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United Nations Development Programme Background Guide 2025

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NATIONAL MODEL UNITED NATIONS

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Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 2025 National Model United Nations Washington DC Conference (NMUN•DC)! We are pleased to introduce to you our committee, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Your committee's work is facilitated by volunteer staff. This year's committee staff are Director Malana Homan-Hepner and Assistant Director Jessica Mansour. Malana Homan-Hepner is a quadruple major in Political Science, International Science, History and Economics. She is currently interning for the United States House of Representatives and Duane Morris Governmental Strategies. Jessica Mansour studied Political Science, concentrating on International Relations, and now works for Amazon AGI, training AI using ethical and honesty standards. The preparation of these materials was supported by Under-Secretary-General, Kenny Nguyen, and Secretary-General, Alliyah Edwards.

The topics on the agenda for this committee are:

1. Minimizing and Addressing the Impacts of Ocean Acidification
2. Youth Engagement in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The United Nations Development Programme is the United Nations lead development agency, working in 170+ countries to eradicate poverty, reduce inequalities, and build resilience through integrated support for the Sustainable Development Goals. Governed by a 36-member Executive Board and funded by voluntary contributions, UNDP delivers policy advice, technical assistance, and capacity building across governance, inclusive growth, climate action, and crisis recovery, guided by its Strategic Plan 2022-2025.

This Background Guide serves as an introduction to the topics for this committee. However, it is not intended to replace individual research. We encourage you to explore your Member State's policies in depth and use the bibliography to further your knowledge on these topics. In preparation for the conference, each delegation should submit their Position Papers by 11:59 p.m. (DC Time) on 15 October in accordance with the guidelines in the [Position Paper Guide](#) and the [DC Position Papers page](#).

Two resources, available to download from the NMUN website, serve as essential instruments in preparing for the Conference and as a reference during committee sessions:

- The [NMUN Delegate Preparation Guide](#), which explains each step in the delegate process, from pre-conference research to the committee debate and resolution drafting processes. Please take note of the information on plagiarism and the prohibition on pre-written working papers and resolutions.
- The [NMUN Rules of Procedure](#), which includes the long and short form of the rules, as well as an explanatory narrative and example script of the flow of procedure.

In addition, please review the mandatory [NMUN Conduct Expectations](#) on the NMUN website. They include the conference dress code and other expectations of all attendees. We want to emphasize that any instances of sexual harassment or discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, or disability will not be tolerated. If you have any questions concerning your preparation for this committee, please contact Under-Secretary-General Kenny Van Nguyen at usgkenny.dc@nmun.org or the Secretary-General, Alliyah Edwards at secgen.dc@nmun.org.

We wish you all the best in your preparations and look forward to seeing you at the Conference!

Malana Homan-Hepner, Director
Jessica Mansour Assistant Director



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Committee Overview

Introduction

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) draws its purpose from Article 55 of the Charter of the United Nations (1945), which outlines that the organization should promote “higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development.”¹ UNDP is the leading United Nations agency on sustainable development and assists Member States with achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) (2015).²

Mandate, Function, and Powers

As the lead United Nations agency on international development, UNDP’s core mandate is to “end poverty, build democratic governance, rule of law, and inclusive institutions.”³ As articulated in its *Strategic Plan 2022-2025* (2021), UNDP structures its work through a “3 x 6 x 3” framework, comprising three directions of change, six signature solutions it can provide to partners, and three enablers to allow these solutions to be effective.⁴ The directions of change, which are (1) structural transformation, (2) leaving no one behind, and (3) resilience, serve as areas of focus for UNDP to support Member States towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.⁵ Its signature solutions are poverty and inequality, governance, resilience, environment, energy, and gender equality.⁶ These signature solutions are predicated on and can be scaled up by three enablers, which are development financing, strategic innovation, and digitalization.⁷

While the following list is not exhaustive, UNDP’s mandate can be summarized as:

- UNDP will **generally**: support country-led efforts to achieve the SDGs with its projects and programs; work with governments to identify funding, investment, and partnership opportunities for programs focused on development; support Member States to develop their governance structures, institutional capacities, and legislative approaches; provide data and analysis to Member States; develop and foster partnerships between local, national, and international actors;

¹ United Nations Development Programme. *About us*. 2024; United Nations Conference on International Organization. *Charter of the United Nations*. 1945. art. 55.

² United Nations Development Programme. *The SDGs in Action*. 2024; United Nations Development Programme. *About Us*. 2024.

³ United Nations Development Programme. *About Us*. 2024.

⁴ United Nations Development Programme. *United Nations Development Programme Annual Report 2022. 2023*. p. 7.

⁵ Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Office for Project Services. *UNDP Strategic Plan, 2022-2025 (DP/2021/28)*. 2021. p. 7.

⁶ United Nations Development Programme. *United Nations Development Programme Annual Report 2022. 2023*. p. 7.

⁷ Ibid.



make recommendations to and coordinate with Member States, regional bodies, and other international actors on the achievement of the SDGs.⁸

- UNDP **will not generally**: direct Member States, non-governmental organizations, other United Nations agencies, and stakeholders to carry out specific development activities or actions; create new development frameworks or policies that do not align with those adopted by the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council; work on areas not covered by its *Strategic Plan 2022-2025*.⁹

Governance, Funding, and Structure

UNDP reports annually to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).¹⁰ Its leadership consists of an Administrator and an Executive Board.¹¹ The Administrator leads a team of five Regional Bureaus and provides support to other Bureaus, such as the Bureau for External Relations and Advocacy and the Crisis Bureau, to carry out UNDP's programs.¹² In addition, the Administrator also acts as the Vice-Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, which is the United Nations system's high-level forum for policy coordination on sustainable development and includes other United Nations entities focusing on sustainable development.¹³

The Executive Board oversees all of UNDP's projects, approves budgets, and ensures that projects adapt to changing situations and the unique needs of each Member State.¹⁴ The Executive Board consists of 36 rotating Member States from five geographic groups: eight from the group of African states, seven from the group of Asia-Pacific states, four from the group of Eastern European states, five from the group of Latin America and the Caribbean states, and 12 from the group of Western European and other States.¹⁵ Member States of the Executive Board are elected by ECOSOC each year for three-year terms.¹⁶ Only the group of Western European and other States decides on its rotation internally.¹⁷ The Executive Board holds three sessions each year: one annual session and two regular sessions, typically held in New York City.¹⁸ UNDP shares its Executive Board with the United Nations Populations Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS).¹⁹

⁸ Ibid.; Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Office for Project Services. *UNDP Strategic Plan, 2022-2025 (DP/2021/28)*. 2021.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ United Nations Development Programme. *Information Note About The Executive Board Of UNDP, UNFPA And UNOPS*. 2024.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² United Nations Development Programme. *Leadership*. 2024; United Nations Development Programme. *2024 Organizational Chart*. 2024.

¹³ United Nations Sustainable Development Group. *Who We Are*. 2024.

¹⁴ United Nations Development Programme. *Information Note About The Executive Board Of UNDP, UNFPA And UNOPS*. 2024; United Nations Development Programme. *Executive Board*. 2024.

¹⁵ United Nations Development Programme. *Executive Board*. 2024; United Nations Development Programme. *Members of the Executive Board*. 2024.

¹⁶ United Nations Development Programme. *Executive Board*. 2024.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ United Nations Development Programme. *Reports on Sessions*. 2024.

¹⁹ United Nations Development Programme. *Executive Board*. 2024.



UNDP's work is carried out by its offices in different Member States, which are focused on helping governments develop policies, institutional abilities, leadership skills, and resilience to achieve poverty eradication and reduce inequalities.²⁰ UNDP also administers and utilizes the United Nations Volunteers program and the United Nations Capital Development Fund to support its work for sustainable development.²¹ Similarly, UNDP works with prominent individuals as Goodwill Ambassadors and Advocates to raise awareness on important global development issues.²²

To achieve its mandate, UNDP relies entirely on voluntary contributions from Member States, multilateral organizations, the private sector, and other sources.²³ Its budget is segmented into core resources, which are unrestricted and can be used for its day-to-day operations, and earmarked contributions, which can only be used for specific themes, programmes or projects.²⁴ In 2023, the total annual contributions to UNDP increased slightly by 1% to \$5 billion from \$4.9 billion the year before.²⁵ Roughly three quarters of its financial resources come from donor countries and multilateral institutions.²⁶

²⁰ United Nations Development Programme. *About Us*. 2024.

²¹ New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. *United Nations Handbook 2024-2025*. 2024. p. 8.

²² United Nations Development Programme. *Goodwill Ambassadors and Advocates*. 2024.

²³ United Nations Development Programme. *Funding*. 2024.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ United Nations Development Programme. *Funding Compendium 2023*. 2024. p. 5.

²⁶ Ibid. p. 11.



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1. Minimizing and Addressing the Impacts of Ocean Acidification

Introduction

Covering over 70% of earth's surface, oceans regulate climate, cycle nutrients, provide food, sustain biodiversity, and support the livelihoods of over three billion people globally.²⁷ One of their most critical climate functions is acting as a carbon sink, absorbing nearly 30% of anthropogenic carbon dioxide (CO₂).²⁸ CO₂ emissions resulting from human activities such as burning fossil fuels, deforestation, and industrial processes, which helps buffer the full extent of atmospheric warming.²⁹ However, absorption triggers a chemical chain reaction that reduces seawater potential of hydrogen (pH), which is a phenomenon known as ocean acidification (OA). OA is a growing threat to marine ecosystems, economic stability, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set out in General Assembly resolution 70/1 “*Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*” (2015).³⁰ Ocean surface acidity has increased by nearly 26% and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) projects a further pH decline of 0.3 to 0.4 units by 2100 if current CO₂ emissions persist.³¹

Seemingly, small change represents a significant alteration in marine chemistry.³² As CO₂ dissolves in seawater, it forms carbonic acid and dissociates into bicarbonate and hydrogen ions, thereby decreasing the availability of carbonate ions needed by calcifying organisms to form shell skeletons.³³ Coral reefs, home to nearly 25% of all marine species, experience increased bleaching and structural collapse, due to acidification compounded by warming and pollution.³⁴ Loss of reef ecosystems endangers biodiversity and undermines coastal protection, tourism, and fisheries for millions of people's dependencies, particularly in small island developing states (SIDS) and low-income coastal communities.³⁵

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), global fisheries and aquaculture industries generate over USD \$400 billion annually and provide primary protein sources for more than one billion people, particularly in the Global South.³⁶ Shellfish industries, valued at over USD \$10 billion, are particularly vulnerable, as increasing acidity hinders shell formation and reduces harvest yields.³⁷ Impacts

²⁷ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *The Ocean and Climate Change: Solutions and Actions*. 2023.

²⁸ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. *Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate*. 2019.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. *What is Ocean Acidification?*. 2022.

³¹ Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO. *Global Ocean Acidification Observing Network (GOA-ON) Annual Report*. 2023.

³² Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. *Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate*. 2019.

³³ Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO. *Global Ocean Acidification Observing Network (GOA-ON) Annual Report*. 2023.

³⁴ United Nations Environment Programme. *Impacts of Ocean Acidification on Coastal Communities*. 2021.

³⁵ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture Report*. 2022.

³⁶ Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme. *Arctic Ocean Acidification 2018: Summary for Policy-Makers*. 2018.

³⁷ United Nations Environment Programme. *Impacts of Ocean Acidification on Coastal Communities*. 2021.



disproportionately affect those reliant on marine resources, such as Indigenous communities, small-scale fishers, and subsistence economies.³⁸

The Arctic West Coast of the United States of America is experiencing accelerated acidification due to colder waters, which absorb CO₂ more efficiently, further heightening vulnerability for communities dependent on marine species for food and cultural practices.³⁹ The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) recognizes ocean acidification as a climate development challenge intersecting with biodiversity loss, food insecurity, poverty, and inequality.⁴⁰ Through initiatives such as Ocean Promise, which integrates ocean health into national policies; Climate Promise, which strengthens ocean-based actions in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs); and biodiversity adaptation portfolios targeting ecosystem resilience, UNDP supports Member States in mitigating ocean acidification and accessing climate finance.⁴¹

By promoting equitable ocean governance, defined by UNDP as inclusive management and fair resource distribution, and nature-based solutions (NBS), which use ecosystems to tackle environmental challenges, UNDP ensures oceans remain central to sustainable development, especially for vulnerable communities.⁴² As the international community advances the goals of the *Paris Agreement* (2015) and the 2030 Agenda, addressing ocean acidification is critical to marine conservation, climate justice, and economic resilience.⁴³ The *Paris Agreement* focuses on reducing greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) to limit global warming, while the 2030 Agenda includes SDG 14.3 on “minimizing and addressing the impacts of ocean acidification” through international scientific cooperation.⁴⁴ With time-sensitive thresholds approaching, organizations such as the IPCC have emphasized the urgent need for coordinated scientific, financial, and policy action.⁴⁵

International and Regional Framework

Ocean acidification is addressed through a range of international and regional frameworks that target emissions reduction, ocean governance, and scientific cooperation, with UNDP supporting their implementation by providing policy guidance, financing access, and technical assistance.⁴⁶ At the global level, the *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea* (UNCLOS) (1982) provides the legal

³⁸ Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO. *Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021–2030) Implementation Plan*. 2021.

³⁹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015.

⁴⁰ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture Report*. 2022.

⁴¹ United Nations Environment Programme. *Impacts of Ocean Acidification on Coastal Communities*. 2021.

⁴² World Bank. *Blue Economy and Sustainable Ocean Finance Report*. 2022.

⁴³ United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015.

⁴⁴ Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. *Paris Agreement*. 2015.

⁴⁵ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. *Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate (IPCC/SROCC/2019)*. 2019.

⁴⁶ United Nations General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015.



foundation for marine governance.⁴⁷ Article 192 of UNCLOS recognizes the general obligation of Member States to protect and preserve the marine environment, including from pollution caused by anthropogenic CO₂.⁴⁸ UNCLOS encourages cooperative measures of national responsibility to address ocean degradation, including acidification-related impacts on marine biodiversity ecosystems.⁴⁹

The *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (UNFCCC) (1992) and its partially legally binding extension, the *Paris Agreement*, serve as key instruments for addressing ocean acidification by requiring states to submit and update nationally determined contributions, though the emission reduction targets remain non-enforceable under international law.⁵⁰ The *Paris Agreement* calls on Member States to pursue efforts to limit global warming to well below 2°C, ideally to 1.5°C.⁵¹ As CO₂ is the primary driver of acidification, climate goals are inherently linked to ocean health.⁵² The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) also acknowledges the severe implications of acidification for marine biodiversity.⁵³ Its *Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework* calls for actions to promote ecosystem resilience, including integrating ocean acidification adaptation strategies into national conservation plans.⁵⁴

UNDP aligns with this approach by working with governments to embed marine resilience into biodiversity finance ecosystem-based adaptation frameworks, particularly in SIDS and Least Developed Member States (LDCs).⁵⁵ The 2030 Agenda reinforces global commitments through SDG 14.3, on “minimizing and addressing the impacts of ocean acidification”, as highlighted in the *2024 SDG Report*, noting continued acidification with ocean pH now 30% more acidic than pre-industrial levels.⁵⁶ SDG 14 (life below water) is central to UNDP's Ocean Promise initiative and supports Member States in protecting marine ecosystems, advancing sustainable blue economies, and meeting SDG targets.⁵⁷ Additionally, SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation) and SDG 13 (climate action) intersect with acidification mitigation by emphasizing pollution control and emission reductions.⁵⁸ These goals serve as a guiding framework for nations to incorporate ocean health into broader sustainability efforts.⁵⁹

⁴⁷ United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea. *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea*. 1982.

⁴⁸ United Nations, Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (DOALOS). *Marine Pollution: Addressing CO₂ Emissions Under UNCLOS*. 2022.

⁴⁹ United Nations Environment Programme. *The Role of UNCLOS in Sustainable Marine Management*. 2021.

⁵⁰ Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. *Paris Agreement*. 2015.

⁵¹ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. *Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate*. 2019.

⁵² United Nations Climate Change Secretariat. *The Paris Agreement: Essential Climate Action Goals*. 2021.

⁵³ Convention on Biological Diversity. *Global Biodiversity Outlook 5*. 2020.

⁵⁴ United Nations Development Programme. *Biodiversity and Climate Change Adaptation: Integrating Ocean Acidification Strategies into National Policies*. 2021.

⁵⁵ Convention on Biological Diversity. *Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework: Final Draft*. 2022.

⁵⁶ United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015.

⁵⁷ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Sustainable Development Goal 14: Life Below Water – Progress Report 2022*. 2022.

⁵⁸ United Nations Environment Programme. *Freshwater and Ocean Health: Addressing Land-Based Pollution to Reduce Ocean Acidification*. 2021.

⁵⁹ United Nations Development Programme. *Integrating Ocean Acidification Mitigation into National Sustainability Strategies*. 2021.

Regional frameworks complement international agreements by tailoring policies to local oceanographic conditions and governance structures.⁶⁰ The *Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic*, commonly known as the OSPAR Convention, addresses acidification in the North-East Atlantic by promoting regional monitoring efforts and coordinated mitigation actions among its contracting parties.⁶¹ The Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) similarly addresses pollution acidification risks in the Baltic Sea, advancing research ecosystem-based management strategies.⁶² The *Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean*, commonly known as the Barcelona Convention, under the United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP), emphasizes pollution control and marine conservation in the Mediterranean Sea, a region already experiencing accelerated acidification.⁶³

Role of the International System

Addressing ocean acidification requires coordinated action from the international system involving intergovernmental organizations, scientific bodies, and financial institutions.⁶⁴ Among these, UNDP is leading by helping Member States incorporate ocean acidification mitigation and adaptation into their national development strategies.⁶⁵ Through policy guidance, capacity building, and access to climate finance, UNDP ensures marine resilience is not an afterthought, but a core component of sustainable development planning.⁶⁶ UNDP supports Member States in developing and implementing National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and NDCs, integrating ocean acidification as a key climate risk.⁶⁷ For example, UNDP spearheaded a four-year initiative to embed climate change adaptation, specifically in marine coastal zones, into national and subnational governance.⁶⁸ Those efforts help governments align their development priorities with international environmental goals, such as the *Paris Agreement* and the 2030 Agenda, particularly SDG target 14.3, which explicitly targets ocean acidification.⁶⁹ UNDP also champions ecosystem-based adaptation (EBA), which uses biodiversity and natural systems to build climate resilience by working with governments and local communities to restore and protect marine habitats such as mangroves, seagrasses, and coral reefs, which help buffer coastal areas and support livelihoods vulnerable to ocean acidification.⁷⁰

⁶⁰ United Nations Environment Programme. *Regional Approaches to Ocean Governance and Acidification Monitoring*. 2020.

⁶¹ Commission for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic. *Strategy for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic*. 2022.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Helsinki Commission. *Baltic Sea Action Plan and Ocean Acidification Risk Mitigation*. 2021.

⁶⁴ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. *Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate*. 2019.

⁶⁵ United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015.

⁶⁶ United Nations Environment Programme. *Strengthening Global and Regional Ocean Governance through Scientific Research and Policy Guidance*. 2021.

⁶⁷ Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO. *Global Ocean Acidification Observing Network (GOA-ON): Strengthening Scientific Collaboration*. 2022.

⁶⁸ United Nations Development Programme. *Advancing Climate Adaptation through Ocean Protection*. 2023.

⁶⁹ United Nations Development Programme. *Building Climate Resilience in Coastal Economies*. 2023.

⁷⁰ United Nations Development Programme. *Climate Finance for Ocean Conservation and Acidification Mitigation*. 2023.



In the Caribbean, where coral reefs are vital to tourism, biodiversity, and coastal protection, UNDP's Climate Promise supports Member States in creating locally driven solutions to address dual threats of warming seas and acidifying waters.⁷¹ Interventions are currently led by actors such as UNDP, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network, and international climate funds, and are essential as up to 90% of coral reefs in tropical regions are projected to disappear by mid-century without urgent and coordinated action.⁷² In finance, UNDP is a key factor in facilitating innovative funding mechanisms for ocean sustainability.⁷³ Seychelles' Blue Bond, developed in collaboration with the World Bank and UNDP, raised \$15 million to expand marine protected areas, enhance fisheries management, and strengthen climate-resilient coastal communities.⁷⁴ The pioneering instrument exemplifies how UNDP supports nations leveraging capital markets to finance nature-based solutions for long-term adaptation.⁷⁵ UNEP addresses ocean acidification through its Regional Seas Programme, which fosters regional cooperation and promotes shared governance of marine resources.⁷⁶ UNEP assists Member States in monitoring acidification trends, mitigating land-based sources of marine pollution, and applying science-based policy frameworks.⁷⁷

Through the Regional Seas Strategic Directions (RSSD) 2022–2025, UNEP guides Regional Seas Programmes in advancing ecosystem-based management, pollution control, and ocean governance, aligning regional actions with global commitments, such as the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.⁷⁸ UNDP collaborates with UNEP on integrated approaches to ocean governance, particularly in regions like the Mediterranean and Western Indian Ocean, where multiple Member States share marine ecosystems and face common acidification challenges.⁷⁹ The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO coordinates the Global Ocean Acidification Observing Network (GOA-ON), a global platform for collecting, analyzing, and sharing data on ocean chemistry. GOA-ON's standardized protocols and open-access data portals enable scientists and policymakers to track acidification hotspots and inform evidence-based interventions.⁸⁰ UNDP supports expanding observation systems through national capacity-building efforts and cross-sector partnerships, ensuring developing Member States are equipped to participate in and benefit from global monitoring efforts.⁸¹

⁷¹ United Nations Development Programme. *Climate Promise: From Pledge to Impact – Scaling Up Action in the Caribbean*. 2022.

⁷² United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. *Adaptation and Resilience: Introduction*. 2025.

⁷³ United Nations Development Programme. *NAP GCF – UNDP Climate Change Adaptation*. 2025.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ United Nations Development Programme. *360-Degree Crisis, 360-Degree Response: UNDP Climate Promise*. 2025.

⁷⁶ United Nations Development Programme. *Small Island Developing States on the Frontlines of Climate Change*. 2025.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ United Nations Development Programme. *Exploring Blue Bonds Potential to Support the Ocean Economy*. 2023.

⁷⁹ World Bank. *Seychelles Launches World's First Sovereign Blue Bond*. 2018.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ United Nations Environment Programme. *Revisiting Ocean Acidification, Food Security and Our Earth System*. 2016.



UNDP supports UNEP's MAP in coastal zone management and helps states monitor acidification and reduce vulnerability.⁸² The Arctic Council and its Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP) report rising risks to Indigenous communities from acidification in cold-water ecosystems.⁸³ Scientific networks like GOA-ON, coordinated by IOC, enable standardized data-sharing and monitoring.⁸⁴ Partnering with GOA-ON and national research bodies, UNDP helps build observation systems, improve early warning, and inform marine policy.⁸⁵ Legal and policy frameworks guide global responses, while UNDP ensures these commitments lead to local action, ocean protection, and sustainable development.⁸⁶ FAO plays a key role in addressing the impacts of ocean acidification on fisheries and aquaculture, sectors critical to food security and livelihoods in many developing Member States.⁸⁷ FAO provides technical support for building resilience in seafood supply chains, promoting sustainable aquaculture practices, and enhancing community-based management of marine resources.⁸⁸ UNDP partners with FAO in many initiatives, ensuring ecosystem-based adaptation in fisheries aligns with broader development goals and incorporates local knowledge systems.⁸⁹

Scientific research also benefits from the work of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which established the Ocean Acidification International Coordination Centre (OA-ICC) in 2012.⁹⁰ OA-ICC advances the understanding of acidification by applying nuclear and isotopic techniques, offering unique tools for tracking long-term changes in marine chemistry and biological responses.⁹¹ OA-ICC also facilitates training programs to build research capacity in developing Member States and provides critical policy linkages by promoting science-informed decision-making.⁹² UNDP's support for ocean science diplomacy and its emphasis on South-South cooperation align closely with OA-ICC's mission to democratize access to cutting-edge research.⁹³

In addition to scientific collaboration, international financial institutions play a vital role in enabling Member States to implement ocean acidification strategies.⁹⁴ International financial institutions support ocean acidification responses by funding sustainable fisheries, biodiversity protection, and low-carbon energy.⁹⁵ The World Bank's PROBLUE fund and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) promote tools like blue bonds and debt-for-nature swaps, such as Belize's debt buyback for marine protection.⁹⁶ UNDP works

⁸² Mediterranean Action Plan. United Nations Environment Programme. *Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea Against Pollution*. 2022.

⁸³ United Nations Environment Programme. *Regional Ocean Governance: Enhancing Cross-Border Cooperation to Tackle Marine Challenges*. 2021.

⁸⁴ Arctic Council. *Arctic Ocean Acidification Assessment: Impacts and Future Outlook*. 2021.

⁸⁵ Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme. *Arctic Ocean Acidification 2018: Summary for Policy-Makers*. 2018.

⁸⁶ Arctic Council. *Sustaining Arctic Indigenous Communities: Ocean Acidification and Traditional Livelihoods*. 2022.

⁸⁷ United Nations Environment Programme. *About the UNEP Regional Seas Programme*. 2017.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ United Nations Environment Programme. *Regional Policies a Critical Linchpin for Marine Protection – New Report*. 2020.

⁹¹ United Nations Environment Programme. *Climate Change*. 2017.

⁹² World Bank. *PROBLUE: The World Bank's Blue Economy Program*. 2023. p. 1.

⁹³ International Monetary Fund. *Belize: Swapping Debt for Nature*. 2022. p. 1.

⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 2.

⁹⁵ United Nations Environment Programme. *Strengthening Ocean Efforts to Tackle Climate Change, Marine Biodiversity Loss, and Pollution*. 2022.

⁹⁶ United Nations Environment Programme. *Regional Seas Strategic Directions 2022–2025*. 2021.



with governments, the Green Climate Fund, and others to unlock climate finance for renewable energy, carbon capture technologies, and NBS, as shown in the Seychelles Blue Bond and emerging blended finance models.⁹⁷

International organizations collectively underpin the global response to ocean acidification through governance, science, finance, and capacity building.⁹⁸ UNDP's integrative role, which is linking climate policy, sustainable finance, marine conservation, and scientific collaboration, positions it as a central actor in catalyzing long-term solutions.⁹⁹ By working with UNEP, IOC, FAO, IAEA, and others, UNDP ensures that ocean acidification is addressed as an environmental issue and a development challenge that demands equitable, inclusive, and sustainable action.¹⁰⁰

Mitigating Ocean Acidification Through Renewable Energy and Carbon Sequestration

Ocean acidification cannot be addressed without directly confronting the primary driver, which is atmospheric CO₂.¹⁰¹ The most effective strategy for mitigation remains the reduction of global CO₂ emissions, mainly from fossil fuel combustion.¹⁰² Transitioning to renewable energy sources, such as offshore wind, solar, and tidal power, is essential for limiting future acidification.¹⁰³ However, tackling this challenge also requires deploying carbon capture technologies, piloting ocean-based CO₂ removal methods, and integrating these innovations into national and regional climate strategies.¹⁰⁴ UNDP plays a central role in advancing these solutions, particularly in developing Member States and SIDS that are disproportionately impacted by ocean acidification but have limited resources to respond.¹⁰⁵

The renewable energy transition, which involves shifting away from fossil fuels to sustainable energy sources, is the cornerstone of global mitigation efforts.¹⁰⁶ Offshore wind energy has expanded rapidly in regions such as Europe, where they have established large-scale turbine arrays to meet climate targets and reduce CO₂ emissions.¹⁰⁷ Tidal energy, still emerging, offers a consistent and predictable source of power, particularly relevant for coastal states with strong marine currents, such as Canada's Bay of Fundy, which has received international support for pilot projects in this domain.¹⁰⁸ Solar energy has become one of the most scalable and cost-effective technologies, especially in low- and middle-income Member States.¹⁰⁹ Decentralized systems, including rooftop solar and community microgrids, can dramatically reduce dependence on diesel and coal, providing climate and development co-benefits.¹¹⁰ UNDP supports the expansion of renewable energy through its Climate Promise initiative, which helps Member States revise their NDCs to include ambitious renewable energy targets, thereby indirectly

⁹⁷ Union of Concerned Scientists. *CO₂ and Ocean Acidification: Causes, Impacts, Solutions*. 2019. p. 1.

⁹⁸ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. *Ocean Acidification*. 2023. p. 5.

⁹⁹ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. *Ocean Acidification*. NOAA Education Resources. 2023. p. 3.

¹⁰⁰ European Environment Agency. *Ocean Acidification*. 2023. p. 3.

¹⁰¹ Union of Concerned Scientists. *CO₂ and Ocean Acidification: Causes, Impacts, Solutions*. 2019. p. 1.

¹⁰² National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. *Ocean Acidification*. 2023. p. 5.

¹⁰³ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. *Ocean Acidification*. NOAA Education Resources. 2023. p. 3.

¹⁰⁴ European Environment Agency. *Ocean Acidification*. 2023. p. 3.

¹⁰⁵ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. *Carbon Dioxide Removal*. NOAA Ocean Acidification Program. 2023. p. 1.

¹⁰⁶ International Energy Agency. *CO₂ Emissions in 2022*. 2023. p. 1.

¹⁰⁷ International Energy Agency. *Renewables*. 2023. p. 1.

¹⁰⁸ International Energy Agency. *Net Zero by 2050*. 2021. p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ International Energy Agency. *Wind*. 2023. p. 3.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. p. 1.



reducing the rate of ocean acidification.¹¹¹ For hard-to-abate sectors like cement, steel, and chemical production, where immediate renewable alternatives are limited, Carbon Capture, Utilization, and Storage (CCUS) serves as a crucial strategy for reducing CO₂ emissions.¹¹² These technologies capture CO₂ emissions at their source and either store them in deep underground reservoirs or convert them into usable products, such as construction materials or synthetic fuels.¹¹³

According to IAEA, CCUS is indispensable for achieving net-zero CO₂ emissions globally, especially given the existing industrial infrastructure in both developed and emerging economies.¹¹⁴ UNDP facilitates capacity building and policy support for Member States exploring CCUS integration into their decarbonization strategies, particularly those that lack technological expertise or regulatory frameworks.¹¹⁵

In partnership with institutions such as the World Bank and regional development banks, UNDP helps identify financing pathways and establish safeguards to ensure that CCUS deployment aligns with national climate objectives and environmental standards.¹¹⁶ In addition to CO₂ emission reductions, ocean-based carbon dioxide removal (CDR) strategies are being researched to enhance the ocean's ability to absorb and sequester atmospheric CO₂.¹¹⁷ These innovations include ocean alkalinity enhancement, which involves adding naturally alkaline substances to seawater to increase its ability to buffer acidity and absorb additional CO₂.¹¹⁸ This method mimics natural weathering processes and could provide scalable, long-term mitigation if ecological risks are appropriately managed.¹¹⁹ Electrochemical removal is a newer technique that uses electrical currents to alter seawater chemistry, facilitating CO₂ extraction and alkalinity enhancement.¹²⁰ These systems are still in the early testing stages but offer promise as modular, scalable tools for reducing ocean acidification at key hotspots.¹²¹ Both methods, while promising, require extensive field testing to assess potential side effects on marine biogeochemistry and biodiversity.¹²² The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and academic partners are leading pilot projects.¹²³

At the same time, UNDP has expressed interest in supporting research in SIDS and coastal nations where real-world applicability can be tested under localized conditions.¹²⁴ Through its climate resilience and blue economy programming, UNDP encourages responsible innovation in marine carbon removal,

¹¹¹ Ibid. p. 1.

¹¹² Ibid. p. 1.

¹¹³ Ibid. p. 1.

¹¹⁴ International Energy Agency. *Renewables*. 2023. p. 1.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. p. 1.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. p. 1.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. p. 1.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. p. 1.

¹¹⁹ Marine Renewables Canada. *Our Current Future*. 2023. p. 1.

¹²⁰ Global Youth for Environment and Sustainability. *The Role of Tidal Energy in Reducing Carbon Footprint*. 2021.

¹²¹ Government of Canada. *Canada's Tidal Energy Sector in Bay of Fundy Gets Support for New Deployments, Additional Research, International Outreach*. 2024. p. 1.

¹²² Global Youth for Environment and Sustainability. *The Role of Tidal Energy in Reducing Carbon Footprint*. 2021.

¹²³ Government of Canada. *Canada's Tidal Energy Sector in Bay of Fundy Gets Support for New Deployments, Additional Research, International Outreach*. 2024. p. 1.

¹²⁴ International Energy Agency. *Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage*. 2023. p. 1.



ensuring that developing nations are not left behind in accessing or influencing the development of these frontier technologies.¹²⁵

The Role of Bioengineering and Synthetic Biology in Restoring Marine Life

The rapid decline of marine ecosystems such as coral reefs, seagrasses, and coastal wetlands, driven by ocean acidification, warming, and pollution, threatens biodiversity, food security, and coastal livelihoods.¹²⁶ In response, bioengineering and synthetic biology offer innovative methods to strengthen the resilience of marine organisms.¹²⁷ Clustered regularly interspaced short palindromic repeats (CRISPR) gene editing has been utilized to target coral genes responsible for thermal tolerance and calcification, thereby helping corals adapt to increasingly acidic and warmer waters.¹²⁸ Laboratory trials are underway to evaluate their potential for reef restoration.¹²⁹

Microbiome engineering focuses on introducing beneficial microorganisms to stabilize coral health and improve resistance to stress and disease.¹³⁰ Marine microorganisms such as cyanobacteria and microalgae are being enhanced to increase CO₂ absorption, growth efficiency, and suitability for biofuel production.¹³¹ Some approaches involve synthetic microbial systems that capture carbon and convert it into beneficial biological compounds, combining environmental restoration with sustainable production.¹³² These technologies raise ecological and ethical concerns, including disruptions to food webs, the spread of modified genes to wild populations, and unintended environmental impacts.¹³³ International organizations such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and the International Union for Conservation of Nature are developing global safeguards, including biosafety protocols, public engagement, and long-term monitoring.¹³⁴ The United Nations Development Programme supports scientific research and implementation through policy guidance, funding, and cooperation among scientists, governments, and communities.¹³⁵ When used alongside emissions reduction and conservation strategies, these innovations can contribute to marine resilience if guided by inclusive and science-based governance.¹³⁶

Conclusion

¹²⁵ Ibid. p. 1.

¹²⁶ Roger et al. One Earth. *Nanobiotech Engineering for Future Coral Reefs*. 2023. pp. 778-789.

¹²⁷ Li et al. *Microbiome Engineering: A Promising Approach to Improve Coral Resilience*. 2022.

¹²⁸ Anthony et al. Nature Ecology & Evolution. *New Interventions Are Needed to Save Coral Reefs*. 2017. pp. 1420-1422.

¹²⁹ Ibid. pp. 1420-1422.

¹³⁰ Parkinson et al. Conservation Letters. *Molecular tools for coral reef restoration: Beyond biomarker discovery*. 2018.

¹³¹ Bernardet et al. Scientific Reports. *Ion transporter gene expression is Linked to the thermal sensitivity of coral calcification in the reef coral Stylophora pistillata*. 2019.

¹³² Cleves et al. *CRISPR/Cas9-Mediated Genome Editing in a Reef-Building Coral*. 2018. pp. 5235-5240.

¹³³ Liew et al. Science Advances. *Epigenome-Associated Phenotypic Acclimatization to Ocean Acidification in a Reef-Building Coral*. 2018. p. 28.

¹³⁴ Bay et al. Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences. *Genetic Adaptation to Prevailing Environmental Conditions in Coral Populations*. 2017.

¹³⁵ Van Oppen et al. Global Change Biology. *Shifting Paradigms in Restoration of the World's Coral Reefs*. 2017. pp. 3437-3448.

¹³⁶ Nakamura et al. Journal of Experimental Marine Biology and Ecology. *Coral Larvae Under Ocean Acidification: Survival, Metabolism, and Metamorphosis*. 2011.



Ocean acidification presents a growing transboundary threat to marine biodiversity, food security, and economic stability, particularly for SIDS and vulnerable coastal communities.¹³⁷ Rooted in rising atmospheric CO₂ concentrations, this phenomenon disrupts marine chemistry, endangers calcifying organisms, and intensifies broader ecological stress.¹³⁸

A coordinated international response has emerged through foundational frameworks, such as UNCLOS, the *Paris Agreement*, and the 2030 Agenda, which collectively guide national and regional action on CO₂ emissions reduction, marine conservation, and scientific cooperation.¹³⁹ UNDP plays a central role in operationalizing these commitments by providing policy advice, financial mechanisms, and capacity-building tools to help Member States integrate ocean acidification mitigation into national planning.¹⁴⁰

Across the international system, partnerships between UNDP, IOC, UNEP, and financial institutions have facilitated observation networks, regional strategies, and sustainable finance instruments that strengthen marine resilience and local implementation.¹⁴¹ Substantive efforts also include promoting renewable energy transitions, advancing carbon capture strategies, and piloting ocean-based CO₂ removal technologies.¹⁴² Additionally, innovations in bioengineering and synthetic biology are being explored to enhance the adaptive capacity of marine organisms and ecosystems, though these raise important ethical and ecological concerns that require robust governance frameworks that lead to tangible improvements for ocean health and human well-being.¹⁴³

Further Research

As delegates conduct further research and consider how to address this topic, they should consider: What international regulatory frameworks are needed to govern the use of bioengineered marine organisms and ensure ecological safety? How can Member States better integrate ocean acidification targets into their NDCs under the *Paris Agreement*? What are the most effective ways to expand global ocean acidification monitoring networks in under-resourced regions? How can financial instruments such as blue bonds and debt-for-nature swaps be scaled to support mitigation and adaptation in coastal developing Member States? What role should Indigenous knowledge and local communities play in shaping scientific research and marine restoration efforts? How can public education campaigns be designed to promote broader awareness of ocean acidification and its socio-economic impacts?

¹³⁷ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. *What is Ocean Acidification?*. 2022.

¹³⁸ United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015.

¹³⁹ United Nations Development Programme. *Ocean Promise: Delivering Blue Economy Solutions for Sustainable Development*. 2022.

¹⁴⁰ Global Ocean Acidification Observing Network (GOA-ON). *Annual Status Report on Ocean Acidification Monitoring*. 2022.

¹⁴¹ International Atomic Energy Agency. *Carbon Capture, Utilization, and Storage (CCUS) Tracking Report*. 2022.

¹⁴² Convention on Biological Diversity. *Global Biodiversity Outlook 5*. 2020.

¹⁴³ United Nations Development Programme. *Building Climate Resilience in Coastal Economies*. 2023.



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2. Youth Engagement in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

“Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals requires a seismic shift - which can only happen if we empower young people and work with them as equals.”¹⁴⁴

Introduction

According to the United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, young people are the individuals with the boldest solutions to offer for a brighter future, as they are the ones with the most at stake.¹⁴⁵ However, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) found that the average age globally of a member of parliament, otherwise known as an elected representative within a democracy, is 53 years old.¹⁴⁶

The term “youth engagement” was properly defined by the United Nations in 2007 as the involvement of young people in development, their active part in decision making processes, and empowerment to become meaningful participants of civic engagement through education, health, productive employment, and poverty alleviation opportunities.¹⁴⁷ Currently, there are 55 United Nations entities and 131 Country Teams actively working towards youth engagement through programming with governments and civil society.¹⁴⁸ According to the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, the definition of “youth” is characterized as a person between the ages of 15 and 24 years of age.¹⁴⁹ This comprises 16% of the global population, and the number of youth is expected to grow by 7% in 2030.¹⁵⁰

The United Nations and its subsidiaries have long acted as supporters and global protectors of young people, and often encourage international entities to be accountable and responsive towards the needs of youth.¹⁵¹ The United Nations Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, Felipe Paullier of Uruguay, was appointed in October of 2023.¹⁵² He believes that with the proper knowledge and opportunities, young people can and should be encouraged to strive toward furthering development, peace, and security outlined in *Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda)* (2015), as the youth have a unique perspective equipping them with the ability to make perhaps the most effective change globally.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁴ Guterres. *Secretary General's message*. 2024.

¹⁴⁵ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Guterres launches latest report on youth participation at the UN*. 2023.

¹⁴⁶ United Nations, United Nations Development Programme. *The Global Parliamentary Report*. 2015.

¹⁴⁷ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *World Youth Report 2007*. 2007.

¹⁴⁸ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Guterres launches latest report on youth participation at the UN*. 2023.

¹⁴⁹ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Youth*. N.d.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals. *Youth and the SDGs*. N.d.

¹⁵² United Nations, Youth Affairs. *Felipe Paullier Appointed as the first Assistant Secretary-General for Youth Affairs*. 2023.

¹⁵³ United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals. *Youth and the SDGs*. N.d.



The United Nations General Assembly adopted the *2030 Agenda* as a guide to expand peace and freedoms for people, the environment, and prosperity.¹⁵⁴ The *2030 Agenda* comprises 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets, all of which are designed to address specific areas to better humanity and balance sustainability in economic, social, and environmental development.¹⁵⁵ UNDP is committed to aiding Member States through challenges in the development and implementation of the SDGs.¹⁵⁶ UNDP encourages youth engagement in the SDGs, in ways of global programmes of youth empowerment, publishing youth strategies in governance, and partnering with civil society, United Nations agencies, and development partners.¹⁵⁷

International and Regional Framework

The United Nations General Assembly is one of the many bodies that passes doctrines pertaining to the oversight and implementation of policies regarding both inalienable human rights and youth engagement.¹⁵⁸ As highlighted in *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) (1948), all human beings, without any distinctions, have the right to participate in governance, receive an education, and the ability to partake in scientific advancements, among many others.¹⁵⁹ Since youth were not specifically mentioned by name in the aforementioned document, the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) worked to clarify that children are also guaranteed the rights listed within the UDHR. The *Convention on the Rights of the Child* also builds upon the special care and assistance needed by young people that are to be given to every person below the age of 18 years old.¹⁶⁰ According to Article 28, Member States recognize the importance of cooperation to achieve access to modern technological knowledge and teaching methods for all children, with special consideration taken of the needs of developing regions.¹⁶¹ This doctrine also protects the right of all children to freedom of assembly and association.¹⁶²

Although the United Nations had long supported the rights of youth, the United Nations Third Committee focusing on social, humanitarian, and cultural affairs first acknowledged the importance of youth engagement in peace and security, in addition to abolishing other abuses of human rights through the *Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples*, which was later passed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1965.¹⁶³ The Declaration recognizes the need to instill in young people a respect for all human beings, nations, economic and social progress, disarmament, and peace and security through education and organizations on the national and international level.¹⁶⁴ Within the *Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples*, there are six principles, or recommendations, which include implementing instruction in education regarding ideals to

¹⁵⁴ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. N.d.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ United Nations, United Nations Development Programme. *Youth as partners for the implementation of the SDGs*. 2017. p. 245.

¹⁵⁸ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Documents*. N.d.

¹⁵⁹ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. 1948.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 1.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. p. 8.

¹⁶² Ibid. p. 4.

¹⁶³ United Nations, General Assembly. *Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples* (A/RES/2037). 1965.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.



bring humanity together in peace, increasing exchange, tourism, and foreign language learning, and encouraging associations of young people to promote peace, security, and human rights abroad.¹⁶⁵ The *World Programme of Action for Youth* (1995) was the subsequent strategy adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, in which it is proposed to offer training for youth leaders and workers, develop infrastructure to allow for the dissemination of information through media and technology, namely in relation to environmental and peace developments, and increasing national policy to allow for youth to have part in governmental decision making processes.¹⁶⁶ This strategy also proposed furthering youth engagement with the *United Nations Millennium Declaration* (2000) by supporting youth organizations on the local, national, regional, and international level.¹⁶⁷

The *United Nations Millennium Declaration* was a conglomeration of Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) to measure development in areas such as education expansion, eradication of hunger and poverty, and prevention of deadly diseases, and they were the predecessor to the *2030 Agenda* and the SDGs¹⁶⁸ To track the implementation of the SDGs, since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the United Nations Secretary-General produces an annual “SDG Progress Report”, while an independent group of scientists hired by the Secretary-General produce the “Global Sustainable Development Report” once every four years.¹⁶⁹ According to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), youth are historically champions to the SDGs, most notably achieving great strides in regards to SDGs 13 (Climate Action), 5 (Gender Equality), 10 (Reduced Inequalities), 2 (Zero Hunger), and 3 (Good Health and Well-Being).¹⁷⁰ Youth have aided in advancing these goals by raising environmental awareness; campaigning for inclusive societies; innovating the field of sustainable agriculture; addressing youth unemployment, poverty, and migration; developing adequate technology; and advocating for equitable care in health crises.¹⁷¹

To ensure that youth are engaged in achieving the SDGs, in addition to generally expanding upon a young person’s ability to be involved in governance, policy making, the United Nations, and fostering a peaceful society, the United Nations Secretary-General adopted *Youth 2030* (2018).¹⁷² This framework is the first system wide strategy on youth, emphasising the importance of young people in decision making processes, especially in conflict, strengthening educational access and job training opportunities, and fostering civic engagement.¹⁷³ *Youth 2030* is actively observed by 55 United Nations bodies and 132 global United Nations teams in differing Member States.¹⁷⁴ In addition, in the landmark and unanimously adopted Security Council resolution 12149 (2015), “Urging Member States to Increase Representation of Youth in Decision-Making at All Levels,” the United Nations warns Member States that the marginalization

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ United Nations, United Nations Development Programme. *Background on the Goals*. N.d.

¹⁶⁹ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *The 17 Goals*. N.d.

¹⁷⁰ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Four things you need to know about youth and SDGs*. 2021.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² United Nations Youth Strategy. *Youth 2030*. 2018.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.



of young people in peacebuilding negotiations and policy making will be detrimental to maintaining a peaceful international community.¹⁷⁵

Role of the International System

UNDP is one of the most integral bodies working toward youth engagement.¹⁷⁶ UNDP utilizes a multifaceted approach when approaching this issue, including promoting inclusive policies, creating channels for communication and collaboration, and investing financials in development programs for youth leadership.¹⁷⁷ UNDP's digital platform for collaboration to achieve the goals and solve some of the world's most challenging issues is entitled UNDP Global Youth Space.¹⁷⁸ They are currently hosting the "#Youth4Climate Call for Solutions 2025," which can provide the winners with up to \$30,000 in financial support, in addition to mentoring, training, and knowledge sharing.¹⁷⁹ UNDP also recently celebrated the International Anti-Corruption Day with the year's theme being "Uniting with Youth Against Corruption: Shaping Tomorrow's Integrity."¹⁸⁰ There are also many regional youth initiatives that UNDP supports, such as the United Nations Pacific Regional Anti-Corruption Project, which integrates youth in climate discussions.¹⁸¹ Further, in order to educate the youth about the SDGs and how to take action, UNDP published the *SDG Guidebook for youth in action* (2022) in Thailand.¹⁸² This publication works to provide the principles of the SDGs, share how youth have impacted development, give examples as to how to implement the goals in one's daily life, and provide guidance as to how to create an SDG aligned project.¹⁸³

The United Nations Youth Office, which includes the Office of the Envoy of the Secretary-General on Youth, sits in the United Nations Secretariat and reports directly to the Secretary-General.¹⁸⁴ This office is also heavily involved with promoting youth engagement in SDGs, such as with their Young Leaders for the SDGs initiative.¹⁸⁵ On a biennial basis, 17 young people working to achieve the SDGs are selected to work with the United Nations and its partners to promote innovative ways to accomplish the Goals, in addition to inspire youth engagement in SDGs.¹⁸⁶ The United Nations Youth Office attempts to establish intergenerational and long-term partnerships and collaboration, in addition to bettering accountability and mentorship.¹⁸⁷ This office closely collaborates with the ECOSOC on youth initiatives, such as the annual ECOSOC Youth Forum, most recently held from 15-17 April 2025 to provide youth with a platform to speak to Member States and stakeholders about possible recommendations to achieve the SDGs,

¹⁷⁵ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Security Council, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2250 (2015), Urges Member States to Increase Representation of Youth in Decision-Making at All Levels*. 2015.

¹⁷⁶ United Nations, United Nations Development Programme. *Youth Empowerment*. N.d.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ United Nations, United Nations Development Programme. *Fostering youth-inclusive political processes for integrity and anti-corruption*. 2024.

¹⁸¹ United Nations, United Nations Development Programme. *UN Pacific Regional Corruption*. N.d.

¹⁸² United Nations, United Nations Development Programme. *SDG Guidebook for youth in action*. 2022.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ United Nations, General Assembly. *Establishment of the United Nations Youth Office (A/RES/76/306)*. 2022.

¹⁸⁵ United Nations, United Nations Youth Office. *About the Young Leaders for the SDGs*. N.d.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.



focusing this year on SDGs 3 (good health and well-being), 5 (gender equality), 8 (decent work and economic growth), 14 (life below water), and 17 (partnership for the goals).¹⁸⁸

In addition to the aforementioned United Nations entities, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) also plays a large role in meaningful youth engagement.¹⁸⁹ UNESCO has created intentional toolkits for United Nations staff to best engage and empower youth through programmes, activities, and raised awareness.¹⁹⁰ UNESCO also created a toolkit for policy makers, public officials, and practitioners, in order to provide them with a training tool on youth engagement, youth policy design, and youth civic engagement entitled “Because Youth Perspectives Matter.”¹⁹¹ This document provides training tools to better youth engagement in policy making, resources on how to strengthen intergenerational dialogue between different stakeholders, and guides to create youth specific policy.¹⁹² UNESCO also recently published a report, *Youth Report technology in education* (2024), which synthesized the views of over 1,500 youth and students views on how they feel technology should be affordable, accessible from an early age, have barriers reduced of girls’ access to technology, have content suitable for their communities, have youth and teacher trainings, and youth engagement on the design, implementation, and evaluation.¹⁹³ The United Nations General Assembly also mandates the self-organized entity, The Major Group for Children and Youth (UN MGCY), which works not only on an international scale, but also through regional, national, and grassroots levels to foster conversations of youth relating to policy, implementation, monitoring, and so forth, educational opportunities, and to provide a platform for knowledge sharing of innovative youth based initiatives.¹⁹⁴

Furthermore, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) has established a Youth Advisory Group consisting of 12 youth activists to engage the young people with the development of human rights commitments, including the SDGs.¹⁹⁵ OHCHR is also currently partnering with Norway working on a project to work with youth-led organizations to create a network of youth officers in the Middle East and Northern Africa, Central Asia, Western Africa, their headquarters in Switzerland, Guatemala, and the Pacific.¹⁹⁶ This program will work closely with the *UN Youth Strategy* (2018) and train the officers in ways meant to increase youth engagement in policy, protect youth human rights, and train young people.¹⁹⁷ In addition, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) has an ITU Secretary-General’s Youth Advisory Board that creates solutions to reducing barriers to technology, increasing cooperation, and working alongside the SDGs to connect parts of the world that may not have

¹⁸⁸ United Nations, Economic and Social Council. *ECOSOC Youth Forum 2025*. N.d.

¹⁸⁹ United Nations, United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. *Meaningful Youth Engagement*. N.d.

¹⁹⁰ United Nations, United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. *Meaningfully engaging with youth*. 2019.

¹⁹¹ United Nations, United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. *Because youth perspectives matter: UNESCO toolbox for youth policy and programming*. 2023.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ United Nations, United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. *Youth report 2024: technology in education: a tool on our terms!*. 2024; United Nations, United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. *About Us*. N.d.

¹⁹⁴ United Nations, Major Group for Children and Youth.

¹⁹⁵ United Nations, United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights. *Youth and Human Rights 75 initiative*. N.d.

¹⁹⁶ United Nations, United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights. *Working for rights with and for young people*. N.d.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.



access to the same level of technological connectivity.¹⁹⁸ Also working to implement technological strategies for youth engagement, AI For Good's initiative, Young AI Leaders Community, equips youth in 51 Member States with skills, mentorship, and community to innovate and build a more sustainable and inclusive future.¹⁹⁹ Additionally, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) collects data on youth engagement, in order to build awareness of the international circumstances of young people.²⁰⁰ Moreover, the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) oversees an organization entitled "SDSN Youth."²⁰¹ SDSN Youth seeks to empower youth to be the leaders in achieving the SDGs, and the organization works towards this goal through providing education, resources, and a network of international youth leaders.²⁰²

Regionally, there are organizations that work to increase youth engagement in the Goals, such as 2030 Beyond, which is a non-profit in Denmark.²⁰³ 2030 Beyond hosts the "Danida Fellowship Learning Program," which brings together youth working to achieve the SDGs for a three to four week learning program.²⁰⁴ This organization also has a program called "Build the future", which teaches vocational students about the SDGs and tools to develop the building sector in a sustainable way.²⁰⁵ Additionally, within the European Union (EU), there is an initiative entitled "Youth Empowerment Fund," which encourages youth to contribute to a sustainable future by achieving the 2030 Agenda.²⁰⁶ This EU program provides micro-grants to break down barriers to funding, provides mentorship, and encourages young people to think of ways to solve some of the world's most pressing issues.²⁰⁷

Engagement of Youth in the Digital Age Working Toward Achievement of Sustainable Development Goals

According to UN DESA, data and technology have the ability to positively contribute to at least 70% of the 169 SDG targets.²⁰⁸ Due to a majority of youth being digital natives, they hold special skills that could be enhanced with proper resources to achieve the *2030 Agenda*.²⁰⁹ In addition, the use of technology in sustainability could be economical and lead to the reduction of up to \$55 trillion in efforts to achieve the SDGs.²¹⁰ Youth have been advocates for the goals and development, but they still encounter legal and social barriers of entry.²¹¹ There are still many disparities to accessing this technology that could aid in sustainable growth, including the fact young women have less access to education in science and

¹⁹⁸ International Telecommunication Union. *Youth Advisory Board*. N.d.

¹⁹⁹ AI For Good. *Young AI Leaders Community*. N.d.

²⁰⁰ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Youth*. N.d.

²⁰¹ Sustainable Development Solutions Network. *SDSN Youth*. N.d.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ 2030 Beyond. *About Us*. N.d.

²⁰⁴ 2030 Beyond. *Danida Fellowship Learning Program*. N.d.

²⁰⁵ 2030 Beyond. *Build the future*. N.d.

²⁰⁶ European Commission. *Youth Empowerment Fund*. N.d.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *International Youth Day 2024: Youth Digital Innovation for Sustainable Development*. 2024.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *International Youth Day 2024: Youth Digital Innovation for Sustainable Development*. 2024.

²¹¹ United Nations, Executive Office of the Secretary-General. *Our Common Agenda policy brief 3: meaningful youth engagement in policymaking and decision-making processes*. 2023.



technology.²¹² Less than one third of technology sector graduates, mainly comprised of youth, globally are women.²¹³

Despite these challenges, global internet use has risen in most regions of the world, and the generational gap is diminishing.²¹⁴ However, youth still utilize the internet dramatically more than the rest of the population, displaying 75% of their demographic using the internet as opposed to 65% of the rest of the population.²¹⁵ UN DESA refers to youth as “digital natives,” having grown up in a world with the internet, and holding special perspectives and skills, due to their technological experiences, which could aid in creative solution building in sustainability.²¹⁶ UN DESA acknowledges the fact that 2030 is the year the SDGs are meant to be accomplished, and while it’s only a few years away, still recognizes the utmost importance of including youth in the development of technological solutions that could aid in over 70% of the 169 SDG targets.²¹⁷

There have been many youth-led organizations that have worked towards accomplishing the SDGs, such as Fridays for Future, established in 2018.²¹⁸ Fridays for Future strives to have every nation comply with *The Paris Agreement* (2016), maintain global temperature rises below 1.5C when compared to that of pre-industrial times, and comply with the updated sciences.²¹⁹ This organization hosts school strikes, in order to inspire change and pressure legislators to implement policy to ease the climate crisis.²²⁰ These goals would work towards many SDGs, including: SDG 2 (zero hunger) by promoting sustainable agriculture and improving security and nutrition, SDG 6 (clean water and sanitization) by introducing sustainable water management, and SDG 13 (climate action) by advocating for sustainable climate solutions.²²¹ Fridays for Future is an example as to how youth utilizes technology in the digital age to advocate for their sustainability goals, as this organization utilizes platforms, such as WhatsApp, Telegram, and Email to find other activists in one’s region, updates about upcoming movements, and connect with youth activists far away.²²² Through youth engaging technologically, what was once a singular 15 year old girl protesting for climate action became an international movement with millions of people participating in strikes for Fridays for Future, and ultimately the SDGs, worldwide.²²³

In addition, SDSN Youth holds an annual youth symposium to learn about and discuss SDGs, important challenges in the world, the post 2030 world, and finding solutions, and they provide a link for anyone in the world to access these resources through Zoom and YouTube.²²⁴ SDSN also oversees Global Youth

²¹² United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. *Power on: How we can supercharge an equitable digital future*. 2023.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ United Nations, International Telecommunication Union. *Three-quarters of 15- to 24-year-olds use the Internet*. 2022.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *International Youth Day 2024: Youth Digital Innovation for Sustainable Development*. 2024.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Fridays for Future US. *Who We Are*. N.d.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Food and Agricultural Organization of the United States. *Sustainable Development Goals*. N.d.

²²² Fridays for Future US. *Who We Are*. N.d.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Sustainable Development Solutions Network. *Vatican Youth Symposium*. N.d.



Networks, which utilize cross-cultural mentorship through technology, in order to empower youth to achieve the SDGs.²²⁵

Participation in Governance and Policy Regarding the 2030 Agenda

Global Citizen indicates that throughout the world, 76% of people 30 and under do not feel as if their officials hear them, despite that demographic making up around 50% of the global population.²²⁶ Even though youth have been strong activists when it has come to the SDGs and mobilization, youth still do not have the proper voice, in regards to public policy, decision making, and peace discussions, due to legal barriers in voting age and access to polling places.²²⁷ In *Our Common Agenda* (2021), the Secretary-General proposed growing youth participation in policy, requiring youth engagement in the United Nations, and establishing a United Nations Youth Townhall.²²⁸ According to UN MGCY, engagement in governance is a right, and this role should not require youth to pay for their seats that should be designated for their demographic.²²⁹ However, there are many barriers as to why it is difficult to engage youth in deliberations, including the lack of dedicated resources to facilitate youth engagement.²³⁰

In order to alleviate some of the barriers to entry for youth in policy making and governance, such as a lack of access and support, UNESCO founded the UNESCO Global Youth Grant Scheme (GYGS), in order to fund international youth-led grassroots efforts and research for policy-oriented solutions.²³¹ UNESCO partnered with Nestle to create “Impulso Joven - Because Youth Matter,” which awarded 20 grants of \$10,000 to youth leaders, entrepreneurs, and youth organizations to achieve sustainable development through innovative solutions and policy making.²³² Globally, there are regional initiatives to allow more young voices in governance, such as the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs’ Young South Asian Leaders Initiative (YSALI) in the United States Department of State.²³³ YSALI connects a network of youth in South Asia to better environmental policy, civic participation, and economic empowerment.²³⁴ YSALI will provide over 420 million young people in the region with access to leadership training, networking opportunities, professional exchanges, and academic fellowships.²³⁵ Organizations such as these inspire youth engagement in governance and policy, especially regarding climate change policy and SDG 13.²³⁶

²²⁵ Sustainable Development Solutions Network. *SDSN Youth Networks*. N.d.

²²⁶ Global Citizen. *Be Seen, Be Heard: Everything You Need to Know About the Campaign Getting Young People Into Politics*. 2023.

²²⁷ United Nations, Executive Office of the Secretary-General. *Our Common Agenda policy brief 3: meaningful youth engagement in policymaking and decision-making processes*. 2023.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ United Nations, United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth. *Principles and Barriers for Meaningful Youth Engagement*. 2017.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ United Nations, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *UNESCO Global Youth Grant Scheme*. N.d.

²³² United Nations, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *UNESCO Global Youth Grant Scheme*. N.d.

²³³ United States Department of State. *Young South Asian Leaders Initiative*. N.d.

²³⁴ United States Department of State. *Young South Asian Leaders Initiative*. N.d.

²³⁵ United States Department of State. *Department of State Launches Youth South Asian Leaders Initiative (YSALI)*. 2024.

²³⁶ United States Department of State. *Department of State Launches Youth South Asian Leaders Initiative (YSALI)*. 2024.



Conclusion

Since the creation of the United Nations, there have been universally accepted inalienable rights, including those to partake in governance and participate in scientific advancement.²³⁷ As *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) made clear, children are just as entitled to the enumerated human rights, and thus must be granted the same privileges, in addition to special care and considerations in society.²³⁸ In modernity, the Secretary-General has introduced frameworks to ensure that youth are not just granted fundamental human rights, rather are empowered to make meaningful change in the international world to ensure a more sustainable future by achieving the SDGs.²³⁹ There are initiatives throughout the global community to accomplish this goal, such as UNDP's Global Youth Space.²⁴⁰ In addition, there have been various regional approaches to host programs and partner with UNDP to achieve youth participation in the goals, such as with *SDG Guidebook for youth in action* (2022) in Thailand.²⁴¹ In order to empower youth to become active in policy development and conversation, United Nations entities and civil society have introduced initiatives to aid youth leaders in their pursuits to innovate, such as with "Impulso Joven - Because Youth Matter."²⁴² Overall, Secretary-General António Guterres believes that young people must be in the center of policy creation, regarding the digital world and shaping of institutions, and he states that achieving the SDGs and a more sustainable future will require a shift in educational investments, critical thinking literacy, bridging digital divides, and addressing gender and age based discrimination in the technology industry.²⁴³

Further Research

As delegates conduct further research and consider how to address this topic, they should consider: How have Member States implemented policies to work towards achieving the SDGs? Have these policies been influenced by any youth led groups or voices? How could the voices of those in developing nations be amplified to help push toward the achievement of the SDGs? How could the international community support marginalized voices through access to technology and education? Are there any risks to encouraging youth to engage more with technology? Are there any ways to measure youth engagement in the achievement of the SDGs?

²³⁷ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. 1948.

²³⁸ United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. 1989. p. 8.

²³⁹ United Nations Youth Strategy. *Youth 2030*. 2018.

²⁴⁰ United Nations, United Nations Development Programme. *Global Youth Space*. N.d.

²⁴¹ United Nations, United Nations Development Programme. *SDG Guidebook for youth in action*. 2022.

²⁴² United Nations, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. UNESCO Global Youth Grant Scheme. N.d.

²⁴³ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Youth digital engagement crucial for achieving SDGs: Guterres*. 2024.



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<https://www.unsdsn.org/our-work/sdsn-youth/#:~:text=Development%20Solutions%20Network-.SDSN%20Youth.campuses%2C%20countries%2C%20and%20regions>

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https://www.unyouth2030.com/_files/ugd/b1d674_9f63445fc59a41b6bb50cbd4f800922b.pdf

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