

**“Youth Can Move the World” Workshop Series
Meeting Summary | 26 April**

Transforming Leadership in the UN

Transformation in the norms and practice of leadership

- New paradigms around leadership and leadership development are needed, if the international community is to tap into the transformative potential of rising generations.
- Leadership needs to be developed in masses of young people around the world, not just in small numbers of exceptionally high achievers, who are active in multilateral spaces.
- Leadership can be very ego-driven and self-focused, including among youth. Approaching leadership in terms of service to others elevates abilities and expands possibilities.
- Transformative leaders unlock the capacities of other people to contribute to the well-being of society. Effective leadership does not need to be about authority or recognition, as often seem to be emphasized or sought.
 - A shift away from individualism, and toward more collective approaches to leadership, is needed. “Leadership is not about the elevation of self. It’s about the elevation of the community—so that through our action and efforts, more people prosper together.”
- Leaders are embedded in, and shaped by, the society and institutions around them. Leadership has to do not just with the capacity of one individual, but the environment that enabled (or hindered) him or her. Youth leaders and the community around them must transform in tandem.
- Strengthening the values that underpin effective decision-making processes can be a powerful outcome of youth leadership.
 - The inner qualities of leaders, as human beings, are as important as the outer presentation or performance of leadership that they give for public consumption.
 - Moral qualities such as love, justice, education, and knowledge address a wide range of challenges that local communities face.

Transformation in institutions of leadership

- Youth engagement in decision-making spaces, particularly at the UN, needs to shift from often-tokenistic to more participatory modes.
 - Ensuring that young people have a seat at the table is a necessary first step, but must culminate in genuine partnership, co-leadership, mutual support, and joint decision-making. “What would the table look like if youth designed or built it?”
- Co-leadership requires trust. Without trust, many young people distance themselves from formal governing structures. Critical reflection on, and reform of, many of these structures is needed.
- Intergenerational partnership is key to drawing on the full power of young people.
 - Youth are uniquely positioned to collaborate both “upwards” with older colleagues, but also “downwards” with children and adolescents in their localities and beyond.

- Planning is needed to prepare younger generations to enter the UN, and similarly to provide means for those “aging out” to continue championing the youth agenda. A youth alumni network could assist with this.
- Youth must be provided with the skills, background, and preparation needed to be effective in the roles they are asked to play.
- Accompaniment will be key in youth drawing on the experience of older colleagues. But it will be equally relevant in situations where youth represent the reservoir of capacity and elders are the ones in need of development.
- Within the UN system, employment descriptions need to be structured in ways that evolve as young people filling them grow in experience and maturity. Projects should be structured in ways that empower and build capacity.
- Leadership needs to reflect the diversity of humanity. The contributions of women, historically marginalized groups, and other specific populations need to shape decision-making processes.
 - Working from a standpoint of intersectionality is crucial to achieving social inclusion and, with it, legitimacy, representation, and effectiveness.
- Structural, logistical, and procedural barriers that inhibit youth participation and leadership need to be removed.
 - Reliable financing is needed for equitable economic access to international spaces, especially for youth from lower income countries. Access to civic space, ICT tools, assistance with visa arrangements, and other practical matters are equally important.

Transformation among youth leaders themselves

- Youth leaders need to find partners who will listen to them. But they also need to listen to other youth. Youth need to learn from one another, rather than striving to always reinvent the wheel.
- Youth can help shift away from zero-sum narratives of leadership, and instead promote more community-based understandings of leadership that recognize capacity in everyone.
- Youth spaces need to be constantly including new representatives and voices. This will require those who already have access to actively invite other young people and to refuse to hoard opportunities, for example, by declining speaking opportunities in favor of others.
- Youth face external barriers to leadership, but also internal ones, such as disillusionment, fear that the world will never change, underappreciation of their own capacity, and lack of faith in themselves. Youth can and must help one another overcome these challenges.

Transformation in global circumstances

- The change needed to address humanity’s most pressing challenges is a long-term project, and thereby inherently multigenerational.
- Rapid changes are occurring in numerous sectors; the youth of today are therefore at the heart of a global society in the midst of fundamental change.
- The current moment presents an opportunity to build on past gains and lessons learned, rethink approaches to problem solving, and strive for higher levels of unity and cooperation, which will involve intergenerational collaboration.
- Youth are less attached to established structures and status quo, leaving them well-suited to help a maturing humanity move toward the future we want.