

## **Final Statement:**

### **Youth sector consultation towards Australia's Voluntary National Review on Agenda 2030 and the SDGs**

#### **Introduction**

On 1 January 2016, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) came into effect. The 17 SDGs and their 169 targets were agreed to by 193 governments in September 2015 at the United Nations. The goals constitute a shared global framework of development priorities to 2030 and aim to bring an end to extreme poverty, promote prosperity and wellbeing for all, protect the environment, address climate change, and encourage good governance and peace.

The challenges outlined by the SDGs are relevant to all countries, including Australia. While Australia is an advanced country, we still face major challenges, including gender equity, domestic violence, homelessness, high levels of youth unemployment, the rise of non-communicable diseases, environmental degradation, climate change, the gap experienced by Indigenous Australians, etc. These challenges not only impact children and youth disproportionately today, but they also contribute to long-term systemic problems that could undermine the efforts of our communities to grow and prosper in the near future.

The SDGs are giving Australia a unique opportunity to improve our performance. Using these ambitious, measurable and time-bound framework, policymakers, business leaders, academics, and communities can work together overcome the biggest challenges we are facing as a country.

This statement serves to illustrate the potential for young people to lead the implementation of the SDGs, demonstrate the efforts already undertaken towards the SDGs, and offer recommendations on how the sector can be further supported in order to maximise its impact.

The statement has been prepared by the the Sustainable Development Solutions Network - Youth (SDSN Youth) in the Australia/Pacific region, a network which aims to empower young people to create sustainable solutions. It draws upon inputs and case studies put forward by youth organisations, university students, student groups and youth representatives during a youth sector VNR consultation hosted by SDSN Youth Australia/Pacific on **7 February 2018** in Melbourne.

#### **How the Australian youth sector contributes to the SDGs**

Young people have the opportunity to play a central role in the movement to achieve the SDGs. While they are often disproportionately affected by the problems outlined in the SDGs, they are also well placed to tackle many of them. Gifted with great imaginations, energy, and numbers, young people should be considered the key drivers of sustainable development

Australian youth are prominent advocates and actors in this important movement. They have the potential to make significant contributions to the implementation of the SDGs, particularly in the following areas:

- **Communication and advocacy:** by increasing awareness of the SDGs in local communities, using new communication technologies and modern applications, in order to facilitate effective outreach campaigns.
- **Informal Education:** by providing supplementary SDG education for youth, in particular school students, in order to create a deep understanding of the SDGs in schools around Australia and preparing the next generation to face and overcome the many challenges ahead of them.

- **Innovation & Entrepreneurship:** by inventing new technologies which will enable more effective implementation of the SDGs and scaling successful local solutions for wide scale impact.
- **Community mobilisation:** by mobilising the community around local developmental and environmental priorities and enabling them to take action towards the SDGs.

Many youth organisations, student groups and young individuals across Australia are already advancing the SDGs indirectly through their ‘business as usual’ core activities, which includes various areas of work such as education, community mobilisation, social entrepreneurship, technology, and innovation. Not only that, they are also going beyond to demonstrate their commitment to the SDGs and integrating them explicitly into their work. Examples of SDG-focused initiatives include:

- **AIESEC in Australia** - In 2017, *AIESEC in Australia* sent over 430 young people abroad to volunteer in countries in Asia as part of ‘Youth for Global Goals’. These volunteer projects ranged from teaching English in rural areas to help women grow their own business, as well as educating the community on health practices.
- **The Australian Medical Students’ Association (AMSA)** - ‘Gender Equity Project’ addresses *SDG 5 (Gender Equality)* by working with medical students to recognise and resolve gender imbalances both in and outside of the organisation.
- Additionally, through its ‘Code Green Project’, *AMSA* also pursues *SDG 13 (Climate Action)* by working to increase awareness among medical students on the health impacts of climate change.
- **FORM** - A Western Australia based non-profit that advocates for creativity and artistic practice is actively contributing to *SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities)* through its project ‘Pujiman’, which engages young people in remote areas to use contemporary art to safeguard the future of Aboriginal culture.
- **Meri Toksave** - A youth-led gender justice initiative for the Pacific focused on the intersection of gender equality and youth empowerment. Their ‘Directory of Emergency and Support Services’ was the first and only nation-wide directory and database for victims of gender-based violence in Papua New Guinea, addressing *SDG 5 (Gender Equality)* and *SDG 16 (Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions)*.
- **The Monash Students Sustainability Association (MSSA)** - A student group committed to leading and inspiring students at Monash University to learn about sustainability and embed its principles into their behaviours on and off campus. In 2017, they organised the Monash Sustainable Development Summit which brought together over 70 students to connect participants working in key areas relating to the SDGs and discover new opportunities to drive greater SDG action at Monash.
- **SDSN Youth** - Launched the Local Pathways Fellowship in 2017, bringing together 60 young leaders from 52 cities around the world including Melbourne, Sydney, Canberra and Brisbane. The Fellowship used the SDG Cities Guide and the Sustainable Cities MOOC to educate fellows on a range of topics related to sustainable development in cities, particularly focusing on the implementation of SDG 11.

- The ‘Global Schools Program’, another project of *SDSN Youth* aims to generate interest about sustainable development in schools in an effort to educate and engage students with the SDGs and to encourage them to prioritise the goals. The program’s ‘Ambassadors Program’ has selected 100 candidates around the world, including 7 from Australia. Ambassadors will serve as advocates in their cities to work with local schools in integrating the SDGs into classroom education and school activities.
- **Unbound** (formerly Laika Academy) - A social enterprise providing educational experiences. They address a number of SDGs through ‘The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Study Tour’ in Vietnam, which provides students with first-hand knowledge of the SDGs in an emerging economy context. It uses a multi-disciplinary, team-based project to explore these global issues, while also improving their understanding of Australia’s role in addressing the SDGs.

### **Opportunities for the youth sector to scale up their contribution to the SDGs**

At the [National Youth Summit](#) in 2016, which was co-hosted by SDSN Youth, Global Ideas and Foundation for Young Australians, youth organisations and student associations across Australia made a commitment to align their priorities and activities to the SDGs, and hold government, academia, businesses and civil society accountable to ensure concrete action is taken to achieve the goals. Since then, young Australians have been mobilising, supporting and collaborating with one another to incorporate the SDGs in their work and make youth participation more mainstream in the development sector.

As evidenced by the current work undertaken by youth organisations and young people across Australia, the sector plays a significant role in the national, regional and global implementation of the SDGs and will continue to strengthen and expand its contributions to the ambitious agenda.

Young people can play a larger role in the implementation of the SDGs if they are supported in innovation and enterprise efforts, provided with quality education, training and tools to measure their impact, integrated in cross-sector and intergovernmental dialogues, and included as an integral part of decision-making and negotiation processes. A society that cultivates and supports its youth population will benefit from a generation that is highly skilled and equipped to deliver strategies to solve the challenges we face as a nation and as a planet. Youth must not be seen simply as tokens in the sustainable development movement, but as active participants capable of leading and partnering with other sectors to make a valuable contribution towards the SDGs.

### **Acknowledgements**

SDSN Youth Australia/Pacific gratefully acknowledges the contributions participating individuals from the following organisations, groups and initiatives from which this statement draws:

AIIESEC Australia, Australian Medical Students Association, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Foundation for Young Australians, Future Business Council, Future Farmers Network, Global Ideas, Global Schools Program, Jump Foundation, Local Pathways Fellowship, Meri Toksave, Monash Student Association, National Union of Students, New Colombo Plan, Oaktree Foundation, RMIT Student Union, SDSN Australia/Pacific, Settlement Services International, Unbound, UN Youth Australia, UWA Student Guild, Young Australians in International Affairs.

This statement is not necessarily endorsed by participating individuals or their organisations.