



UNGASS YOUTH FORUM

Countering Corruption through Collaboration: Youth Perspectives and Engagement

24 - 26 May 2021

UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS, NEW YORK, A FULLY VIRTUAL EVENT

INFORMAL REPORT

**The Roundtable summaries contained in this Report have been prepared by the six UNGASS Youth Forum Rapporteurs and are not official summaries of the United Nations.*

The United Nations Special Session of the General Assembly (UNGASS) against Corruption Youth Forum, organized by the United Nations Office on Crime (UNODC) New York Liaison Office, took place fully virtually from 24 – 26 May 2021. The theme of the Youth Forum was “*Countering Corruption through Collaboration: Youth Perspectives and Engagement*”.

The Youth Forum was organized as a special event to directly contribute to the [UNGASS](#) on challenges and measures to prevent and combat corruption and strengthen international cooperation, held from 2 to 4 June 2021 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. The Youth Forum was held in line with [General Assembly resolution 74/276](#) which encouraged “*the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, subject to the availability of extrabudgetary resources, to organize a youth forum to discuss ways for young people to contribute to efforts to prevent and counter corruption, and invites a youth forum representative, selected by the President of the General Assembly, to participate in the special session, including through the delivery of a statement on the outcome of the discussions at the youth forum, during the opening segment of the special session*”. Further details about the background to the Youth Forum are contained in the [Concept Note](#).

Over the course of the three days, 313 attendees joined the Youth Forum from 93 nationalities. This included representatives from 93 civil society organisations, 21 participants from academia and 7 international/regional organisations.

The high-level opening session featured remarks by the H.E. Volkan Bozkir, President of the General Assembly; Ghada Waly, Executive Director, United Nations Office on Drugs and

Crime; Jayathma Wickramanayake, Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth; as well as a musical performance by Cill Soul, Fair Play Winner 2020. The high-level opening was moderated by Delphine Schantz, Representative, UNODC New York Liaison Office.

Over the course of the three days, three interactive Roundtable discussions provided an opportunity to hear from over 75 youth and expert speakers who spoke as panellists, delivered interventions from the virtual floor, or posed questions during the Roundtables.

The closing session featured remarks by Delphine Schantz, Representative, UNODC New York Liaison Office and Serena Ibrahim, Founder of Youth against Corruption, Lebanon, who was selected by the President of the General Assembly to deliver a Youth Statement, summarizing the outcome of the Youth Forum discussions, during the UNGASS opening session on 2 June 2021.

The Youth Forum [concept note](#), [programme](#), [bios of high-level speakers, moderators, panellists and rapporteurs](#), and [logistical information](#) are all available on the dedicated Youth Forum website.

Following the conclusion of the formal programme, “Fair Play”, created by Transparency International and Jeunesses Musicales International to promote the anti-corruption agenda through music, hosted a [digital concert](#) of anti-corruption youth voices featuring previous winners of Fair Play’s international music competition.

SUMMARY OF ROUNDTABLE 1: CORRUPTION AND ITS EFFECT ON YOUNG PEOPLE, 10:00 – 12:00 (EDT), 24 MAY 2021

PREPARED BY LEO KAPETANOVIC AND MUNEERA EBRAHIM ALMUHANNADI

One need not be president to be part of the government. The importance of youth engagement can be summarized this way. Youth activists, students, and young professionals acting together may do more than experienced politicians. The Youth Forum featured an impressive turnout, demonstrating a strong commitment towards integrity and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The format of the Youth Forum provided young activists with a safe space to discuss corruption issues in their home countries. With over 800 registrations from 6 continents, it took account of a multitude of perspectives. A key message was that youth have the most to lose and, at the same time, are in the best position to make an effective change. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated world inequalities and created further opportunities for corruption. Just like the Youth Forum adapted to a virtual setting, young people called for policy-makers over the world to adapt to the needs of youth to guarantee them a better future.

Roundtable One on the topic of “*Corruption and its Effect on Young People*” aimed to discuss the effects corruption has on young people. The main themes arising from the exchange

between participants were healthcare and COVID-19, education for integrity, and accountability of institutions.

Healthcare and COVID-19

Youth are the backbone of any society and have the power to impede the escalation of corruption. Corruption affects young people's development and engagement in education, health (physical and mental), and employment, and creates other socio-economic issues. Its effects are not limited to the present but have strong implications also for the future. Young people, the LGBTQ+ community and individuals who are discriminated against on the basis of skin color or ethnic origin, were noted as among the most vulnerable groups when it comes to corruption. Healthcare is often denied, due to lack of financial resources or discrimination. Inequality is further intensified by corruption and a lack of transparency in the healthcare system. Access to healthcare may not be available to people from disadvantaged backgrounds and in developing countries. The need for urgent medical equipment, drugs, and facilities, create further opportunities for the proliferation of corruption. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of access to quality healthcare. Some of the measures proposed by participants were:

- Initiating public and private partnerships addressing anti-corruption within the healthcare sector;
- Setting in place transparency and accountability mechanisms in healthcare procurement, especially when dealing with COVID-19 vaccines; and
- Setting up safe spaces and platforms for youth engagement in anti-corruption projects.

Education for integrity

Youth all around the world are naturally curious and willing to mitigate corruption in their communities. Governments should make use of that curiosity and recognize that corruption is not necessary. Without a conscious electorate, it is not possible to guarantee effective public scrutiny. Several participants noted the great importance of education and training on integrity issues. This is especially true when it comes to youth. The aim is to empower youth through an understanding of the causes and consequences of corruption. Young people are not only the recipients of educational training, but also the future generation of policy-makers. They will need to be involved in the implementation of the recommendations:

- Anti-corruption education is not usually present in curricula, but must be incorporated into strategies to combat corruption. SDGs must be integrated within the school curriculum starting from primary education. Some participants recognized that some elements are already addressed within ethics and global citizenship classes. This allows students to identify values and build solutions to solve ethical dilemmas.
- The teaching of ethics and legal awareness must be simplistic and engaging. A source of inspiration can be the UNODC Education for Justice Program (E4J). E4J helps educators engage with youth by dealing with real-world problems. Live and asynchronous (on demand) modules should be further developed, starting from primary education.

Accountability of Institutions

Although young people mostly understand the devastating effects of corruption, people in power are not always aware of the scale of the problem. Education for integrity and accountability go hand in hand. The former educates youth. The latter provides checks and balances for those in power. Young people can either be victims or changemakers. Corruption implies the abuse of public power for private gain. Over the last few months, several participants have witnessed demonstrations and revolts demanding accountability of their leaders and Institutions. These were the effect of extensive youth mobilization. Youth demonstrations generally started peacefully, but violent riots and human rights violations soon followed. A youth survey presented by one of the participants showed a drop in young people's confidence in institutions. Yet, faith in democracy and voting remained intact. All participants agreed on the necessity to reinforce the message of accountability in politics. This relies on a more critical electorate. Most of the participants concurred that youth is a political subject with every right to demand answers. Yet, the current system puts a greater emphasis on validating the position of adults. As well, the system discriminates against young people due to their lack of experience.

Transparency is key to enhance accountability. When young people have the tools to hold government and key figures accountable, they can make a significant contribution to fight and eliminate corruption. Some of the participants proposed the following avenues to promote accountability, allowing a larger number of people to be heard:

- Better improving access to remedies for all groups of victims of corruption, including through adopting a human rights-based approach to corruption;
- Addressing asset recovery processes, especially by promoting the adoption of restitution mechanisms complying with the principles of transparency, accountability, and inclusivity, and ensuring that recovered assets are used to contribute to local development, in line with the SDGs, and with the participation of civil society; and
- Developing comprehensive frameworks to ensure the protection of, and alleviate risks to, young whistle-blowers.

To conclude, many of the participants stressed the importance of holding institutions, whether political, military, police, or judicial, accountable. Three key success factors were identified to improve scrutiny:

- Guaranteeing media independence, due to the role in monitoring accountability and in broadcasting beyond national boundaries;
- Further strengthening collaboration with the NGO sector and civil society by forming collective action initiatives and/or other forms of collaborative engagement to combat corruption and guarantee integrity; and
- Despite a lack of trust in institutions, trust is ever-present in democracy. A conscious electorate is crucial for that.

SUMMARY OF ROUNDTABLE 2: YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN PREVENTING AND COMBATING CORRUPTION, 10:00 – 12:00 (EDT), 25 MAY 2021

PREPARED BY DANELLA NEWMAN AND MARK JACINTO

“Youth have an integral role to play in fighting corruption” as 1.8 billion of them make up the world’s population. This was the common consensus amongst all participants of the UNGASS Youth Forum’s Roundtable Two discussion on the topic of *“Youth Engagement in Preventing and Combating Corruption”*. The key themes discussed in the session were (1) education on integrity, transparency and anti-corruption; (2) challenges of youth engagement in anti-corruption efforts; (3) innovative initiatives for youth involvement; and (4) creating spaces for youth engagement and whistle-blower protection.

Education on integrity, transparency and anti-corruption

Corruption has shaped the future of young people and future generations. One common message across all three panels was that fighting impunity for corruption offenses remains high on the agenda, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The panelists highlighted the urgent need for a cultural shift from corruption as an accepted norm to integrity as a desirable attribute, and a general no-tolerance policy for corruption. Participants found it necessary to substantially strengthen educational programs on integrity, transparency and anti-corruption, starting from a very young age. Corruption is a global problem, which requires a global solution that must take into account factors such as gender, race, and ethnicity, amongst others.

Some ways of successfully educating youth on integrity, transparency and anti-corruption highlighted in the discussion are through the platforms and activities they are most active in, such as social media and sports, which are recognized as catalysts for sustainable development. Panelists highlighted that influencers, coaches, and athletes can lead by example by conveying to their often relatively young audience strong messages on the importance of integrity and transparency in their daily lives. Similarly, business integrity was highlighted as a sustainable investment in the future. Mentorship in this regard is crucial not only for young entrepreneurs, but also for consumers, to ensure they are aware of the back-story of a product and that they consume ethically. Every small step can make a big difference in the end.

Challenges of youth engagement in anti-corruption efforts

Corruption forms an intrinsic part of many young people’s lives. With their futures on the line, they are swiftly acting against corruption. However, youth participants stressed the lack of adequate spaces to speak up against corruption, share practices, and collaborate with each other to promote anti-corruption, and good governance. Challenges range from not being taken seriously by leaders and duty-bearers to a sense of helplessness about how to contribute in the first place. There was a general agreement on the fact that joining youth networks and learning from each other’s best practices are among the best tools we have to effectively tackle corruption and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Innovative initiatives for youth involvement

The innovative initiatives of youth involvement presented by the participants showed that there are many different ways of tackling corruption. Successful approaches in one local context can be replicated, but need to be adapted to ensure they are just as effective. Giving young people a voice and empowering them to monitor the effective implementation of their school's administration, or other commitments their leaders have made, is a crucial way of giving them a sense of ownership. Examples of such initiatives include mobile applications to document corruption in communities. Face-to-face interactions between youth and leaders were deemed indispensable by panelists as one effective means of holding duty-bearers accountable while avoiding conflict and keeping youth safe. Participants also stressed that new technologies can add legitimacy to young people's involvement in uncovering traditional, and emerging, forms of corruption, as evidenced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Creating spaces for youth engagement and whistle-blower protection

Young people should be recognized for their efforts in mobilizing youth, promoting good governance, and speaking out against corruption. However, they often face challenges when doing so. Some panelists stressed that young people would be the "ideal whistle-blower" since they often enter environments of entrenched corruption with a pair of fresh eyes. However, they are also more vulnerable to retaliation, which can affect their future educational and professional opportunities due to a lack of established support and safety networks. Therefore, participants noted an urgent need for secure and anonymous reporting channels for young whistle-blowers and other supporting measures such as legal representation, financial assistance, and mental health support.

Young people often fear the consequences of speaking up against corruption. There is an urgent need to create safe spaces where youths are empowered to speak up, share best practices and collaborate with fellow youths on combating corruption. Panelists highlighted the importance of speaking out on both mass and social media. These channels have played a crucial role in uncovering even high-level corruption scandals, resulting in a mobilization of civil society, and sometimes even the resignation of those in power.

Recommendations for priority actions

Throughout Roundtable Two, participants called on UN Member States to ensure that the following priority actions are taken:

- Invest in educational programs for children and youth of all ages to instill a culture of zero tolerance towards corruption amongst our future generations;
- Create dedicated youth forums to make sure youth representatives have a voice in important decision-making bodies at all levels of the public and private sectors, ensuring that a follow-up mechanism to their suggestions is in place;
- Invest heavily in new technologies as a way of engaging youth in the fight against corruption, and foster and empower youth through initiatives that encourage them to hold their leaders accountable;

- Establish protective mechanisms for young whistle-blowers that include safe and anonymous reporting channels in schools and work places in both the public and private sectors, as well as other forms of legal, financial and mental health support, and conduct more research on the nuanced challenges young whistle-blowers face; and finally;
- Lead by example by holding your governments and yourselves to the highest standards of integrity, transparency, and accountability.

Young people are integral in combating corruption, and building a better world for all. What are you doing to invest in our future?

SUMMARY OF ROUNDTABLE 3: YOUTH EXPECTATIONS FOR UNGASS AND BEYOND, 09:00 – 11:00 (EDT), 26 MAY 2021

PREPARED BY HAMMAD NOOR AHMED AND SUVECHCHHA CHAPAGAIN

“The youths of this generation are determined to lead this fight against corruption as active agents of change to ensure that our voices are heard and opinions counted”. This stood as a major highlight throughout the UNGASS against Corruption Youth Forum Roundtable 3, which increased understanding of the position of youth on corruption and their expectations from the UNGASS. Currently, about 1.8 billion young people are vulnerable to the effects of corruption and their right to have a sustainable future has been directly compromised. Moreover, the pandemic has further escalated the vulnerabilities by putting the advancement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at risk.

Thus, participants during the UNGASS Youth Forum Roundtable 3 on the topic of “*Youth Expectations for UNGASS and Beyond*” strongly emphasized the need to lay a robust foundation for the meaningful participation of youths and to mobilize both local and global measures to eradicate the problem of corruption. The common themes that were discussed during Roundtable 3 were the need to: (1) develop alternative narratives through formal education; (2) invest in new and innovative technologies led by youth promoting open data and transparency; (3) form youth agencies at the continental/regional level to enhance collaboration; (4) encourage more global programs and platforms to foster youth engagement; (5) ensure judicial independence in UN member states; and (6) encourage positive approaches for norm and value-shifting.

Develop alternative narratives through formal education

Roundtable 3 participants recommended that, as a long-term solution to address the root causes of corruption, governments should build into the curriculum for school and university students education about the new global integrity culture and a new social narrative against corruption. The focus should be on countering the normalized concept of corruption and substituting it with norms that promote integrity, openness and accountability. As well, an informal curriculum should be introduced for those who do not attend formal education, which could be rolled out through non-profits, civil societies and social groups working in this field.

Invest in youth-led new and innovative technologies promoting open data and transparency

Governments should promote young political and social entrepreneurs that provide innovative and creative solutions to counter corruption. Young people should be provided opportunities to leverage new and emerging technologies, along with the traditional means to combat corruption, through open data and other monitoring mechanisms. Similarly, emphasis should also be placed on outreach to youth to educate them about the urgency of the matter. The best way to reach young people could be using the language they understand and mediums they prefer, including through social platforms like Instagram, Tiktok.

Form youth agencies at the continental/regional level to enhance collaboration

Governments should work together to form youth agencies at the regional or continental level to encourage co-learning and sharing experiences among youth actively fighting against corruption. It is important to realize that, although the fight against corruption is global, the actions to combat it should be taken locally. Youth agencies at the local and regional level should together form agendas, conduct advocacy efforts and simultaneously promote normative standards of leadership. This unity of young people could serve as a stepping stone to creating a long-term corruption road map that puts youth at the core of the agenda.

Encourage more global programs and platforms to foster youth engagement

The UN should bring more global programs and platforms that foster the meaningful participation and empowerment of youth and children across the world. Programs similar to the UNGASS Youth Forum, and others focusing on capacity-building, enhancing awareness, skills etc., make a significant difference. Moreover, it is equally crucial to understand youth demography and intersectionality in developing the programs. To ensure that inclusion and voices of the minorities are paid special attention, a speaker also recommended the expansion of UN agencies' efforts in combating corruption at the grassroots level. As a trusted source, many local communities are willing to collaborate with UN agencies in positive interventions.

Ensuring judicial independence in UN member states

Judicial independence in UN member states is one of the crucial factors in ensuring that no one is granted impunity based on power, influence and position. Corruption is observed across every level - in many countries, there are instances of corruption charges against executive heads. Thus, it is important for countries to keep the judiciary separate from political intervention, allowing for effective supervision and unbiased enforcement of law. In addition, it is also important to ensure safety of the youth who come out as whistle-blowers, as well as the safety of national monitors who hold their leaders accountable.

Encourage positive approaches for norm and value-shifting

The panelists and participants built a common understanding that the culture of honoring and identifying honest leaders is as important as calling out the corrupt ones. Various forms of art - music, literature, drama etc. - could be used to shift values in order to develop new social

norms and culture. Countries should also acknowledge the efforts of dedicated leaders who advocate for transparency, accountability and lead the fight against corruption.

Lastly, the recurring expectation from Roundtable 3 for UNGASS and beyond was that the international community should come together and negotiate and develop further resolutions focused on corruption. Participants made it clear that they expect member states to deliver on what they promise during UNGASS and implement the Political Declaration; the implementation and monitoring of the Political Declaration is as important as the drafting and formulation of it. Thus, UNGASS should play an important role as part of a follow-up framework to the Political Declaration that puts youth at the forefront to hold their states and leaders accountable. UNGASS 2021 is certainly the first step of a journey which requires commitment, sheer determination and high spirits for saving the future of billions.