

“How Far Are We from the Sustainable Development Goals?”

Statement by Ms. Yolanda Joab Mori, Founder and Executive Director of Island PRIDE, and
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Behind the post-card worthy images of Pacific islands
Are stories of resilience
Like that of
A 91 year old woman, who has
Spent her entire life
farming and caretaking the same land she calls home
She grows everything from taro, to sakau
Feeding and sustaining generation after generation
For a near century
this has been her only livelihood
A livelihood now grappling with
A changing a climate
This woman is my grandmother
And when I think of sustainable development
I think of her,
I think of families like ours that
Throughout the Pacific islands and around the world
Depend on and sustainably cultivate livelihoods through resources that
Are at stake in a world that is not developing sustainably
She is 90 years worth of indigenous knowledge, practice and expertise
So when she tells me that the seasons are misbehaving
That means something
Especially in rooms like this
So to answer the question *how far are we from the sustainable development goals?*
As long as stories like this exist then we are not close enough

My name is Yolanda Joab Mori and I am from the resilient islands of the Federated States of
Micronesia.

As a young person that's spent 8 years working in climate change adaptation in my community
I can tell you that the decisions made in high level meetings like this are not translating into
action enough on the ground where it matters.

As a young mother I can tell you that our children will see a very different world than from what
you and I see if we don't rectify this. Because mine already do.

As a young person that refuses to just inherit the world but also lead shaping it I can tell you, that we need more space to be engaged and participate because the success of these goals need us as much as we need them.

And I am not alone.

In April over one thousand young people from around the globe came together for the largest youth gathering hosted by the UN for the ECOSOC Youth Forum.

We came together to examine what it means for us to be Empowered, Included and Equal and more importantly what is at stake when we are not.

We broke out into sessions and poured over our challenges, opportunities and priorities for the 2030 Agenda.

[Key messages from Youth Forum on each SDG]

In each thematic area fresh perspectives reimagined systems that have become stagnant:

On SDG 4 on Education, the lack of access to quality education continues to leave young people behind. Young people need more opportunities for capacity building for hard and soft skills that translate to the market we have and need to build. Carinnya Feaunati a young architect from NZ adds that young people need long-term investments for career pathways, particularly in STEM, to be the problem solvers our planet needs.

To address discrimination, xenophobia, and violence, all learners should acquire skills, values and attitudes for peaceful coexistence, thereby education for human rights and global citizenship should be mainstreamed.

On SDG8 on inclusive growth and decent work young people highlighted three key areas:

First was economic growth and the need to look beyond the GDP by placing value across the spectrum of work from our formal to informal economies. Going beyond the singular focus of the GDP means redefining how we see and measure growth and employing other measures of social and economic progress.

The second focus was on youth transitions to decent work. To support these transitions into the labor market, it is important to foster collaboration amongst multiple actors, from governments to private sector and civil society, always valuing and encouraging meaningful youth participation with focus on the most marginalized particularly young women, youth in rural economies, indigenous youth and youth with disabilities.

And thirdly young people focused on the need to rebuild trust-- Across the board young people have lost their trust in the institutions of work and to restore this trust young people need to be involved in shaping the future of work.

As Siosaia Mataele, a young professional and entrepreneur from Tonga puts it "We focus on building the future for young people, but often fail to build our young people for the future." It's time for youth to formally be involved.

On SDG10 on inequalities, it was discussed that despite important gains made in lifting people out of poverty, inequalities and large disparities remain with young people, indigenous people, women, those with various disabilities disproportionately carrying the burden.

Young people want to see policies developed to combat inequality based on data and experiences of the most marginalized because in the end inequality is a policy choice.

On SDG13 young people recognize that it is no longer about whether or not you believe in climate change, but if you understand it. And no one understands it like young people who have to watch inaction continue to gamble with our future. No one understands it better than Pacific Islanders living with its impacts everyday back home like I do. The Secretary General recently visited the Pacific Islands of Aotearoa, Fiji, Tuvalu and Vanuatu where he saw first hand what climate change actually looks like for people like my family. Because of this no one appreciates more the necessity to make decisions based on science and uphold the Paris Agreement. Science is not negotiable. Young people agree that sustainability and climate ambition should be mainstreamed into curriculum.

It is paramount that we transform our economy and stop subsidizing fossil fuels and amplify efforts to a clean and green transition.

On SDG16 on peaceful societies and robust institutions young people are taking back the narrative that portrays young people as only perpetrators of violence or victims and owning their role as peacebuilders and agents of positive change-- instrumental in sustaining peace and preventing conflict.

To unlock the endless potential of young people to accelerate progress on SDG16, we need enhanced awareness of and education on the rights of young people which would enable youth to fight corruption, promote access to justice and ensure rule of law.

On SDG17 related to partnerships and the means of implementations. The importance of cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder partnerships cannot be overstated, but initiating a dialogue on better defining transparency and accountability standards is key. On science, technology and innovation - there needs to be a better appreciation for diverse sources of knowledge - formal, informal, traditional and indigenous - as well as foresight on the potential implications of technologies to address potential risks before they become emergencies.

[Linkage to SDG Summit & Implementation]

These are only a few highlights of what young people have to say.

When I delivered my opening address in that Forum and looked out to the crowd I saw a room full of my peers.

Today I look out to this room and I see power. I see people in a position to either make or influence the decisions and actions we need. But the world doesn't need any more power. What we need, if we're ever going to come close to reaching our 2030 Goals, isn't power, what we need now is action, and to get there we need some courage.

Young people are starving to see some courage reflected in our leaders. Leadership that has the guts to take action. Leadership that is fearless enough to put people and planet above profit. Leadership that is inclusive, uplifts equality and empowers everyone, even a small island girl like me.

As we look to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda over the next decade young people are eager to see inequalities, unemployment, meaningful youth participation and climate action prioritized because we play a vital role in keeping member states accountable as well as raising their ambition.

So as we move to the SDG Summit in September we must remember that the review of these goals need equal and inclusive assessment to reflect what's actually happening and inform solutions. We cannot continue to keep working in silos and must close the disconnect between government and grassroots. We must mobilize resources where the work on implementation actually happens and make them more accessible at the community level and for youth-led initiatives. Diverse challenges demand diverse solutions with collaborative, multi-sectoral, holistic approaches.

We need to start thinking differently and welcome disruption, business as usual is not progress. Gone is the time for doing "just enough". We are making up for lost time so if you think you are doing enough do more. If you think you are moving fast move faster. And if you are thinking of which decision to take next, take the one that requires more courage. So that when we ask ourselves how far are we from the sustainable development goals, we won't have to wonder anymore, we'll already know.

I thank you for listening.