

Outcome-

African Youth: Powering The Sustainable Development Goals

In the lead up to the African Regional Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be held in Morocco in April 2019, Restless Development, the 2030 Youth Alliance, Youth Advocates Ghana, Library and You, YouthHubAfrica, End Water Poverty Coalition and African Monitor held a webinar on the theme "African Youth: Powering the Sustainable Development Goals".

This practical youth-led webinar, the first in series, seeks to provide key insights and tools for how young people across Africa can input to their government's Voluntary National Review (VNR) process and ensure they are held accountable to their Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) promises at national, regional and global levels.

The webinar was co-moderated by **Boitumelo Zwane**, Commission for Gender Equality, South Africa and **Damilare Oyedele**, Library and You, Nigeria with **Emmanuel Ametepey**, the Executive Director of Youth Advocates Ghana-YAG and Convener of African Youth SDGs Summit delivering the opening remarks. The speakers comprised **Itumeleng Thabang Moiphisi**, Research Consultant and Youth Champion for the Citizens Report at Youth Alliance for Leadership Development in Africa (YALDA)/ African Monitor; **Aisha Matiko**, Youth Accountability Advocate, Restless Development Tanzania; **Rotimi Olawale**, The Executive Director of YouthHubAfrica and **Uzoamaka Mbara**, Programme Officer, Christian fellowship and Care Foundation and End Water Poverty Coalition.

Opening Statement

In his opening statement, Emmanuel Ametepey gave an overview of the Voluntary National Review Process and mentioned how this space offers a great opportunity for young people to shape decisions on issues affecting their lives and provides civic spaces where they can dialogue with government officials and duty bearers to deliver on the SDGs promises.

He further noted that, in order for national governments to account for their progress on the SDGs, The United Nations through the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) has instituted the yearly review of the SDGs at the High Level Political Forum which encourages member states to conduct regular and inclusive review (Voluntary National Review) of progress at the national and sub-national level which are country-led and country-driven and aims to facilitate the sharing of experiences, successes, challenges and lessons learnt over the years with a view of accelerating the implementation of the SDGs across countries.

He indicated that, the 2019 HLPF, the 4th in series will see about 50 countries from across the world reporting on the theme "*Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality*" from Tuesday, **9 July, to Thursday, 18 July 2019**; including the three-day ministerial meeting of the forum from **Tuesday, 16 July, to Thursday, 18 July 2019**.



The set of goals to be reviewed in depth are:

- **Goal 4.** Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
- **Goal 8.** Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
- **Goal 10.** Reduce inequality within and among countries
- **Goal 13.** Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
- **Goal 16.** Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
- **Goal 17.** Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

Highlights of the Webinar

In response to the question on the role young people can play in SDG planning, implementation, review and follow up at different levels: national, regional and global, the speakers made the following observations:

- Most African Governments do not really see the relevant contributions that youth bring to the table and often neglect them in the development process. This poses a very difficult challenge to young people as they must constantly find ways to consistently convince Governments of the relevant contributions youth can make to the SDGs.
- Often, young people and youth organizations work in silos making it very difficult for Governments to work with them as they are unable to know whom or which youth organization to deal with.
- Financial challenges are also great barriers to young people in their work on the SDGs. Young people are limited in the area of financial capital needed to advance the work they do on the SDGs and are unable to raise funds or identify funding support for their works.
- Political bureaucracies in dealing with government agencies which slows down the progress of the works of young people on the SDGs
- There is lack of or limited data on SDGs available to young people to serve as an evidence base for their works. Young people find this very challenging as it makes it very difficult to make assertions without any data backing.
- It is important that young people are able to identify what they want to do and find opportunities in their various communities. Young people must be self-starters and be able to work on their goals before presenting to Governments. This would serve as a critical leverage to engage with policy makers and hold Governments accountable.
- Young people must learn to work as an organized front in their engagement with key government agencies and institutions as this makes it easier for institutions to deal with them.

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The speakers also agreed that young people face various challenges with their Governments in working on the SDGs. These serve as barriers in their work on the SDGs and hinder intended progress. However, speakers identified the following solutions to the above challenges:

- Young people must learn to bring recognition to their works by preparing shadow reports to present the things that they do. This would serve as a leverage to fight for recognition from Governments, government agencies and institutions that they intend to work with.
- Young people must also identify others working in the same area as them, team up and work as a formidable front in their engagements with institutions.
- Young people must be their own motivators and push their agendas until they finally realize the results they want to see without waiting on governments.

Addressing how young people can engage their national governments and to ensure their voices are not ignored, the speakers noted that:

- Young people and youth organizations must leverage on their numbers to mobilize, organize and engage with a united front as the voice of large numbers cannot be easily ignored. The African Youth SDGs Summit was mentioned as a good example of how young people can create their own space and use it to engage policy makers.
- They must also ensure that they engage duty bearers with relevant information so they can be given the platforms to operate.
- The relevance of capitalizing on videos and articles to convey their messages to the intended audience and also take advantage of their networks and alliances to reach relevant authorities to support their works.

In concluding the webinar, the speakers recommended that young people and civil society organizations interested in engaging their national governments on the Voluntary National Review process must contact the National Development Planning Commissions in their respective countries or through the National Youth Councils/ Authority at country level.

By: Ellen Lindsey Awuku, Communications Officer & Youth Champion at Youth Advocates Ghana.

