



## **Economic and Social Council**

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### **Commission for Social Development**

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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and  
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:  
priority theme: rethinking and strengthening social  
development in the contemporary world**

### **Statement submitted by Transdiaspora Network, Inc., a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

What does social innovation mean to all of us? Regardless of our ideology, religious beliefs, cultural upbringing, gender identity, or socioeconomic background, we all have the assumption that social innovation should be connected to re-imagining social systems, to re-imagining the Future with capital F. Yes, because we applied the concept of Big Revolutions to that Future with capital F, and Big Revolutions are matters of Big People. This sounds very exciting, no? However, we should not talk about Big Revolutions and Big People, but think about social innovation as a way to understand our youngest generation's local language and the context of their dreams and social challenges. Nowadays, young people are full of gigantic and difficult questions because they are exposed to a social reality that is a thousand times more complex than the reality of the 1945, when the United Nations was created and the statement "We the People ..." opened a new and brighter horizon for humankind.

The National Resource Center for Youth Development asserts that "in order for youth to be prepared to work in partnership with adults, they need to develop and/or enhance their leadership skills." An effective way to commit ourselves to this ideal is to reflect on the existing structure of NGOs and develop new approaches for more inclusive and sustainable environment.

As representatives of global civil society, we cannot apply the idea of social innovation in the development of youth in a vacuum. We must consider the different nuances of local cultures, either in the Global North or the Global South, and redirect our engagement with the business sector with a better understanding of the principles of Social Return on Investment (SROI).

Engaging with culture is closely aligned with participatory development methods, since it entails starting where young people are, respecting and recognizing their ability to decide and act on what changes are important in their lives. Engaging with culture means dialogue, working with channels of communication that are favoured and valued within their communities, working within the 'cultural logic' of those communities, supporting how they define their own solutions which may be adopted because those solutions work through rather than ignore or confound their understanding of the world.

"Future development cannot be imposed by a few elites at the top. Instead it will come from more knowledge exchanges with people connecting, engaging, challenging and innovating. Because of the global demographic dividend and almost ubiquitous connectivity there are now many more global citizens that can participate in such development debates." Following this World Bank statement, there is a strategic urgency to put in place appropriate policies which take advantage of the "demographic dividend" for most countries and to promote investments in human capital, especially in young people, as one of the mechanisms for growth. As a result, NGOs that promote youth access to quality education, youth capacity building programs and proactive youth leadership roles in a multi-dimensional and cross-sectional way are not only going to secure an organic succession from one generation to the next, but are also going to benefit from a healthier youth population, better educational outcomes and fewer economic pressures at home.

"Every SDG requires youth action for success. With 1.8 billion youth, they are a demographic that cannot be ignored. Youth have expressed their voices and taken action — in most cases more than any other age groups, as we have seen from the

more than 6 million youth votes on MyWorld. Without youth, the SDGs cannot succeed” (Ravi Karkara & Doug Ragan, 2015).

As stressed in the 2015 Commission for Social Development Resolution on Policies and Programmes involving Youth, the full and effective participation of youth as civil society representatives is essential to implementing the World Programme of Action for Youth and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The theme of this year’s International Youth Day was ‘Youth Civic Engagement.’ The engagement and participation of youth is essential to achieve sustainable human development. Yet often the opportunities for youth to engage politically, economically and socially are low or non-existent. The UN Secretary-General stated during this year’s ECOSOC Youth Forum: “In this landmark year, as leaders prepare to adopt a bold new vision for sustainable development, the engagement of youth is more valuable than ever. At this critical moment in history, I call on young people to demand and foster the dramatic progress so urgently needed in our world.”

Finally, I would like to give you two quick examples of how the Transdiaspora Network, a social enterprise organization is securing the successful implementation of the SDGs.

Firstly, our organization will be engaged in different local partnerships to translate the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from a UN-centred document to more youth-friendly language. These collaborations will allow us to improve the long-term strategy on how national governments and the civil society sector effectively engage the youngest generation from low-income neighbourhoods/villages in the implementation and fulfilment of this new people-oriented global agenda for development.

Secondly, our team is currently promoting the implementation of the TDN Cross-cultural Youth Coalition™ via partnerships with UN State Members and other regional/local civil society stakeholders to mobilize all available resources in a spirit of global solidarity with one of the most vulnerable section of the population: youth. The Cross-cultural Youth Coalition (CYC) is a collaborative initiative to be developed and implemented in 2015-2016 Fiscal Year under the framework of the newly adopted SDGs, and has been presented as a concrete way to foster global solidarity in the area of youth capacity building and bridge the existing gap to support sub-national alternative health promotion projects.

Although the world has seen remarkable progress under the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Member States and all stakeholders need to adapt to the changing populations of youth and cultural entities in order for Agenda 2030 to succeed. This will not only require engaging youth and building their capacity to participate as leaders in their governments and institutions in order to successfully serve their communities, but will also rely on developing sustainable cross-cultural and international networks for this to happen. As stated before, the United Nations is developing a new paradigm for cooperation among Member States and other stakeholders. However, we the people (which means we, the NGOs) should embrace social innovation as the new shifting paradigm to bring young people’s voice with their endless network of solutions yet to be discovered. Let us bring them to the forefront of this ambitious, challenging and futuristic endeavour from cross-generational thinking. To paraphrase Ted Turner: if all of us proactively bring in young people now, the would-be leaders of 2030 are going to realize soon that our planet is the address of a sustainable paradise.