

## **Global Ethics Forum Roundtable Consultation**

**Shaping Tomorrow's Agenda: Youth Consultation Workshop**

September 2, 2024

**Hosted by:** Globethics in collaboration with the UNESCO-MOST BRIDGES Coalition

**Objective:** To engage youth and intergenerational participants in shaping the UN Summit of the Future, with a focus on ethics, education, policy-making, and sustainable development.

### **Overview:**

The Global Ethics Forum Roundtable Consultation, held on September 2, 2024, was a closed-door roundtable with 18 participants designed for intergenerational dialogue centered on youth participation in global decision-making processes. The session brought together various sectors, including academia, civil society, and international organizations, to deliberate on ethical leadership, systemic change, the future of education, and community-driven solutions ahead of the UN Summit of the Future, slated for later in September 2024.

This roundtable emphasized the importance of elevating youth voices, particularly in designing ethical frameworks for future governance, tackling corruption, and ensuring sustainability in policy and practice. The session addressed three primary topics:

1. **Co-Designing the Future of Education:** A consensus was among the participants that education is the key tool for creating a more equitable future. Discussions ranged from community-based approaches to multilateral approaches. Youth participation needs to be actively integrated into global education and policy strategies.
2. **Policy Verses Practice:** Participants expressed frustration with the differentiation between policies in place, what is practiced, and who bears accountability. Participants voiced concerns that it is not necessarily new policies that need to be created for change, but rather the implementation and, specifically, who is implementing these changes.
3. **Accountability and Ability to Adapt:** A recurring theme among participants was the personal and professional cost of being an ethical leader. Leading ethically within a government or organization that operates unethically is especially challenging, particularly across different countries and political systems. This discussion also highlighted the importance of cultivating future generations of ethical leaders through education, yet the pressing question remained: how can we create accountability and drive systemic change among those currently in positions of power?

## Key Themes and Participant Insights:

### 1. Ethical Decision-Making and Leadership

Participants emphasized the crucial need for ethical leaders empowered by community support. One participant raised concerns over the Western world's failure to distinguish between good and evil in public discourse, leading to ethical stagnation. Ethical progress, he argued, depends on reintroducing moral clarity into public decision-making processes.

Another participant stressed the importance of systemic thinking, advocating for youth to be active co-creators of change rather than passive beneficiaries. She called for the creation of inclusive spaces where young people can shape their own futures through grassroots initiatives and community-driven approaches, emphasizing a bottom-up design. This was echoed by a Globethics Youth Leadership Award winner, who highlighted the severe power imbalance in her home country of Nepal, where youth have little influence in political decision-making. This exclusion, she noted, perpetuates stagnation and hinders progress. Many participants agreed that fostering change at the grassroots level is relatively feasible, as most governments do not tightly control or regulate local efforts.

### 2. Empowering Youth through Education

Education emerged as a critical enabler for ethical leadership and societal progress. One participant underscored the role of education in empowering marginalized communities, especially in regions like Lebanon. Access to education, he suggested, can bridge the gap between vulnerable youth and their potential to drive positive social change. *"Education is fundamental but the perspective against corruption needs to be adapted. Within a few generations with a critical education system and corruption cleaned out, hope emerges"*.

Participants also criticized traditional education systems for inadequately preparing youth to face real-world challenges. Critical issues like climate disasters and global conflicts are rarely addressed in schools, leaving young people without the tools or frameworks to think critically about potential solutions. The shared sentiment encapsulated in the phrase, *"nobody ever asked us if we could do it ourselves,"* resonated deeply, as many participants expressed frustration at being perceived as inexperienced or needing guidance to make decisions. Empowering youth and cultivating future generations to be strong and capable was seen as the only sustainable path to societal improvement.

### 3. Systemic Change and Governance

Transparency and inclusivity in governance emerged as key themes throughout the discussions. One participant, coming from a non-democratic country, criticized the lack of transparency in large institutions and called for more democratic and open decision-making processes. A Kenyan participant echoed this sentiment, advocating for a shift away from the "savior mentality" in development work, emphasizing the need for stakeholders to engage

communities as equal partners in co-creating sustainable futures. Many participants described their own countries as either undemocratic or suffering from corrupt democracies. They expressed frustration that while youth desire change, those who created and maintain these systems remain in power, deliberately holding on to authority to prevent progress.

Youth representatives called for greater grassroots involvement in governance, emphasizing that policies should be designed not just for communities but with them. An African participant underscored the disconnect between governmental policies and the needs of rural communities, particularly in his home country, where systemic corruption and technological manipulation obstruct progress. He poignantly remarked, *"When I think of 'government,' how do we get African governments to act ethically? In my country, being unethical costs nothing—they do it intentionally. For instance, they deliberately slow down the internet to hinder our advancement. The reality is they want to exploit and loot more money from the people."*

#### **4. Climate Change and Polarization**

A Globethics Youth Leadership Judge emphasized the urgent need to address climate change and societal polarization, both of which disproportionately affect vulnerable populations. He pointed out that many current leaders will not live to experience the long-term consequences of their policies on climate change or regional instability. He questioned, *"How can we ensure our voices influence policy in a meaningful way, and at what point will we be updated on whether our input had any real impact on policy decisions?"* Participants expressed shared frustration, noting that while youth—and even many older generations—agree on the need for action, large-scale change remains elusive.

Another key topic raised was the role of empathy in peacebuilding and leadership. The participant argued that empathy should be integrated into global governance as a vital tool for promoting peaceful coexistence and addressing pressing issues like environmental crises and violent conflicts. She stated, *"We can't stop wars with guns, but we can work on ourselves, listening to our inner voice. I believe that by following our hearts rather than our heads, we can more easily foster peace and peacebuilding."* She emphasized that empathy allows leaders to connect with the human experience behind policy decisions, leading to more compassionate and effective governance. This shift, she argued, is essential in a world increasingly divided by conflict and environmental degradation.

#### **5. Collaboration and Grassroots engagement in decision-making**

Collaboration across diverse sectors and grassroots initiatives was highlighted as a crucial driver of ethical, systemic change. Many participants advocated for bottom-up approaches to education and governance, especially in conflict-prone regions where young people often lack access to resources and opportunities. They argued that empowering local communities and fostering collaborative efforts can lead to more sustainable and impactful solutions. This need for grassroots involvement is partly due to the limitations of top-down approaches, which

often fail to address local needs effectively. Furthermore, the lack of youth representation in decision-making positions exacerbates this issue, as young people currently have limited capacity to influence top-down decisions. By prioritizing inclusive and participatory strategies, stakeholders can build stronger, more resilient systems that genuinely reflect the needs and aspirations of those most affected.

Participants consistently urged global organizations to listen to the needs of local communities instead of imposing externally derived solutions. The roundtable served as a platform for youth to voice their frustrations with current systems while proposing alternative, community-centric solutions.

## Recommendations

The recommendations reflect a comprehensive approach to addressing the multifaceted challenges discussed.

- **Strengthen Youth Participation:** Ensure that youth voices are not tokenized but genuinely integrated into the policymaking process, from local to global levels. Create spaces for intergenerational dialogue and co-creation.
- **Reform Education:** Focus on critical education reforms that tackle corruption and empower young people to engage ethically in decision-making processes, including having discussions based on future issues such as being an ethical leader, conflicts and climate change.
- **Promote Transparency and Inclusivity:** Global institutions must prioritize transparency and inclusivity in governance, ensuring that policies are shaped by and for the communities they impact, which are then properly enforced and adapted.
- **Address Climate and Social Polarization:** Immediate action is needed to address climate change and societal polarization, both of which threaten the futures of vulnerable populations.
- **Foster Empathy and Ethics in Leadership:** Integrate empathy and ethical thinking into global governance frameworks as a means of fostering peaceful coexistence and resilience in the face of crises.

## Conclusion

The Global Ethics Forum Roundtable Consultation, held on September 2, 2024, served as a pivotal gathering for intergenerational dialogue on the role of youth in shaping global decision-making. The discussions underscored the critical importance of elevating youth voices and integrating them meaningfully into policymaking processes. This involves moving beyond token gestures to ensuring that young people are actively involved in shaping policies from the local to the global level. Education emerged as a central theme, with participants emphasizing the need for reforms that not only address corruption but also prepare young people to tackle complex issues such as climate change and global

conflicts. **The consensus was clear: education must evolve to empower youth to become ethical leaders and informed decision-makers.**

A significant point of contention was the disparity between policy intentions and actual practices. Participants voiced frustration with the lack of accountability and the gap between what is promised and what is implemented. They highlighted the necessity of not only crafting effective policies but also ensuring that they are enforced and adapted to meet the needs of the communities they are intended to serve. This calls for a more transparent and accountable approach to governance, where the implementation of policies is closely monitored and evaluated.

The roundtable also addressed the urgent need for systemic change in the face of climate change and societal polarization. Participants stressed that these issues disproportionately affect vulnerable populations and require immediate action. The discussion highlighted that many current leaders may not experience the long-term impacts of their policies, which further complicates efforts to address these pressing challenges. The integration of empathy into leadership was proposed as a means to bridge divides and foster more compassionate and effective governance. This approach emphasizes understanding and addressing the human dimensions of global issues, which is essential for creating resilient and inclusive systems.

Collaboration across diverse sectors and grassroots initiatives was identified as a crucial driver of ethical and systemic change. Participants argued that empowering local communities and fostering collaborative efforts can lead to more sustainable solutions. This is particularly important in conflict-prone regions where top-down approaches often fail to address local needs effectively. The lack of youth representation in decision-making positions was also noted as a barrier to large-scale change. To overcome this, participants advocated for inclusive and participatory strategies that genuinely reflect the needs and aspirations of affected communities.

The recommendations emerging from this roundtable provide a comprehensive framework for addressing the challenges discussed. Strengthening youth participation involves creating genuine opportunities for young people to contribute to policymaking and decision-making processes. Reforming education is essential for preparing youth to engage ethically in global challenges, with a focus on critical issues such as corruption, conflict, and climate change. Promoting transparency and inclusivity in governance ensures that policies are not only designed with but also effectively implemented for the communities they impact.

Immediate action is needed to address climate change and societal polarization, which threaten the futures of vulnerable populations. Finally, fostering empathy and ethical thinking in leadership is crucial for promoting peaceful coexistence and resilience in the face of crises. By adopting these recommendations, stakeholders can work towards a more equitable and just global governance system, where the voices of the next generation are not only heard but actively shape the future. This holistic approach aims to create a world where ethical leadership and inclusive governance are the cornerstones of progress and sustainability.