Exploring Youth Innovation in Higher Education: the Case of SDG 13 and SDG17 in Italy

8 May 2024, 15:00 - 16:15 PM (EST), United Nations Headquarters – Conference Room F

Organized by: United Nations Youth Delegate Programme of Italy, World Food Forum, University for SDGs

SUMMARY

Background on the event
The Side Event spotlighted the symbiotic relationship between emerging exemplary practices in Climate Action (SDG13) and Partnership for the Goals (SDG17) through a unique case study: Innovation in Italian Higher Education. Within the framework of sustained dedication to quality education acknowledged in the 2023 SDG Summit political declaration, youth-driven innovation emerged as a pivotal catalyst for SDG advancement, notably contributing to the outcomes of the Summit of the Future. Collaborative efforts among diverse stakeholders amplified the mobilization of youth-led initiatives, leveraging knowledge, expertise, technology, and financial resources to generate mutual benefits across sectors. The event showcased exemplars of multi-stakeholder and local innovation in Italian higher education institutions, featuring the inaugural “Italian Youth for Innovation” (IYI) Challenge and presenting concrete instances of student-led innovation. Distinguished speakers highlighted the role of youth in advancing the SDGs, including Giacomo Di Capua (UNYDP Italy) and panelists Ose Ehianeta Arheghan (UNA-USA) and Celeste Macilwaine (World Food Forum), who discussed youth-led multi-stakeholder innovations. Eleonora Bosio (University for SDGs) shared insights into fostering multi-stakeholder collaborations at the local level. The event concluded with reflections by Kenley Rudimch-Kenneth (Permanent Mission of Palau to the United Nations) and Dana-Marie Salina (Permanent Mission of the Republic of Trinidad & Tobago to the United Nations) on the pivotal role of multilateral cooperation in fostering youth leadership for the comprehensive attainment of SDG13 and SDG17, drawing from collaborative experiences between Italy and Small Island Developing States under the AOSIS Fellowship Programme. Giacomo Di Capua (UNYDP Italy) moderated the event.

Key Issues discussed
- The need for multistakeholder partnerships to support youth-led innovation for sustainable development, working towards achieving the SDGs, particularly in the context of SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 17 (Partnership for the Goals).
Mobilization of resources by Member States, UN agencies, non-profits, and the private sector to support young innovators and further commit to youth empowerment in agri-food system transformation, among other strategic sectors.

The importance of education and youth-led innovation as pillars to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, highlighting the role of empowered youth in identifying challenges and finding solutions relevant to their countries’ specific needs and vulnerabilities.

Investing in higher education as a means and a catalyst to equip young people with the knowledge and skills to address SDG 13, particularly crucial for small island developing states, emphasizing the transformative potential of initiatives like the Italian Youth for Innovation (IYI) Challenge.

Youth-led innovation in higher education, focusing on the intersection of SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 17 (Partnership for the Goals), underlining the significance of multi-stakeholder collaboration and youth engagement in sustainable development to bridge industry, government, and civil society in the promotion of bottom-up innovation.

Key recommendations for action

- **Establish Multistakeholder Partnerships**: Create multistakeholder partnerships at all levels, engaging diverse stakeholders to support youth-led innovation for SDG achievement.

- **Mobilize Resources for Youth Empowerment**: Member states, UN agencies, non-profits, and the private sector should mobilize resources to demonstrate commitment to youth empowerment, particularly in achieving SDG 13.

- **Invest in Youth-focused STEM Training**: Increase investment in youth-focused STEM training to leverage science, innovation, and technology for SDG 13 gains, connecting political vision with technical solutions across diverse subnational contexts.

- **Facilitate Youth-led Coalitions**: Facilitate the establishment of youth-led coalitions for sustainable development to create a network aligned with the SDGs, fostering collaboration between Italian initiatives and international partners to accelerate progress towards Agenda 2030 implementation.

- **Leverage Higher Education as a Multi-Stakeholder Catalyst for Youth Innovation**: Member States should increasingly support the creation of multi-stakeholder working tables centered around higher education institutions to facilitate the exchange of innovative practices, accelerate cross-sector capacity-building, and increase the visibility of youth-led innovation at the national scale.