

# United Nations 53<sup>rd</sup> Graduate Study Program

## Geneva, Switzerland

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Every year, as part of the educational outreach programs undertaken by the United Nations, the Information Service at Geneva organizes a Graduate Study Program. This program provides an opportunity for outstanding young postgraduate students from all over the world to deepen their understanding of the principles, purposes and activities of the United Nations and its related agencies via first-hand observation and study at the offices of the United Nations in Geneva.

This year's program, which lasted two weeks, attracted 75 graduate students representing 37 countries of the world. The young academics gathered in Geneva to deliberate on the theme: "From Millennium to Sustainable: Crafting new development goals for the future we want."

### Fresh thinking in the face of growing challenges

The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – which range from halving extreme poverty rates through halting the spread of HIV/AIDS to providing universal primary education – will be concluded this year. They will be replaced by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which will run for the next 15 years.

Sessions of the Graduate Study Program were delivered by staff of various different United Nations Organizations, such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Education Fund (UNICEF), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), among others.

Study program participants formed working groups and, under the guidance of United Nations experts, developed new ideas for tackling challenges related to climate change, poverty reduction, and trade & development. The prime objective of these working groups was to engage participants in creative thinking processes aimed at producing innovative ideas that could add real value to ongoing endeavors.

**“Development cannot be sustainable if it does not address the challenge of climate change”**

Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General

### Overview of the activities of the Working Groups

#### World Meteorological Organization

*Climate Change and Youth: We are the last generation that has a choice*

Led by Clare Nullis, the 53<sup>rd</sup> Graduate Study Program WMO Working Group was challenged to think about how to engage with other young people so as to tackle the challenges posed by climate change.

An indicator for the urgent need for action in this matter was the inspiring result of the global “My World” survey,<sup>1</sup> which shows the consistently low significance attributed to “Actions taken on climate change” in the overall list of priorities. Based on this analysis, this Working Group focused on the possibility of bridging the gap between the perception and the reality of the effects of climate change among young people. Particular focus was on ways of convincing young people to take action on climate change by building on the strengths of a widely established social media tool – a Facebook page called “Actions We Take”,<sup>2</sup> in reference to the “My World” survey and the “The World We Want” website report.<sup>3</sup>

#### United Nations Development Programme

*World Alliance of Cities against Poverty (WACAP)*

Under the guidance of Adam Rogers, the UNDP Working Group, to which I was assigned, worked on the action plan and final proposal for a project called WACAP – the World Alliance of Cities against Poverty. WACAP is a global network of municipal governments established by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to mobilize information and resources with the aim of combating poverty. This project is a response to the following situation.



Friends United in Geneva: Priyamka Manohar, Luiz Carlos, Adedotun Owolabi and Lionel Clesly Voss (left to right).

Some 3.9 billion people – more than half of humanity – now live in urban areas. In 2014, the world's urban population accounted for 54% of the total global population (up from 34% in 1960). It is expected to grow to two-thirds of the earth's population by the year 2050. In terms of absolute numbers, this expansion is concentrated in the less developed regions of the world, where the urban population is expected to grow at a rate of approximately 1.84% a year between 2015 and 2020, 1.63% a year between 2020 and 2025, and 1.44% a year between 2025 and 2030. This dramatic demographic shift will pose significant challenges to municipalities which are already struggling to provide adequate housing, transportation, employment, energy and social services for their inhabitants.<sup>4</sup>

Creating inclusive urban environments that embrace sound, sustainable principles for this growth and providing for their inhabitants is an important goal of the post-2015 development agenda, and will go a long way to determining whether cities succeed or fail in creating livable habitats that can meet the basic needs of their populations.

The UNDP Working Group developed a model that will sustain the organization and will contribute to the overall objective of WACAP, which is to create a new generation of cities in which people are provided with the resources and opportunities that will enable them to achieve a high quality of life. This input will be used at the next WACAP Executive Steering Committee Meeting, which will take place in Macau, China.

### United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)

*Using Trade and Investment for Sustainable Development, Surpassing the Past, Fulfilling the Future: Youth as the driving force*

The UNCTAD Working Group, which was under the leadership of Ms Miho Shirotori and Mr Galloway, worked on a project explor-

ing trade & investment as a pivotal tool in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, with young people as the driving force behind the endeavor.

As readers may be aware, the UN Sustainable Development Agenda is an all-encompassing strategy aimed at fostering a global social, economic and environmental architecture that is equitable, inclusive and sustainable for the existing population, as well as for generations to come. The UNCTAD working group project elaborated mechanisms for different stakeholders within the private sector, the public sector, and civil society to leverage trade and investment which can benefit tomorrow's leaders and agents, with a focus on youth engagement. The goal of this project is to improve the global architecture of trade and investment for all countries, with a special focus on developing countries, so as to achieve economic prosperity while incorporating the new global goals for sustainable development.

To reduce poverty and end inequality requires inclusive growth that allows everyone to contribute; and trade and investment are major catalysts that can ameliorate these struggles.

### Conclusion

Ensuring that leaders take ambitious decisions to reduce poverty and inequality and protect our planet is everyone's responsibility. Only then can implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals help lift everybody into a better future.

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