

I would like to ask a first question to all of you. We are not doing so well on the SDGs overall. At the same time, as the keynote speaker has stressed yesterday, there is reason for hope and there are opportunities. In light of this and given your personal experience, what is your biggest hope regarding sustainable development? What makes you keep your optimism? And what worries you most when you think of the SDGs and the prospects of sustainability?

Thank you for the question. Indeed, we are not where we need to be in terms of SDG progress. But we stand here today not in despair, but with determination—because alongside the challenges, there is immense potential for transformation. And, effectively, we, the youth, are the future and the agents of change because we recognize that today shapes our tomorrow. If nothing changes, it is we who will suffer the consequences.

What gives me hope?

My greatest hope regarding sustainable development lies in the power and resilience of young people. Across the world, we see youth mobilizing for climate justice, pioneering social enterprises, advocating for gender equality, and driving innovative solutions to health and employment challenges. The commitment, creativity, and urgency with which young people engage in SDG action demonstrate that a different future is possible. This generation is not waiting for change; we are making it happen.

What sustains my optimism?

Above all, I am encouraged by the fact that young people are increasingly being heard. More than ever, we have spaces to voice our concerns, propose solutions, and contribute meaningfully to decision-making. The growing recognition that sustainability is not a choice but a necessity further strengthens our optimism. Governments, International Organizations, businesses, and communities are increasingly understanding that investing in sustainability is investing in economic stability, human well-being, and planetary survival. The shift towards green and blue economies, the rise of youth-led social innovations, and the strengthening of global partnerships give me confidence that we can accelerate progress.

What worries me most?

What concerns me most is that despite this moment, decision-making structures remain slow, fragmented, and often disconnected from those most affected by global challenges. Youth voices are still sidelined, financing remains insufficient, and short-term political and economic interests continue to undermine long-term sustainability goals. If we do not address these systemic barriers, we risk failing not only this generation but all those that follow.

So, while there are reasons for hope, there is also urgency. We cannot afford to be complacent. The time for bold, inclusive, and decisive action is now. Let us move forward with the conviction that a just, equitable, and sustainable future is within our reach—if we have the courage to act. Thank you.

What is the perspective of youth on the opportunities and challenges of SDG acceleration? How will young people be affected by this? And how can young people be heard and be part of the process?

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, and fellow youth advocates,

It is an honor to stand before you today as a representative of young people, whose voices, energy, and innovation are crucial to accelerating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As we gather to discuss SDG 3, SDG 5, SDG 8, SDG 14, and SDG 17, we must acknowledge that youth are not just beneficiaries of sustainable development; we are key actors in shaping its outcomes.

Opportunities and Challenges in SDG Acceleration

The acceleration of the SDGs presents both remarkable opportunities and significant challenges for young people.

In the realm of SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being, digital health solutions, youth-led community health initiatives, and mental health advocacy are reshaping healthcare accessibility. However, barriers such as inadequate mental health services and unequal healthcare access continue to threaten the well-being of young people, particularly in marginalized communities.

With SDG 5: Gender Equality, we witness inspiring youth-led movements challenging gender-based violence and advocating for equal pay and leadership opportunities. Yet, systemic discrimination and restrictive policies hinder the full participation of young women and gender-diverse individuals in economic and political life.

Under SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, the digital economy and entrepreneurship provide unprecedented opportunities for youth employment. However, the reality remains that too many young people are trapped in legally not protected, precarious, or unpaid jobs. The acceleration of SDG 8 must ensure that youth have access to skills development, fair wages, and social protections to foster inclusive economic growth.

The urgency of SDG 14: Life Below Water is undeniable. Youth-led environmental movements are actively raising awareness and developing solutions to address marine pollution and biodiversity loss. Yet, financing and policy support for youth-driven marine conservation efforts remain insufficient. Without action, our generation will inherit an ocean in crisis.

Lastly, SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals, with a focus on financing for sustainable development, is critical for ensuring that youth-led initiatives can thrive. However, current financing models often exclude young people due to bureaucratic barriers, lack of trust, and limited access to financial resources.

How Will Young People Be Affected?

The acceleration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will have profound and lasting implications for our generation. The choices we make today will define the health, economic opportunities, and social well-being of young people around the world for the upcoming decades. Investments in education, healthcare, innovation, and sustainability are not just necessary—they are urgent. They will determine whether we inherit a future of opportunity or a future of crisis.

Our health and economic security depend on bold action. Strong healthcare systems, quality education, and decent jobs are not privileges; they are fundamental rights. Yet, millions of young people still struggle with unemployment, precarious work, and limited access to essential services. Without immediate action, we risk deepening inequalities that will take generations to undo.

Beyond economic security, the state of our oceans, forests, and ecosystems will shape our livelihoods and our survival. Environmental destruction is not just an ecological crisis—it is a threat to our futures. A degraded planet means fewer resources, fewer opportunities, and greater risks to global stability. We cannot afford to stand by while the world's natural systems collapse.

But perhaps the greatest challenge we face is ensuring that young people are not just passive beneficiaries of development but active architects of change. If financing models and governance, including private sector structures fail to integrate young people's perspectives and leadership, we will perpetuate cycles of exclusion. We must be at the decision-making table, not as an afterthought, but as equal partners in shaping policies that impact our lives.

We are at a turning point. The actions we take—or fail to take—will echo for generations. We call upon governments, institutions, and global leaders to prioritize youth-led solutions, to invest in our potential, and to trust our vision for a sustainable future.

Because when young people are empowered, societies thrive. When we lead, the world moves forward. And when we are given the opportunity, we will not just inherit the future—we will transform it.

Ensuring Youth Voices Are Heard and Involved

Young people must not only be heard but must play an integral role in shaping the decisions making process that define our future. Our voices, ideas, and leadership are essential to accelerating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and ensuring a just, sustainable, and prosperous world for all. However, for this to happen, we need more than symbolic participation—we need structural change. We call for:

1. Youth-Inclusive Governance

Governments, international institutions, and decision-making bodies must institutionalize youth participation through permanent youth advisory boards, youth councils, and intergenerational decision-making frameworks that have an actual decisiveness. Policies that impact young people cannot be designed without us. We demand co-creation and shared leadership, where youth representatives are not just consulted but are active partners in shaping policies, programs, and global frameworks.

2. Dedicated Youth Financing Mechanisms

Young people are already driving innovative solutions to global challenges, yet they often lack access to the funding needed to scale their initiatives. We call for dedicated youth financing mechanisms, including youth-led grant programs, microfinance opportunities, and social impact investments that support youth activities and SDG-driven projects across sectors. Governments, development banks, and private investors must commit to unlocking financial resources that empower young changemakers.

3. Access to Skills and Employment Opportunities

The transition from education to employment remains a major challenge for young people worldwide. Governments and businesses must work together to develop education-to-employment pathways that align with the demands of the green and blue economies. By investing in technical training, digital literacy, and sustainable industry skills, we can equip young people with the tools needed to thrive in the jobs of the future—jobs that protect the planet and drive economic resilience.

4. Protection and Recognition of Youth Activists

Across the world, young people are at the forefront of movements for e.g. climate justice, gender equality, and decent work. Yet, many face political repression, economic retaliation, and even violence for their activism. We call for stronger protections for youth activists, including legal safeguards, access to resources, and the recognition of youth-led movements as vital to democratic progress. Our activism is not a threat—it is an asset that strengthens societies.

5. Stronger Youth Partnerships

Youth engagement must move beyond tokenism. True collaboration means that young leaders are given decision-making power, not just a seat at the table. We urge governments, international organizations, businesses, and civil society to foster multi-stakeholder partnerships that integrate youth leadership into governance structures, policy implementation, and global SDG efforts. Our generation is ready to lead and act—we need the space and support to do so.

Conclusion

The moment to act is now. Investing in children and youth's independence is not just a choice—it is essential to achieving the SDGs. If we are serious about creating a world that is inclusive, sustainable, and just, we must go beyond engaging young people in discussions;

we must empower them as leaders in driving solutions. The future should not be something young people merely inherit—it must be something they actively shape and act .

Accelerating progress on the SDGs is one of the greatest challenges of our time, and young people must be at the forefront of this mission. We are not simply requesting a seat at the table—we are already building our own. Now, we urge you to listen, to invest, and to work alongside us. A future that is fair, prosperous, and sustainable is within reach—but only if youth are genuinely included in shaping it.

The time is now. The choice is ours. Let's act—together.

Thank you.