WHEC2022 Youth Blog Article – Organization

Title: Michigan State University's Global Youth Advancement Network: Advancing the SDGs

Submitted by: Opal Leeman Bartzis, Ed.D., Interim Director, Global Youth Advancement Network, Michigan State University bartziso@msu.edu

https://globalyouth.isp.msu.edu

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are an invitation for organizations to invest in humanity and demonstrate genuine care for the holistic concept of sustainability. What better way to operationalize these commitments than to empower youth to embrace them? Perhaps the greatest role organizations can play, therefore, is that of facilitator of connections, increasing awareness and giving youth the supportive space to carry forward the imperatives of the SDGs.

The Global Youth Advancement Network (GYAN) at Michigan State University (MSU) was established in 2016 to enable faculty, staff, students and local and international partners access the resources they need to engage youth across the globe in cutting-edge research and programs that transform individuals and communities. GYAN serves as a coordinating platform for research and international development activities related to the education, entrepreneurship, mentoring, and leadership training of youth. Based on research on youth in developing countries, GYAN is focuses on three priority themes, partner organizations, and regions: convening thought leaders GYAN builds on MSU's legacy of international engagement and creates innovative solutions that will improve the livelihood of millions of global youth. In collaboration with other MSU programs—such as the Alliance for African Partnership, Asian Studies Center, and MSU's #1 ranked program for teacher education—GYAN is increasing the university's global engagement and building on the university's land-grant values to address young people's aspirations for sustainable global prosperity.

*Convening Thought Leaders*
GYAN is working with MSU faculty and partner institutions to develop and disseminate case studies and comparative analyses across the globe of pilot projects that have positively impacted youth, particularly in the area of entrepreneurship, reproductive health and food security. Sample projects include the facilitation of youth-led conferences; research and outreach projects; and support for social and business entrepreneurship ventures.

*Capacity Building*
Activities in this area occur on multiple levels and include capacity building of MSU faculty and faculty from local institutions through joint research and program implementation. GYAN is also focused on institutional capacity-building and technical training of local NGO partners, government officials and young entrepreneurs, which involves the coordination and implementation of livelihood activities with these stakeholders.

*Content Development*
GYAN collaborates with local partners to develop educational content that is culturally relevant and appropriate to the language, literacy and local realities of target communities. Content developed through this initiative aim to reflect state-of-the-art pedagogy that utilizes participatory, multimedia and blended learning approaches and delivery mechanisms. Content is shared with local educators, NGO

partners and civil society organizations and used as instructional aides to increase young people's access to life skills, vocational training, and leadership opportunities.

**Advancing the SDGs**
GYAN is well positioned to foster strategies related to the advancement of the SDGs, as exemplified by the GYAN Global Voices initiative, which offers a platform for young people around the world to advocate for their communities, share their opinions, and introduce solutions to local and national challenges. The Global Voices webinar series was launched in November of 2020 to showcase the work young global innovators are doing in relation to one or more of the SDGs. The series actively serves as a coordinating platform for research and outreach activities related to the various SDGs and connects young innovators with faculty and industry mentors who can help scale their work. Global Voice webinar episodes produced thus far have addressed food security, jobs for youth, quality education, and peace and justice.

Additionally, recognizing that the voices of young people have always been and always will be critical to the evolution of a just society, GYAN aims to provide a thoughtful platform for these voices by hosting a recurring regional essay competition for 15-24 year olds. Choosing from several themes, the participants submit a 600-900 word essay about how they are addressing a challenge their communities face. A panel of MSU faculty and staff reviews the essays and GYAN awards prizes to the top three entries. GYAN also publishes their essays, along with the honorable mention essays within each theme, in a book to publicize these young leaders' voices to the world. In collaboration with MSU's Alliance for African Partnership, GYAN co-hosted the inaugural essay contest in 2017 titled "Working Together to Create the Africa We Want" in a project that signaled a new era of engagement in Africa in which the voice of young people are the driving force behind the partnerships, strategies, and vision that move the continent forward. Subsequent essay contests have focused on Latin America and Southeast Asia, encouraging participants to illuminate their interventions to confront the inequities of their local communities.

With the continuation of important initiatives like Global Voices, GYAN will relentlessly seek to advance the SDGs and solve global challenges by offering dynamic spaces for youth to exchange ideas, develop and showcase innovative ideas, and build genuine networks that enable them to collaboratively define their future in a way that is equitable, just, and sustainable.

###