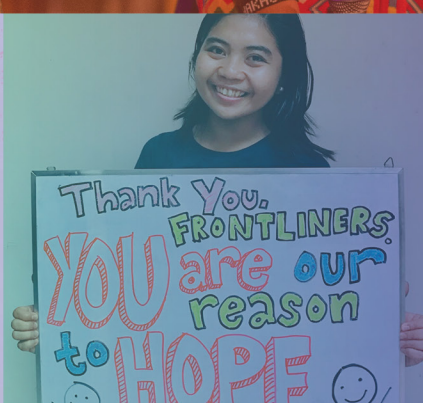


UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME



The 16 x 16 Initiative



Shaping a new model for meaningful youth engagement in the implementation, monitoring and review of Sustainable Development Goal 16 on peaceful, just and inclusive societies

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Key reflections

The first phase of the 16 x 16 Initiative (2019–2021) has provided key reflections for future initiatives on meaningful youth engagement in the processes of implementing, monitoring and reviewing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

Recognize young people's expertise: Young people have the right to participate and also have a diversity of lived experiences, expertise and ideas to contribute to development efforts and decision-making processes.

Ensure timing is strategic: A well-planned initiative can complement formal mechanisms for SDG review and established youth engagement platforms in United Nations processes, thus enhancing the inclusion of a diversity of young people.

Expand existing channels for youth engagement and open new ones: By opening new channels and providing a conducive space for collaboration, youth organizations can take the lead in identifying development challenges and strategic priorities for peace.

Link levels: Initiatives should go beyond youth engagement in reviews, conferences and the development of policy documents by recognizing and supporting the work of youth organizations, movements and networks at the local level.

Bridge dimensions: By bringing together young people who are working on different aspects of the SDGs, with a particular focus on the most marginalized, vulnerable people, integrated youth-led advice can be brought to bear on the future of development.

Foster co-creation: Co-creation between the United Nations and youth makes the outcomes of the activities more relevant to the lived experience of young people and can facilitate greater uptake of recommendations.

Do no harm: It is critical to uphold the do no harm principle by being sensitive to the divides, inequalities and power imbalances between and among young people and their context. Equally essential is providing safe spaces for the inclusion of young people who are typically at risk of being left behind.

Build trust: Fostering an environment of trust and ownership that includes opportunities for mentoring and peer-to-peer exchange can enable effective activities.

Make timelines and budgets flexible: Ensuring that the timeline for the use of budget lines is relatively flexible means that new opportunities can be accommodated and that programmes can adapt to new situations.

16 leaders of youth organizations, networks and movements and partners in building peaceful, just and inclusive societies: 9 women and 7 men.

[Read more about them here.](#)

100+ activities (as of May 2021):

57 events

32 inputs to policy and programming

30 communication and advocacy efforts

Background on the 16 x 16 Initiative

Introduction

The 16 x 16 Initiative is supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and implemented through the [UNDP Youth Global Programme for Sustainable Development and Peace \(Youth-GPS\)](#). It recognizes, values and supports the positive role that young women and men play as leaders of **16 youth organizations, movements and networks** and as agents of change and partners in building peaceful, just and inclusive societies. The continuous collaboration between UNDP and youth-led organizations through the 16 x 16 Initiative has enabled young people's leadership in conversations and activities at all levels within the framework of **SDG 16: Peace, justice and inclusion** and other related frameworks.

This paper presents highlights from the first phase of the 16 x 16 Initiative (2019–2021) and looks ahead by reflecting on how best to promote, support and facilitate **meaningful youth engagement** and multi-stakeholder collaboration for the implementation, monitoring and review of the SDGs, particularly SDG 16. In the [Insights, Impacts and Learnings](#) section, it introduces practices and strategies for engaging youth in implementing, monitoring and reviewing the SDGs and the achievements and activities of the 16 x 16 Initiative. This is followed by an overview of the key components of the 16 x 16 Initiative. The [Looking ahead](#) section includes reflections on challenges, key recommendations and models for meaningful youth engagement in implementing, monitoring and reviewing SDG 16 and the 2030 Agenda in general. The intended readership of the paper is development practitioners and advisers that are looking to support youth and multi-stakeholder engagement in national and international processes relating to sustainable development and peace.

Why “16 x 16”?

The name of the 16 x 16 Initiative refers to 16 young leaders of youth organizations advancing SDG 16. It also reflects the notion of the multiplier effect, through which the 16 leaders engage with their own constituencies and networks and foster new SDG 16-focused partnerships that go beyond the initiative itself.

Objectives of the 16 x 16 Initiative

- Recognize and make visible young people's agency and leadership through the “16x16 global campaign”, highlighting the work that 16 youth-led organizations accomplish to advance SDG 16;
- Expand existing channels and open new ones for meaningful youth participation in implementing, monitoring and reviewing SDGs, with a focus on SDG 16 and related frameworks;
- Enhance capacities and youth-inclusive policy and programming, working collaboratively with youth-led organizations.

Facts

Implementer: UNDP's Youth Global Programme for Sustainable Development and Peace (Youth-GPS).

Partners: The 16 x 16 Initiative was made possible thanks to bilateral funding from the Government of Italy. It has also been supported by the Government of Denmark through the placement of a Junior Programme Officer as part of Youth-GPS.

Timeline: April 2019–ongoing (as of July 2021).

Budget: US\$200,000 for project activities.

The young participants in the 16 x 16 Initiative and UNDP's Youth Global Programme developed this paper jointly. It builds on the [16 x 16 Dialogue Series](#), which was launched in 2021 to provide space for deeper reflection at regional and global meetings. The paper also draws on best practices and strategies on youth engagement in sustaining peace and sustainable development, a mapping overview of 16 x 16 activities and UNDP's comprehensive approach to youth empowerment. See [annex 1](#) (page 30) for further information on the **framework of analysis**.

Putting youth engagement at the heart of the United Nations

The [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) recognizes young people as **agents of change**. Likewise, [United Nations Security Council resolutions 2250 \(2015\), 2419 \(2018\) and 2535 \(2020\)](#) on youth, peace and security underline the **positive role that young people play** in sustaining peace. If young people are not able to influence or have a say in their own lives and societies, development will not benefit the whole of society, policymaking will overlook the needs of the affected people and peacebuilding initiatives will only bring short-term outcomes. However, young people are often portrayed as perpetrators or victims of violence and solely as beneficiaries of development. The 16 x 16 Initiative was launched to challenge the persistent negative narratives on the role of youth in peace and development and to amplify the positive contribution of youth-led organizations, movements and networks in building peaceful, just and inclusive societies. The **review of SDG 16** at the [High-Level Political Forum \(HLPF\)](#) in 2019 was a window of opportunity to strengthen youth engagement in a global policy process.

Promoting inclusive societies also entails actively reaching out to young people, especially those who pertain to groups that have been historically left out of decision-making processes, giving them robust support to understand and (re)shape their realities.

Ana Carolina Paixão de Queiroz, 2019



Nature needs a seat at the table. If not now, when? If not us, who?

Elisha Bano and other young leaders address the audience at the [Equator Prize Ceremony](#) in New York in September 2019

Credits: UNDP Equator Prize Initiative/Mike Arrison 2019

The 16 x 16 Initiative contributes to these processes, aiming to open new channels and provide a space that encourages **collaboration** between youth and the United Nations, benefiting **policy and programming support** and youth organizations themselves. This illustrates how the 16 x 16 Initiative aims to go beyond youth participation at conferences and meetings. The 16 x 16 Initiative views **youth empowerment** as “an attitudinal, structural and cultural process whereby young people gain the ability, authority and agency to make decisions and implement change in their own lives and in their societies”ⁱ. The Initiative aimed to leverage UNDP’s presence in around 170 countries and territories by bridging local, national, regional and international levels and bringing together multiple stakeholders, in line with the comprehensive approach put forward in the UNDP Youth Global Programme for Sustainable Development and Peace (see [annex 2](#), page 30).

Regions and countries

[Latin America and the Caribbean](#): Brazil, Honduras, Jamaica, Venezuela

[Eastern Europe and the CIS](#): Bosnia and Herzegovina & Moldova/Ukraine

[Africa](#): Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Togo

[Asia Pacific](#): Fiji, Nepal, the Philippines, Solomon Islands

[Arab States](#): Egypt, Tunisia

For so long, young people have been excluded from fully representing their voices in any SDG. Doing this will reflect the inclusivity of SDG 16.

Phillip Subu Taungani, Malaita Youth Caucus, [interview](#) at the preparatory conference on SDG 16, Rome 2019



Neville Charlton in a training session for youth on human rights, leadership, and effective advocacy.

Credits: Youth Inspiring Positive Change

An initiative to support 16 young leaders advancing SDG 16

Youth is not a homogeneous group, and young people's various **identities**—such as their class, ethnicity, tribe and gender—may combine differently from culture to culture to shape young people's lived experiences. The 16 young leaders illustrate the many different youth efforts that are contributing to building more peaceful, just and inclusive societies. These efforts include fostering peace education, promoting the rights of women and marginalized groups and enhancing youth engagement in local governance. The inclusive but rigorous **selection process** for the 16 x 16 Initiative deliberately sought to reflect this diversity among the leaders chosen to participate. To do so, UNDP engaged a broad range of partnerships and support from various United Nations entities and youth constituencies and networks to ensure the call for applications reached and mobilized the widest possible audience of young people from across the world. While the 16 x 16 Initiative set out to support the ongoing work of the 16 women and men chosen to participate in it, it has not channelled funding to support youth organizations' activities. Instead, it has provided recognition and support for their work. The call for applications to participate in the 16 x 16 Initiative and preparatory meetings clearly stated the **type of support** that youth organizations would receive through it. This was a way of managing expectations and providing a common understanding of the possibilities and limitations of the 16 x 16 Initiative.

Fostering collaboration, trust and ownership through an inclusive selection process

The 16 young women and men were selected from a pool of 453 longlisted candidates from a total of 1330 applicants.

SELECTION

The **call for application** was shared by United Nations entities and youth networks and launched at the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Youth Forum 2019.

The **selection committee** consisted of the UNDP Youth Team, Global Policy Network and the Major Group for Children and Youth (MGCY), advised by UNDP regional youth focal points.

The **objectives** and **possibilities** of the 16 x 16 Initiative were expressed clearly to ensure that applicants' expectations were realistic.

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https://www.yunbaogao.cn/report/index/report?reportId=5_11448

