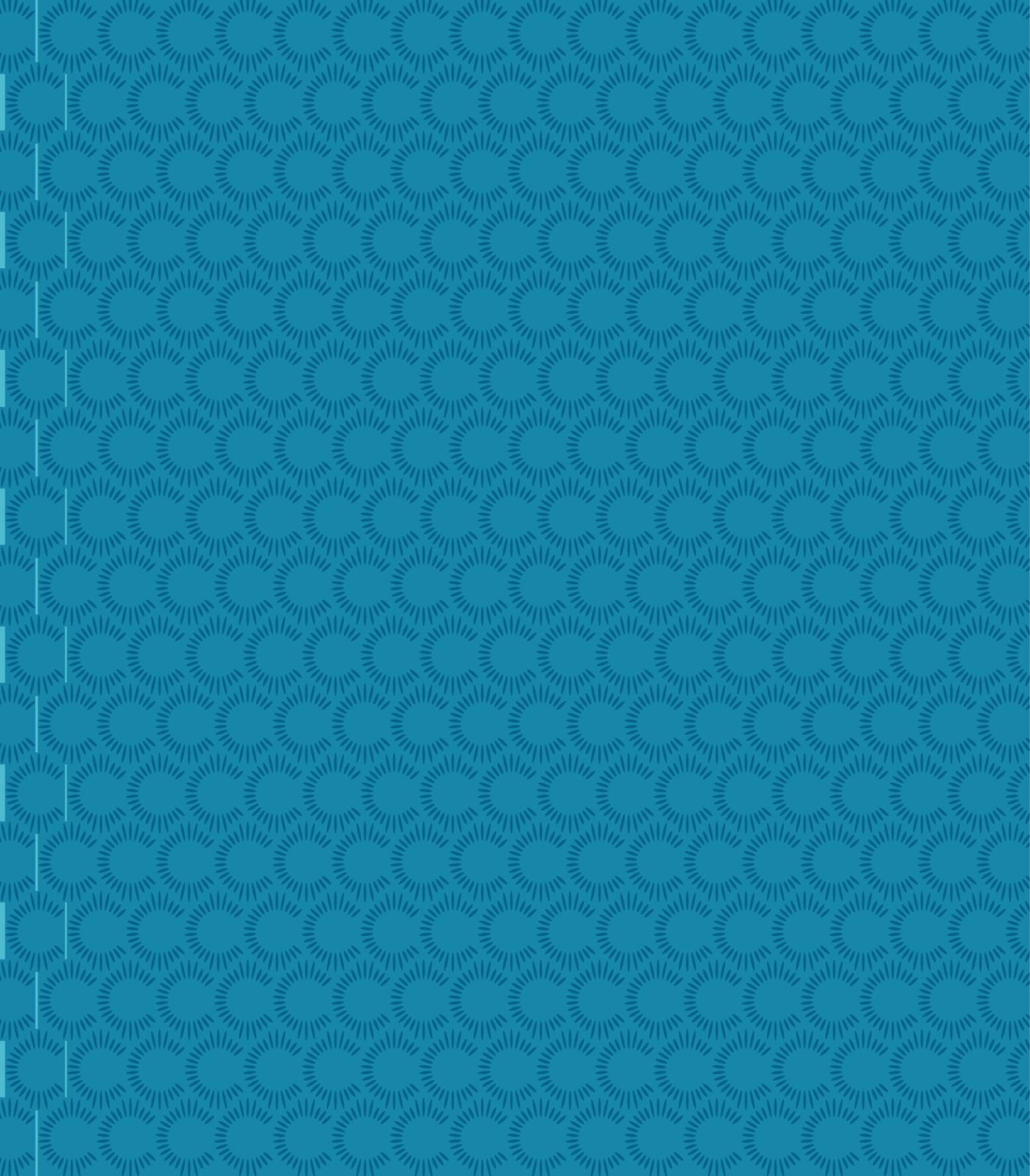


ENGAGING  
**YOUTH**  
ACROSS  
**GLOBAL**  
COMPANY  
SUPPLY CHAINS



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The authors' views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the companies that contributed to the document

# ENGAGING YOUTH ACROSS GLOBAL COMPANY SUPPLY CHAINS CONVERSATIONS WITH CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY LEADERS

Investing in a sustainable future clearly benefits the bottom line for the private sector. At 1.8 billion, the global youth population—made up of potential employees, suppliers, customers, brand ambassadors, and problem solvers—can act as a key driver behind sustainability efforts across industries. Yet, surprisingly, most companies are not prioritizing youth in their sustainability strategies.

We set out to explore this contradiction by reviewing more than 50 sustainability reports of large private sector companies and talking with twelve corporate sustainability leaders at multinational companies committed to delivering shared value to all their stakeholders, including youth.

Our research confirmed that companies can achieve their own sustainability objectives and improve their profits, performance, and reputation, while simultaneously impacting youth wellbeing in significant ways. We also identified six distinct “youth engagement models” that companies can employ to advance youth wellbeing priorities and contribute to global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For each of those models, we learned about specific industry and geographic examples, the roles assumed by private sector and young people, and how they align with youth wellbeing domains and SDGs.

The research also surfaced the challenges and opportunities of youth engagement, as well as possible solutions to advance the alignment of private sector sustainability objectives with youth wellbeing and the SDGs.

## WHY ENGAGE YOUTH

The business case for engaging youth is very strong for the following reasons:

- For an employer in any sector, human capital creates value, growth, and prosperity. Attracting, hiring, retaining, and leveraging the best talent is the lifeline for all businesses. Companies recognize the importance of young people’s career choices, and they engage with potential job seekers during their education, school-to-work transition, and beyond. The “war” for talent is won through long-term, strategic investment in youth engagement.
- Young people represent a significant customer segment for the private sector, both as individual consumers and as future purchasing decision makers for their organizations. Engaging with youth as potential or existing buyers of products and services demands deep understanding of their preferences, tastes, and habits. Building customer loyalty among youth requires brands to find innovative approaches to capture their imagination, trust, and approval.

## Youth Wellbeing

Wellbeing is broadly defined as a state characterized by health, happiness, and prosperity. In international youth development, wellbeing is a multidimensional concept that encompasses a person’s physical and mental health, educational status, economic position, physical safety, access to freedoms, and ability to participate in civic life.

The Global Youth Wellbeing Index, introduced by International Youth Foundation (IYF) and Center for Strategic and International Studies, with support from Hilton Worldwide, consists of 35 indicators measuring the state of youth quality of life across seven domains:

- Citizen Participation
- Economic Opportunity
- Education
- Health
- ICT
- Safety and Security
- Gender Equality

- In today’s fast changing business environment, where technological and social trends collide to consistently challenge businesses to find new solutions, market offerings, and efficiencies, young people are a critical source of innovation, creativity, and forward thinking. Increasingly, the private sector must engage with youth to collaboratively address business, environmental, and social challenges.
- Businesses thrive in peaceful, cohesive, and inclusive societies. When young people feel safe and valued as citizens, and when they have access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities, freedoms, and human rights, they become builders of the future in their communities. The private sector has a crucial contribution to make towards advancing the wellbeing of young people, and towards stable, prosperous communities.

## TRENDS AND APPROACHES

In building their sustainability strategy and plans, most large, reputable brands go through a highly structured analysis—materiality assessment—to identify their stakeholders’ priorities, align those with their organization’s capacity to influence specific issues, and carefully select a small set of targets to pursue. Many companies link those objectives with both their business performance and with the SDGs.

Since 90 of the 232 SDG indicators are related to youth, there are ample opportunities for companies to engage and collaborate with youth within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development<sup>1</sup>. Yet, only few models are widely reported and their outcomes linked to youth wellbeing objectives or the SDGs.



1.

United Nations.  
“World Youth Report:  
Youth and the 2030 Agenda for  
Sustainable Development”. 2018.  
Accessed at: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2018/12/WorldYouthReport-2030Agenda.pdf>

## Youth as Employees

Sectors with massive hiring needs (especially in entry-level positions), such as tourism and hospitality, construction, retail, banking, and food and beverage, lead in engaging youth as job candidates or prospective employees. The availability of well-qualified, engaged, and loyal workers is critical for growing companies, and their investment in building a sustainable talent pipeline makes perfect business sense. Under this model, many corporations support work-based learning initiatives, host interns and apprentices, mentor students and prospective new hires, and partner with education and training providers to align skills development programs with evolving competencies in target job roles. This model of youth engagement aligns with two of the most important youth wellbeing domains—access to economic opportunities and access to relevant, holistic, and affordable education. Outcomes under this approach could be counted towards SDG goals 8 and 4.

## Youth as Suppliers

Technological advances and globalization of markets have created new opportunities for young entrepreneurs to participate in global supply chains. Although few companies have structured initiatives for engaging youth as suppliers, there are many examples of their supporting youth entrepreneurship programs as an alternative pathway to economic independence. In Africa, where most national economies are not creating enough jobs for their rapidly growing populations<sup>2</sup>, companies are recognizing youth unemployment as a major threat to stability and prosperity of the region and are investing in finding innovative solutions. In some sectors, such as agribusiness, multinationals are facing a different challenge: their suppliers are aging, and young people are not entering the sector. Some companies are actively engaging with youth, helping them with access to land, skills, and microloans, while revitalizing their own supply chains. Since this approach helps youth access economic opportunities, it contributes to SDG goal 8.

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## How Companies are Engaging Youth as Suppliers

**Olam International**, a leading food and agribusiness company operating in 70 countries, is dedicated to supporting farming communities. Through its subsidiary, Société d'Exploitation Cotonnière Olam (SECO), and under the Olam Livelihood Charter, it provided pre-financing, technical training, healthcare, and education to more than 16,800 smallholder cotton farmers in 2018. SECO also engages a group of volunteers to teach literacy skills to the local youth and women who are unable to go to school, reaching over 3,000 people since 2011.

Operating since 1865 out of Minnetonka, Minnesota, **Cargill Corporation** and its 155,000 employees bring food, agricultural, financial, and industrial products to people in over 70 countries. Cargill engages youth in income-generating activities focused on skills development and encourages the formation of youth-led farms. In addition, Cargill's "Agri Fellow" program is helping rural unemployed youth in India to build agri-enterprises.

The Swiss multinational food and drink processing conglomerate corporation, **Nestlé S.A.**, is deeply committed to linking young people with livelihoods. Since 2012, their "Agripreneurship" program is preparing the next generation of farmers by developing young people's agricultural and business skills and making farming an attractive and viable career pathway for youth. Nestlé has also developed a toolkit for promoting good agricultural practices among young farmers, recognizing that training helps farmers improve their productivity and income, while ensuring Nestlé's standards are met.

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2.

"Promise or Peril? Africa's 830 Million Young People By 2050".

Accessed at: <http://www.africa.undp.org/content/rba/en/home/blog/2017/8/12/Promise-Or-Peril-Africa-s-830-Million-Young-People-By-2050.html#>



## How Companies are Engaging Youth as Employees

**Hilton Worldwide Holdings Inc.**, the 100-years old American hospitality company, had committed to youth wellbeing as one of the central objectives of their sustainability strategy. Recognizing that "people are the core of their business," Hilton is supporting a multitude of initiatives to "Open Doors" to one million young people by 2019, and connect them to economic opportunities. Partnering with IYF, Hilton has trained over 20,000 of its young employees globally in life skills. In Africa, Hilton launched the "Big Five" for Sustainable Travel and Tourism, contributing to training and apprenticeships programs for youth in the region.

Recognizing that most young people joining the fast food industry sector are in their first job, **McDonald's Corporation** is helping their young employees to acquire valuable technical and soft skills and work experience, thus creating a highly supportive environment for youth career advancement.

Since 2008, **Expeditors International**, a global logistics and freight forwarding company headquartered in Seattle, Washington, runs "Opportunity Knocks for Youth," a program that provides young people workplace readiness and professional training, mentoring, and possible job opportunities within viable career pathways. Expeditors benefits through an expanded talent pipeline, increased employee diversity and engagement, strengthened company culture, and relationships with the community. Based on years of experience in many cities, Expeditors has developed a program playbook called "Opportunity Knocks in a Box" available as a PDF for download at: <https://web.expeditors.com/opportunity-knocks/>.

**Gap Inc.** is a worldwide clothing and accessories retailer, with headquarters in San Francisco, California. Operating for 50 years with more than 135,000 employees in over 90 countries, Gap is a major employer of entry-level workers and youth. Their "This Way Ahead" program targets young people 16 to 24 years old and helps them land their first job through structured training and paid work experiences. Recent studies have confirmed that the program has excellent outcomes for both the young people and the company—72 percent of graduates find stable employment, and Gap achieves 130 percent return on their investment in the program.

The Swiss multinational human resources provider and the largest temporary staffing firm in the world, **Adecco Group**, is determined to develop young people as the leaders for the future. Their initiative, "CEO for One Month," sifts through more than 200,000 applicants to choose talented individuals who shadow Adecco Group country CEOs in nearly 50 countries, thus gaining valuable work experience, self-confidence, and exposure to the world of work.

Operating in 40 countries, **RELX** is a multinational information and data analytics company that supports education and employability programs for disadvantaged youth. Through the RE Cares community program, RELX employees propose their local youth charities for funding, engage with youth as mentors, and contribute valuable time and financial resources to youth development.



## Youth as Citizens—Problem Solvers

Peaceful, vibrant, and thriving communities are more conducive to business growth. The private sector recognizes that young people are drivers of change, capable of conceiving creative solutions to existing business, social, and environmental problems, and equally able to organize protests and overthrow governments.

There is an opportunity for the private sector to play a role in convening youth, government, civil society, and other private sector representatives to collaborate and co-create solutions.

Companies can leverage the creativity and fresh thinking of young people to bring new products and services to the market and gain significant competitive advantage. Engaging youth as citizens contributes to SDG goal 16, and to another important domain of youth wellbeing—it provides them with voice and agency and, perhaps most importantly, opportunity to actively participate in their community's decision making.

### How Companies are Engaging Youth as Citizens and Problem Solvers

**Hilton** recently hosted the Global Laureate Fellows at the Hilton ideation Lab and invited them to join Hilton business leaders in co-creating solution to tangible business problems related to Hilton's 2030 sustainability goals. Sponsored by Laureate International Universities, the Global Laureate Fellowship program invests annually in twenty exceptional young social entrepreneurs.

The **Citi Foundation** and UN Development Programme jointly launched Youth Co:Lab and convened a series of national dialogues and social innovation challenges, bringing together young people, policymakers, private sector partners, youth-led organizations, NGOs, and academia to develop and accelerate youth-led entrepreneurship and social innovation.

**Bayer AG**, a German multinational pharmaceutical and life sciences company, engages with young food security activists to develop concrete projects to help feed a hungry planet. The Youth Ag Summit, part of the Bayer Agricultural Education Program, brings together young change-makers, aged 18-25, to tackle the challenges of how to feed a growing population by 2050. In May of 2019, from more than 2800 applications, Bayer selected 100 participants from 45 countries for the fourth edition of the Youth Ag Summit.





## How Companies are Engaging Youth as Brand Ambassadors

In September of 2017, **Johnson & Johnson**, an American multinational medical devices, pharmaceutical, and consumer-packaged goods manufacturing company founded in 1886, launched a global coalition on youth mental health in Canada, in partnership with Jack.org, the University of Toronto, iFred, and batyr, thus engaging and amplifying youth voices advocating for mental health support worldwide.

The ride sharing company **Lyft**, based in San Francisco, California, engages its drivers, many of them young people, in its “Disaster Relief Access” program. In the aftermath of natural disasters, Lyft provides a valuable community service to those affected by natural disasters and connects them safely, at no charge, to their loved ones or to shelters.

## Youth as Brand Ambassadors

Evidence consistently shows that millennials and generation Z young people are willing to pay more for brands committed to positive social and environmental impact.<sup>3</sup> Consumers are looking for brands they can trust and for products that are good for their health, environmentally friendly, and manufactured within safe workplaces. When young people endorse a brand, they are enthusiastic to share their experience over social networks with their friends and can significantly impact the success of a product. Some companies are realizing the potential of young brand ambassadors and exploring innovative approaches to engage with them.

Health, safety, and security are important components of youth wellbeing, and companies dedicated to advancing these sustainability targets can engage young people in implementing and propagating related initiatives. Health is the focus of SDG goal 3, and safety and security relate to SDG goal 16.

## Bridging Gender and Digital Divide across Engagement Models

Today, many companies recognize the importance of empowering girls and young women. Across various models of engagement, they strive for gender equality and inclusiveness. This contributes to SDG goal 5 and aligns with one of the youth wellbeing domains.

Also, for youth wellbeing it is important that youth have access to ICT, a key component for fostering innovation and for participating in inclusive and sustainable communities. Companies in the technology sector are leading the way in bridging the digital divide and leveraging ICT for sustainable development, simultaneously contributing to SDG goal 9 related to industry, innovation, and infrastructure.

## Successful Models of Engaging Young Women

**Johnson & Johnson** is partnering with leading educational institutions to develop high-impact strategies for increasing the number of young women enrolling in STEM programs and graduating with degrees. Their WiSTEM<sup>2</sup>D—Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, Math, Manufacturing, and Design—supports and inspires girls and women in their pursuit of those six fields of study around the world.

Launched in partnership with JP Morgan and IYF, **Hilton** provided 200 young women in Saudi Arabia with skills training for employment in the retail and hospitality sectors.

3.

Nielsen. “Sustainability Imperative: New Insights on Consumer Expectations”. October 2015.

Accessed at: <https://www.nielsen.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2019/04/global-sustainability-report.pdf>

## ICT as an Entryway for Youth Engagement

**Tata Group**, an Indian multinational conglomerate holding company headquartered in Mumbai, India, is committed to bridge the digital divide for Indian youth. Their “IT Employability” program, running in 33 engineering colleges and five science colleges in 12 states, has trained close to 3,034 students in technical and business skills and general aptitude as of March 2018, including 980 from socially and economically disadvantaged communities.

With **Citi Foundation** funding, Trust for the Americas, a nonprofit organization affiliated with the Organization of American States, is preparing Latin America’s low-income urban youth for careers in cyber security. Latin America has seen an unprecedented growth of jobs in the tech sector, but educational opportunities in the digital arena remain limited. This program aims to bridge that skills gap and give vulnerable youth access to employment opportunities in high-demand industries. Through technical skills development and job-readiness training, as well as opportunities to become certified, more than 300 participants in the program have improved their prospects for employment in cyber security.

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Even experienced corporate sustainability experts agree that it is more challenging to successfully implement youth-related initiatives than environmentally-responsible programs, such as water stewardship, waste reduction, or clean energy. Our discussants shared the following concerns related to youth engagement in sustainability strategies:

- Measuring results is challenging, evaluating impact is complex, and it often takes a long time to observe outcomes.
- Many solutions, tools, and potential service providers exist, making it difficult for the private sector to choose the right combination.
- Most implementing partners do not have a global footprint yet rarely collaborate among themselves, forcing the sustainability executive to work with different project designs in each market.
- There is ample evidence of what works in youth economic opportunity programs in developing countries, yet there is a lack of similar research in mature markets.
- There is no central repository of actionable models for youth engagement, with best practices, case studies, and practical, proven solutions to common challenges.

Despite these concerns, companies committed to youth engagement continue to invest in programs that promote youth wellbeing. They are looking for ways to collaborate on innovative solutions, such as workforce sharing, joint skill development programs, and defining career pathways across sectors and firm boundaries. Many multinationals are setting ambitious long-term objectives and pledging their resources to achieve them. Here are some examples:

- **Hilton** committed to doubling their investment in social impact in their operations, their communities, and their supply chain by 2030.
- **McDonald's** pledged to reducing barriers to employment for two million young people by 2025, through pre-employment job readiness training, employment opportunities, and workplace development programs.
- **Gap** plans to expand their youth development program, "This Way Ahead," to 53 cities globally, to engage 10,000 youth in the program by 2020, and to hire five percent of their entry-level workers from their program by 2025.
- **Adecco Group** pledged to secure 4,000 work-based learning opportunities per year by 2021 in 11 countries with their client companies and 500 work-based learning opportunities per year for internal hires by 2021. In the United States, Adecco Group committed to creating 10,000 work-based learning opportunities by 2023.
- **Nestlé** announced at the UN General Assembly that they will help two million young people to access economic opportunities by 2030, through their global youth initiative, "Nestlé needs YOUth."





## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our findings related to different approaches to youth engagement across global company supply chains are summarized in the following table.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT MODEL	PRIVATE SECTOR ROLE	REPRESENTATIVE SECTORS	YOUTH WELLBEING CATEGORY	ALIGNMENT WITH SDGS
<b>Youth as Employees</b>	Employer, mentor, trainer, investor in education and training programs	Tourism and hospitality, retail, banking, food and beverage, construction	Access to economic opportunities and relevant, holistic, and affordable education	SDG#8 Decent work and economic growth SDG#4 Quality education
<b>Youth as Suppliers</b>	Supply chain “owner,” investor in entrepreneurship programs	Agri-business, food and beverage	Access to economic opportunities	SDG#8 Decent work and economic growth
<b>Youth as Citizens— Problem solvers</b>	Convener, engagement platform	Across sectors	Citizen participation, youth voice and agency	SDG#16 Peace, justice, and strong institutions
<b>Youth as Brand Ambassadors</b>	Trendsetter	Across sectors	Health, safety, and security	SDG#13 Good health and wellbeing SDG#16 Peace, justice, and strong institutions
<b>Focus on Gender in Youth Engagement</b>	Equalizer of opportunities across genders	Across sectors	Inclusiveness and equality	SDG#5 Gender equality
<b>Focus on ITC in Youth Engagement</b>	Builder of bridges over the digital divide	ICT, pharmaceutical, medical	Across ICT	SDG#9 Industry, innovation, and infrastructure





Although there is a clear imperative for engaging youth across supply chains, across sectors, and in a multitude of ways, only a handful of corporate sustainability leaders are incorporating youth engagement systematically and at scale in their sustainability strategies and long-term plans. Those companies measure the outcomes of their youth investments and recognize impact they have on their bottom line.

The challenges for significantly larger investment in youth development, collaboration with youth, and strategic engagement of young people by the private sector are real and complex, but they are not insurmountable. Here are our recommendations for addressing the concerns our discussants raised:

- **Consolidate the current knowledge and best practices in youth engagement within corporate social sustainability programs, and widely share with private sector and their potential partners** (youth supporting organizations, government agencies, youth development funders, etc.). In our interviews with companies leading their sectors in youth engagement, it was obvious that they acquired a number of lessons learned, and that they were willing to share their experience. On the other side, there are many companies willing to further their youth initiatives, but they are lacking practical, proven models, tools, and solutions.
- **Simplify implementation of global company's youth programs across markets through partnerships.** To address the challenge of fragmentation in the youth NGO space and assist multinationals in implementing their youth engagement initiatives in multiple locations, it is necessary to form coalitions of partners with a well-defined shared mission, operating model, and standards for tracking impact. This action may require an entity to act as a "backbone" for bringing together local youth NGOs, schools, and other relevant organizations.
- **Quantify return on youth engagement investment.** Since it is more difficult to measure the results of social sustainability programs and their impact on company's bottom line, it is necessary to create easy-to-use tools, processes, and systems for each model of youth engagement. Choosing a relatively small number of youth engagement indicators, setting specific targets for them, and linking them clearly to corporate performance will entice more companies to make pledges impacting youth wellbeing.

While more work is needed to validate these findings, this research provides initial insights into the current situation and relevant suggestions to increase corporate focus on youth across their global supply chains. We look forward to engaging with sustainability focused companies to advance thinking and action on this topic in the future.







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