



ORGANIZING AN SDG-FOCUSED ACTIVATE TALK

A Methodology for Engaging Children,
Youth and Local Change-Makers

Produced by the Agenda 2030 Team, UNICEF Public Partnerships Division
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BACKGROUND

UNICEF has initiated an *SDG Activate Talk Series*, with the two intentions of bringing the messages of the SDGs to the young public as well as showcasing to decision-makers the positive actions children and young people are already taking on various issues within the agenda.¹

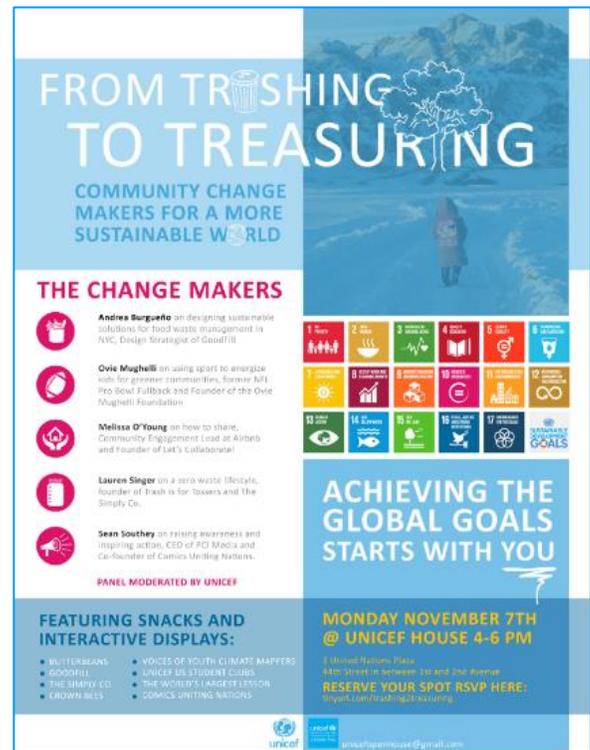
UNICEF's messaging around the role of children and youth in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can be summed up as three "A's" -- raising **awareness**, taking **action** and holding governments and other stakeholders to **account** on progress or lack thereof. As a way to highlight the role of children and youth in the SDGs, UNICEF offices and partners, including schools and youth groups, can utilize the *SDG Activate Talk* methodology so that a young audience has the platform to inspire and activate each other.

The fundamental idea is to look at topics that are both in the SDGs and where children and youth have shown a strong interest, and then engage local change-makers who are making progress on this topic in their personal, professional or academic lives in a moderated discussion, open publicly to children and youth in the community. It is also to make these topics – which can often seem abstract or overwhelming – more relatable to children and youth, demonstrating that they can do things individually or in partnership that will make progress towards the Global Goals.

For the first *SDG Activate Talk* (November 2016), UNICEF and partners co-organized a discussion focused on SDG 12: sustainable production and consumption issues, targeting children and youth in the NYC metro area. The topic was inspired by the mass voices of young people who expressed a strong commitment to preserving the planet during consultations that took place during the SDG negotiations. The event was titled [From Trashing to Treasuring: Community Change Makers for a More Sustainable World](#).

The second *SDG Activate Talk* was held on the margins of the first UN Oceans Conference (June 2017) and took a more expansive approach with young speakers from NYC, Bali, Texas, Florida and Canada. The young panelists demonstrated that ocean conservation is important in every geographic location and can take place through various means including through scientific invention, political campaigning, community organizing and peer-to-peer learning. The event was titled [Young Change Makers go Under the Sea](#).

Given the successful results of the first two *SDG Activate Talks*, UNICEF and partners plan to collaborate on a series of open houses throughout the SDG era, and believe the methodology can be easily transferable for other



The flyer is titled "FROM TRASHING TO TREASURING" and "COMMUNITY CHANGE MAKERS FOR A MORE SUSTAINABLE WORLD". It features a central image of a person standing on a beach with a tree. Below the title, it lists "THE CHANGE MAKERS" with four speakers: Andrea Buzio, Ovie Mughelli, Melissa O'Young, and Lauren Singer. It also mentions "FEATURING SNACKS AND INTERACTIVE DISPLAYS" and "ACHIEVING THE GLOBAL GOALS STARTS WITH YOU". The event is scheduled for "MONDAY NOVEMBER 7TH @ UNICEF HOUSE 4-6 PM".

SDG-Activate Talk online flyer, professionally designed for free by a volunteer.

¹ The *SDG Activate Talks* have been informed and inspired by UNICEF's Division of Communication's [Activate Talk methodology](#) developed in 2014, which had the overall aim to "bring together change-makers from all walks of life to rethink and rework how we can deliver results for the most vulnerable and marginalized children."



UNICEF offices and partners to use for engaging and showcasing actions of children and youth in their respective communities.

Please see below for some tips for organizing an *Activate Talk*. You can also contact [Shannon O'Shea and Callie King-Guffey](#) in the UNICEF Agenda 2030 Team for any questions or potential support with child-friendly materials. For child-friendly content on the SDGs, see also [World's Largest Lesson](#) and [Comics Uniting Nations](#) websites.

DESCRIPTION

An *SDG Activate Talk* is an open house that includes a panel of local dynamic change-makers – some, if not all, preferably children and youth -- who are working on the SDGs, knowingly or not. The idea is to reach a young public that may or may not (necessarily) be interested in the inner-workings of the United Nations or have even heard of the SDGs, but are interested in hearing from “unexpected” community leaders. Depending on the topic chosen, the panel could include innovators, inventors, campaigners, entrepreneurs, activists, designers and other change makers. These panelists would ideally present their work in hopes of *activating* others.

The event would run approximately 2 hours and be comprised of four core elements: 1) Introductory remarks/keynote (10 minutes); 2) A moderated “talk show” with panelists (30 minutes); 3) Q&A with audience (20 mins); 4) A networking fair with refreshments (60 minutes).

1. **Introductory Remarks and/or a Key Note Address** can either feature a decision maker (i.e. government official or UN representative), a young leader, or both. Ideally, the remarks would provide context as to why the discussion is addressing a certain topic and give a brief outline on what the SDG Activate Talk is and aims to achieve. Afterwards, the moderator can either immediately introduce the panel or conduct a transition activity that engages the audience. *See text box for inspiration.*

An SDG Activate Talk run-of-show is meant to be **flexible** so that hosts can add interactive activities to engage the audience depending on context. For instance, during *Young Change Makers go Under the Sea*, the run-of-show added a few elements:

-  **Introductory Remarks** by UNICEF official who briefly described SDG 14
-  **Keynote Address** by SDG Young Leader who briefly discussed his recent invention to cap oil spills
-  Before introducing the panel, the moderator interacted with the audience with a **Trivia Game** on the importance of oceans and a World's Largest Lesson [Video](#) on what young people can do to achieve the SDGs.
-  After the interactive panel discussion, a UNICEF Partner, Comics Uniting Nations took the stage **to launch a new comic** on SDG 14 and invited the audience to get a signed copy during the networking fair.

2. The main focus of the Activate Talk is the **talk-show style panel discussion** with 4-5 “change maker” speakers. For the *Trashing to Treasuring SDG Activate Talk*, the moderator asked each panelist to introduce themselves and their work in 1 minute and finished with the question “Did you know what the SDGs were before this Activate Talk?” Additional questions can be discussed and agreed to in advance with participants (see text box below for examples). Interventions should be brief and more of a discussion than a lecture.



Panel Questions were given to each speaker in advance of the *Young Change Makers go Under the Sea* who were told they have 30 seconds – 1 minute to respond to the following:

-  What inspired you to care about our oceans?
-  How have you or your community been impacted by oceans?
-  What actions are you taking to protect oceans?
-  Many people question how much their individual choices can affect the environment. Can the actions of one person make a difference?
-  What actions can the people here today do to protect their oceans?

3. After the interactive discussion with panelists and the host/moderator, there would be a period of **Q&A** from the floor and, potentially, from an online audience if the event is webcasted.
4. Following the panel, a **networking fair with refreshments** would invite the attendants to socialize and learn about each other's interests and work. This can be facilitated by a Science-fair style portion of the Open House in which local organizations, schools, companies and individuals are invited to have a "booth" to showcase their causes and projects to the attendees.

The overall message behind the Open House would be shaped by the participants and the work they present, but could center on the notion that it is individual actions, big or small, that will help achieve the SDGs and that children and youth are already taking action.

PLANNING STEPS

Step 1: Select theme. For instance, the first *SDG Activate Talk* at UNICEF HQ featured the topic of sustainable production and consumption and care for the planet. This was informed by consultations with children and youth whereby concerns for wildlife and preservation of the earth and its natural resources were repeatedly highlighted as areas of interest.

Step 2: Select date and time. It is important to organize the event at a time when children and youth can most likely participate (e.g. outside of school hours) but also convenient for parents -- for example from 4-6 PM. Offering light refreshments is also a nice feature and a means to entice children and youth to attend. If you do organize the event during normal school hours, work with local schools to make the event into an educational field trip.

Step 3: Confirm and prep 4-5 panelists. The panel could be moderated by either a young person or a UN/UNICEF staff member, but the panelists themselves should come from outside of the UN system, representing external fields and practice areas and thereby demonstrating how the SDGs encompass the work of all industries and traverse both the public and the private sectors. Strong emphasis should be placed on having a good balance of child/youth panelists as well as gender and racial identity to the extent possible. Once confirmed, send the panelists: 1) information about each other and; 2) a list of questions for the discussion, asking them to provide you with any additional questions they would like to be asked.



The confirmation of the NY *SDG Activate Talks* involved a lot of cold-calling over the course of a few months after learning of different, interesting individuals through: **the media; online, co-workers; local academic institutions; local government entities; partner organizations; and networking.**

Step 4: Invite relevant local organizations/initiatives to hold a booth in the Science-Fair portion of the Open House. The idea is for participating booths to have something for the attendees to learn about, take home or be specifically inspired to take action on. For example, at the *From Trashing to Treasuring* event, the inventor of the [My Conscience, My Choice](#) smartphone app presented her invention, which is a resource for finding and buying eco-friendly, cruelty-free and natural alternatives to mainstream products. At *Young Change Makers go Under the Sea*, the New York Aquarium had a booth with information on how young people can get involved in local ocean and wildlife conservation efforts.

Examples of how panelists were identified and invited:

Media

- 🌍 [Lauren Singer](#), a young New Yorker who lives a zero-trash life-style was contacted after the Agenda 2030 Team saw a [CNN feature on her](#)

Online

- 🌍 With a simple google search, the team found a local organization who runs an [ocean art contest for children](#). Not only did they agree to attend the networking fair, the organization put the team in touch with a prominent ocean activist who founded a [Youth Ocean Summit](#) and moderated the panel.

Co-workers

- 🌍 [Melissa O'Young](#), community director of Airbnb, was a connection from a UNICEF staff member who had formerly worked on sustainable production and consumption issues at UNEP
- 🌍 A co-worker's 10 year old son who had used the [World's Largest Lesson](#) participated as a panelist

Local Academic Institutions

- 🌍 Reaching out to the New School in NYC, the program director recommended [Andrea Burgeuño](#), a recent graduate who had implemented an award winning community project

Government Entities

- 🌍 The team reached out to and met with the [NYC Junior Ambassador Program of the NYC Mayor's Office](#) who recommended a 7th grade participant as a panelist.

Partner Organizations

- 🌍 [Sean Southey](#) is the CEO of PCI Media, an NGO that works with UNICEF on behavior change communications and has also partnered with the Agenda 2030 Unit on [Comics Uniting Nations](#).
- 🌍 [Melati and Isabel](#) collaborated with the World's Largest Lesson and were featured in the animated video. The WLL introduced the sisters to the team upon learning they would be at the UN Oceans Conference.
- 🌍 The Youth Envoy's Office introduced the [SDG Young Leader](#), Karan Jerath, who gave the Key Note Address.

Networking

- 🌍 During a panel to present *Comics Uniting Nations* at the New York City ComicCon, the Agenda 2030 Team met [Ovie Mughelli](#), a former American football player for the NFL, who now runs a non-profit that engages youth through sports to educate about sustainable energy practices and climate change

Step 5: Invite audience members of children and young people to attend through schools, youth groups, universities and other channels. Try to focus on reaching children and youth that might not otherwise have a chance to be involved with something at the United Nations as well as children and youth from underserved areas, children with disabilities and other marginalized groups.



Make the event publically open if possible, but take the proper measures for security and room capacity constraints. For example, using a free event-planning tool like [Eventbrite](#), can ensure that all attendees are registered and also allows you to limit the number of seats/tickets available.

Remember that people who sign up for free events do not always show up. A general rule of thumb is that about 25-30% of registrants will actually come to the event – so you may want to make more tickets available accordingly!

If possible, try to either webcast or record the event so that those not able to attend in-person can still benefit or participate remotely. If the event is webcast live, a dedicated social media focal point could take questions from the online audience during the Q&A.

Step 6: Find youth volunteers! Many young people were willing to help in organizing the event – for example: taking pictures, checking in guests, designing flyers or setting up booths and refreshments. Engaging volunteers can give youth a sense of purpose in making the event a success and can also help you to keep costs down. For the *From Trashing to Treasuring* event, the US Fund for UNICEF helped to coordinate youth volunteers who are members of UNICEF clubs in local high schools and colleges to participate.

Step 7: Coordinate media outcomes. Write up a press release to be shared shortly after the event and invite local media and bloggers to cover. Encourage people to live tweet the event using a specific hashtag (e.g. #SDGActivateTalk). If you host an event, make sure to also let the [Agenda 2030 Team](#) know so we can feature in the global [Agenda 2030 newsletter](#) that goes to all UNICEF staff or through our social media channels.

COSTS



YouTube recording of SDG-Activate Talk:
From Trashing to Treasuring: Community Change-Makers for a More Sustainable World.

Organizing an activate talk will have some costs but should be relatively inexpensive. Here are some tips:

- 1) **Venue:** Try to secure a space where you would not have to pay a rental or booking fee -- e.g. an event space at your local UNICEF or UN compound or your school.
- 2) **Event management:** There are great online tools for managing invitations and communicating with people who register that are free and simple to use. We recommend [Eventbrite](#).
- 3) **Panelists:** Most panelists are excited to be recognized for their good work and are willing to share their experience/participate for free. Look for panelists that do not charge speaking fees. Where applicable, you may need to cover costs for travel and transportation but those should be minimal, especially if the panelists are local.
- 4) **Volunteers and Partners:** As noted above, volunteers can help with tasks that might otherwise cost money – make a list of activities that need to be done either in advance of or during the event and see if you can find people willing to help with those items for free. You can also ask local child-focused partners (e.g. NGOs) to help you plan and execute the event, serving as a co-host/organizer.



- 5) **Refreshments:** This is likely to be a cost unless you can find a local vendor willing to donate. Focus on healthy food and beverage choices and try and limit the use of packaged foods, plastic bottles and disposable utensils. Make the refreshments a source of learning on how to create less trash and food waste!
- 6) **Video recording, photography or webcasting:** This will likely be a cost unless you are able to engage a volunteer or have in-house capacity. However, it is an important element to involve people not able to attend in-person. Having a video that can be archived and accessible is great for preserving the discussion and action items resulting from the event. Having photos to promote the talk visually engages those who were not able to attend.



Three panelists from *Young Change Makers go Under the Sea* holding up the [Annie Sunbeam and Friends comic](#). Photo captured by volunteer professional photographer.

CONTACT US!

We hope this short guide has inspired you to host an *SDG-focused Activate Talk* in your community! If you have any questions or are looking for lessons learned, tips or tricks for a successful event, please [contact us](#)!