



FACTSHEET

Meaningful Youth Engagement to Advance Global Change

Developed from “A future for the world’s children? A WHO–UNICEF–Lancet Commission” in *The Lancet*, Vol. 395, No. 10224 (2020), and 35+ *Supporters Guidelines* from the Sunrise Movement (n.d.).

More than half the world’s population is under the age of 30. Although children and youth are most vulnerable to the devastating effects of climate change, they are given little voice in the shape of their future. Decisions that affect their lives are made by caregivers, local leaders, governments, and heads of global corporations.

At the same time, **young people are frequently at the forefront of social change.** Youth around the world are organizing around issues that matter most to them – including sexual and reproductive rights, gun control, anti-racism, education, and climate change. Youth-led movements can challenge governments to implement environmentally- and socially-responsible programs and policy.

In 2015, countries around the world adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs aim to protect our planet from a dangerous and uncertain future, and to ensure that we deliver secure, fair, and healthy lives for future generations. The SDGs are intimately linked to young people’s health and wellbeing. A 2020 report from the World Health Organization, UNICEF, and medical journal *The Lancet* explores what’s to come for the world’s children and youth, arguing that **we need to ensure young people’s voices are being heard in order to build a more sustainable future.**

MEANINGFUL YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Meaningful youth engagement has many **benefits**:

- » Improved social cohesion
- » More egalitarian communities
- » Better informed, healthier, and more empowered transitions to adulthood

But there are also **challenges**:

- » Adultism, the notion that adults always know better than youth
- » Unwillingness or inability of overburdened local authorities to listen to youth
- » Tokenistic youth participation
- » Exclusion of the most marginalized youth
- » Weak adult facilitators

How can adults support youth engagement?

- » **Provide supports** for engagement, such as access to safe spaces and a credible audience that youth can influence.
- » **Adopt laws and policies** that provide youth with rights and opportunities for participation.
- » **Implement innovative approaches** to monitoring and evaluation, such as crowdsourcing via social media, photovoice, and community mapping, to support youth in measuring their own wellbeing.

BEYOND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT: ADULT ALLYSHIP

Adults can strive to become allies in youth-led change-making efforts. Adult allies support young people’s initiative and leadership, and share decision-making power with youth.

The Sunrise Movement, a youth-led political movement advocating for action on climate change, provides helpful guidelines for adults who want to be allies:

FIVE WAYS adults can become allies

01. Help with fundraising.
02. Amplify the movement’s message on social media.
03. Provide meeting space and housing.
04. Show up at actions, meetings, and events.
05. Use their networks to get others involved.

FOUR BEST PRACTICES for meaningful adult allyship

01. Talk to youth leaders about what support they need.
02. Be aware of adultism (the negative stereotyping of young people).
03. Make space for youth to share their ideas first.
04. Stay in the “now”, rather than recounting work from the distant past.