

Statement from the Youth Sub-Platform (CSO Platform on SDGs)

Greetings from the Youth Sub-Platform of the Ghana CSO Platform on SDGs. The activities of the sub-platform hinge strongly on the principle of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which seeks to drive development in a manner that leaves no one behind. We work at the sub-platform and organisational levels to mobilise youth action for the achievement of the SDGs. As a network of youth-led and youth-focused civil society organisations, we are thrilled to participate in the thematic consultation on 'youth engagement in civil society'.

Civil society is "an ecosystem of organised and organic social and cultural relations existing in the space between the state, business, and family, which builds on indigenous and external knowledge, values, traditions, and principles to foster collaboration and the achievement of specific goals by and among citizens and other stakeholders". The civil society space therefore allows individuals such as the youth, who may not have the political power of the state and the financial muscle of the private sector to engage with the influential and powerful. And not only are the youth able to express issues of importance to these stakeholders, it also builds their capacities and grooms them to become problem solvers. Youth engagement in civil society fosters intergenerational dialogue and learning.

Despite these benefits, there exist some systemic issues that challenge the full participation of young people in the civil society space. Young people (15-35 as defined by the 2010 National Youth Policy) represent over 35% of Ghana's population, yet, their voices are not as audible even in matters that concern them. It was therefore worrying that students at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi considered violence as a way to register their displeasure, as their SRC (a civil society body) seemed to have been overpowered by the school's administration.

In a gerontocratic society like that of Ghana, young people are considered as having a lower social status and that adults know what is best for them. The most cited proverb that enforces this loosely translates as 'not all had the chance to be an adult, but every adult has been through youthhood'. Although there lies some inherent truth in this proverb, times and conditions change, and adults may not know it all. This generational differences often results in poor cooperation and understanding between the young and old.

These challenges, however, are even starker for young people with limited education, young people from poor families, young women and young people living with disabilities. The perpetuation of these challenges only works against the achievement of the SDGs.

We are confident that the SDGs gives us an opportunity to right the wrongs, to be able to gain from the active engagement of young people in civil society space. As a sub-platform, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

- Young people are generally drawn to social movements (online and offline) as compared to traditional NGOs. This is usually so because social movements are spontaneous and organised around a specific cause. Social media therefore presents a medium where young people can effectively mobilise and engage duty-bearers. Therefore, there should be better engagement and cooperation between social movements and NGOs, in a way that is mutually beneficial.
- Small and flexible resources should be channelled into youth-related activities. Structured and larger CSOs could make available flexible and some resources that can help youth-focused and youth-led organisations implement their programmes. Less endowed CSOs compete with companies and international CSOs for the same media coverage, space for events and grant opportunities. The conference room of a well-resourced company, for example, could reduce

significantly the cost of organising a capacity building effort of a youth organisation for its members.

- Also, CSOs need to deliberately ensure a good intergenerational mix of staff. This is not only useful for the performance of the CSO in being a relevant authority in the space they are engaged in, but more importantly for knowledge transfer and the eventual sustenance of the organisation. Leaders of CSOs need to be deliberate about grooming younger professionals who can carry the organisations even when the older generation have moved on to other responsibilities and calling. This is a crucial element in the discussion of civil society sustainability.

We, as the Youth-Sub platform on the SDGs, are excited about the Ghanaian youth. The young Ghanaian wants to be heard; knows the importance of being heard; is present when given a seat at the table; and even when not invited to the table, knows how to find a way to the table. We are hopeful that the Ghanaian youth will take advantage of the generational opportunity provided by the SDGs to eradicate poverty, ensure the prosperity of all whilst protecting our planet. We believe that the civil society space offers young people the space to be free, innovative and deliberate about driving the change they wish to see for Ghana.

We wish you a fruitful discussion.