



# Economic and Social Council

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## Commission for Social Development

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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and  
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:**

**Priority Theme: Socially just transition towards sustainable  
development: the role of digital technologies on social  
development and well-being of all**

### **Statement submitted by World Youth Alliance, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution [1996/31](#).

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

The World Youth Alliance is a global coalition of young people dedicated to promoting the dignity of the human person in policy and culture and building solidarity between young people of developing and developed countries.

All human beings are equal in dignity and therefore deserve respect, opportunity, and the freedom to use their abilities and talents. Countries and communities may take different paths to reach the goal of social development, but when people understand human dignity – the intrinsic and equal value of every human being – they strive to create conditions that include everyone and enable them to thrive. Human dignity must be at the foundation of all development efforts.

This human dignity-centered approach is reflected in the well-established principle that development must be person-centered. It is the intrinsic worth of the human person that provides the basis on which to found policies and laws that create conditions under which human beings can flourish. Therefore, we should respect every human being and work together in solidarity to ensure that every human being is included in our efforts to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development.

Person-centered development is grounded in human dignity and focuses on empowering people. Policies based on human dignity recognize each person's ability to contribute to, not just benefit from, development. Human creativity and hard work have driven innovation, improving living conditions for countless people. Policies grounded in human dignity prioritize education and vocational training (SDG 4) and good governance and infrastructure (SDG 16) to empower people to achieve authentic development. Policies that treat persons as part of a problem to be solved rather than participants in development ultimately detract from these essential efforts.

The importance of person-centered development extends to the creation and use of digital technologies. Innovation in technology has shown tremendous capacity to connect people around the world, help bridge accessibility gaps for persons with disabilities, and allow greater civic engagement in monitoring and accountability. During the global coronavirus health crisis, digital technologies have played an important role in facilitating education, work, and healthcare. At their best, these technologies reflect the best of human ingenuity and connectedness.

As with other things, technology can also be used badly. Digital technologies can result in the commodification of the human person, and contribute to and facilitate exploitation. Authoritarian governments have also used technology to monitor their citizens' communications and lives to a degree which would be impossible without smartphones, personal computers, and cameras. These uses demonstrate the need for a culture and climate which is committed to protecting and promoting dignity and freedom.

Education is central to promoting a free and just society. Quality education must be available to all on an equal basis and should flow from an authentic understanding of the human person, and foster respect for self and others in solidarity. Parents bear the primary responsibility for educating their children and should be supported in this role by the state.

World Youth Alliance has developed a curriculum that can help promote respect, responsible behavior, and equality between men and women. The Human Dignity Curriculum (HDC) teaches children about human dignity: that every human being has it, and should therefore be respected. The program is culturally sensitive and encourages parental involvement.

Students who understand human dignity are not only prepared to make responsible personal decisions, but to contribute to their communities and to treat others with respect in their families, peer groups, and communities, including in their personal relationships. The lessons they learn about solidarity, excellence, and respect encourage them to examine their actions and responsibilities to themselves and others. With these lessons in mind, they can promote authentic development, inclusive policies, and fair workplace practices.

The HDC also has a sexuality education extension. This program teaches age-appropriate, biologically accurate information with a focus on personal development and informed decisions related to students' sexuality based on an understanding of themselves, and with respect for their own human dignity and the dignity of others. This can help girls and boys form healthy, respectful relationships and resist peer pressure.

Young people who understand human dignity are not only prepared to make responsible personal decisions, but to contribute to their communities and to treat others with respect in their families, peer groups, and communities, including in their personal relationships. They will be prepared to contribute to sustainable development and poverty eradication, not just for themselves, but also for others.

Education cultivates the skills and personal characteristics necessary for people to thrive. However, for people to be able to apply their gifts and abilities, they need opportunity. Policies grounded in the dignity of the human person must also facilitate equal access to various forms of capital. By opening these forms of capital up to everyone, we can create new opportunities among diverse groups for innovation which can meet more and various needs, not only through social entrepreneurship but new business, research, and investment.

Michael Fairbanks, an advisor to President Paul Kagame of Rwanda, identified seven forms of capital that people need access to in order to thrive. These are: natural endowments such as location, subsoil assets, forests, beaches, and climate; the financial resources of a nation, such as savings and international reserves; humanly made capital, such as buildings, bridges, roads, and telecommunications assets; institutional capital, such as legal protections of tangible and intangible property, efficient government departments, and firms that maximize value to shareholders and compensate and train workers; knowledge resources, such as international patents, and university and think tank capacities; human capital, which represents skills, insights and capabilities; and culture capital, which means not only the explicit articulations of culture like music, language, and ritualistic tradition, but also attitudes and values that are linked to innovation. The development of human capital is fundamental to the development of our societies, and we need to be true to the idea of no one left behind.

Institutional capital aligns closely with SDG 16, and is critical to ensuring the access to the other forms of capital. In countries where corruption is widespread, the poor and those in vulnerable situations often cannot afford to exercise their rights. Those with inadequate or overbearing regulations make it impossible to start new enterprises, often leading to concentration of power and wealth. A lack of good infrastructure inhibits successful entrepreneurship. The use of digital technologies to censor, monitor, and control is likewise antithetical to authentic development and good governance. These problems will always have the most limiting effect on those at the margins.

Countries that invest in just and accountable institutions and good infrastructure management can bring about lasting change. Eliminating bribery puts more people on an equal footing. Regulatory schemes that are reasonable and intelligible to the ordinary person can protect resources from misuse while guaranteeing access to those

resources by anyone with a good idea and the willingness to work for it. Creating systems that are just and accountable will increase their use by those most likely to be excluded. Digital technologies can increase access to information, disseminate important information, and help keep institutions and leaders accountable. Their proper use will give everyone a voice in developing the policies they want in place to ensure that everyone can be a participant in fostering development.

Human beings are our greatest resource. By grounding our efforts in human dignity and building person-centered policies, we can equip all human beings to be problem-solvers. Thus empowered, everyone can contribute to the development of their communities using their unique capacities and gifts.

World Youth Alliance urges the Commission to promote policies based on human dignity to ensure that all people have access to quality education and just and accountable institutions facilitating access to the various forms of capital. These efforts are central to ensuring that digital technologies are used well and contribute to a just and equitable transition to sustainable development.

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