

As 'drivers' of innovation, youth need skills and capacity – UN General Assembly President

17 July 2017 – Underscoring the importance of well trained and capable youth to realize the opportunities offered by advances in technology and innovation, the President of the United Nations General Assembly today called for building their capacities to ensure that they can fulfil their potential as well as support sustainable development.

“As the main beneficiaries of the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), and as the drivers of innovation and change, [it is vital that the enthusiasm and ingenuity of youth are harnessed to transform the world for the better](#),” Peter Thomson said at an event held at UN Headquarters in New York on the theme *Skills for the future of work*.

“Just as youth need education and training to access decent jobs in and of the future, they also require skills development to fulfil their vital role in SDG implementation,” he added.

In his remarks, Mr. Thomson called for targeted policies and resources to develop the digital skills of today’s youth, as well as for specific programmes to ensure that women and girls have access to education, health and employment opportunities.

Doing so, he said, would make sure they secure decent jobs and are never left behind again.

“We must see investing in quality education and training as fundamental for a world of sustaining peace and sustainable development,” he noted.

In particular, Mr. Thomson highlighted the need to work cooperatively with all stakeholders in building the education and training systems that are responsive to the needs, and given the complexities involved, called for international cooperation, strategic partnerships, and transfer of technology.

“The multilateral system has a responsibility to bring together governments, youth, employers, educators, and innovators to demystify the labour markets of the future, and to find innovative ways of building digital skills across the world, all in support of the implementation of the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development,” he stressed.



Peter Thomson, President of the seventy-first session of the General Assembly, makes remarks during the opening of the Ministerial segment of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. Photo: UN Photo/Manuel Elias

Speaking alongside Mr. Thomson, Jayathma Wickramanayake, the UN Envoy on Youth, also called for greater and more coherent efforts to better forecast the skills that will be needed in the future.

“We must adapt existing policies and initiatives to be fit for the digital era and ensure that we remain flexible enough, to adapt these further in the future,” she said, citing the example of the technological advances made since the turn of the millennium and signs that this will not slow down in the years ahead.

“We must [also] ensure that national youth policies are integrated, holistic and funded,” she added.

In her remarks, the Youth Envoy also underscored the need for holistic education to address evolving technical skills as well as impart competencies required to adapt to changing and demanding workplaces.

In this regard, she highlighted that formal education alone would not be enough, and stressed the importance of non-formal and informal education.

“With all this talk of change in such little time, one truth remains: there is no better investment a country can make than in the capacities and potential of its young people,” she stated.