

## **Skilling Youth for Sustainable Development Goals: The Case of the Local Pathways Fellowship**

Nnaemeka Phil Eke-okocha, Project Lead, Local Pathways Fellowship, UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network- Youth (corresponding author)

phil.eke-okocha@sdsnyouth.org

(443) 523 – 8919

475 Riverside Dr., Suite 530

New York, NY 10115 USA

Bessy Thuranira, Deputy Project Lead of the Local Pathways Fellowship UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network- Youth

Amer Qawasmi, Project Officer, Mentorship Program of the Local Pathways Fellowship, UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network- Youth

Zakaria Abyaa, Project Officer, Content and Training of the Local Pathways Fellowship, UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network- Youth

### **1. Abstract**

This paper draws on existing literature and empirical data to examine the challenges of labor market transformation, including governance, technological advancements, and finance. The study emphasizes the necessity for innovative approaches to education and training, with the potential to equip young individuals with the skills needed to establish sustainable projects that can thrive amidst evolving market conditions. Data gathered from a sample of Local Pathways Fellows is studied in this paper to identify the role of the Local Pathways Fellowship (LPF) in supporting their sustainable development efforts. It also demonstrates how skills acquired through the program have been essential in their contribution to creating sustainable cities; this includes community engagement, local action in renewable energy, green infrastructure, housing waste management, and sustainable transportation. Data gathered from the LPF informs the paper's argument for the importance of youth training and education to match the transformational wave. Overall, the paper presents a compelling case for investing in youth training and education to promote sustainable development and address the challenges of labor market transformation. The LPF is highlighted as an effective program that provides young people with the skills and experience needed to positively impact their communities, build sustainable businesses, and contribute to a more sustainable future.

Keywords: labor market transformation; sustainable cities; youth; urban

## 2. Introduction

Over the past century, the global population has experienced unprecedented growth and urbanization. In 1950, the global population was only 2.5 billion, living primarily in rural areas, yet by 2020, the global population had grown to 7.8 billion, with over 50% of humanity now living in cities<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, the global urban population is expected to reach 68% by 2050<sup>2</sup>. While growing, cities have also become younger – with the majority of the city residents under 30.

This rapid urbanization has placed immense pressure on land, water, energy, and other resources, leading to increased greenhouse gas emissions and exacerbating the threats of climate change. Recognizing the critical role that cities have to play in sustainable development, The UN Agenda 2030 developed SDG 11 – ‘Sustainable Cities and Communities – which underscores the important contribution of cities in making human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. Through strategic planning, sustainable infrastructure development, renewable energy transitions, efficient transportation systems, waste management, and community engagement, cities can significantly reduce their carbon footprint, enhance resilience, and inspire global climate action.

To bridge the gap between the skills needed to address sustainability in cities and the growing youth population, it is crucial to leverage the potential of young people and equip them with the necessary skills to tackle urban challenges. This approach not only empowers youth but also taps into their creativity, energy, and fresh perspectives, fostering innovation and driving sustainable urban development. By providing targeted skill development opportunities for urban youth, cities can effectively address their pressing challenges and build a more inclusive and sustainable future. On a global scale, it is imperative to develop programs that bridge this gap between youth training and sustainable development.

In an era where sustainable development is of utmost importance, its advancement has remained crippled by the acute lack of knowledge and skills among individuals to promote sustainable practices<sup>3</sup>. This problem is more pervasive among the youth who lack access to training and education opportunities due to various factors, such as financial constraints, geographic location, and socio-economic status.

Youth training is a critical component of sustainable development strategies. It can empower young people to shape the transition towards a more sustainable and equitable future and equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to participate in labor market transformation. There is a need for more programs that provide practical and theoretical training that fosters innovation, entrepreneurship, and green skills development to young people who can become agents of change, contributing to the development of sustainable and socially responsible businesses, industries, and communities.

In light of the pressing need to skill the youth for sustainable development in the face of unprecedented urbanization and global challenges, this paper aims to make a valuable contribution to the field. The LPF serves as a notable case study, acting as a frontrunner in empowering young leaders to localize the SDGs and drive positive change locally.

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<sup>1</sup> World Cities Report 2022

<sup>2</sup> World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 Revision

<sup>3</sup> Martinez-Fernandez, Cristina, Carlos Hinojosa, and Gabriela Miranda. "Green Jobs and Skills: The Local Labour Market Implications of Addressing Climate Change." Working Document, CFE/LEED, OECD, February 2010.

The LPF program by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) Youth is designed to promote sustainable education and training for the skill sets needed to create a sustainable future in urban communities and manage the wave of transformational change shaping our world. Fellows engaged in the program gain a deep understanding of the challenges and opportunities presented by this transformational wave and are prepared to take on leadership roles in shaping the future of their communities.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. Methodology

#### *Case Study Approach*

This paper takes a case study approach, with the Local Pathways Fellowship being the primary case. The paper looks at the program's objectives, structure, methodologies, and outcomes, as well as the program's impact, success stories, and lessons learned.

#### Data collection

##### a) **Literature review**

The foundation of this paper is based on a comprehensive literature review to understand the existing research, theories, and best practices related to skilling youth for sustainable development. This provided an understanding of the current state of practice in skilling youth for sustainable development. It also helped establish the theoretical framework and informed the analysis of the Local Pathways Fellowship program as a case study. A literature review of the Local Pathways Fellowship's documentation, reports, and publications serves as a knowledge base about the program's implementation, success stories, and lessons learned.

##### b) **Primary data**

A questionnaire was designed to collect valuable primary data from the Local Pathways Fellowship program participants. The questionnaire consisted of various sections, delving into skills gained during the program and how the acquired skills had made a difference in participants' careers or community projects. The survey was completed by 27 participants.

### 4. Result and Discussion

The Local Pathways Fellowship program is one of the initiatives under the Sustainable Development Solutions Network Youth (SDSN-Youth) network, which specifically focuses on engaging young people in the implementation of the SDGs. The program Local Pathways Fellowship aligns with the SDSN's mission of mobilizing youth to contribute to sustainable development efforts but has a specific focus on **urbanization and SDG 11**.

The Local Pathways Fellowship (LPF) was launched in 2016 in Quito at the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), intended to build on the momentum around the adoption of the New Urban Agenda. Each year, LPF brings together a cohort of young thought leaders, urban planners, sustainability practitioners, researchers, and innovators from more than a hundred cities across the world to advance local dialogue, collaboration, and problem-solving around Sustainable Development Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11) to make cities and urban settlements "smart, fair and sustainable".

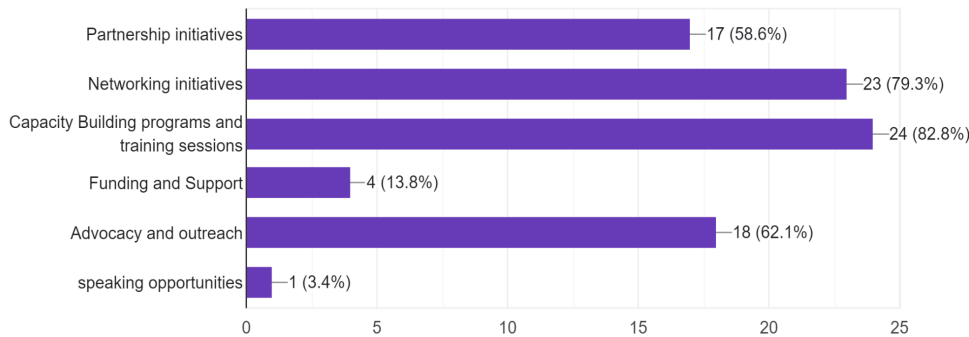
The program's main objective is to equip young leaders with the knowledge, skills, and networks they need to become effective agents of change in their local communities. By focusing on youth empowerment, the Local Pathways Fellowship aims to mobilize and engage young people in addressing global challenges and promoting sustainable development at the local level.

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<sup>4</sup> Ynestrillas Vega, Ana Gabriela, Elie Kallab, Shweta Gandhi, Nnaemeka Phil Eke-Okocha, and Joseph Sawaya. "A Comparative Analysis of the Role of the Youth in Localizing SDG 11 at the Local Level in the Global North and Global South." *Environmental Sciences Proceedings* 15, no. 1 (2022): 47.

## Results

Our analysis of the survey data assessing the effectiveness of the Local Pathways Fellowship in equipping participants with the necessary skills to make meaningful contributions to SDGs showed an overwhelming 100% of respondents affirmed that their participation in the SDSN Youth's LPF significantly increased their awareness of the development challenges faced by their communities. Participants mentioned that the course modules and research activities in the program exposed them to a wide range of information and ideas from various sources and individuals. This comprehensive learning experience helped them gain a well-rounded view of the development challenges in their cities and how to engage their communities and develop solutions for them.



*Figure 1: Opportunities received through the program*

The survey data shows that the program has provided fellows with various opportunities to localize the SDGs. The majority of the respondents mentioned the following opportunities;

1. Partnership initiatives: 58.6% of the respondents mentioned the availability of partnership opportunities which suggest that fellows through the program are able to foster collaborations with individuals and organizations to help implement local solutions and build businesses that thrive amidst evolving market conditions.
2. Networking: 79.3% affirm that the program enabled them to collaborate with like-minded individuals, organizations, and stakeholders and work towards the SDGs collectively.
3. Capacity building: 82.8% agree that the program has offered training sessions and skill development workshops that have enhanced their capabilities in localizing the SDGs and navigating transformational labor market waves.
4. Advocacy and outreach: 62.1% agree that the program has actively encouraged participants to promote the SDGs and contribute to a sustainable future.

The survey also highlighted other prospects offered by the program such as speaking opportunities (3.4%) and funding opportunities (13.8%).

Based on the survey findings, an overwhelming majority of respondents, approximately 88%, expressed a positive response regarding the program's efficacy in enhancing their skill set. The fellowship was perceived as instrumental in equipping them with essential skills, empowering them to drive positive and meaningful change within their local communities and make significant contributions toward a sustainable future.

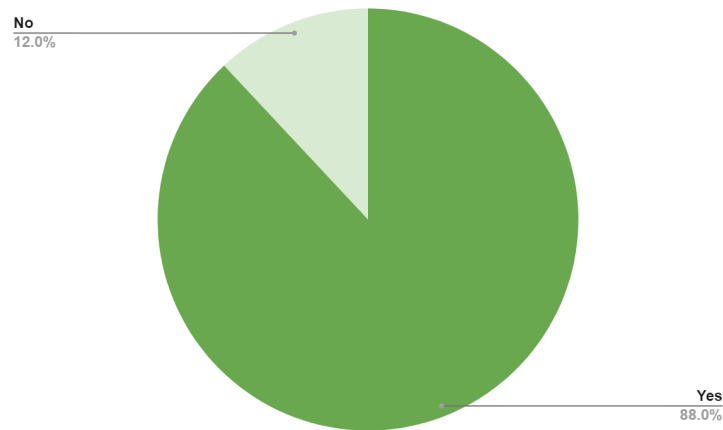


Figure 2: Percentage of fellows who acquired skills through the fellowship

The survey data indicates that the fellowship program has had a positive impact on equipping the fellows with valuable skills . The skills can be categorized as follows:

i) **Increased knowledge and Insights:** A majority of the respondents expressed that the fellowship has given them a better understanding of sustainable development, specifically the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and were now equipped to address community challenges.

<i>"It has given me the insight/knowledge I need to tackle problems in my community I may not have cared about."</i>	<i>"The materials were insightful and changed my expectations regarding SDGs."</i>	<i>"The LPF program is quite amazing in that it gives you a lot of knowledge."</i>
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ii) **Collaboration and networking:** Engaging with diverse networks of people from different countries through the program allowed participants to build valuable connections and collaborate on projects.

<i>"Engaging with the networks of people from different countries has helped me build valuable connections, collaborate on projects, and exchange ideas with like-minded individuals."</i>	<i>"The LPF program is quite amazing in that it gives you a lot of knowledge, but also because it gives you the opportunity to think about solutions, and connects you to other young people with similar interests."</i>	<i>"I believe the network will play a huge role in making a meaningful impact."</i>
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**iii) Global Perspective and SDGs Understanding:** Participants highlighted that the program helped them gain a better understanding of the SDGs and their relevance on a global level, contributing to their confidence in making an impact.

<i>"Opened me to a global way of doing things"</i>	<i>"I have a better understanding of the SDGs, and also I believe the network will play a huge role in making a meaningful impact."</i>	<i>"Yes, I think it helped me understand the system itself around SDGS, how they work on a general level, or even where to look for certain information."</i>
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**iv) Empowerment for Tackling Community Issues:** The program gave participants valuable insights and knowledge, empowering them to tackle community problems they may not have previously considered and providing them with the skills needed to drive positive change.

<i>"...the knowledge I gained has empowered me to understand the challenges facing my community and develop informed solutions."</i>	<i>"It has given me the insight/knowledge I need to tackle problems I may not have cared about in my community."</i>
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Based on the responses provided, the specific skills that participants developed during their time with the LPF are diverse and cover a wide range of areas related to sustainable development and community engagement. Many respondents related skills related to project design and development, a better understanding of SDGs and sustainability, urban planning, research, collaboration, and networking. Here is a word cloud of the skills mentioned by the respondents:



Figure 3: Response word cloud

Majority of respondents (20 out of 22) indicated that they have been able to apply the knowledge and skills they gained through the LPF in practical settings. This observation strongly indicates that the program has successfully prepared participants for practical implementation and skills that can be applied in real-world scenarios.

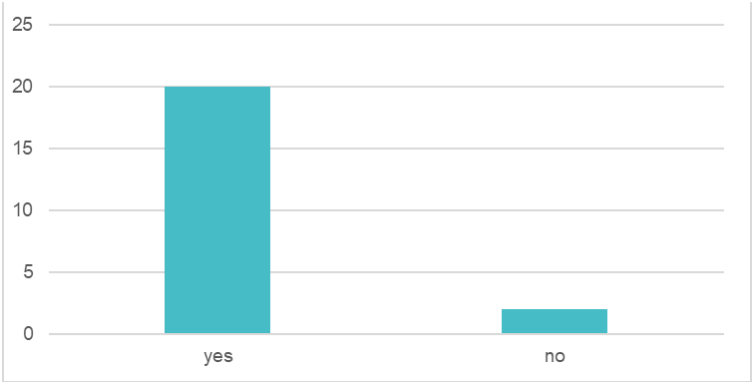


Figure 4: No of fellows who have applied skills gained through the program

Evidently, from the responses, the knowledge, and skills gained through LPF have been put into practical use by the participants. They have effectively applied the learning in their professional careers, community development projects, and mentoring activities, showcasing the real-world impact of the programs in empowering young individuals to address sustainable development challenges.

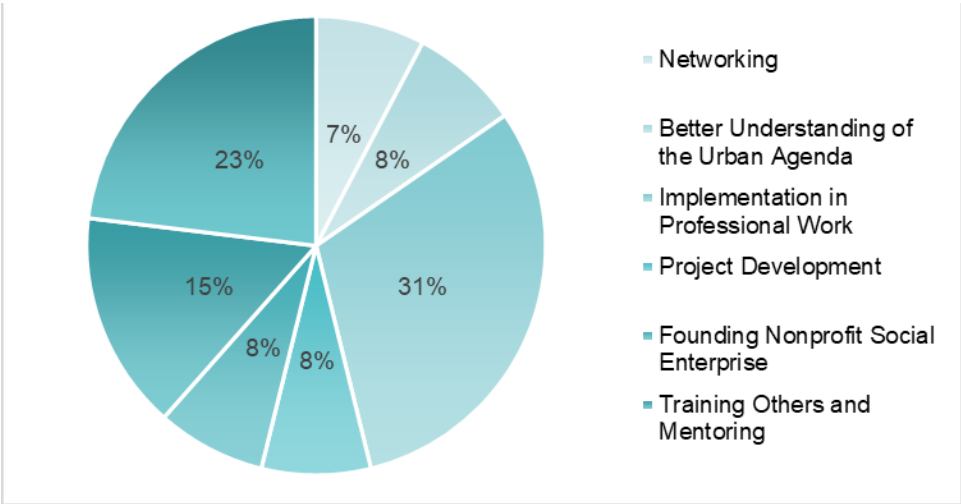


Figure 5: Areas where fellows have applied skills gained through the program

**Impact case examples**

The respondents provided several case examples that illustrate the significant impact of the LPF program on participants' ability to tackle real-world challenges and create positive change in their communities. The program has empowered young individuals to become change agents, leveraging their knowledge, skills, and networks to address sustainable development goals and make a meaningful impact in various parts of the world. Below are a few of the impact stories recorded in the survey:

**Candidate A:**

*“Yes, because of the knowledge and skills gained through the SDSN Youth program, I founded a nonprofit social enterprise Lets Build for Humanity Initiative, with the mission of providing social impact infrastructures to vulnerable and underserved people community. we have been able to win a grant of USD5000, where we design and constructed the first mobile toilet in Nigeria using plastic tanks to reduce open defecation and plastic pollution among the internally displaced people community in the northeast Nigeria.”*

**Candidate B:**

*Many of the urban design training videos have helped me to learn the theory which I use in my current job, which is about green building consulting.*

**Candidate C:**

*Yes! The Municipal Youth Conference for SDG that I created in 2022 with the support of LPF, we are going to the second year! Also, I'm one of the head organizer of LCOY Brasil 2022 and 2023!*

**Candidate D:**

*I got into Greenlight Initiative, a nonprofit organization based in Abuja, Nigeria. This organization is working to solve Nigeria's traffic problems. This organisation has been funded by Georgetown University, Washington DC to carry out a pilot research project in Nigeria - Talk Ooo. I'm currently involved in this research project as the south-east field officers team lead, and an intermediary between the organisation and its project partners, Peace Mass Transport, with it's head office in Enugu, Nigeria where I'm based.*

**Candidate E:**

*After the Fellowship, even I do not count with a Master till today, because of this opportunity and a few other past professional experiences people really relate me to sustainability it, it help me create a stronger network about this subject too and build connections were I have found more opportunities to keep growing in this direction. Thank you!!!*

## 5. Conclusion

The study has examined the critical issue of youth empowerment for sustainable development, particularly the Local Pathways Fellowship's (LPF) contribution to addressing labor market transformation. The findings of this study emphasize the need for innovative approaches to youth training and education to tackle the challenges arising from the rapidly changing market while promoting sustainable practices.

After a review of the survey data, it is evident that the LPF has played a significant role in equipping young people with the necessary skills needed to localize sustainable solutions and contribute to other sustainability efforts.



Despite the vast opportunities provided to young people, funding and resource allocation is still a major issue for them and limits their ability to localize sustainable development solutions. The impact cases demonstrate that the youth, with proper support, can conceive better cities and manage the transformational market waves.

After analyzing the responses, we can conclude that the Local Pathways Fellowship (LPF) program contributes and can serve as a best practice for youth education and organization to help address labor market transformation.

As labor market transformation continues to pose challenges, it has become evident that investing in youth is essential for shaping a more sustainable and inclusive future. LPF offers a holistic and all-encompassing approach to youth development in sustainable development. It equips young people to drive significant and long-lasting change in their communities and contribute to a more sustainable future by enhancing various skills, fostering cultural exchange, fostering digital literacy, and nurturing leadership qualities, among many other benefits.

## **6. References**

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