



# SDSN Youth submission to the Senate Inquiry on the Sustainable Development Goals

April 2018

## About SDSN Youth in Australia/Pacific

The UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network - Youth Initiative (SDSN Youth) is the youth-led division of the SDSN, a global network of knowledge institutions that mobilises scientific and technical expertise to promote practical problem solving for sustainable development, including the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDSN Youth engages with youth between the ages of 18-30 to create solutions to sustainable development challenges. We educate young people about the challenges of sustainable development and create opportunities for them to use their creativity and knowledge to pioneer innovative solutions for the SDGs. In addition, we create platforms for youth to connect, collaborate and integrate their ideas and perspectives into national and regional pathways for implementation of SDGs.

SDSN Youth Australia/Pacific is an initiative run by young people between the ages of 18-30, and sits under the auspices of the SDSN Australia/Pacific regional centre. We have undertaken a wide range of activities to engage young people in Australia around the SDGs, which include:

- Supporting the inclusion of young people in SDSN Australia/Pacific activities, including in the Australian SDGs Summits in 2016 and 2018.
- Providing national coordination for youth around the SDGs, including co-organising the 2016 [National Youth Summit on the SDGs](#). More recently we organised a Youth sector consultation towards [Australia's Voluntary National Review \(VNR\)](#), which was co-chaired with DFAT, and facilitated the collection of youth-related case studies for the VNR.
- Supporting the participation of young people in Australia in global SDSN Youth leadership programs, including Local Pathways Fellowship, Global Schools Program and the SDG Student Program.

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## Executive Summary

Sustainable development emphasises that the economic, social and political decisions we make today can prevent irreversibly detrimental effects. It highlights that the 'future generations', or today's youth, are essentially one of the main stakeholders affected by such detriments and have a vital role to play in contributing to the process of national and international sustainable development.

Youth participation in the economic, political and community life of the country can have profound consequences for development and social inclusion within society at large. Australian youth have displayed exceptional capability in volunteerism and activism. It has also been observed that young people display a greater level of early stage entrepreneurial intention and start-up activity compared to older generations. However, when we talk about the role of young people in achieving the SDGs, we often forget that they are not simply there to be creative and mobilize support. Youth are also incredibly skilled, and many of them



are already contributing to the 2030 Agenda through their actions and undertakings in educational programs, charity initiatives, research and enterprise.

Young people are one of the most well-equipped demographics for advancing the Sustainable Development Goals. Youth are naturally creative, idealistic, and ambitious, and willing to live through their values.

However, lack of resources, under-representation in governance systems, and exclusion from negotiations and decision-making processes have hindered the ability of young people to contribute to the agenda to their full potential.

SDSN Youth Australia/Pacific makes the following key statements and recommendations to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee:

- Youth advocacy, educational institutions and new technologies have an enormous potential to mobilise the community around local developmental and environmental priorities, enabling greater action on the SDGs.
- The SDGs should be formally integrated into the national educational curriculum.
- The Government should set up an inter-departmental initiative to establish a highly-efficient reporting mechanism with robust indicators. A collaborative platform between governments, civil society organisations and research organisations is crucial to consolidate resources towards establishing the reporting mechanism.
- The Government needs to take the lead in establishing an open data source to improve accountability and efficiency of SDG-related data between various government departments.
- With a very low level of youth representation in the political system in Australia, it is time for Australia to establish a Ministry of Youth Affairs to fill the vacuum of youth-based needs.
- The government should establish a national commission which conducts an annual review into Australia's progress on the SDGs.

## Response to selected Terms of Reference

Our report which is attached to this submission, "Challenges, Impacts and Benefits of Increased Youth Participation in Sustainable Development in Australia", lays out the circumstances of youth in Australia and their potential for impact on the SDGs. In light of this report, a number of recommendations are made with reference to the ToRs.

### a. **The understanding and awareness of the SDG across the Australian Government and in the wider Australian community**

Awareness of SDGs in the government and wider Australian community has much room for improvement.

#### **SDG awareness among Australian youth**

[AIESEC's 2016 YouthSpeak Living in Australia Report](#) found that only 29% of Australian young people knew of the SDGs.<sup>1</sup> When we consider the audience that this survey examined were likely to be people who are already somewhat interested and engaged in the sustainable development space, this statistic becomes more worrying.



### **SDG awareness across the Australian government**

SDSN Youth Australia/Pacific has had the opportunity to interact with government representatives at the local, state and federal levels through our various programs and activities. In our experience in the past, there has been a lack of widespread awareness among department leaders. There seems to be a large gap in terms of operationalising the SDGs, hence increasing awareness throughout government is critical. There also seems to be a perception amongst state and local levels that the responsibility of the SDGs rests predominantly on the Federal Government.

### **Recommendation: Education and curriculum integration**

Instead of the responsibility for awareness raising among government and the public resting just with the Federal Government, we strongly advocate for governments at every level, be it federal, state or local, to drive both internal and public awareness. This could involve focus on formal training in SDG awareness and implementation, a series of SDG-themed events for the general public and SDG policy implementation.

We believe educational institutions are instrumental mediums to create awareness of SDGs, particularly among youth. Schools and universities must rally behind the education of SDGs by integrating SDGs into the national curriculum.

- For example, launching a national SDG Day among schools and universities nationwide sends a strong message about the Australian Government's commitment to the SDGs.
- The [Global Schools Program](#) by SDSN Youth is one such initiative that is aimed at driving SDG awareness in schools. Some of these resources are currently operational, and can be scaled up or directed into high schools and/or universities.

## **b. The potential costs, benefits and opportunities for Australia in the domestic implementation of the SDGs**

### **Impacts on youth and future generations**

Failure to implement SDGs will have a significant impact on youth in terms of education quality, unemployment rate, widening gender inequality and rising energy prices. If left unchecked these may lead to vastly unfulfilled potential and worsened socioeconomic inequality, which may provide barriers to sustainable development. While this report cannot address the entire scope of potential costs, benefits and opportunities for Australian youth, we have provided a comprehensive assessment of SDG impacts on youth in Section 2 of our supplementary report.

### **Political representation of youth**

Underlying these issues is the lack of political representation among youth in current governance systems. The Commonwealth Secretariat and the Institute for Economics and Peace in the inaugural Australian Youth Development Index (YDI) reported that political participation among young people saw the largest jump with an increase of 7.5 per cent and civic involvement rose by 10 percent across Australia.<sup>2</sup> Australia also tops the Global Youth Wellbeing Index 2014 that focused on how this age group fuelled societal and governmental change around the globe in recent years.<sup>3</sup>

Despite Australian youth's substantial potential for contributing to political decisions, there has yet to be a channel for youth to be politically legitimised. The current Australian government has 42



ministers with an average age of 51. There is only 1 federal minister (2.3% of all ministers) below the age of 30.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that close to 9.1 million people (38.5%) out of the entire Australian population are below the age of 30.<sup>5</sup> This shows a major shortcoming in terms of youth representation in government.

Youth are well placed to advance SDG implementation at the highest level with their idealism, resourcefulness collaborative nature. Meaningful youth participation and leadership require young people and youth-led organisations to have an enabling environment and relevant programmes and policies. Realising young people's right to participate and be included in democratic processes and is also vital in ensuring the achievement of the SDGs.

**Recommendation: Ministry of Youth Affairs**

We call for the re-establishment of a Ministry of Youth Affairs to fill the political needs of youth. The functions of this ministry may include, but should not be limited to:

- Identifying gaps in SDG impacts, challenges and implementation for youth in Australia.
- Gathering youth input on the implementation and creation of national policies
- Working with a Future Generations Commission (as suggested by Oaktree) to facilitate a check-and-balance system in policy implementation.
- Assisting the Education Department to integrate SDG education in schools and universities.
- Supporting youth groups across advocacy, business, research and entrepreneurial sectors to aid in their achievement of SDG-oriented goals
- Providing financial and human resources to youth educational groups who implement the SDGs
- Reporting regularly in ensuring all stakeholders are held accountable in accordance with measures recommended in this report.

**c. What governance structures and accountability measures are required at the national, state and local levels of government to ensure an integrated approach to implementing the SDG that is both meaningful and achieves real outcomes**

**Current assessment**

A robust accountability system will be vital to successful implementation of the SDGs. However, there is currently no governance structure or accountability measures in place to assess SDG implementation across all levels of government. At the same time, our attached report has demonstrated that youth are heavily impacted by the SDGs, and have the potential to have a very significant contribution to SDG implementation. It is therefore important to harness young people's potential in ensuring integrated SDG implementation.

**Recommendation: Future Generations Commission**

Echoing Oaktree's recommendation in their submission to this Senate Inquiry, we strongly advocate for the establishment of a Future Generations Commission. The Commission functions to work independently to develop key areas for youth action. It organises grassroots effort led by the people to help identify gaps in SDG implementation especially pertaining to youth policies. At the same time, the Commission will work alongside the proposed Ministry of Youth Affairs and other partners to support data collection and rally support for policy implementation in preparing for



emerging trends. This commission ultimately ensures accountability and meaningfulness of national, state and local initiatives.

**Recommendation: Reporting Mechanism with Open-Source Platform**

We recommend a Government-driven reporting mechanism. In its first year, it should establish baselines and identify gaps and key areas for improvement by the different areas of the government. This can build on a [baseline report on Australian performance against the SDGs](#) that was collated by the National Sustainable Development Council, in partnership with the Monash Sustainable Development Institute and SDSN Australia/Pacific.

To facilitate this process, Government can establish a joint open-source data platform and share data pertaining to SDGs across departments. An open-source system encourages accountability and accelerates research efforts. This is followed by goal-setting and developing robust indicators to track progress. The Government can play a key role in conducting annual reviews to identify previously-unseen issues, drive progress and more importantly implement corrective measures to drive constant improvement.

- d. **How can performance against the SDG be monitored and communicated in a way that engages government, businesses and the public, and allows effective review of Australia’s performance by civil society;**

**Recommendation: National Commission for Annual SDG Review**

Data collected related to SDG indicators has to be presented in a comprehensive and engaging manner. A National Commission consisting of government officials, academia, businesses, civil society, youth and others can be established to conduct an Annual SDG Review. The Commission should publish a report that is publicly available. While functioning as a tool to update the stakeholders about SDG progress, an online platform could also allow for consistent data submission from a wide array of stakeholders.

**Youth Contribution**

Youth are capable of contributing to SDG monitoring and communication through:

- *Policy initiatives* – Youth can support local governments by discussing and presenting solutions for communities and regions. Incentivising young innovators to tackle specific topics can also serve as a more direct approach to achieving SDG targets at the local level.
- *Data collection* – Youth have the capacity to educate many demographics in society. Existing local youth organisations are a valuable resource in the collection process, especially for those working across multiple regions. In addition, building capacity for impact assessment could help youth organisations and social businesses become key contributors to broader data collection efforts under the SDG indicator framework, thereby actively participating in the monitoring initiative.



**h. Examples of best practice in how other countries are implementing the SDG from which Australia could learn;**

**Germany**

- Federal government commissioned the [German Sustainable Development Strategy](#).
- National-level strategy that developed framework for parliamentary review of SDG.
- Appointed Ministry Coordinators for Sustainable Development in all ministries.

**Denmark**

- Launched [Youth Leading the World 2030](#) focused on humanitarian action.
- Supports youth participation in deciding Denmark's future development.
- Recommends youth-focused strategies to operationalise and optimise SDG.

**Wales**

- [Future Generations Commission](#) that is legitimately sanctioned by the Government.
- Moves away from 'tick-box' approach to a long-term approach that delivers services.
- Build solid partnerships between key stakeholders and movements for change.

**References**

<sup>1</sup> AIESEC, YouthSpeak Insights: Living in Australia Youth Report, 2016

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<sup>2</sup> The Commonwealth Youth Programme, Australian Youth Development Index, 2016

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<sup>3</sup> Centre for Strategic International Studies, Global Youth Wellbeing Index, 2014

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<sup>4</sup> Australian Politics, The Ages Of The Turnbull Government Ministers, 2016

<http://australianpolitics.com/2016/04/10/the-ages-of-the-turnbull-government-ministers.html>

<sup>5</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, Five Year Age Groups, 2016

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