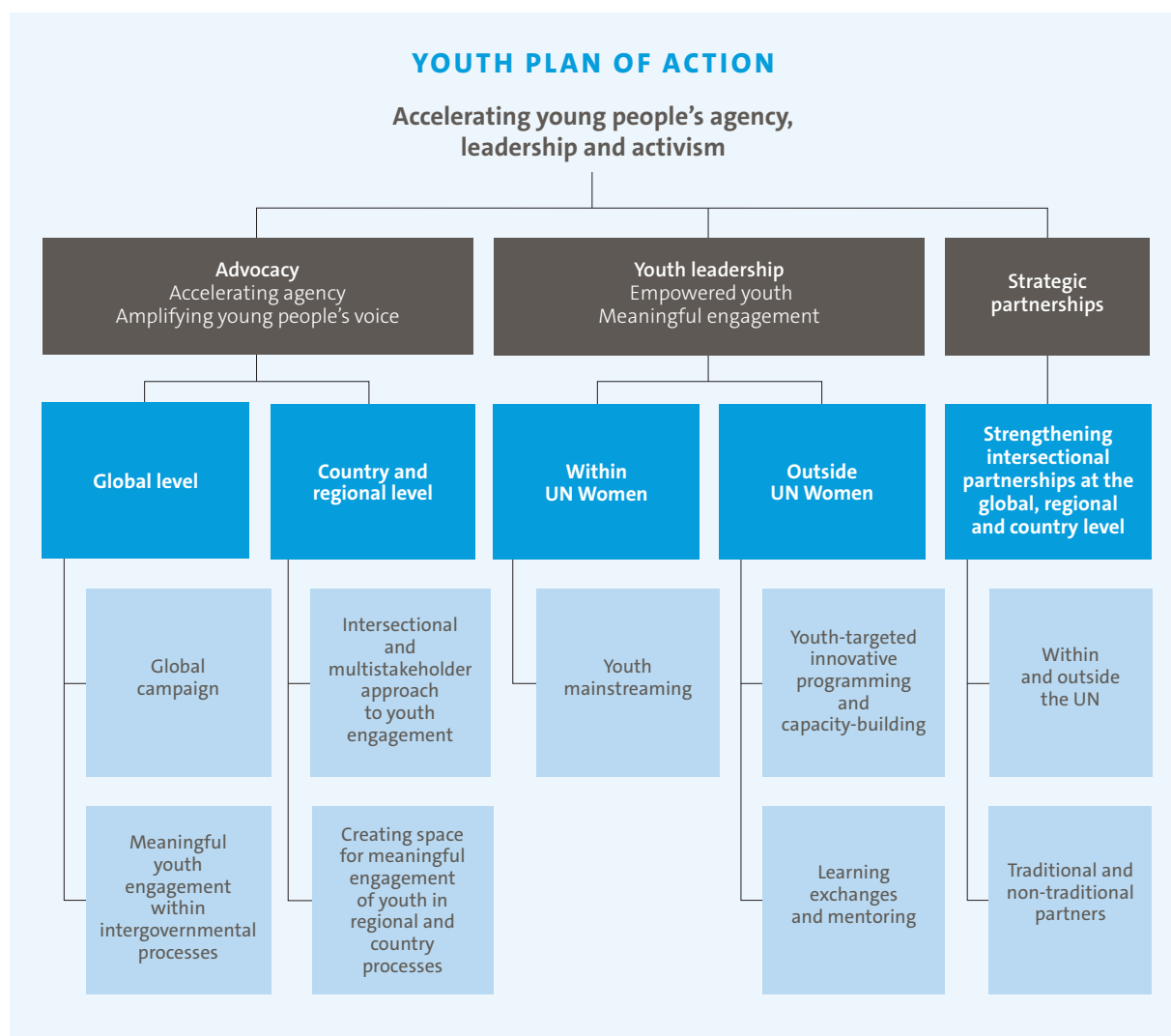


Above: “Voices against violence” curriculum training in Zambia ©UN Women.

4.

OVERVIEW OF THE YPOA

The YPoA will leverage UN Women’s principles aligned to the triple mandate by: (i) supporting the strengthening of global norms and standards to accelerate progress towards gender equality with a focus on young women and girls; (ii) promoting more effective coordination and coherence of youth work within and outside UN Women; and (iii) advocating for policies and development plans that address the needs of young people at the regional, country and local level as part of its operational activities.



5.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE: AN AMBITIOUS PLAN

UN Women plays a central role in the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda). It is in a unique position to infuse gender perspectives into the wider youth policymaking and programming discourse and to bring the youth perspective to its ongoing gender mainstreaming work across the UN system and beyond. The YPoA will focus on advocacy, building the leadership capacity of young women, girls, trans and non-binary youth, and strengthening partnerships with youth-led and youth-serving networks, organizations and youth civic movements.

5.1 Advocacy

Our **advocacy** is structured around supporting a cohort of young feminists leading the gender equality agenda for Beijing+25 and beyond. It is based on the premise that development will not be sustainable if it does not follow the principle of Leave No One Behind and bringing young women and girls' voices to the fore.

The Youth Plan of Action provides a framework for UN Women's youth engagement at the global, regional and country level. It is important to note that this is a framework and the context for youth participation, engagement and empowerment differs between the global North and global South. Work in regions and countries will also be context-specific.

Voice

Using an intersectional and multi-stakeholder approach, UN Women will create space for the voice of the most marginalized young women to defend their rights, especially those who experience multiple and intersecting forms of discriminations stemming from sexual and gender diversity, disability, HIV status, rural location, ethnic minority status, class and income, and living in conflict and post-conflict settings with the aim of:

- Supporting increased representation of youth voices in international, national and local development programming and policy reforms aimed at enhancing adolescent girls, and young women's leadership and political participation.
- Ensuring that youth are mobilized as influential advocates for driving the social and policy reform agenda to end violence against women and girls.
- Supporting young women's political participation and leadership through different country programmes.

5.2 Youth leadership

UN Women is strategically positioned to support young people in reaching their full potential, recognizing their agency, resilience and positive contributions as **agents of change** in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.⁴ Through this plan of action, UN Women will strengthen the capacity of young people, particularly young women and girls, to act and pursue their goals through decision-making, leadership, mentoring and collective action.

Young women and girls lead and transform their futures

Following an intergenerational, intersectional approach to working with young women and girls, UN Women will focus on shifting social norms, supporting policy

⁴ UN Youth Strategy. Draft for final review, 6 July 2018, p. 2.

change, fostering young women and girl’s leadership and amplifying their voices through effective partnerships. UN Women will advocate, support and promote country programmes that advance transformational change, shifting cultural norms and societal expectations, by charting new pathways for girls including promoting a counter-narrative against stereotyping and gender biases. UN Women will strengthen young women’s leadership through four different ways: Learn, Earn, Lead and Transform (LELT). These four pillars intersect across UN Women’s thematic areas of work, ensuring collective impact on the work that we do with youth at the country, regional and HQ level.

Learn

Through building the **capacity and skills** of young women and girls to advocate for their rights, UN Women will:

- Advocate for the development of the next generation of girls and young women leaders in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields.
- Support second-chance education and vocational training to enhance the skills of adolescent girls to obtain decent work, and business and related training to help young women to start and expand their businesses.

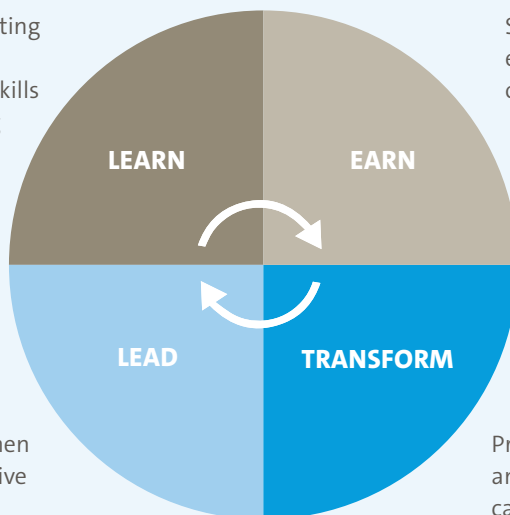
In Moldova, the UN Women programme, GirlsGoIT, teaches girls digital, **IT and entrepreneurial skills** that promote positive role models through video; similarly, in Kenya and South Africa, 20 Mozilla Clubs for women and girls teach basic **coding and digital literacy skills in safe spaces**.

LEARN, EARN, LEAD AND TRANSFORM (LELT)

Accelerating Young Women and Girls’ Leadership, Activism and Power

An intergenerational, intersectional approach to working with young women and girls, focusing on shifting social norms, supporting policy change, fostering young women’s and girls’ leadership through effective partnerships

Supporting and advocating for quality education, capacity-building and skills development for young women and girls



Supporting and promoting economic empowerment of young women

Supporting young women and girls to lead collective action and movement building for gender equality

Promoting young women’s and girls’ leadership that can transform unequal gender norms

Earn

Through the **economic empowerment** of young women, UN Women will:

- Mainstream young people in existing programmes in country and regional offices.
- Enhance specific youth and gender equality programmes in countries experiencing a youth upsurge, such as in Africa, the Middle East and Asia.
- Support vocational training for young women to access decent employment and entrepreneurial opportunities.

The **One Win Leads to Another** programme, jointly run by UN Women, the International Olympic Committee, Women Win and Brazilian NGO Empodera, builds self-esteem and economic empowerment for girls and young women via weekly life-skills training and sporting activities led by trained female facilitators.

Lead

Through the promotion of young women's **voices, leadership and agency**, UN Women will:

- Create opportunities for girls and young women to forge their own networks of solidarity and mobilization, and to serve as agents of change in their communities in ending the inequities that impede their economic and social inclusion.
- Ensure that, internally, leadership of all young professionals and interns benefit from intergenerational capacity-building and mentoring from other young professionals including senior UN Women representatives.

UN Women will support young leaders, particularly young women, in accessing regional and global forums like the Commission on the Status of Women and the Generation Equality Forum.

Transform

Through supporting a cohort of young leaders, activists, advocates and feminists to **own and drive** the gender equality agenda, UN Women will engage in:

Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls

- Continue to support and promote UN Women's signature campaigns including HeForShe,⁵ UNiTe⁶ and the Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Initiative.⁷
- Strengthen work with young men and boys in challenging toxic masculinities, including with faith-based actors.
- Strengthen work with university students to raise awareness about ending campus violence and violence against women and girls (VAWG), including through the use of ICT and social media as advocacy tools.

Young women in peace and security

- Continue to work with governments, UN entities and civil society organizations, especially young women, in peacebuilding processes.
- Provision of technical support – awareness and advocacy initiatives for the protection and promotion of the rights of young women in conflict and post-conflict situations.

UN Women will support work on increasing HIV knowledge among young women and adolescent girls, including using mobile technologies.

5 <https://www.heforshe.org/en>

6 <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/take-action>

7 <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2017/10/safe-cities-and-safe-public-spaces-global-results-report>

5.3 Strategic partnerships

In order to undertake a successful and meaningful engagement process with young people, UN Women will take a 'partnership approach'. A partnership approach to working with young people means treating them as equal stakeholders, valuing their knowledge, experience, expertise and input. A partnership approach encourages young people to gain a sense of ownership in the process and feel empowered and motivated to engage with the organization in the future. Leveraging this strength, UN Women will continue to cultivate **strengthened and effective partnerships** with youth-led and youth-serving organizations, globally and through

UN Women youth focal points in country and regional offices, including close relationships with the UN Interagency Task Force and the Office of the Secretary General's Envoy on Youth.

Strong partnerships and networks exist at the country, regional and global levels. These partnerships are intersectional, intersectoral and intergenerational in nature, drawing upon the knowledge, experience and contributions of the partners in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for girls and young women. This approach brings together knowledge and expertise from different actors to create a more positive change and leverage the collective experience of partners to connect, capture and share best practice.

Strategic partnership engagement

Partnerships	Engagement
Member States	Actively engaging with Member States, specifically Ministries of Youth, Gender and Children, and other relevant ministries, bringing them together to ensure that the inclusion of gender-specific mandates across negotiated outcomes and agreements also includes adolescent girls and young women
UN System	Actively engaging with the UN Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (IANYD), which comprises over 40 UN entities working together to advance youth development
Civil Society Organizations	Working with women's organizations, CSOs and women's rights movements to actively work with young people to be key partners in promoting gender equality
Youth-led organizations and networks	Actively engaging with youth-led organizations and networks, both online and offline, to prioritize gender equality and women's empowerment. Special efforts will be made to collaborate with young women-led organizations and networks
Youth-serving organizations	Developing new partnerships with youth-serving organizations at the country, regional and global levels
Private sector	Actively promoting women's empowerment principles that are also applicable to the young women cohort
Foundations	Working with those who focus on youth issues and then partnering with those that have already prioritized girls and young women
Media	Working with modern and traditional media to act to eliminate stereotypes and the objectification of adolescent girls and young women and promoting examples of youth-led action on gender equality
Academia/Universities	Working with women's and gender studies centres to increase academic discourse on the importance of youth involvement in realizing gender equality

6.

HOW ARE WE GOING TO DO IT?

UN Women is recognized as a thought leader and champion for gender equality and empowering girls and women. The ability to leverage partnerships with governments to eliminate structural barriers to gender equalities, facilitate policies to empower women and girls, and leverage its convening power and diverse public and private sector partnerships, including with youth-led NGOs and civil society organizations, accelerates its ability to build the evidence base and best practices on gender equality and women's economic empowerment. The four main objectives of this YPoA will lead to six main outcomes. These outcomes will be achieved through the following approaches:

Outcome 1

A cohort of effective, dynamic and influential young feminists leading advocacy for gender equality and young women's empowerment

- a. Creating opportunities for young women feminists leading and promoting gender equality.
- b. Supporting a strengthened cohort of self-organizing young feminists raising their voices in demanding space, rights and opportunities that lead to ending violence, building and sustaining peace, and promoting political participation.
- c. Ensuring intersectional and diverse young feminists' engagement at high-level events.

Result: A global network of dynamic, influential young women feminists influencing policy and promoting gender equality at the country, regional and global level.

Outcome 2

Strengthened youth engagement and contribution to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the country, regional and global level

Strengthening youth engagement and contribution on SDGs implementation at the country, regional and global levels by:

- a. Creating opportunities for diverse, intersectional youth activists to be involved in influencing the achievement of the SDGs.
- b. Mainstreaming youth in all of UN Women programmatic work.
- c. Supporting UN Women Senior Management Team missions by ensuring that there are opportunities to engage with youth.
- d. Promoting and showcasing youth country work through advocacy products within and outside UN Women.

Result: 500,000 young women and girls impacted by UN Women programmes.

Outcome 3

Young women and young men leaders and activists effectively participating in intergenerational dialogues and intergovernmental processes

- a. Creating and supporting safe spaces for youth participation and engagement in intergovernmental processes.
- b. Building the capacity of young women and youth delegates on how to engage in intergovernmental processes and contribute to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) negotiations.
- c. Convening intergenerational dialogues that engage the new generation of young women and young men leaders and activists on gender equality, ending violence, economic empowerment and peace and security.
- d. Supporting UN Women country and regional offices to ensure that young people are represented and participate actively during regional meetings before, during and after CSW, including during the HLPF, UN GA and HRC.

Result:

- A CSW youth dialogue every year.
- 20 effective youth-led and youth-serving partnerships strengthened and actively participating in intergovernmental processes.
- 100 young women per year engaging effectively in intergovernmental processes.

Outcome 4

Young people leading and meaningfully engaged during the Beijing+25 mobilization country consultations and the UN Women advocacy events leading up to Beijing+25

- a. Ensuring youth ownership of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action by developing an engagement strategy, including advocacy products for dissemination at national and regional consultations, CSW, and the Generation Equality Forum in 2020.

- b. Supporting UN Women country offices in creating opportunities for young women to engage during national and regional Beijing+25 consultations.
- c. Supporting the UN Women Generation Equality campaign.
- d. Ensuring the inclusion of women human rights defenders in the process leading up to the Generation Equality Forum in 2020.

Result: At least 5 youth-led and youth-serving organizations per region and a minimum of 25 percent young women actively participate in each of the 5 multi-stakeholder events planned by UN Women.

Outcome 5

Young women's leadership promoted and access to learning and mentoring opportunities created

- a. Developing a repository of UN Women's good practice on meaningful participation and engagement of young women and girls.
- b. Promoting and ensuring access and dissemination of existing leadership training materials to partner organizations through the EmpowerWomen platform, iLEARN, UN Women Virtual Skills School and the UN Women Training Centre.
- c. Collaborating and working with youth-led and youth-serving organizations to facilitate skills labs and webinars for youth advocacy training before and during CSW as well as other global advocacy spaces such as the HLPF, UN GA and HRC.

Result: 10,000 young women per year accessing learning and mentoring opportunities through UN Women platforms.

Outcome 6

Internal and external coherence and coordination of youth work for maximum impact

- a. Ensuring meaningful engagement of UN Women youth focal points and interns in amplifying youth work at UN Women headquarters and regional and country offices.
- b. Implementing minimum standards for mainstreaming youth within UN Women.
- c. Using UN Women regional score cards on youth engagement to show collective impact.
- d. Developing training on mainstreaming youth into UN Women programmes.

Youth Council: UN Women acknowledges that increased youth participation across the organization positions the youth constituency as an empowered consultative body whose innovation capacity ensures that we are keeping up with changing times. Composed of young professionals under 35 years of age working at UN Women, the Youth Council is a reference group that engages with UN Women's policies and frameworks and integrates a youth perspective into the work of UN Women at all levels.



Above: #CSW63 Side Event "Take the hot seat" Intergenerational Dialogue ©UN Women.

ANNEX: BASIC PRINCIPLES OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Meaningful youth engagement

Introduction

UN Women created Youth Common Minimum Standards (YCMS) for meaningful engagement and full participation of young people. The standards aim to ensure active, strategic involvement of young people in all of UN Women's work at the country, regional and global level. They build on field practices shared by UN Women country offices, youth-led and youth-serving organizations. They will serve as the minimum steps UN Women headquarters, divisions, country and regional offices and liaison offices will have to take in order to ensure meaningful engagement of young people with a focus on young women and girls. However, UN Women headquarters, divisions, country and regional offices, including liaison offices, are encouraged to go beyond the minimum standards. UN Women will be transparent and accountable at all levels in ensuring true youth participation in its approach.

The basic principles of successful and meaningful engagement of young people

In order to undertake a successful and meaningful engagement process with young people, it is vital that UN Women takes a 'partnership approach'. A partnership approach to working with young people means treating them as equal stakeholders, valuing their knowledge, experience, expertise and input. A partnership approach encourages young people to gain a sense of ownership in the process and feel empowered and motivated to engage with the organization in the future.

It is important to acknowledge the contributions of young people. The support should inspire leadership, ownership and promote participation by young people. Recognizing and valuing the contributions of young people as important participants is integral in developing respectful and insightful engagement with young people.

These basic principles should be followed.

Intergenerational leadership: Young people in all their diversity should participate in leadership and decision-making activities as equals with older people as board members, management, staff, volunteers, members and programme participants. Young people should be engaged in the implementation, monitoring and participatory design of development initiatives.

UN Women will commit to formally protect and enhance youth engagement in consultations, by giving feedback, diversifying opportunities, recruiting and mentoring young people.

Commitment to diversity and inclusion: When decisions are made that impact groups, especially marginalized groups, young representatives of those groups should be included as equal leaders and decision-makers.

UN Women will ensure the participation of young women and girls, trans, intersex and gender non-conforming youth from various diverse groups such as persons with disabilities, young women and girls living with HIV, indigenous and non-indigenous communities, and young women from communities operating in different economic settings, including in conflict and post-conflict settings.

Safe spaces: A safe space is important for the participation and leadership of young people, including vulnerable groups, in decisions that impact their lives at all levels and in all sectors. Safe spaces are fundamental for realizing meaningful engagement with young people.

UN Women will create, promote and protect safe spaces for young people in its advocacy work.

Access to information: Young people should be allowed to have access to the same amount of information as other decision-makers.

UN Women will leverage increased technological connectivity for participatory approaches, particularly through social media, mobile phone and SMS-based feedback loops to improve access to information in their work with youth.



Above: *Orange the World 2018 – Guatemala* ©UN Women.

UN WOMEN IS THE UNITED NATIONS ENTITY DEDICATED TO GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN. A GLOBAL CHAMPION FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS, UN WOMEN WAS ESTABLISHED TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS ON MEETING THEIR NEEDS WORLDWIDE.

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to ensure that the standards are effectively implemented and truly benefit women and girls worldwide. It works globally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls and stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on four strategic priorities: Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems; Women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy; All women and girls live a life free from all forms of violence; Women and girls contribute to and have greater influence in building sustainable peace and resilience, and benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and humanitarian action. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.



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