Cohort 2030

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BRIEF

Cohort 2030 in Brief

Notwithstanding deep divisions that are emerging in many countries, and anxieties circulating in many capitals, with the adoption in September 2015 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we are moving into what could be the most exciting period of development in generations. The ultimate goal underpinning the SDG agenda is to make societies more prosperous and equitable, and the planet more sustainable by 2030. Not only do the SDGs apply to all of us—they reflect the demand by some populations that governance and justice be included in the agenda; they are fundamental to advancing development. Their inclusion represents a paradigm shift from the traditional technocratic frame that has dominated the field.

We are still early in the life cycle of the SDGs, and it is not surprising that the glide path to robust implementation is not yet apparent. While over 100 countries will have voluntarily reported progress by July 2018, the SDGs are not well known outside expert circles, and the goals, the indicators, and the targets require a work force trained in skills that, in many cases, are as yet undeveloped. To the extent that citizens do know about the SDGs, there is often a tendency to think of them as the "UN Goals" rather than as "Our Goals." The UN has a role, for example, in hosting the High Level Political Forum in New York each year. To fully implement the SDGs by 2030, however, the agenda must be locally owned.

We face a particular challenge and enormous opportunity to identify and help grow the next generation of social entrepreneurs, what we are calling "Cohort 2030," the cadre that will mature as the SDGs are implemented. (We use the term "social entrepreneur" in the way that Ashoka does; change-makers using innovative approaches to address the most pressing challenges confronting societies.) Cohort 2030, the demographic born roughly between 1980 and 2000, appears distinct from other generations in important ways; their native fluency in innovation and technology, their attitudes toward diversity including LGBT rights and gender, their antipathy regarding corruption, their interest in ethically-sourced products, and concern about climate change. Specifically, we are placing a big bet on the untapped opportunity to broaden constituencies for freedom among this cohort afforded by the SDGs, echoing Amartya Sen's view of "development as freedom." This demographic for many countries is the largest, and thus a source of energy that needs to be productively channeled. This generation will shape and carry forward the post-2030 agenda; what we are able to achieve in the next decade will be leveraged into the future.

Simply put, we envision a virtuous cycle driving progress on the SDGs. The Global Goals offer the chance to nurture and grow Cohort 2030, a generation that will be skilled in how to use survey data, big data, digital platforms, and other information systems and communications methods to understand and respond to the needs of various populations. We envision pursuing numerous strategies, works streams, and multiple partnerships to advance and grow the Cohort 2030 initiative. As currently conceived, we envision three pillars working synergistically:

1. Backing the next generation of young civil society leaders/social entrepreneurs: This will include a combination of elevating voices from Cohort 2030 through various media, developing support systems and learning opportunities through cross-border convenings and locally-rooted and globally connected networks, or creating additional infrastructure to bolster these young leaders longer term helping make them more resilient to trends such as closing space around civil society.
2. Working with universities to prepare students and to conduct research focused on solving the great societal issues of our time through the SDG lens: This will include teaching/training, research, and collaboration around the SDGs. This pillar could be a joint partnership between universities or a wider consortia of universities devoted to teaching, research, and growing expertise on various aspects of the SDGs and Cohort 2030.
3. Activating cities as partners in achieving the SDGs: Working with mayors of select cities in the United States and around the world, this will include gathering public opinion data of youth, identifying their passion points, and shaping social marketing campaigns to grow demand for implementation and to highlight achievements around specific clusters of goals.

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