



YOUTH

ADVOCACY

FOR
GENUINE YOUTH
PARTICIPATION
**IN HIGH-
LEVEL EVENTS**

UNESCO
www.unesco.org

About Coordination SUD est la coordination nationale des organisations françaises de solidarité internationale (OSI).

Coordination SUD is the national coordination body for French international solidarity organizations (ISOs).

Founded in 1994, it currently brings together over 170 ISOs, including about 100 through six collective association networks (CLONG-Volontariat, Cnajep, Coordination Humanitaire et Développement, CRID, Forim, Groupe Initiatives).

Members of Coordination SUD engage in emergency humanitarian actions, development assistance, environmental protection, and human rights advocacy for disadvantaged populations in France and internationally. They also conduct education initiatives to promote global citizenship and international solidarity, alongside advocacy efforts.

Coordination SUD undertakes four main missions:

- Advocacy and promotion of ISOs
- Support and capacity building for French ISOs
- Monitoring and analysis of the international solidarity sector
- Representation of collective positions to public and private institutions in France, Europe, and globally

Coordination Sud YOUTH AND INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY COMMISSION (JSI)

The JSI Commission of Coordination SUD was established in 2017 and brings together about forty youth and popular education organizations, as well as international solidarity groups operating in France and/or internationally.

Member organizations include:

Action Contre la Faim, Aide et Action, YMCA France, ATD Quart Monde, CCFD-Terre Solidaire, Éducasol, Scouts et Guides de France, Secours Catholique-Caritas France, Terre des Hommes, and many others.

The JSI Commission's common goal is to ensure that youth are active agents of social, political, and economic change, rather than mere beneficiaries of policies and programs that concern them.

This document was written by Plan International France on behalf of and with contributions from the JSI Commission of Coordination SUD.

Several young collaborators who work with member organizations enriched this document with their feedback. We extend our heartfelt thanks to them: Nguépellbé Tokinon, Basile Ouedraogo, Marie Goasampis, Nicolas Paris, and others.

Introduction

Why is authentic youth participation important, especially in high-level events, and what does it mean?

The 2015-2030 Agenda recognizes the critical role that youth can play in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that states have collectively committed to. However, youth remain underrepresented in high-level events related to this agenda. When they are included, their roles are often limited to that of observers.

Authentic youth participation in high-level events requires that young people—notably in all their diversity—be able to fully express their voices, contribute to debates, and develop recommendations within institutionalized dialogues with decision-makers, rather than being mere witnesses.

This level of participation demands a paradigm shift regarding the place of youth in society, acknowledging them as drivers of social, economic, and political transformation. Youth must be recognized for their diverse experiences, including differences in age, gender, socio-economic status, geography, disabilities, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Given the future they will face and their unique generational experiences, youth should be regarded as legitimate actors in decision-making spaces.

This transformation primarily depends on political will. However, political will alone is not enough to achieve authentic youth participation or intergenerational dialogue in high-level events. Numerous factors must be considered before, during, and after such events.

This document aims to share these considerations with decision-makers seeking to ensure genuine youth participation and with civil society organizations (CSOs) that may support youth in this endeavor. These recommendations, drawn from practical experience, apply broadly to events involving youth but are especially crucial for high-level events due to their stakes and participant profiles. We are convinced that addressing these considerations will enhance youth participation and enrich decision-making processes on sustainable development and inequality reduction through intergenerational dialogue.

1. By 'high-level' we mean events, at both national and international level, attended by political decision-makers (heads of state and government, ministers, secretaries of state, members of parliament, etc.) or high-ranking individuals (ambassadors, directors of government departments, development agencies, UN agencies, major companies and foundations, etc.) at which decisions and strategic guidelines are discussed and adopted. Examples include major international summits (United Nations General Assembly, Human Rights Council, Commission on the Status of Women, G7, G20, Generation Equality Forum, Cop, etc.) and national bodies such as the Comité interministériel de la coopération internationale et du développement (Cicid) or the Conseil national pour le développement et la solidarité internationale (Cndsi).

1 | KEY CONSIDERATIONS BEFORE THE EVENT

Right from the design stage:

- 1 Include young people in the organising committee right from the design stage of the event, informing them of the context, issues, format and objectives of the event and taking account of their points of view and constraints in drawing up the agenda, taking care to involve them sufficiently early on and over a period that is not too long.
- 2 Encourage genuine participation by young people, i.e. be prepared to let them express their expectations and recommendations to the decision-makers present, and include a deadline for their feedback in the agenda.
- 3 Provide a budget to encourage genuine participation by young people, including their presence at the event venue at least two days before the event to allow time for rest and preparation; also provide for any translation costs so that language is not a barrier to their participation, as well as the costs of accompanying persons if necessary.
- 4 Designate a contact person within the event's organising committee who can guarantee the genuine participation of young people in the event. This person could, if necessary, draw on skills relating to the commitment of young people in their diversity, high-level events and the theme being addressed, so that he or she can best take charge of the selection and support process for the young person(s) before, during and after the event.

1. Selecting the Youth Participants

Draft clear Terms of Reference (ToR) for youth participation in the event and share them with potential youth participants and youth organizations.

These ToR should include accessible information about the event's context, objectives, structure, participants, the expected profile and role of the youth participants, their contributions, and the support (including financial, if necessary) that will be provided before, during, and after their participation. Emphasize the importance of diversity (see below) and the complementarity of profiles and experiences, ensuring that selected youth participants are relevant to the event's theme and capable of contributing meaningfully to discussions.

The ToR will serve as a basis for discussions with youth participants and youth organizations involved in the selection process. A mutual agreement should be reached with youth participants regarding their precise roles in the event.

Selection process

Prioritize the participation of young individuals who are members of youth organizations (formal or informal) so they can act as representatives of their communities during the event. Involve these organizations in pre-selecting participants who best match the desired profile outlined in the ToR. Avoid always selecting the same individuals, and provide opportunities for less experienced youth to engage.

Diversity of Youth Participants:

Adopt an inclusive approach to ensure the participation of youth in all their diversity, including differences in age, social, economic, and geographic backgrounds, ethnicity, and more. Special attention should be given to include: girls and young women, youth from disadvantaged or underprivileged backgrounds, less educated youth, youth with disabilities, those from rural areas, crisis contexts, or marginalized communities, young parents.

Avoid favoring the most media-visible voices or repeatedly offering participation opportunities to the same individuals.

Financial support

Ensure the financial coverage of expenses for youth participants and any accompanying persons (travel, accommodation, meals, translation, etc.). If speakers are compensated for their participation, youth speakers should also be remunerated for their time and expertise.

2. Preparing the Selected Youth Participants

Ensure the protection of youth participants by implementing a protocol before, during, and after the event.

Event organizers must prioritize the safety and well-being of youth participants by establishing and enforcing a safeguarding protocol throughout the event². All stakeholders, including the youth participants, their parents, and organizers, must be informed of and agree to the terms of this protocol.

2. A safeguarding policy refers to the responsibility to protect children and young people from any form of harm that could affect their safety, integrity or dignity. The aim is to ensure that no child or young person is subjected to any form of harm as a result of their participation in an event or their association with an NGO. To find out more: Plan International's child and youth protection policy.



Key safeguarding Rules include :

- Do not share personal information, data, or images of youth participants outside the event without explicit consent, including parental or guardian approval if necessary.
- Establish mechanisms, with youth input, for reporting inappropriate behaviors.
- Ensure any shared images or videos of youth adhere to safeguarding and ethical standards, avoiding stereotypes.
- Develop and require participants and partners to sign a code of conduct that prohibits discrimination, abuse, harassment, or inappropriate language or actions.

For online events, additional safeguards must include³:

- Identifying potential risks related to the use of images, videos, private conversations, and shared information.
- Equipping youth participants with the necessary tools and knowledge to navigate the platform and adhere to its guidelines, including codes of conduct and reporting mechanisms.
- Protecting participants from exposure to inappropriate content during the event.
- Guaranteeing data security, including safeguarding participants' personal details (names, addresses, passwords).

3. International France's child protection policy for online events.

Ensure appropriate event information and communication

- Share information, preparatory documents, and the agenda as early as possible, in multiple languages if necessary.
- Simplify preparatory documents to make the topics more accessible to youth⁴. Avoid jargon or, at the very least, explain it (provide a glossary of key technical terms, acronyms, and abbreviations).
- Plan a dedicated exchange session to present the issues, participants, and other speakers, as well as the event's structure, expectations for youth participation, potential benefits for the youth, and to address their questions while identifying their expectations and support needs.
- Whenever possible, ensure that youth participants can engage with the moderator of their panel and other speakers prior to the event. Facilitate their preparation by involving a third-party actor, such as an association, to support them.
- Assist in advance with the preparation of social media publications for youth participants who wish to share content on their networks.

Capacity-Building for Youth Participants

- **Identify youth support needs** during an initial interview to tailor the preparation process ;
- **Offer training** in advocacy, leadership, and/or communication to equip youth with the tools they need to participate effectively and influence discussions.
- **Assist youth** in reviewing their key messages (without censorship), preparing their interventions, and rehearsing before the event. This ensures clarity, adherence to time limits, and respect for speaking codes in high-level forums.
- **Encourage peer networking** among youth participants, enabling them to share experiences, reinforce each other's capacities, and collaborate on collective actions before the event.

4. An example of a popularisation tool designed for young people ahead of the Beijing +25 process: 'Beijing +25 Toolkit'.

Collecting Youth Expectations and Proposals⁵

- **Gather youth expectations and ideas** related to the event, integrating them into the agenda and format whenever possible.
- **Help youth set objectives** for their participation, such as speaking during a plenary, meeting specific delegations, or covering the event on social media.
- **Identify spaces** (e.g., social media or specific discussions) where youth contributions can be highlighted and amplified.
- **Ensure equal speaking time** and encourage two-way conversations so that youth can debate with decision-makers and propose solutions.
- **Plan for accountability mechanisms** to inform youth participants about the decisions made during or after the event and the extent to which their recommendations were considered.

Logistical Considerations

- **Provide resources** to enable youth to participate virtually, especially in rural or underserved areas. This could include internet packages, access to smartphones or computers, and training on video conferencing software if necessary.
- **Develop accessible tools and communication methods** in local languages to ensure broader inclusion.
- **Ensure the event platform** supports translations and is user-friendly to include as many youth participants as possible.

5. See, for example, the following tools and experiences that have made it possible to gather and make young people's priorities heard at a high level: 'Setting the Agenda: Girls Platform for Action' as part of Beijing + 25; a broad consultation of young people from West and Central Africa facilitated by the MEAE ahead of the ministerial meeting on education and development in July 2019, as part of the G7 under the French Presidency, and the participation of their spokespersons in a high-level dialogue: <https://www.plan-international.fr/news/2019-07-18-g7-young-africa-leaders-from-the-west-and-centre-mobilise-for-education>

2 | POINTS TO BEAR IN MIND DURING THE EVENT

Structuring and Organizing the Event

- Pair inexperienced youth participants with those who have experience in similar events to provide mentorship.
- Hold regular check-ins with youth during the event to ensure they are comfortable, understand the discussions, and have opportunities to express themselves.
- Ensure moderators allocate sufficient speaking time to youth and avoid interrupting them, allowing them to fully present their priorities.
- Minimize presentations and maximize interactive discussions, activities, and group conversations.
- Introduce youth speakers in the same manner as expert participants (biographies, formal address, seating arrangements, etc.), while respecting safeguarding policies such as not sharing their last names unless agreed upon.
- Adopt transformative actions that directly address youth rights and needs, especially for marginalized groups or those in humanitarian contexts.
- Facilitate informal exchanges between youth participants and decision-makers.

Logistic

- Offer to film the event so that it can be broadcast and followed;
- Provide communication support, including taking photos for their social networks if they so wish;
- Provide any necessary translation, including for more informal occasions.

Application of the safeguarding protocol

3 | POINTS TO CONSIDER AFTER THE EVENT

Communication

- Diversify communication tools by incorporating audiovisual formats to share youth experiences.
- Highlight youth messages through various communication platforms.

Debriefing and Experience Sharing

Conduct a debrief with youth participants to:

- Evaluate what worked, identify areas for improvement, and assess the achievement of their objectives.
- Understand whether youth gained new skills, evolved their perspectives, or built new connections with other youth groups or decision-makers.
- Ensure their safety and well-being in the days following the event, confirming they have not been subject to inappropriate behavior.
- Organize sessions where youth can share their experiences with their organizations or other young people, inspiring further engagement.

Accountability and Follow-Up

- Share event summaries with youth participants, including decisions made and how their recommendations were addressed.
- Maintain connections among participants, possibly organizing follow-up meetings to track progress on commitments made during the event.