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Navigating Opportunities to Improve Youth Outcomes in a Least Developed Country: An Action Research Study

Naomi Docilait
Antioch University - PhD Program in Leadership and Change

NAVIGATING OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE YOUTH OUTCOMES IN A LEAST
DEVELOPED COUNTRY:
AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

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Naomi Docilait

ORCID Scholar No. 0009-0004-6000-2187

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This dissertation, by Naomi Docilait, has
been approved by the committee members signed below
who recommend that it be accepted by the faculty of the
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Dissertation Committee:

Mitchell Kusy, PhD, Chairperson

Aqeel Tirmizi, PhD, Committee Member

Michael Valentine, PhD, Committee Member

ABSTRACT

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Naomi Docilait

Graduate School of Leadership & Change

Antioch University

Yellow Springs, OH

The ambitious United Nations-adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) require the
concentrated effort of governments, the business sector, and other key stakeholders, including
women and youth, for its success. Effective leadership will be essential for different sectors to
integrate these development goals into strategic plans and operational activities in the service of
realizing this agenda by 2030. Unfortunately for Least Developed Countries (LDCs), the
COVID-19 pandemic caused the worst economic outcomes in 30 years. For this group of
countries, the pandemic has negatively influenced efforts to eradicate poverty and improve social
outcomes. This setback makes achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 a more
distant prospect for LDCs, which include 20% of the world's youth. Although governments need
to take the lead, additional stakeholders, such as non-profit organizations, including
youth-focused organizations, are vital to achieving the SDGs. Therefore, this research study
focused on the work of a youth organization operating in Haiti, and its alignment with the United
Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Using action research, this dissertation
aimed to provide support for the prioritization of youth outcomes in the developmental goals of
countries.

The findings of this action research study underscored existing opportunities to improve youth outcomes in Haiti. The study participants agreed that previous volunteer opportunities, available to active and engaged members of the organization HAITI5, allowed the youths to get training regarded as work experience. Hence, the study participants designed an intervention to expand volunteer opportunities, and to provide more youths with professional experiences that could be leveraged in the recruitment process for employment. Also, the study participants considered the youth-focused organization invaluable to the professional and personal development of members and agreed that HAITI5's commitment to developing the skills of its members through training should be incorporated into the designed intervention. The study results provide an understanding of measures undertaken by youths in a Least Developed Country to improve youth outcomes and the importance of partnerships with youth-focused organizations to make progress toward achieving the SDGs. This dissertation is available in open access at AURA (https://aura.antioch.edu) and OhioLINK ETD Center (https://etd.ohiolink.edu).

Keywords: sustainable development, sustainable development goals, least developed countries, action research, youth, young people, United Nations

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my mentor, Dr. Mary Lindsey, my inspiration for embarking on this journey.

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A special acknowledgment to the organization in Haiti that agreed to the study and all the young adults who submitted signed consent forms to participate in the study. I hope that you all are proud of the work that you have accomplished, and my hope is for you to continue being active young adults engaging in activities for the development of Haiti. Without your participation, the study would have faced significant challenges in addressing the research questions and achieving the overall study objective. With special thanks to all my colleagues, partners, and friends I worked with in Haiti and Zambia. You all are my inspiration to continue being a voice for the voiceless.

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Terms and Definitions

Absolute Poverty. Absolute poverty means poverty defined using a universal baseline with no reference to other people's income or access to goods. It refers to the state in which a subject lacks the means to meet their basic needs (Eskelinen, 2011).

Action Research (AR). Action research is collaborative, focusing on the co-creation of knowledge and generating living theories of practice (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010).

Caribbean Community (CARICOM). All CARICOM countries are classified as developing countries and are relatively small in population and size. They are all in proximity to major markets in North and South America and must overcome the challenges of frequent natural disasters and are vulnerable to external shocks.

Change Agent. An individual or a group who undertakes the tasks of initiating and managing change (Lunenburg, 2010).

Climate Risk Index. The index identifies the extent to which countries have been affected by extreme weather events (Eckstein & Künzel et al., 2021).

Committee for Development Policy. A subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations that advises the Council on a wide range of issues that are relevant to implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations. The principal body for coordination, policy review, policy dialogue, and recommendations on economic, social, and environmental issues. It also implements internationally agreed upon development goals.

Extreme Poverty. The World Bank (2022) measures it as the number of people living on less than $ 2.15 per day.

Food Insecurity. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, International Fund for Agricultural Development, United Nations Children's Fund, World Food Programme, and the World Health Organization (2023) define it as a lack of physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets the dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

General Assembly. The General Assembly is the primary representative organization of the United Nations. The General Assembly is a universal representation of all 193 Member States of the United Nations.

Gross Domestic Product. Measures the monetary value of final goods and services, those that are bought by the final user and produced in a country in a given period (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2023).

Human Development Index. A summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable, and having a decent standard of living (United Nations Development Programme, 2020).

Indicator(s). The United Nations Economic and Social Council (1984) definition refers to a measure that indicates a variable different from the one of which it is a direct measure.

International Labour Office (ILO). Founded in 1919, it is a United Nations agency whose mandate is to advance social and economic justice by setting international labour standards.

Least Developed Countries. A category for countries that have been classified according to a combination of geographical and structural criteria (United Nations, 2021). The Committee for Development Policy comprehensively reviews the LDC criteria and reports it to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations.

Major Group for Children and Youth (UNMGCY). The United Nations General Assembly-mandated and self-organized mechanism for young people to meaningfully engage in certain United Nations processes.

Marginalized Groups. Groups that have been historically oppressed by influential groups and includes women, youth, and children (Kozak et al., 2012).

Member States. The United Nations comprises 193 Member States, and each state is a member of the General Assembly.

Millennium Development Goals. Eight international development goals for the year 2015 that were established following the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in 2000.

NEET. Youth not in education, employment, or training (International Labour Organization, 2021). It is an indicator of a healthy transition from school to work.

Poverty Eradication. Defined by the United Nations (1995) as universal access to economic opportunities that will promote sustainable livelihoods and basic social services, as well as special efforts to facilitate access to opportunities and services for the disadvantaged.

Restrictive Funding. Monies given to a country for a designated purpose. They are restricted to a designated category and cannot be used for another category.

Sense-Making. Giving data meaning that can be understood well enough to enable reasonable decisions.

Socio-Economic Development. The process of social and economic development in a society that is measured with indicators, such as Gross Domestic Product.

Stakeholders. A term used to define partners for sustainable development, which includes governments, intergovernmental organizations, major groups, individuals, and other groups that will be impacted by decisions and policies associated with sustainable development.

Sustainable Development. The general concept of sustainable development is based on the concept of development and socio-economic development as it relates to ecological constraints. It is also based on the concept of needs as it relates to the redistribution of resources for quality of life for all, and the concept of future generations, focusing on the possibility of long-term usage of resources for the quality of life for future generations (Klarin, 2018).

Sustainable Development Goals or Global Goals. Seventeen goals adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity.

United Nations. An intergovernmental organization founded in 1945, with headquarters in New York City, New York. The United Nations is currently formed by 193 Member States.

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). An intergovernmental organization within the United Nations Secretariat that promotes the interests of developing countries in world trade.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The United Nations Development Programme works in countries and territories to eradicate poverty, reduce inequalities, and build resilience so countries can sustain progress.

United Nations Statistics Division. A division in the United Nations that disseminates global statistical information, develops standards and norms for statistical activities, and supports the effort of countries to strengthen their national statistical systems.

Vulnerable Employment. The International Labour Organization's (2010) definition is inadequate earnings, low productivity, and difficult conditions of work that undermine workers' fundamental rights.

Vulnerable Population. A group within the overall population having a higher degree of demographic or socioeconomic disadvantage (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015).

Youth or Young People. The United Nations defines youth as between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by Member States. The Commonwealth categorizes persons 15 to 29 years old as youth. CARICOM Youth Development Action Plan (CYDAP) defines youth from 10 to 29 years old. The African Youth Charter refers to youth as every person between the ages of 15 and 35 years (Camarinhas, 2019).

Youth Bulge. The relatively large increase in the numbers and proportion of a country's population of youthful age (Ganie, 2020), typically ages 16 to 25 or 16 to 30.

Youth-Focused Organization. An organization focused on promoting and offering opportunities for personal and social development through leisure activities, voluntary engagement, and non-formal and informal learning.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

From Development to Sustainable Development

The concept of development is concerned with how developing countries can improve their living standards and eliminate absolute poverty (Kingsbury et al., 2004). Kingsbury et al. (2004) explained that after World War II, European colonial powers withdrew from their colonies throughout parts of the world. This process is called decolonization. The people and governments of these developed or industrialized countries acknowledged their responsibility to assist developing countries in improving their citizens' lives.

Governments of the most developed or industrialized countries provided aid to countries classified as poor (Hudson, 2010). This aid was frequently used on money, goods, or services with short lifespans in developing countries, and services were unable to be sustained once the donor left. There was criticism of this system of aid because it was based on restrictive funding categories that limited long-term development programs for developing countries (Hudson, 2010).

Hudson (2010) explained that instead of providing aid based on short-term political objectives—which results in a disproportionate percentage of aid being allocated to middle-income countries—the needs of recipient countries should drive aid allocation. This would place greater focus on the unique circumstances of each country receiving aid. The assistance should be tailored to fit the individual needs of each country. The best aid, considered as imparting knowledge and skills, should proceed leaving technology in place that is sustainable in the local context. Levels of aid depend not only on needs, but also on the commitment level to development that the recipient country has shown (Hudson, 2010). Hudson (2010) argued that direct aid to recipient governments should be increased when there is an ability to implement

transparent, credible development strategies. Also, close, and consistent coordination with the recipient country should be ensured to provide the most effective combination of assistance to meet the needs of the recipient country. This coordination could encourage local ownership of aid and other ensuing benefits toward the country's development.

After World War II, development was primarily associated with economic growth and was measured as gross domestic product (GDP; Kingsbury et al., 2004). Development based on economic growth remained until the 1970s when this growth and consumerism put pressure on the environment (Klarin, 2018). Klarin (2018) explained that this development focus was evident due to various ecological problems, ecosystem disturbances, global climate change, natural catastrophes, hunger and poverty, and many other negative consequences for the sustainability of the planet. Significant research, such as *Limits of Growth* (Meadows et al., 1972), called on the world's population to change their behaviors toward the planet and provided a framework for the contemporary concept of sustainable development. Though there is no universal agreement on what sustainable development constitutes, some key ideas consider sustainability in ecological, economic, and social terms.

Various organizations and institutions participated in creating the concept of sustainable development. The most significant definition is the United Nations (UN), which through a series of activities and dialogues, identified three key elements of the concept (Klarin, 2018):

1. The concept of development (socio-economic development in line with ecological constraints),

2. The concept of needs (redistribution of resources to ensure quality of life for all), and

3. The concept of future generations (the possibility of long-term usage of resources to ensure the necessary quality of life for future generations).

The United Nations has been active in the field of sustainable development, taking action with initiatives such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which identified employment as a critical link between growth and poverty reduction. Therefore, establishing inclusive employment policies, programs, and projects is necessary, especially for the marginalized and vulnerable segments of the population (Klarin, 2018). With the MDGs agenda, extreme poverty declined significantly to 14% in 2015 (United Nations General Assembly [UNGA], 2015), but some countries lagged in reaching the Goals. Data from the United Nations Statistics Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2011), showed that countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia had insufficient progress for productive and decent employment, and insufficient actions to reduce extreme poverty and hunger by half.

In 2015, the 193 Member States of the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to eradicate extreme poverty. This agenda included the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which consist of 17 goals and 169 targets (see Table 1.1). It is an action plan for people, planet, and prosperity. The Sustainable Development Goals recognized that eradicating poverty in all of its forms and—including extreme poverty—is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. These goals aimed to build on the MDGs and complete what the MDGs did not achieve.

Table 1.1

17 Sustainable Development Goals

Goal #	Description
Goal 1	End poverty in all its forms everywhere.
Goal 2	End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.
Goal 3	Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.
Goal 4	Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
Goal 5	Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
Goal 6	Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
Goal 7	Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all.
Goal 8	Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all.
Goal 9	Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation.
Goal 10	Reduce inequality within and among countries.
Goal 11	Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.
Goal 12	Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.
Goal 13	Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

Goal #	Description
Goal 14	Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development.
Goal 15	Protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.
Goal 16	Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels.
Goal 17	Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

Adapted from *Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, by United Nations General Assembly, 2015 (https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/70/1).

Why Least Developed Countries (LDCs)?

Assisting LDCs to develop their productive capacities could enhance the social development returns of economic growth and accelerate structural transformation, which is essential in the decade remaining to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As of 2021, 46 countries were designated by the United Nations (n.d.) as Least Developed Countries. This list is reviewed every 3 years by the Committee for Development Policy, a group of independent experts that report to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

Following a triennial review of the list, the Committee for Development Policy may recommend—in its report to the Economic and Social Council—countries for addition to the list or graduation from LDC status. Between 2017 and 2020, the Committee for Development Policy undertook a comprehensive review of the LDC criteria and established the following three criteria (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development [UNCTAD], 2021, p. x):

1. *An income criterion.* This is based on a 3-year average estimate of the gross national income (GNI) per capita in United States dollars, using conversion factors based on the World Bank Atlas methodology. Also, the World Bank's low-income category is the threshold for inclusion and graduation.

2. *A human assets index (HAI).* This consists of two sub-indices: a health sub-index and an education sub-index.

3. The health sub-index has three indicators:

   a. The under-5 mortality rate,

   b. The maternal mortality ratio, and

   c. The prevalence of stunting.

4. The education sub-index has three indicators:

   a. The indices, secondary school enrolment ratio,

   b. The adult literacy rate, and

   c. The gender parity index for gross secondary school enrollment.

5. *An economic and environmental vulnerability index.* It consists of two

   a. sub-indices which are the economic vulnerability sub-index and an

   b. environmental vulnerability sub-index.

6. The economic vulnerability sub-index has four indicators:

   a. Share of agriculture, hunting, forestry, and fishing in GDP,

   b. Remoteness and landlockedness,

   c. Merchandise export concentration, and

   d. Instability of exports of goods and services.

7. The environmental vulnerability sub-index has four indicators:

       a.   Share of the population in low elevated coastal zones,

       b.   Share of the population living in drylands,

       c.   Instability of agricultural production, and

       d.   Victims of disasters.

The structural nature of LDC vulnerabilities puts the 46 countries at the forefront of looming crises confronting the multilateral system. The system's capacity to adequately provide global public goods, redress entrenched inequalities, and support sustainable development and resilience building is also in crisis (UNCTAD, 2020). Since LDCs have a heightened exposure to shocks, these countries would benefit from a revamped and more effective multilateral system capable of addressing today's global challenges and creating a more conducive international environment.

For the SDGs, productive capacities could help LDCs enhance progress on reducing extreme poverty (Goal 1), bolstering agricultural productivity (Goal 2), and enhancing industrial growth (Goal 8; United Nations, 2021). The United Nations (n.d.) explained that for these goals to be achieved, there needs to be improved labor productivity.

Why the Focus on Youth?

> The future of humanity and our planet lies in our hands. It lies also in the hands of today's younger generation, who will pass the torch to future generations. We have mapped the road to sustainable development; it will be for all of us to ensure that the journey is successful and its gains irreversible. (UNGA, 2015, p. 53)

The UNCTAD (2020) explained that LDCs currently account for 20% of the world's youth, which is expected to increase 4% by 2030. Youth is considered a transitional period, during which a person becomes an active and fully responsible member of society. Youths are often left behind but are an essential group for any economic development and growth. Youths are the largest untapped force in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (Buheji, 2019).

Jobs are the cornerstone of development and are critical in promoting prosperity, fighting poverty, and encouraging peace (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UNDESA], 2020a). Still, youths continue to face tough labor markets and job shortages.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, unemployment rates were significantly higher for young workers (ages 15 to 24 years) than adult workers (ages 25 and older; International Labour Organization [ILO], 2021). Fortunately, many youth programs exist that are striving toward the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Therefore, the role of government is important in coordinating and facilitating youth initiatives.

According to the International Labour Organization (2020), approximately 40% of young people worldwide are engaged in the labor force, but there are marked differences across countries and subregions. Despite these disparities, there was a universal decline in labor force participation rates between 1999 and 2019. The global rate of participation fell by almost 12% throughout this period, from 53.1% to 41.2%. The total number of young persons in the labor force declined accordingly from 568 million to 497 million, despite the youth population rising from 1 billion to 1.3 billion (ILO, 2020). Both young women and men have experienced a decline in labor market engagement around the globe. People may be outside the labor market for various reasons including education, family responsibilities, sickness or disability, and discouragement (ILO, 2021).

There are ways to monitor the share of young people who are unemployed or not enrolled in educational or training programs. Youths not in education, employment, or training (NEET) is an indicator used to measure progress on achieving the SDGs, specifically Goal 8 (Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all; ILO, 2021). NEET is very important in measuring the effectiveness of youth

employment approaches in any country or community. Youth initiatives and programs may assist the government and other donor agencies in providing more effective and relevant interventions toward achieving the SDGs.

Zu (2020) argued that successfully achieving the purpose of the SDGs would require national authorities to empower youths as global leaders and engage them in the realization of the SDGs. Authorities could do this by creating and enabling innovative environments. Fostering innovation and youth entrepreneurship calls for involvement at all levels, including government, industry, political, social, and educational sectors. Their active involvement in implementing the SDGs is critical to achieving a peaceful, just, and sustainable future (Nichols, 2021).

Gaps in Literature

My literature search and review uncovered the lack of institutions based in LDCs engaging youth in practical ways. There are ways to better support youth, to expand on existing opportunities for the improvement of youth outcomes, and to promote opportunities that support the SDGs. Studies have focused on analyzing how young people's problems affect their well-being. This has resulted in an abundance of studies that detail the prevalence of problems (Lawson et al., 2015). There should be more focus on studies that engage young people and build their capacities to make positive differences in their countries. This focus would help youths to transition into adulthood more successfully. Action research is a practical approach that involves participants and can build on their strengths in a meaningful way.

Unfortunately, there are countries where youths are neglected by their governments. A study conducted in Nigeria (Jegede et al., 2019) explained that there was funding established for youth empowerment and development programs. Those programs would offer young people opportunities to develop important life skills and participate in community development schemes

that support positive youth outcomes. However, the study (Jegede et al., 2019) mentioned serious challenges that worked against the youth empowerment programs, including: the non-involvement of youths in the policy making process, refusal of older politicians to resign and give way for younger politicians with fresh innovative ideas, discrimination against youth, and other factors. Both participation and equality are extremely important when considering economic and social services, and therefore initiatives that are geared towards the economic participation of disadvantaged groups can be very significant (Dreze & Sen, 2002). Since youth participation is indispensable for addressing youths' problems, identifying appropriate solutions to the challenges identified in the Nigerian study is necessary (Jegede et al., 2019).

Ideally, the proper stakeholders in youth engagement are the youths because they have different mindsets and orientations. Youth organizations and programs that are managed, developed, and staffed by youth offer advantages due to greater social proximity, familiarity, and awareness of youth issues. Hence, it is critical to understand and relate to youth and design and implement programs that youth deem attractive and pertinent (Plan International UK, 2018). Thus, this action research (AR) study focused on a collaboration with youth and members of a youth-focused organization in a Least Developed Country.

Problem Statement

In this dissertation, I asked—with young people being pushed out of the labor market even before the COVID-19 pandemic—what are effective responses to decreasing the number of young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET)? The International Labour Organization (2021) used household surveys to demonstrate the share of young people who were NEET increased in most of the countries with data available. In 24 of 33 countries, an increase in NEET rates for young men and women was reported (ILO, 2021). The United

Nations Youth Strategy Guide (2018) mentioned youth-led innovations as a strategy to counteract this condition. Therefore, there should be a continual analysis of strategies developed and initiatives implemented to improve the number of young people employed, educated, or trained.

Purpose of the Study

This dissertation was an action research study about a youth-focused organization in the Least Developed Country of Haiti. There are 17 SDGs, with several Goals specifically targeting young people. Goal 8 targets young people who are NEET. Since transitions from youth to adulthood are complex, it becomes increasingly cumbersome if available jobs do not consist of a minimum income, job security, or acceptable working conditions. Many young people seeking their first job must possess a minimum level of education accompanied by work experience, which some may lack. Youths need an opportunity to gain experience and access to employment. Fortunately, there are initiatives implemented to address this challenge that provide youth with opportunities needed to improve employment, education, and training (e.g., youth networks and organizations). The organization selected for this study designed an intervention that could improve youth outcomes and possibly contribute to sustainable development in their country.

Action Research

This action research study focused on youth outcomes. Action research is practice based; "practice" is understood as action and research (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). The practice of action research means that all people in all contexts who are investigating the situation can become researchers. Action research differs from traditional research since the AR process helps the practitioner to develop a deep understanding of what they are doing as an insider instead of an outsider. When considering the various definitions, action research is (Costello, 2003):

- A flexible spiral and cyclic process.

- Practical and emphasizes problem-solving.

- Carried out by individuals, professionals, and educators.

- Systematic and involves critical reflection and action.

- The gathering and interpreting of data for critical reflection.

A summary of AR by Masters (1995) explains the process that researchers go through as a spiral of action research cycles comprising four major phases:

1. Plan: a specific situation is identified, a possible way forward is discussed, and a plan is designed.

2. Act: the plan is implemented with the collection of data.

3. Observe: the action is monitored, and the information collected is analyzed to provide an understanding of what is happening.

4. Reflect: the findings are shared with the team and the team reflects on the research process. From the Reflection phase, the team can go into a second cycle of AR with proposed modifications.

A powerful aspect of action research is that it can contribute to social and cultural transformation (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). Practitioners become aware of their capacity to influence the future, particularly about new forms of social and cultural practices. Since AR is focused on improving learning to improve action, it becomes clear how one individual can influence the thinking of other individuals through collaboration (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). People can learn from those accounts and find ways of improving their own learning and practices. Youths can use AR to influence the thinking of others and to improve their own learning and practices as they aim to enhance their well-being. Acero López et al. (2019)

provided a case study example of using a participatory design for the better management of water resources, specifically for sustainable development.

Research Questions

When preparing to collaborate with youths and a youth-focused organization through action research, these were my reflection questions:

- How can young people contribute to sustainable development in a Least Developed Country?

- How can youth-focused organizations succeed in improving youth outcomes?

- How can the efforts of organizations focused on improving youth outcomes support the Sustainable Development Goals in a Least Developed Country?

The reflection questions led to an overarching research question and three sub-questions:

- How can an organization aiming to improve youth outcomes align its programmatic work with the Sustainable Development Goals?

- What are the opportunities to improve youth outcomes in a Least Developed Country?

- How do youth frame responses to address identified opportunities?

- How could these opportunities support progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals?

Positionality of the Researcher

In 2012, I was assigned to Zambia as a Peace Corps community health volunteer. For this 2-year assignment, I lived in a rural community, where I worked with both the youths and the adults. Most of the adults were smallholder farmers and were overwhelmed by the challenges they were facing due to rain shortages. This limited their participation in community health

campaigns offered by their local clinic and local neighborhood health committees (NHCs). NHCs mobilized the community for health promotion activities, which included providing information on community health priorities. Unfortunately, it was difficult for adults from the community to attend these activities. Even NHC members, who were volunteers committed to working in the community, had difficulties maintaining their dedication to community outreach efforts since their livelihood activities suffered.

The youth in this rural community were eager to learn from me. They shared their challenges and what they envisioned for their future. The time I spent with the youths focused on providing them with life-skills training, such as communication, and improving their capacity to think critically and make well-informed decisions for their futures and their community. I wanted them to be catalysts for change and understand how they could contribute to the development of their community. I presented the youths with my perspective on the importance of each person participating in community development. From this experience, I have continued to work with youths and adults in Zambia and now Haiti, reflecting with them on practical ways that they can improve their living conditions and how they can be change agents for sustainable development.

During the past 8 years, I grew interested in learning more about what slows sustainable development progress, particularly in Least Developed Countries. For those 8 years, I have worked in the international development sector in LDCs. As I continue my work in LDCs, I have noted the difficulties that poor communities continue to face despite the support provided to improve living conditions. The support was typically development projects accompanied by a list of activities, goals, and expected outcomes. Once the project was completed, the expectation was that these targeted communities would build on this success and continue to improve their living conditions, which did not occur. When asked why there was a lack of progress, responses from

the community ranged from the lack of funding to sustain the project at the level that it was implemented or the mismanagement of funds by the committee responsible for sustainability.

Because a project-based approach to development did not prove successful in the implementation of the MDGs, a more integrated, comprehensive, and holistic approach was recommended and developed by the United Nations as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The government would take the lead in this holistic approach and all sectors of the community (i.e., nongovernmental organizations, community-based organizations, academia, businesses, and philanthropy) would be engaged with the shared goal of eradicating extreme poverty and ensuring no one was left behind. If the 17 Sustainable Development Goals are to be reached by 2030 and thereby declare sustainable development for communities, society, and the environment, then it is important to understand the strategies used to achieve the SDGs. Implementing SDGs in Least Developed Countries remains a challenge to achieve by 2030. In over 10 years of working with youth, I have seen the importance of an environment that promotes a higher level of well-being for youth. Therefore, I was interested in engaging with a group of young people to learn about their local environment and its promotion of opportunities in education, employment, and training. Since my research focuses on Least Developed Countries, I decided to conduct a study with young people living in Haiti, which is classified on the United Nations' list of Least Developed Countries. I was interested in examining the opportunities that exist for young people in a tumultuous country and the interventions designed to explore opportunities.

Scope and Limitations

The study was based in Haiti, a LDC, and consisted of members selected from a youth-focused organization. The members were Haitian citizens currently living in Haiti. The

study included both women and men. When considering Haiti's culture, history, and socio-political context, this study may not necessarily apply to other young people living in a LDC with a different generational period (e.g., Millennials, Generation Z). Therefore, the findings may have some transferability within the same generational period and the readers must determine its larger relevance.

Ethical Considerations

Power and Agency

This research involved cooperation and coordination with young people and ethical standards were followed to promote the values essential for this collaborative study. Young people below the age of 18 years were not allowed to participate in this research without permission from their parents or guardians, as the youths were considered incompetent. Therefore, in this AR study, the youth selected were old enough and able to consent. When obtaining consent from participants, I ensured that they were fully informed of both the purpose of the research and the extent of their involvement. Participants decided if they were willing or unwilling to participate. I ensured that participants understood that consent was renegotiable and could be revoked by the research participants at any time.

Protection and Harm Prevention

The research I conducted did not misrepresent young people and the research data promoted the truth. Therefore, I did not falsify or avoid errors. I ensured that the youth were not harmed by the research. This included strategies to minimize distress as well as implementing protocols that safeguarded the youths from abusive or incompetent researchers. The harms and benefits of the research study to the participants, families, and communities were considered when establishing the selection criteria.

Dissertation Chapters

Chapter I introduced sustainable development and the Sustainable Development Goals established by the United Nations to eradicate extreme poverty for over 1 billion people in all 193 countries of the United Nations. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals have 169 targets and 232 indicators established to monitor progress for each Goal. In Chapter I, I discussed gaps in youth engagement and improving youth outcomes for sustainable development. Chapter II is the literature review. In this chapter, I examine the relevant literature on sustainable development, the Sustainable Development Goals, Least Developed Countries, and youth as untapped stakeholders in the United Nation's 2030 agenda.

In Chapter III, I describe a multi-method approach to action research and provide details on the methods used to collect data including a one-on-one survey, a feedback survey, an evaluation survey, and my reflection journal. In Chapter IV, I present the findings and results, highlighting the perspectives of youth and the challenges encountered in the AR study, and suggestions for future research with youth participating in an action research study. Chapter V is the discussion chapter. I address the implications of action research for the advancement of the SDGs. I also address the application of the findings for other Least Developed Countries interested in improving youth outcomes and contributing to sustainable development. The findings are important in enhancing understanding of how the youth population in LDCs can participate in sustainable development. The findings also add to the body of scholar-practitioner knowledge of opportunities for progress with the 2030 Agenda.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, premised on the intent to leave no one behind, includes marginalized and disadvantaged populations. Youths—an overlooked population—are crucial in advancing the 2030 Agenda. Effective participation should be encouraged both for those who are typically active and those who are marginalized or from excluded groups, such as youth, for whom participation has been difficult.

Youths have historically been marginalized from development and decision-making processes. The importance of placing youths at the center of sustainable and inclusive development is often highlighted in national development strategies such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Bastien & Holmarsdottir, 2017). Since the 2030 Agenda has 17 SDGs, it is important to align efforts and include youth participation to progress toward sustainable development. Many development programs self-report project outcomes with results showing success. Yet, further analysis shows failure (Ife, 2009), and the end-users of these programs continue suffering from challenges that were supposed to be addressed through implementing these programs. Therefore, governments and organizations should not overlook the failures of development programs. They should analyze the failures to determine what opportunities for improvements exist to achieve sustainable development for a country.

In this chapter, I present scholarly literature relevant to sustainable development and youth engagement in the LDCs context. Specifically, I review sustainable development and how it has progressed. The review includes the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and discussions on various conferences held, which produced an agenda addressing the eradication of extreme poverty worldwide. I also review Least Developed Countries and their specific challenges with progress on the SDGs. Lastly, I focus on youth, an important stakeholder in

Least Developing Countries, and the importance of encouraging and incorporating their efforts in responding to the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Agenda for Sustainable Development

On September 25, 2015, the United Nations General Assembly agreed and approved the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. All 193 Member States of the United Nations agreed to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in their respective countries to eradicate extreme poverty for everyone everywhere. This would fulfill the unfinished mandate of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development consists of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), their 169 targets, and 232 indicators. The document operates under the three pillars of social, economic, and environmental sustainability.

What development means to different countries can be accurately measured by which countries are making progress toward the 17 SDGs. Soubbotina and Sheram (2000) explained indicators of wealth that track the quantity of resources available to society but do not, however, provide information about the allocation of those resources. Countries can have similar average incomes and yet differ substantially on access to education, healthcare, employment opportunities, availability of clean air and safe drinking water, and the threat of crime, which all contribute to a person's quality of life.

Increasing attention has been given to the problems of developing countries in the last half-century, and despite the steady flow of development aid to these countries, the results have been disappointing overall (Ovaska, 2003). Countries reflect the characteristics of the individuals who live there. Countries are also repositories of knowledge, institutions, and resources that underpin the economic activities within their respective borders (Fagerberg & Srholec, 2017).

One objective of development aid is to raise growth rates. This aid also hopes to encourage economic, social, political, and environmental development, and thus contributes to comprehensive poverty alleviation.

Haiti ranked 170 out of 189 countries on the 2019 Human Development Index (UNDP, 2020) and has one of the highest levels of chronic food insecurity in the world. More than half of Haiti's total population is chronically food insecure, with underlying drivers of this situation including extreme poverty and frequent natural disasters. In the 2019 Climate Risk Index, Haiti (see Figure 2.1) ranked fourth among the countries most affected by severe weather events (Eckstein & Hutfils et al., 2019).

Figure 2.1

Sketch of the country Haiti. Copyright by author.
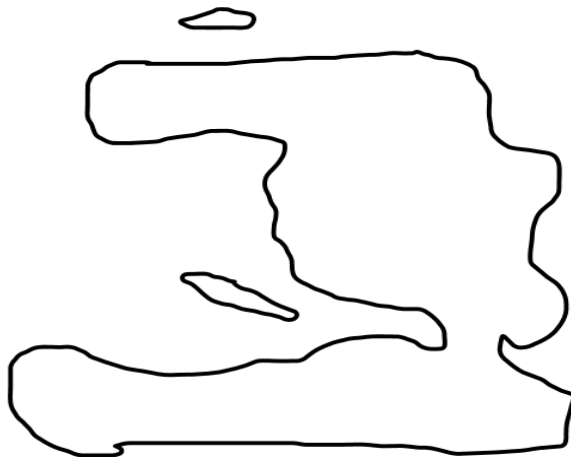
Progress Under the 2015 Millennium Development Goals

In 2000, developing countries at the United Nations were given a set of eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) aimed at eradicating poverty and hunger in their respective countries. These countries did contribute to developing these goals. Over the next 15 years, the MDGs remained the overarching development framework for these LDCs. Progress towards the

eight Millennium Development Goals was measured through 21 targets and 48 official

indicators. Country data, aggregated at the subregional and regional levels, presented overall

advances. The composition of MDG regions and subregions were established on United Nations

geographical divisions, with necessary modifications to create groups of countries for which a

meaningful analysis could be carried out. It is important to note that the situation of individual

countries within a given region at times varied significantly from regional averages.

In general, the figures shown in the MDG Report (UNGA, 2015) are weighted averages

of country data, which use the population of reference as a weight. Additionally, for each

indicator, individual agencies were designated to provide official data. These data were typically

drawn from official statistics provided by governments to the international agencies responsible

for the indicator. Table 2.1 is a summary of the results for each MDG indicator.

Table 2.1

Summary of Results for Each MDG

Goals	Results
Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.	Extreme poverty declined significantly from 1990; nearly half of the population in the developing world lived on less than $1.25 USD per day, and that proportion dropped to 14% in 2015.
Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education.	The number of out-of-school children of primary school age worldwide reduced by almost half to an estimated 57 million in 2015, from 100 million in 2000.
Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women.	Between 1991 and 2015, the proportion of women in vulnerable employment as a share of total female employment declined by 13%.
Goal 4: Reduce child mortality.	The number of deaths of children under age 5 declined from 12.7 million in 1990 to almost 6 million in 2015 globally.
Goal 5: Improve maternal health.	The global maternal mortality ratio declined from 330 deaths per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 210 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2013.
Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases.	New HIV infections fell by 40% between 2000 and 2013, from an estimated 3.5 million cases to 2.1 million.
Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability.	In 2015, of the 2.6 billion people who gained access to improved drinking water since 1990, 1.9 billion gained access to piped drinking water on premises.
Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development.	Official development assistance from developed countries increased by 66% between 2000 and 2014, reaching $135.2 billion.

Adapted from *Millennium Development Goals Report*, by United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2016 (https://doi.org/10.18356/6cd11401-en).

Creating the Sustainable Development Goals was a distinct departure from the way the MDGs were developed. One noticeable difference was that all 193 Member States were involved in their development. For the first time, civil society was actively involved with academia, business, and philanthropic organizations, making it the most inclusive process in the history of the U.N. This inclusiveness set the stage for greater investment and ownership of their country's outcomes. At the conference in Rio de Janeiro in 2012, the outcome document called "The Future We Want" (UNGA, 2012) included all the improvements to the MDGs to better ensure their success, focusing on poverty eradication for everyone everywhere.

The Future We Want

In June 2012—before these MDG results were achieved— the Heads of State and high-level representatives at the United Nations renewed their commitment to a sustainable development agenda with the full participation of civil society. It was clear that poverty eradication was the greatest global challenge and an indispensable need for sustainable development. Therefore, the Member States reaffirmed their commitment, making every effort to accelerate the achievement of the internationally agreed upon development goals. To this end, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA, 2012) established a working group to begin deliberations on the outcome document from the Rio+ 20 conference of 2012. In March 2013, the Open Working Group gathered at the Headquarters in New York, headed by two co-chairs, to begin the process of developing a new set of goals that would become the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. They proposed to:

- Reaffirm all the principles of the Rio Declaration on environment and development.

- Accelerate progress in closing development gaps between developed and developing countries.

- Reaffirm the key role of all levels of government and legislative bodies in promoting sustainable development.

- Affirm that there are different approaches, visions, models, and tools available to each country, in accordance with its national circumstances and priorities, to achieve sustainable development in its three dimensions.

- Underscore the importance of a strengthened institutional framework for sustainable development, responding coherently and effectively to current and future challenges, and efficiently bridging gaps in the implementation of the sustainable development agenda.

- Strengthen intergovernmental arrangements for sustainable development.

- Reaffirm the central position of the General Assembly as the chief deliberative, policymaking, and representative organ of the United Nations.

- Establish a universal, intergovernmental, high-level political forum.

- Reaffirm the need to strengthen international environmental governance within the context of the institutional framework for sustainable development to promote a balanced integration of the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

- Reaffirm that the Economic and Social Council is a principal body for policy review, policy dialogue, and recommendations on issues of economic and social development and the follow-up to the Millennium Development Goals.

Critiques on the UN MDG 2015 Report

With the reaffirmations noted in the document "The Future We Want" (UNGA, 2012)

and commitments to achieving the MDGs, progress was reported over the subsequent few years.

Yet, despite the results achieved, it is believed that the figures presented in the 2015 MDG report

misrepresented the true extent of poverty and hunger. The reality is that between 1.5 and 2.5

billion people do not have access to adequate food, and between 3.5 and 4.3 billion remain in

poverty (Hickel, 2016). These people are considered to not have adequate resources to achieve

normal human life expectancy and meet their basic needs. Article 25.1 in the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights (UNGA, 1948), an international document adopted by the United

Nations General Assembly in Paris that protects the rights and freedoms of all human beings,

reads:

> Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of
> himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing, medical care and necessary
> social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness,
> disability, widowhood, old age, or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his
> control. (p. 76)

Hickel (2016) explained that shortly after the Millennium Declaration was adopted, the

U.N. rendered Article 19 into the Millennium Development Goals. During this process, the

poverty goal (MDG 1) was explicitly diluted. First, it was changed from halving the proportion

of impoverished people in the whole world to halving the proportion in developing countries

only due to the population of the developing world, which is growing at a faster rate than that of

the world. This subtle shift in methodology allowed the MDGs to take advantage of a

faster-growing denominator. The second significant change was that the starting point of analysis

for poverty was moved from the year 2000 back to 1990. This gave more time to accomplish the

MDGs, which allowed for claims of poverty reduction achieved long before the MDGs began.

To measure absolute poverty, the World Bank adopted the International Poverty Line (IPL) and shifted the IPL from the original $1.02 USD in 1985 to $1.08 USD in 1993. This change was introduced in 2000 (Hickel, 2016). This new IPL was introduced the same year that the MDGs went into effect and became the official instrument for measuring absolute poverty. In many countries, living just above the IPL means living in destitution, and the line should be at a level that would allow people to achieve a normal human life expectancy. Hickel (2016) argued that if a selected poverty line is insufficient to guarantee basic nutrition or to provide children with a fair chance of surviving, it would be difficult to claim that lifting people above this line means bringing them out of poverty.

When examining MDG 1 to reduce poverty and extreme hunger, some countries lagged in realizing the goal despite the progress of many countries. This suggests that the eradication of extreme poverty is a remaining problem. It also suggests that the MDGs may not have been very effective in guiding the implementation of location-based small-scale initiatives targeting poverty reduction, especially with respect to marginalized groups (Kozak et al., 2012). Kozak et al. (2012) explained that although the MDGs articulate the goal of ending extreme poverty, they did not address structural barriers that hinder economic participation. The MDGs also did not address policies and practices needed to attain the goal. Furthermore, restricting the goals to what is considered measurable resulted in overlooking certain aspects of poverty, such as social exclusion and its effects, which cannot be easily captured by an indicator (Kozak et al., 2012).

There were also critiques of the MDGs as an agenda. Despite the progress of many countries, these globally set targets did not take into account the diverse national contexts and challenges, and grossly over-simplified development objectives at both national and global levels (Fukuda-Parr, 2014). Global targets applied universally to each country made no sense in

countries where they had already been achieved and were labeled "Minimum Development Goals." Also, when the MDGs were used as performance measures, these global targets were biased against the poorest countries because they had a reverse relationship to the starting point (Fukuda-Parr, 2014). The less resources and capacities a country had, the more challenging it was for that country to achieve the Goals. Therefore, the MDGs should have been applied as a broad and general framework for evaluating needs rather than for judging the performance of countries.

The U.N. and Sustainable Development (Fit for Whose Purpose?)

As the U.N. focuses on the eradication of extreme poverty and the SDGs, the ability of the U.N. system to tackle these challenges appears to have been inadequate. Adams and Martens (2015) discussed how multilateral mandates seem increasingly difficult to conduct, with fragmented projects and a loss of coordinated action. The U.N.'s approach to engagement with the business sector shifted from that of impartial rule-setting and balanced engagement to that of privileging the sector. There is increasing promotion and support of market-based approaches and multi-stakeholder partnerships as the new business model for solving global problems. This idea of engaging the more economically powerful is essential to maintaining the relevance of the U.N. in addressing today's global challenges. This practice, however, has harmful consequences for democratic governance and general public support, aligning more with power centers and away from those with less power.

Therefore, solutions were proposed, and the following should be considered when looking at partnerships:

- The ability of the corporate sector to influence political discourse and   agenda-setting.

- The ability to undermine accountable and transparent multilateralism, thereby hindering comprehensive development strategies.

- The ability to weaken democratic public institutions, given the inequality amongst participating actors.

- The ability for funding to become increasingly privatized since it is dependent on voluntary and unpredictable channels of financing.

- The ability to influence monitoring and accountability mechanisms that should be open, transparent, and accountable.

Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

As the MDGs reached their 2015 deadline, the world had the opportunity to build on their successes and momentum. On September 25, 2015, a resolution was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly known as *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals*, with its 17 SDGs and 169 targets designed to build on and fulfill the unfinished mandate of the Millennium Development Goals. The Sustainable Development Goals and targets aimed to stimulate action for the next 15 years in areas of the 5Ps of the SDGs, through the achievement of Peace and Prosperity for People and the Planet through Partnerships. This is a summary of the 5Ps:

- People: ending poverty and hunger, in all their forms and dimensions, ensuring that all human beings can fulfill their potential in dignity, equality, and a healthy environment.

- Planet: protecting the planet from degradation, including sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managed natural resources, and taking urgent action on

climate change so the planet can support the needs of the present and future
generations.

- Prosperity: ensuring that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives
  and that economic, social, and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature.

- Peace: fostering peaceful, just, and inclusive societies that are free from fear and
  violence. There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace
  without sustainable development.

- Partnership: mobilizing the means required to implement this Agenda through a
  revitalized Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, based on a spirit of
  strengthened global solidarity, focused on the needs of the poorest and most
  vulnerable, and with the participation of all countries, stakeholders, and people.

The Addis Ababa Action Agenda

Beginning in 2013, a parallel process occurred to provide the financing needed for the
new sustainable goals being developed. In July 2015, before the 17 SDGs were agreed upon, the
Heads of State and Government and High Representatives gathered in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
They affirmed their political commitment to address the challenge of financing and creating an
enabling environment at all levels for sustainable development through global partnerships. It
was noted that many Least Developed Countries continued to be largely sidelined by foreign
direct investment that could help to diversify their economies, despite improvements in their
investment climates. However, several new commitments were made by governments and noted
in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA) Debriefing Notes (UNDESA, 2015):

1. **A new social compact to provide social protection and essential public services for all.** As part of the new social compact, governments committed to providing fiscally sustainable and nationally appropriate social protection systems.

2. **A global infrastructure forum to bridge the infrastructure gap.** This global infrastructure forum will identify and address infrastructure and capacity gaps, to ensure that no country or sector is left behind.

3. **Support to Least Developed Countries.** The agenda encourages an increase in the target for the world's poorest nations to 0.2% of national income for Official Development Assistance (ODA) and to adopt or strengthen Least Developed Countries' investment promotion regimes.

4. **A Technology Facilitation Mechanism to advance the SDGs**. Member States agreed to establish a Technology Facilitation Mechanism, consisting of a United Nations Interagency Task Team, an annual collaborative Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology, and Innovation for the SDGs, and an online platform.

5. **Enhanced international tax cooperation to assist in raising resources domestically**. Countries agreed to strengthen capacity building, including through ODA, and agreed to support existing international initiatives for tax cooperation, focusing on increased participation of developing countries.

6. **Mainstreaming women's empowerment into financing for development.** Commitments were made by countries to undertake legislation and administrative reforms to give women equal rights and promote gender-responsive budgeting and tracking, among other measures.

With these commitments, knowledge-sharing, cooperation, and partnerships with stakeholders would be encouraged. This includes partnerships between governments, businesses, academia, and civil society contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, there was an affirmation that regulatory environments would be open and non-discriminatory to promote collaboration and further the efforts of Member States (UNDESA, 2015). Overall, the concrete policies and actions outlined in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda are an integral part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that supports, complements, and helps to contextualize the 2030 Agenda's means of implementation targets.

The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020

The SDGs Report (UNDESA, 2020b) revealed only four of the 17 Goals from less than half of 193 countries or areas had internationally comparable data. In 2020, as governments attempted to contain the spread of COVID-19, field data collection operations were being disrupted, which limited the ability of many national statistical offices to deliver official monthly and quarterly statistics, and the information necessary to monitor progress on the SDGs.

National statistical offices in low- and lower-middle-income countries have seen funding cuts and are struggling to maintain normal operations during the pandemic. These countries expressed external support in priority areas that included technical assistance and capacity-building, financial aid, and software for remote data collection. If these needs are not met, there will be a lasting effect on many countries' abilities to produce timely and disaggregated data for many SDG indicators. The COVID-19 pandemic not only created a massive setback in the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, but also worsened global data inequalities, especially in LDCs, which are already farthest behind. Forecasts from the SDGs Report (UNDESA, 2020b) indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic

pushed 71 million people back into extreme poverty in 2020. This would be the first rise in global poverty since 1998. As more families fall into extreme poverty, this will have life-altering consequences for millions of children and youth worldwide.

Challenges in Sustainable Development

Carant (2017) discussed the construction of poverty and development, focusing on Keynesianism and neoliberalism relating to the development paradigm. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were faulted by many groups who found their formulations of poverty and their proposed policy solutions to be lacking. The U.N. shared its proposed post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to modernize and reconfigure portions of the MDGs.

Carant (2017) argued that the U.N. failed to produce the transformational systemic shifts necessary for long-term, sustainable, and equitable change for all. Although entities such as the World Social Forum consist of diverse interest groups, shifts would be necessary that focus on decision-making that is not limited to and imposed by the interests of powerful economic, patriarchal, and political figures and nations. The article also explained that although the U.N. has designed methods with the intention of gathering marginalized voices, the MDGs and SDGs rely too exclusively on problem-solution frames that aim to temper oppositionists' paradigms. The implementation of these methods illuminates a foundational sampling error, producing an unrepresentative voice for the global 7 billion.

As a result, it is important to understand the origins of terms being used in relation to sustainable development. It is also important to understand the context of *poverty* when looking at the eradication of extreme poverty. The discourses on Least Developed Countries, sustainable

development, and the eradication of extreme poverty have been pivotal to the work that I have committed to as a researcher.

Another argument is that the achievement of the SDGs is unlikely to lead to greater social equality and economic prosperity. Rather, it is thought to lead to a greater spread of unsustainable production and consumption, continuous economic and population growth responsible for environmental problems, and further objectification of the environment and its elements (Kopnina, 2016). Kopnina (2016) explained there should be changes in using eco-efficiency, adaptation, and resilience thinking, or other conventional measures that delay the inevitable crisis without addressing the root causes of unsustainability. The argument addressed population growth since it limits progress towards sustainability and claimed that gains in the SDGs can become overwhelmed by the ongoing numerical growth. Thus, there is a need for a balance between reproductive rights and collective reproductive responsibilities. Even after 2030, countries should continue to find ways to improve conditions in their countries for their citizens and the environment.

Sachs (2015) argued the world is far off course from achieving sustainable development, an issue that has been on the global agenda for more than 40 years. World leaders noted that the single most urgent task—in all of the interconnected challenges of sustainable development—was the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals to fight extreme poverty in 2000, which was a matter of life and death for at least 1 billion people (Sachs, 2015). The MDGs Agenda worked in some areas but also lagged to reach its target in other areas, including sanitation and education. Since education was not as high on the global agenda and not as well financed as global public health, the gains in health outpaced the gains in education (Sachs, 2015). The 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development is even more complex than the MDGs and

is not only the continuation of the fight against extreme poverty, but also includes social inclusion and environmental sustainability.

Least Developed Countries and Their Progress

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) measures a country's collective earnings from wages, rent, interest, and profits. This makes the GDP per capita a good measure of the average income per person in a country. The GDP must be used carefully, especially when using income to determine a country's level of development (Kenny, 2011, p. 16). Since GDP is hard to measure, changing rules on the comparison of income across countries can make a big difference in the resulting picture of growth and relative wealth. Some LDCs seemed to do well and yet many are being left behind.

The Least Developed Countries Report (UNCTAD, 2020) explained that during the COVID-19 pandemic, LDCs were able to weather health aspects of the pandemic better than initially predicted due to country-specific factors. Still, the pandemic's economic repercussions have been devastating. The report indicated how the COVID-19 pandemic led to LDC economies experiencing their strongest economic shock in several decades. This crisis has caused the worst economic outcome in 30 years for this group of countries. It also represented a significant reversal of the economic and social progress achieved in recent years, including poverty and social outcomes. It also makes achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 a more distant prospect.

The report continued by explaining that the global downturn is expected to have a dramatic negative impact on global poverty and food insecurity. This could give rise to path-dependency and could turn transient forms of poverty into chronic poverty. This situation represents a setback for attaining Goal 1 of the Sustainable Development Goals. It could also

mean that some of the other SDGs—notably those related to health and education—would not be reached as populations adopt adverse coping strategies, such as reducing their intake of healthy and nutritious food or taking children out of school. Since the SDGs were purposely designed to the interdependent with each other, the downturn is also likely to further undermine gender equality, as the gender dimension intersects with other axes of structural marginalization.

The LDCs struggle to attract private investment in their economies. Capital inflows to these countries are prone to decline or remain short of needs as investors seek higher prospective capital yields in advanced and emerging economies with more robust track records (Hurley, 2016). The literature written by Hurley (2016) explained that many LDCs remain heavily dependent on Official Development Assistance (ODA) and need to make effective use of other official and private flows, including debt and equity. The development financing landscape has become much more diversified and sophisticated in recent years, which will provide LDCs with financial instruments to more effectively manage risk and vulnerability to shocks. New public and private funders have emerged and/or expanded their international development programs. New financing instruments have emerged both within and in addition to ODA. These include blended finance, green bonds, guarantees, local currency financing, impact investing, diaspora financing, and debt swaps/buybacks, among many others.

Despite relatively fast economic growth, the track record of LDCs graduating from their category has been minimal, with only four graduating since 1971 (LDC IV Monitor, 2016). Moreover, the LDCs are facing a new set of interrelated global challenges that will hamper further progress. Since the commitment of the SDGs is to eradicate global poverty by 2030, improving the prospects of LDCs will play a crucial role. If the SDGs are to be met, the

international community must increase development efforts to help equip the LDCs for prosperity in an increasingly constrained development context.

Despite this progress, the LDCs as a group cannot be expected to meet most of the SDGs unless critical action is taken (LDC IV Monitor, 2016). This argument is based on three key factors (LDC IV Monitor, 2016):

1. The LDCs' historical record of graduating from their category and meeting the previous Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has not been promising.

2. The LDCs failed to meet the MDGs and the targets for graduation during a period of unprecedented economic growth (2000–2015). They now face a significantly more constrained development context, in which they must progress toward the SDGs.

3. LDCs face a set of interconnected global challenges that will seriously hamper their prospects of achieving the SDGs. Compounding the more pessimistic economic outlook are income inequality, automation, jobless growth, demographic imbalances, climate change-related shocks, political instability, security threats, and weakened domestic governance.

Underpinning all these challenges is that despite the progress LDCs have made in reducing their vulnerability, they remain the most susceptible to economic and environmental shocks (LDC IV Monitor, 2016). These shocks have the potential to proliferate between now and 2030, and their associated costs will fall disproportionately on the LDCs. Taken together—the poor historical performance of the LDCs, the worsening economic climate, and the emergence of new global challenges—these factors will limit the progress of LDCs listed in Table 2.2 toward achieving the SDGs unless serious action is taken, both domestically and by the international community.

Table 2.2

Least Developed Countries

Least Developed Countries	
Afghanistan	Angola
Bangladesh	Benin
Bhutan	Burkina Faso
Burundi	Cambodia
Central African Republic	Chad
Comoros	Democratic Republic of Congo
Djibouti	Eritrea
Ethiopia	The Gambia
Guinea	Guinea-Bissau
Haiti	Kiribati
Lao People's Democratic Republic	Lesotho
Liberia	Madagascar
Malawi	Mali
Mauritania	Mozambique
Myanmar	Nepal
Niger	Rwanda
São Tomé and Príncipe	Senegal
Sierra Leone	Solomon Islands
Somalia	South Sudan
Sudan	Timor-Leste
Togo	Tuvalu
Uganda	United Republic of Tanzania
Yemen	Zambia

Adapted from *List of Least Developed Countries*, by United Nations, 2021
(https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wpcontent/uploads/sites/45/publication/ldc_list.pdf)

What Now for Least Developed Countries?

Achieving the SDGs is a process that may take longer than expected for countries. The

total numbers and the share of the world population living in extreme poverty have fallen

dramatically and the number of countries that are highly dependent on aid has fallen significantly

(Horner & Hulme, 2017). Yet, substantial gaps continue to exist between many people and

countries in the Global North and South, and inequalities within many countries have been

growing. The number of people living in extreme poverty remains unacceptably high. There are

several reasons to believe that the target of reducing the number of people living in extreme poverty to below 3% by 2030 will be a challenge to achieve (World Bank, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected progress and continues to affect the health and well-being of people around the world. Also, there is population growth, which can limit progress toward sustainability. LDCs currently have a population that accounts for 20% of the world's youth, which is expected to continue to increase (UNCTAD, 2020). This youth bulge is common in developing countries, and particularly in Least Developed Countries. In addition, there is the global downturn, which is expected to have a dramatic negative impact on global poverty and food insecurity. Throughout this review and research, I was reminded that with less than 10 years remaining, the 2030 target may not yield the expected results. A serious challenge for LDCs is making use of existing human resources, such as women, youth, and ethnic groups, harnessing all available opportunities for growth and equity (UNCTAD, 2020).

Therefore, LDCs should take advantage of their youthful populations to close the widening gap between them and developed countries, and to ensure youth are not used for cheap labor in various sectors. Currently, development discourse tends to readily associate youth and technology, which could lead to overlooking the important role of youth acquiring experiences in other sectors. Haiti is a Least Developed Country with 19% of its population consisting of young people ages 15–24 (United Nations Fund for Population Activities [UNFPA], 2021). Haiti is in a fragile state with a government that cannot provide appropriate guidance for its citizens. So, when a country fails to make noticeable progress, will the country be able to achieve even a minimum level of progress by 2030? Also, when social, environmental, and economic challenges persist in that country, what can realistically be executed to improve the lives of its citizens and sustainable development?

The SDGs are a framework agreed upon by all Member States and the LDCs were taken into special consideration in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. There are provisions such as The Least Developed Countries Fund that provide these countries with additional support needed to graduate and become a developing country. Though these provisions exist, some countries may continue struggling to move out of the Least Developed Country category. Since the local government of Haiti is failing to manage itself, how can it provide its citizens with the much-needed support to eradicate extreme poverty and move out of the LDC category? LDC governments should collaborate with their citizens and local organizations. These LDC governments should provide opportunities for sustainable development despite the shortcomings. Haiti would benefit from taking advantage of its youthful population for the advancement of the 2030 Agenda.

Youth and the Sustainable Development Goals

While billions of people thrive with increased longevity and higher levels of well-being, the poorest of the poor continue the daily fight for survival, lacking basic levels of nutrition, healthcare, shelter, or sanitation (Hwang & Kim, 2017). In September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The SDG initiative positioned youth as one of the major groups to materialize the SDGs by including youth among the Major Groups and other Stakeholders (Ismail et al., 2022). The inclusion of youth in a country's SDGs governance mechanism should be emphasized as countries around the world attempt to make progress with the Sustainable Development Goals. It is important to inform and engage young people since these attempts will influence them. Today, there are 1.21 billion young people aged 15 to 24 years, accounting for 15.5% of the global population (United Nations, 2020). So, raising awareness about the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

among youth, and creating conditions for their active engagement, is a key component in their successful implementation.

Unfortunately, the 2020 pandemic upended the lives of young people from every region, while they try to adapt to new health challenges, lack decent work and employment, food and nutrition security, as well as social isolation and exclusion. Young people have been forced to adjust to what is being called a "new normal" where social distances prevail, especially regarding diverse forms of distance learning, to ensure the continuation of education and skills acquisition (Nichols, 2021). So, building educational skills and capacity of youth, and ensuring their full and effective participation in society is important. As the youth adapt to these new challenges, they must be provided the tools needed to address these challenges.

Nichols (2021) analyzed the concerns of youth and summarized the following points of action:

- Youth should be directly involved in the design and implementation of policy.
- Youth need officially recognized spaces where they can become a part of the decision-making process.
    - These spaces should remove any existing bureaucratic and financial obstacles.
    - Removing these existing obstacles can allow for effective participation from both those who are the typically active participants and those who are marginalized or from excluded groups, for whom participation is difficult.
- Youth tokenism should be eliminated.

- Leadership and government representatives should not only hear young people but understand, respect, involve, and empower them by viewing policy responses and formulation from a youth perspective.

- An investment in pro-youth solutions across key sectors influencing youth development such as education and employment.

- Meaningful dialogue and partnerships between young people and other stakeholders should be encouraged.

Finally, Nichols (2021) recommended that the youth consider future generations. Although they face a huge burden or responsibility, achieving the SDGs by 2030 must be taken into the youths' own hands. They should no longer only be seen as the future, but first and foremost as a group that exists here and now, today.

Youth and Their Classification

The definition of youth by the United Nations is those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by Member States (Camarinhas, 2019). Other organizations use different age ranges. The Commonwealth categorizes persons 15 to 29 years old as youth and the CARICOM Youth Development Action Plan (CYDAP) presents a range from 10 to 29 years old. For this reason, when referring to activities of other organizations or at the national level (e.g., when analyzing a National Youth Policy), "youth" may be interpreted in a more flexible manner (Camarinhas, 2019).

In addition, there are youth categories for the youth of low- and middle-income countries. These youth categories are often based on the vulnerability of the youth and include working youth, trafficked youth, youth living outside of family care, homeless youth, young people

affected by abuse or neglect, and unaccompanied minors, including displaced, refugee, and asylum-seeking youth (Zimmerman & Kyegomb, n.d.).

Youth and Youth Organizations

It could be argued that youth are organizing themselves because of experiences that lead to distrust of existing institutions, and a lack of inclusion and disconnection from the older generation. Yet, engaging with young people should be the norm instead of marginalizing this group. Fortunately, various ways are being created to encourage young people to get involved in social change. Youth organizations are one avenue created to encourage youth engagement.

It has been difficult for young people to have a voice, and major institutions and policymakers have not taken the youth seriously (Ilkiw, 2010). This has created an environment where youths are not seen as experts and youth-led groups are not given the legitimacy needed to thrive. Despite such challenges, and out of the need to be heard, youths are organizing themselves to create positive change and challenge local political decisions to improve conditions in their communities.

These youth organizations provide young people with a forum to effectively deal with important issues. These organizations have the potential to play an important role in making a positive impact in the world. When considering the SDGs and the outcomes that countries want to achieve, there must be decisions that will positively influence the youth population. To achieve Goal 8, targeted coordination needs to be improved between various institutions mandated to enhance youth employment potential (Khan et al., 2016). These coordinated efforts would be beneficial if they included partnerships with youth organizations.

Youth organizations can also play a potentially vital role in providing opportunities for leadership development that young people might not get in a traditional organization. Through

their involvement in an organization, young people are likely to develop professional skills. The skills gained can include the ability to run meetings and experience working as a team. Being a part of a group provides the space for young people to develop important personal and interpersonal skills. These include the ability to think critically and solve problems, and the assumption of personal and group responsibility. These skills can be beneficial for the professional and personal development of young people.

Also, by partnering with other community organizations, youth organizations can often mutually benefit to address some of the following needs (Khan et al., 2016):

- Providing skills that are in demand,

- Providing youth capacity-building programs, and

- Extending the reach of youth skill development programs to the informal sector.

Overall, the creativity and perspectives of young people are invaluable to an organization that chooses to actively involve them. Fortunately, the SDGs acknowledge the centrality of youth and their role in the path towards sustainable development and include targets that are youth-specific. The specific SDGs targets mentioning the terms "youth," or "young people," are listed in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3

Youth-Specific SDG Targets

SDG #	Description
SDG 4.4	By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs, and entrepreneurship.
SDG 4.6	By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.
SDG 8.5	By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value.
SDG 8.6	By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in education, employment, or training.
SDG 8.b	By 2020, develop and operationalize a global strategy for youth employment and implement the Global Jobs Pact of the International Labour Organization.
SDG 13.b	Promote mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in least developed countries and small island developing States, including focusing on women, youth, and local and marginalized communities.

Adapted from *Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, by United Nations General Assembly, 2015 (https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/70/1).

In the 2023 Agenda, youths are a part of the nine Major Groups with which the U.N. closely collaborates to ensure broad participation and representation of all corners of the society. The major groups, including youths, are seen as the voice of the civil society that continues to demonstrate a high level of engagement and input during intergovernmental and U.N. processes. Collaborating with each of these groups and having an effective engagement with these sectors provides an environment to ensure that there is focused attention for each agenda and comprehensive representation (Hwang & Kim, 2017). Since skills and jobs for youth feature prominently in the 2030 Agenda—and are explicitly mentioned in many of the 17 SDGs and their targets—an event that can be used by youth organizations to raise awareness and campaign

for opportunities is World Youth Skills Day. This day promotes the importance of acquiring skills to address the challenges of unemployment and under-employment, and to achieve better socioeconomic conditions for all youth (Hwang & Kim, 2017).

Youth Contributions and the SDGs

Youths have the potential to be a catalyst for change by engaging other youth to take part and contribute to the sustainable development of their country. Therefore, the development of youth networks that can identify and undertake challenges in communities is seen as advancing the 2030 Agenda. Governments need to capitalize on and create opportunities for their youth to partake in these forums and networks. Fortunately, there are efforts from the United Nations to create networks and forums for youth who want to be involved and contribute to sustainable development in their country.

Partnering with youth for sustainable development and tapping into their abilities would achieve the SDGs, since youths are the largest untapped force to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (De Feis, 2018). De Feis (2018) argued that mobilization, redirection, and measurement toward progress are required to unlock the transformative powers of energized people, particularly the youth, and explained the important role of government in coordinating and facilitating youth networks. Many youth programs exist and are striving toward the 17 SDGs. One program is the Business Youth for Sustainable Development to accelerate the achievement of the 17 SDGs (De Feis, 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic, which had the potential to delay and even jeopardize the implementation of many SDGs, triggered the organizing of remote youth networks that focused on SDGs 3, 4, 9, 10, and 17 (Barber & Mostajo-Radji, 2020). The development of these youth networks served as models to solve global health issues and advance the SDGs. Typically seen as

non-state actors, youths are often left behind in policy and decision-making opportunities and they face difficulties in gaining governmental support (Barber & Mostajo-Radji, 2020). Fortunately, recent actions (e.g., related to COVID-19) have focused on relaxing guidelines in certain governmental sectors to allow young entrepreneurs to gain access to government-sponsored funding.

Also, the transitional trajectories have largely failed youths around the world, such as school-to-work transitions (Holmarsdottir & Dupuy, 2017). Alternative approaches are needed to equip youths with the skills needed to thrive in a world that is rapidly changing. Holmarsdottir and Dupuy (2017) explained a holistic life skills program as an approach that provides both soft and hard skills. This enables youth to be social entrepreneurs, make good decisions, think critically, and secure income. Therefore, focusing on creating fully integrated and functional citizens through a skills-delivery approach—instead of solely based on academic learning—should be encouraged. Innovative approaches are also needed to ensure the social and economic inclusion of youth.

Youth and Employment

Emerging and developing countries, as well as rural citizens, show significantly higher rates of informality than developed countries or urban areas (Picatoste & Rodriguez-Crespo, 2021). The informal economy differs depending on countries and workers. There is no official definition of non-standard employment (NSE), but it is understood as work that is not under the umbrella of "standard employment." According to the ILO (2016), the NSE is classified into four basic types:

- Temporary employment,

- Part-time work,

- Temporary agency work and other forms of employment involving multiple parties, and

- Disguised employment relationships and dependent self-employment.

Since the informal sector does not contribute to tax payments, it produces fewer revenues for countries and increases poverty and inequality (World Bank, 2019, p. XVII). Three out of four young people worldwide were engaged in informal employment in 2016 (ILO, 2020). These nonstandard jobs held by young people have unpredictable working conditions, a lack of legal and social protections, and limited opportunities for training and career advancement (ILO, 2020). Since youth employment impacts economic growth and social welfare, it should be an integral part of national and global priorities. The development of skills and labor market intuitions are important in overcoming the challenges of informality for success. Therefore, there must be inclusion in the labor market and a standardized process for this inclusion. This highlights the important role of the state as a regulator in this process and the importance of addressing employment, especially for vulnerable groups such as youths.

When examining Sustainable Development Goal 8, a report that investigated data from 15 low- and middle-income Asian countries, the Middle East and North Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa revealed a mixed picture of progress for adolescents and youth concerning relevant SDG indicators worldwide (Guglielmi et al., 2021). In some domains, including education, there was evidence of progress for some regions while other regions lagged behind. For health outcomes identified in the SDG Agenda, an upward trend in adolescent birth rates was revealed,

particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, which represents a significant threat to the outcome of girls and young women across domains (Guglielmi et al., 2021).

When determining the employability of young people, it appeared as context- and gender-dependent, with girls more likely to be out of secondary education, employment, or training (NEET) when compared to boys. Girls in Asia are the most at risk of NEET status (Guglielmi et al., 2021). While there are findings that highlight some areas of well-being, many indicators examined failed to provide information about how to improve the lives of young people. Yet, it is possible to gather this information through improved reporting mechanisms and data collection.

Youth and Action Research

A youth driven action research study (Ritterbusch et al., 2020) conducted in the LDC of Uganda provides an example of young people leading an AR process and engaging other young people to participate. The AR study reflected on methodological best practices for working with young people to improve their well-being and reduce violence against children. The study (Ritterbusch et al., 2020) was led by a team that included four Ugandan street-connected youth between the ages of 16 to 25 and two Ugandan university-trained youth researchers.

The results of the study reflected both the complexities and transformative potential of including children as researchers in the participatory research framework. The study discussed how ending violence against children (VAC) has been prioritized in recent global development initiatives, including the incorporation of VAC as one of the targets within SDG Goal 16 on ending all forms of abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and VAC by 2030. Hence, promoting the participation and empowerment of young people to interact with or influence policy spaces is important for this Goal.

My AR Study

The AR study engaged active members of a youth-focused organization in a collaborative process to examine opportunities to improve youth outcomes in education, employment, and training. It is important for countries that want to achieve the SDGs by 2030 to prioritize goals that influence the future of their youth, including decent and productive work for youth. The transition of young people from schools and training institutions into the labor market is a critical period in the life cycle (Hwang & Kim, 2017). Hwang and Kim (2017) explained how young people are often trained but not matched by labor demands, which leaves many of the youth stuck in unemployment, with their unemployment rates being significantly higher than adult rates in all geographic regions. When they finally are employed, youths often end up in working conditions that are considered vulnerable (e.g., lack of wage security).

As the youth are encouraged to make daily decisions that can help them achieve their personal and professional goals, they should also be encouraged to help their countries make progress with the SDGs by 2030. With less than 10 years remaining, all categories in society should be engaged, especially the youth and women. A participatory process can be employed so the efforts of youth can be incorporated into the developmental goals of a country. As countries around the world work on the SDGs, youth should be active, remain engaged, and become aware of how they can contribute to the achievement of these goals for their community and country.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The research methodology chosen for this study was action research. The literature on sustainable development reviewed in Chapter II supported the choice of action research as the most suitable research approach for a collaboration with young people engaged in a youth-focused organization in Haiti. The United Nations Development Goal 17 (target 17.16) also provided support for action research:

> Enhance the global partnership for sustainable development complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technologies, and financial resources to support the achievement of sustainable development goals in all countries, particularly developing countries. (UNGA, 2017, p. 24)

When considering the goals of the 2030 Agenda, action research provides for this engagement, transferring of knowledge, and building the technical capacity of young people in Haiti.

Action Research

The constructed theory of action research has been credited to Kurt Lewin (Masters, 1995). Masters (1995) explained that in the mid-1940s, Lewin described AR as "proceeding in a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of planning, action and the evaluation of the result of action" (p. 1). The construction of action research theory made AR a method of acceptable inquiry. Overall, Lewin argued that to understand and change certain social practices, social scientists must include practitioners from the social world in all phases of inquiry.

There are various definitions of action research, which are discussed further in this review. Many of these definitions of action research have four basic themes: empowerment of participants, collaboration through participation, acquisition of knowledge, and social change (Masters, 1995). Masters (1995) explained the process a researcher goes through to achieve these

themes is a spiral of AR cycles comprising four major phases: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting.

A researcher should note the cyclical nature of action research. The cyclical process essentially focuses on action and critical reflection (Costello, 2003), and is often referred to as the action-reflection cycle (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). The cycle proceeds in a spiral of steps, each of which is comprised of a circle of planning, action, and fact-finding about the results of the action (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). New insights can continue to be drawn out of the AR cycles until the process reaches what the researcher considers a logical conclusion.

Action research as a practice has a different paradigm from conventional academic research. Action research has different purposes, is based on different relationships, and has different ways of conceiving knowledge and its relation to practice. AR is about working towards practical outcomes and creating new forms of understanding (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). The action research paradigm is distinctive in three fundamental ways (Bradbury, 2019):

1. It integrates first-person research on oneself, second-person research within a group, and third-person research for larger collectivities.

2. It interweaves research and action, treating the researchers also as co-actors.

3. It describes empirical regularities in third-person data and helps individuals, teams, and wider institutions identify values worthy of pursuit and to provide feedback that makes such pursuit more effective.

Literature from McNiff and Whitehead (2002) described AR as more than just doing activities and but as a form of practice that involves data gathering, reflection on the action as it is presented through the data, generating evidence from the data, and making claims to knowledge based on conclusions drawn from validated evidence. McNiff and Whitehead (2002)

argued that explanations need to be given for the activities in terms of the researcher's values, intentions, and purposes for doing the research. When looking at the difference between traditional research and action research, AR is practice-based and improves practice in both action and research (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). Unlike traditional research, which is focused on improving behavior, action research focuses on improving learning. Action research is collaborative and focuses on creating knowledge and generating living theories of practice. Furthermore, action research (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010, p. 17):

- Involves interrogation, deconstruction, and decentering,

- Requires people to hold themselves accountable for what they are doing and accept responsibility for their actions, and

- Can contribute to social and cultural transformation.

The SAGE Handbook of Action Research (Reason & Bradbury, 2008) explained that within an action research project, communities of inquiry and action evolve and address questions and issues that are significant for those who participate as co-researchers. They argue that such communities usually engage in systematic cycles of action and reflection and that in the action phases, co-researchers test practices and gather evidence. Then, in the reflection stages, they make sense together and plan further actions. Since these cycles of action and reflection integrate knowing and acting, action research does not have to address the space that exists between knowing and doing. Hence, Reason and Bradbury (2008, p. 3) described action research as:

- A set of practices that respond to people's desire to act creatively in the face of practical and often pressing issues in their lives in organizations and communities.

- Engagement with people in collaborative relationships, opening new spaces for communication in which dialogue and development can flourish.

- Values-oriented, seeking to address issues of significance concerning the flourishing of human persons, their communities, and the wider ecology in which we participate. A living, emergent process that cannot be predetermined but changes and develops as those engaged deepen their understanding of the issues to be addressed and develop their capacity as co-inquirers, both individually and collectively.

Action research should not be used if a researcher wants to draw comparisons, show statistical correlations, or demonstrate a cause-and-effect relationship. Though AR data collection tends to use qualitative methods, this does not imply that action researchers avoid quantifying their data. Depending on the data sources and how the data collection instruments are prepared, presenting numbers may be a part of the analysis (Burns, 2009). Burns (2009) also explained that selecting a method for data collection is not random but must be directly related to the kinds of questions or issues a researcher wants to know more about.

Critiques of Action Research

Action research is open to criticisms about its underlying philosophies and approaches, the tentativeness of the processes and procedures for carrying it out, the rigor of data analysis, the lack of replicability, and the limited generalizability of the findings (Burns, 2009). Making firm plans about the underlying questions or steps in the approach is challenging because the process must vary according to how the research resonates with changes and improvements in practice. Action research attempts to change the environment being studied. Still, there is an uncontrollable threat in that the environment being studied will often change in ways that have been predicted by the researcher, or changes will happen in completely unexpected ways (Kock,

2004). In some cases, the change could force the researcher to revisit their methods, theoretical assumptions, and research topic before a single iteration of the action research cycle is completed.

Also, action research draws frequently on qualitative research approaches. These approaches typically rely on the ability of the researcher to interpret the meanings of the information, which leads to questions about the status and reliability of the knowledge generated and how it is reported (Burns, 2009). Supporters of action research argue that these criticisms misinterpret the aims and goals of AR and come from the perspectives of the experimental research tradition. In reporting or publishing AR, the researcher needs to show that the steps in the research are reasonable and logical, and that the available evidence supports the conclusions presented.

Additionally, the level of researcher involvement with client organizations may hinder good AR by introducing personal biases in the conclusions (Kock, 2004). Kock (2004) explained that while deep personal involvement on the part of the researcher has the potential to bias results, that involvement is integral in AR. It is impossible for a researcher to be detached while simultaneously producing a positive intervention on the environment and participants being studied.

Role of Action Research in Sustainable Development

Participative processes are an opportunity for social learning and innovation (Acero López et al., 2019). These processes allow participants to realize (individually or collectively) how they must change their behavior to have their priorities properly addressed. Further, these processes create new ways for accomplishing established objectives. A case study (Acero López et al., 2019) was used to demonstrate a participatory design for sustainable development. In the

case study, there were two provinces with substantial water abundance, yet harmful practices among the local population in the management of the water resource led to its inefficient consumption and waste. As a starting point for the study, the researchers sought to understand the dynamics of the population, technology involvement, and the relationship of the community with their surroundings. The researchers established a series of questions about the information gathered during the exploration visits.

Three main achievements resulted from the research (Acero López et al., 2019). First, the processes of AR allowed the community members to explain their relationship with technology, social systems, and educational systems. The researchers sought to understand social constructions using a participatory evaluation of the relations between students, teachers, and institutions, and making them noticeable to everyone using socio-technical networks. Second, the researchers used a process of imagining, creating, and prototyping a technological solution, which was carried out using the Soft Systems Methodology (SSM). In this action research process, the participants—particularly the students—played a leading role. Third, the technology was cross-cutting in the development of a vision of sustainability. It became possible for the participants to identify the problems concerning the social projects, when approached from the action-research perspective.

Overall, the article (Acero López et al., 2019) supported the application of action research for sustainable development. Employing AR allowed the researchers to achieve their outcomes for sustainable development. The participatory process allowed the researchers to identify a problematic situation and identify where change was necessary as they engaged with participants. Other studies highlight the benefits of a participatory process. Tormey et al. (2008) discussed two AR case studies from the country of Ireland. Another study (Eksvärd & Rydberg,

2010) examined the possibility of sustainable development by integrating participatory learning. These studies provided support for my selection of an action research study. I engaged an action research team to analyze their situation, propose an intervention, and reflect on how the selected intervention could contribute to the desired change.

My Action Research Study

Background on Research Site

International organizations are very present in Haiti. These organizations are heavily involved in global development policies and provide the expertise, technical assistance, training of officials, and investment in development programs. Yet, such organizations have come under attack. Critics explain that these organizations' structural adjustment programs have led to global impoverishment. Critics also consider these organizations' privatization agendas as the latest cycle in the long history of Western global domination and exploitation (Frey et al., 2014). Since I work for an international organization that aims to collaborate with other key stakeholders, I considered AR as an appropriate framework to reduce privatization agendas. Action research provides an opportunity for stakeholders to collaborate for the development of a country. The youth represent a significant portion of the demographics in Haiti.

Some argue that Haiti is an extreme case of a country caught in a vicious circle of unemployment, inequality, and poor education leading to lawlessness and violence. This perception has made it difficult for the economy to grow and create jobs, thus perpetuating unemployment, and inequality (Singh & Barton-Dock, 2015). Yet, Haiti has comparative advantages, including its proximity and access to major markets; a young labor force and a dynamic diaspora; and substantial geographic, historical, and cultural assets. Still, poverty remains endemic in Haiti. Due to the limited capacity of the Haitian government and national

institutions—driven in part by foreign interventions over several decades—nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and private contractors have risen to play a prominent role (Ramachandran & Walz, 2015).

Background on HAITI5: A Youth-Focused Organization in Haiti

Around the world, voluntary and non-government organizations are partnering with businesses and governments to address major social and economic challenges. Therefore, having a common ground and a shared understanding helps to strengthen organizations and their collaborative efforts. Since Haiti has a young labor force, I identified an organization that focused on improving youth outcomes, called HAITI5, for this AR study. The organization was founded in 2011 to address weaknesses in Haiti's higher education system. University students in Haiti have limited access to practical experiences to supplement their classroom education and prepare them to enter the workforce.

HAITI5 has three program components:

1. A volunteering and community service program that recruits students from accredited Haitian universities, on a membership basis, and offers members the opportunity to engage in a range of leadership, personal, and professional development activities.

2. An internship program that aims to identify internship opportunities that can allow Haitian college students to gain practical experience to complement their studies.

3. Leadership and professional development program that complements students' university curriculum by providing additional training.

From these components, HAITI5 has been able to achieve the following successes as of 2019:

- Recruited more than 500 students from 10 universities in Haiti.

- Volunteers have provided more than 15,000 hours of service, with 96.2% of volunteers declaring that they developed new skills.

- Succeeded in placing more than 350 students in internships in eight of Haiti's 10 geographical departments.

- Established partnerships with more than 60 host institutions.

I was interested in conducting this AR study with members of the organization HAITI5. These members were interested in identifying opportunities that would benefit them, would improve youth outcomes, and would align with the SDG target. The results of this AR study could advise the Haitian government to focus more attention on youth initiatives by involving them more in decision-making processes.

The Study

This action research study consisted of four member-participants recruited from HAITI5 for the action research team and eight interviewees for the one-on-one interview survey. The action research team and the eight-interviewee group consisted of active members between the ages of 18 to 29. The action research team participated in designing the one-on-one interview and evaluation survey. The team went through the AR cycle of Planning, Acting, Observing, and Reflecting. Then, the team designed an intervention to offer members more volunteer opportunities. This intervention was agreed upon as beneficial to members of the organization.

For the first AR cycle of the study, each team member was assigned two participants that provided information on organizational activities that were seen as important to improving the well-being of members. The collected information was analyzed by me, the primary researcher and then reviewed with the action research team for "sense-making." The team used the information to design the second AR cycle, which was an intervention for improving youth outcomes. The action research team retrieved feedback from the eight-interviewee group on the intervention that the team designed. Then, the feedback survey was sent to the eight-interviewee

group and the results were analyzed by the primary researcher. The analysis was presented to the

action research team and the team decided on an ultimate intervention design and completed an

evaluation survey.

Action Research Team Participants

For my AR study, I identified a youth-focused organization working at the local level in

Port-au-Prince, Haiti. The participants for the action research study were selected from this

organization. The participants were active members of the organization currently living in Haiti.

All participants received a consent form (Appendix A) that explained the purpose of the study

and what was to be expected once consent was received. Signed consent was received from the

four selected for the action research team and the eight members selected for one-on-one

interviews and the feedback survey. The Reflection phase consisted of prompt questions for the

action research team to consider. An evaluation survey was given to the action research team at

the end of the second AR cycle. As the primary researcher, I used a reflection journal to

document observations during the study. The action research team was primarily responsible for

collecting data in the Act phase from the one-on-one and feedback surveys. The 12 participants

were identified using the selection criteria in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Selection Criteria for Research Team Participants

Criteria Category	Description
Education	Currently pursuing post-secondary education or has completed post-secondary education
Age	Between the ages of 18 to 29
Membership Status	Minimum of One Year
Nationality	Haitian Citizen
Residence	Must Be Currently Living in Haiti
Sex/Gender	Both men and women*

* Non-binary gender recognition in Haiti is not yet established and documented.

Methods

Multi-method research is a generic term. The term is an attempt to combine research methods to address a particular research problem. Multi-method research encompasses a wide range of research strategies that may be used over the course of a research project to breach the qualitative and/or quantitative divide (McKendrick,1999). Overall, the researcher can make educated decisions regarding the choice of methods, how they are implemented, and to which and how many units they are applied. For this multi-method action research study, I selected the following methods: a feedback survey, a one-on-one interview survey, an evaluation survey, and a researcher's reflection journal. I provided the AR team with learning objectives, which were reviewed during the first action research team meeting.

One-on-One Semi-Structured Interview Survey

An interview is a valuable method that provides insights into a person's perceptions, understandings, and experiences of a given phenomenon. An interview can contribute to in-depth data collection. Interviews can be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured (Frances et al.,

2009). This study consisted of a qualitative one-on-one interview deployed as a survey

(Appendix B) with four HAITI5 members and a one-on-one interview survey with eight selected

participants. The survey consisted of open-ended questions that I designed. Open-ended

responses allowed me to understand and present the world as it is seen and experienced by the

participants, without predetermining those standpoints (Yilmaz, 2013).

For the one-on-one survey in the Act phase, the action research team provided their input

on the design. The one-on-one surveys provided data that allowed me to assess how the

participants ascribed the level of importance of youth activities to the well-being of youth. This

information provided the possibility to design an intervention for improving youth outcomes.

Feedback Survey

This action research study also consisted of a feedback survey (Appendix C) that the AR

team designed with me. The action research team conducted this survey in the second cycle of

the Act phase. The objective of the feedback survey was to quantify the eight participants'

satisfaction with the intervention selected by the action research team. The information was

analyzed by the primary researcher with the program Excel.

Evaluation Survey

A semi-structured evaluation survey (Appendix D) was conducted in the second cycle of

AR during the Reflection phase. The survey collected information from the action research team

members about their experience with the AR process, the impact they perceived the intervention

would have on improving youth outcomes, and any suggestions for further exploration. Overall,

this assessment was important in determining the effectiveness of the AR process. Shani and

Pasmore (1982) discussed four factors that determine the effectiveness of the AR process:

1. The degree of organizational improvement; helping the organization to better accomplish its goals and missions,

2. The degree of improvement in the quality of work-life,

3. The degree to which the organization is able to learn about itself and act on this learning, and

4. The generation of new knowledge.

Researcher's Reflection Journal

Reflexivity is largely practiced in qualitative research, where it is used to legitimate and validate research procedures (Mortari, 2015). The reflective researcher does not merely report the findings of the research, but at the same time questions and explains how those findings are constructed. Reflective journals can be used to create transparency in the research process and explore the impact of critical self-reflection on research design. Therefore, I used a reflection journal (Appendix E) to document reflections throughout each phase of the study. Table 3.2 provides a summary of the methods.

Table 3.2

Summary of Methods for Study

Methods	AR Phase	Objective of Methods
One-on-one interview survey	Plan, Act	To assess the activities that were a priority to members and the importance of those activities on youth outcomes.
Feedback survey	Act	To assess the satisfaction of participants with the intervention proposed by the action research team.
Evaluation survey	Reflect	To assess the level of satisfaction of the action research team with the selected intervention toward supporting the well-being of members.
Researcher's reflection journal	Plan, Act, Observe & Reflect	To document the research process by the primary researcher.

The Action Research Cycle

The action research cycle began with the Plan phase. In this phase, I scheduled and conducted meetings with the action research team. The action research team and I reviewed what would be implemented in the next phase, which was Act. In the Act phase, the action research team collected data through a one-on-one survey. In the Observe phase, I monitored and retrieved the data from the action research team. This information was analyzed, and the findings were presented in the Reflect phase. The Reflect phase included a meeting where I helped the team to reflect on the study with reflection questions. After reflections, the team entered the second cycle of AR.

The following was the sequence for the two AR cycles:

First Cycle

1. The primary researcher selected four members for the action research team and eight members for the interviewee group.

2. The primary researcher provided each member of the action research team with a one-on-one survey.

3. Each action research team member was assigned two participants by the primary researcher to conduct the one-on-one surveys.

4. The primary researcher analyzed the data collected by the action research team.

5. The primary researcher presented the findings to the action research team for "sense-making."

6. The action research team made meaning with the findings and the primary researcher provided the action research team with prompt questions for reflection.

Second Cycle

1. The action research team designed interventions based on the analysis.

2. The action research team discussed the interventions with the eight participants.

3. The feedback survey was deployed to the eight participants.

4. The primary researcher analyzed the collected data.

5. The primary researcher discussed the findings with the action research team.

6. The action research team reflected on the findings and finalized the design of the selected intervention.

7. The action research team completed an evaluation survey.

Summary of Each Phase

Plan

    I provided each action research team member with a one-on-one survey. Questions I prepared guided the questions on the survey. The focus of the survey was on assessing organizational activities seen as enhancing the well-being of members. Then, a team meeting was held to discuss the objectives of the study and youth outcomes. Next, the action research

team discussed and provided input on the questions used for the one-on-one surveys provided to the eight participants.

Act

The action research team collected data through a one-on-one survey provided to the eight interviewees. The action research team was responsible for monitoring the completion of the surveys. I analyzed these data and presented the findings to the action research team. The findings from the one-on-one surveys were used to classify the priority of youth activities mentioned by participants. The objective of the one-on-one interview survey was to collect qualitative data that would provide me and the action research team with information to design an intervention for the members of the organization.

Observe

I guided the action research team through the one-on-one interview surveys and feedback process. I maintained weekly communication with the action research team members to keep them engaged and to note observations with the process.

Reflect

For the one-on-one interview surveys collected in the first cycle of AR, I met with the action research team to reflect on the findings for sense-making. We designed an intervention based on the findings. Then, the team engaged in planning for a second cycle of the AR process. For the second cycle, the team reviewed and reflected on the findings from the feedback survey and agreed upon a specific intervention as the final design. Next, the action research team completed an evaluation survey to end the second cycle of AR. Throughout the two cycles of AR, I documented reflections in a researcher reflection journal. Figure 3.1 provides a summary of the research study process.

Figure 3.1

Summary of the Research Study Process. Copyright by author.
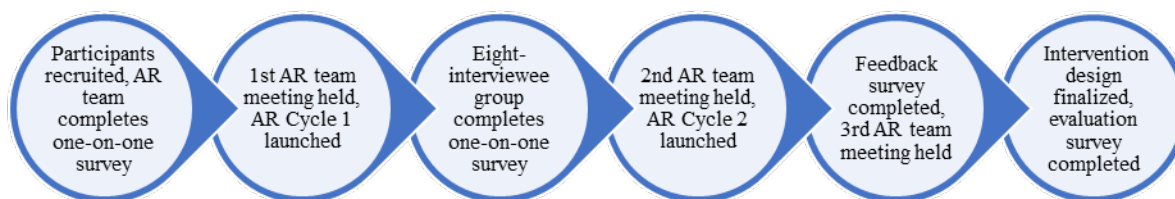
Ethical Considerations

In this research study, there were the standard ethical issues of researching human subjects and informed consent. I reviewed the Investigator's Handbook from the Institutional Review Board (IRB, 2019) for the submission of my research to the IRB. Also, since the study was conducted outside the United States of America, I reviewed the International Compilation of Human Research Standards (Office for Human Research Protections [OHRP], 2021) for Haiti and International ethical guidelines for health-related research involving humans (Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences [CIOMS], 2016).

As discussed in Chapter I, my research involved cooperation and coordination with young people, and I followed ethical standards to promote the values that were essential for this collaborative study. Young people below the age of 18 were not allowed to participate without permission from their parents or guardians, as they were considered incompetent. Therefore, for this study, the youth needed to be of age to be able to give consent. When obtaining consent from participants, I ensured that they were fully informed of both the purpose of the research and the extent of their involvement. Additionally, youth were able to decide on their participation in the study, including dissent or unwillingness to participate. For the AR study, I ensured that

participants understood that consent was renegotiable, and consent could be revoked at any time. Protecting confidentiality could not be guaranteed in a group setting such as the action research team and for the eight interviewees. Still, personal information and responses were not disclosed to anyone outside of the research team unless otherwise agreed upon with the participant. For the information collected, I protected the privacy of and maintained the confidentiality of participants from people outside of the research team using codes and aliases. Also, all information collected for the research was password protected and only accessible to the primary researcher.

This research did not misrepresent the youth. The data reflected and promoted the truth and did not any include falsified information. It was ensured that the youth were not harmed by the research conducted. This included strategies to minimize distress as well as protocols to safeguard the youth from abusive or incompetent researchers. I thoroughly considered the harms and benefits of the research to the participants, their families, and communities.

Potential Researcher Bias

As a researcher, I clearly articulated my positionality. In research, bias occurs when a systematic error is introduced into sampling or testing by selecting or encouraging one outcome or answer over others (Pannucci & Wilkins, 2010). Bias can occur in any phase of research, including study design or data collection, as well as in the process of data analysis and publication. I am a female with a sensitivity to the issues of youths. I worked on the issues of youth as a youth, and I have continued to champion the causes of youths. Given my history of working with youth, for this study, I was aware of my tendency to support the decisions of youth compared to those of adults. I was aware of my assumptions that adults would not include youth

in the decision-making process, and I instead aimed to be open to listening to both youth and adults and their decisions.

I was also aware of my own experiences as a youth and limited my assumptions of how a youth operated. I shared a common background and culture with the youth that I worked with as a co-researcher for this AR study. Still, I was aware that these commonalities might have tempted me to engage in story sharing if there were similar experiences. Doing so would have sidetracked my interactions with participants and would have taken the focus away from their experiences. The awareness of my own biases helped me at all stages of the inquiry process to hold the position of an inquirer and not a participant. Therefore, as a researcher, I listened to and reported the view of the action research team and eight-interviewee group, in addition to my reflections.

Thematic Analysis

Each phase of the action research was documented. The qualitative one-on-one interview surveys were analyzed using MAXQDA, a software program designed for computer-assisted qualitative and mixed methods data, text, and multimedia analysis. This tool was used to document emerging themes and to narrow down the categories to specific concepts. For the first AR cycle, the action research team provided input on the design of the one-on-one survey, and I guided the action research team on how to implement the surveys.

For the second cycle, I continued to guide the team and collected their input on the feedback survey. The action research team advised me on the survey design. The feedback survey was analyzed with the program Excel and was used to assess satisfaction with the intervention that the action research team designed.

I analyzed this information collected during the AR process and presented it to the action research team with themes identified from the analysis. Creating these themes stemmed from reoccurring patterns identified and from grouping the information. The themes presented to the action research team came from data retrieved from the one-on-one surveys.

Summary

Young people's participation in the U.N.'s 2030 Agenda is crucial. Governments should prioritize ways in which innovations can meaningfully involve young people and their communities. This action research study provided youth with a meaningful way to enhance their engagement with improving youth outcomes. This study also provided youth with an opportunity to develop data-driven ideas, provide recommendations from the results of the AR study to local decision-makers, share their knowledge with other stakeholders, and promote sustainable development for their country. In the next chapter, Chapter IV, I discuss the results and outcomes of the AR study conducted with HAITI5.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Background

Since Least Developed Countries comprise 20% of youth around the world, there should be a continual analysis of strategies developed and implemented to improve the number of young people employed, educated, or trained. Therefore, in this AR study, the selected organization designed an intervention that could improve youth outcomes and possibly contribute to sustainable development in their country. The selected organization, HAITI5, is an active, youth focused organization in Haiti with a total of 500 members. From this total of 500, only 155 (31%) of the men and 145 (29%) of the women were classified as active members. Those considered active members provided a minimum of three volunteer hours to the organization.

Also, those no longer living in Haiti were not classified as active members of the organization. The participants in this study were members that have been with the organization for a minimum of 1 year. These participants represented youth living in Haiti who completed their secondary education and pursued post-secondary education. The youth that participated in the study had the capacity to reflect and to participate in critical thinking discussions throughout the study. Figure 4.1 provides information on the demographics of the organization.

Figure 4.1

Demographics of Members of the Organization
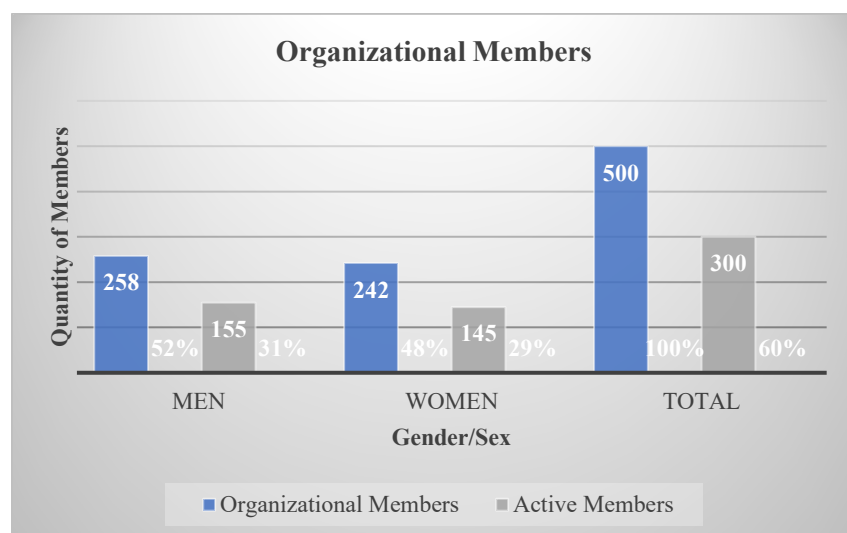
This study focused on understanding the priorities of youths living in a Least Developed Country and the possible interventions that could improve youth outcomes. This action research study used the following learning objectives for the participants:

1. Design an intervention for improving youth outcomes.

2. Provide the HAITI5 organization with an intervention plan that will help the organization to better accomplish its mission and vision.

3. For each participant to learn something through participation in this AR study.

4. To generate knowledge and ideas that will improve opportunities for youth in education, employment and training.

5. The ability to study and analyze youth outcomes through the lens of action research.

Work Phases

This action research study consisted of four phases. Phase 1, the preparation phase, consisted of preliminary work before implementing the first AR cycle. This was followed by the first AR cycle of the study, which assessed what the participants valued as members of the organization. The second AR cycle included the final selection of the intervention. Finally, there was the post-cycle phase, which included the evaluation survey and the preparation to present the results of the study to the leadership of the organization.

For the preparation phase, I decided on the composition of the action research team and the eight-interviewee group. The criteria for this composition were determined by the order participants were listed on the list the organization provided to the primary researcher. The first AR cycle of the study included the first team meeting, the initial collection of data, and the initial data analysis. After the analysis of these data, the second AR cycle was implemented by seeking input from the eight-interviewee group on the two interventions the action research team identified and designed. These interventions were presented to the eight-interviewee group to narrow down the intervention selection. Then, the action research team had a concluding meeting to discuss their satisfaction with the final intervention selected and to propose changes to the final intervention. For the post-cycle phase, I analyzed all the information collected from the previous phases. This analysis prepared me for a presentation with the organization's leadership on how this information will be useful to the organization as it plans to implement the selected intervention in the future. The study sequence in Figure 4.2 details the phases of the research process, which I discuss further in this chapter.

Figure 4.2

Work Phases
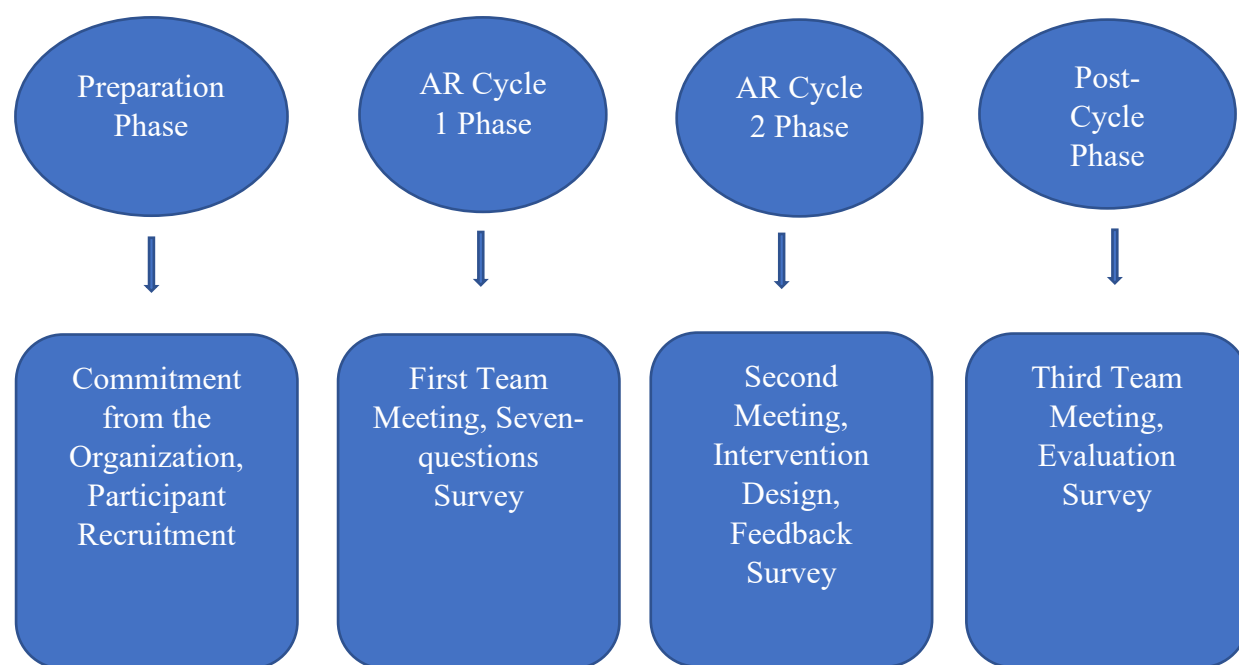
Preparation Phase

    I was able to establish a relationship with the selected organization and explained the goals of this action research study to the leadership of the organization. My discussions as the primary researcher with the leadership of the organization occurred through casual dialogue. We discussed the organization's goals and what they hoped the study would provide for its members. After these discussions and receiving an invitation letter (Appendix F), the organization's leadership agreed to the action research study and provided a list of members that qualified for the study. Table 4.1 provides a summary of the preparation round, which includes the time frame.

Table 4.1

Summary of the Preparation Phase

Step	Objective	Time frame
Participant list provided as commitment from the organization.	The organization agrees and provides the names of participants to begin the recruitment process.	One week
Participant recruitment process.	Email all names on the list to provide an opportunity for members to participate in the study.	One week
Retrieval of signed consent forms.	12 members from the selected organization to agree with a signed consent form.	One Week
Completion of the seven-questions survey by the action research team members.	Members assigned to the action research team to complete the seven-question survey.	Two weeks

Organizational Commitment

The organization was very supportive in the early stages of this study and its focus on youth outcomes. The sponsor was a co-founder of the organization and was the point of contact for this organization. I had a professional relationship with this sponsor, which was key to guiding the framework of this study. Dialogue with the sponsor included conversations on the challenges youth in Haiti were facing. We also discussed how the organization can reach as many youths as possible with the services provided, giving them a better opportunity to succeed as young professionals in Haiti. These conversations occurred as informal meetings, but other conversations occurred during the preparation phase.

Composition of Participants

During the preparatory phase, the organization provided me with a list of 14 names, which represented members that met the criteria established to participate in the study. From the 14 names, eight participants were selected to be in the interviewee group, and I selected four participants to be in the action research team. I emailed each member on the list to express interest in their participation in the action research study. When I contacted the listed members, each member expressed that it was an honor to participate in such an important study that would help the organization determine how to better support members. One participant even suggested that the tasks be well defined so that each member could be held accountable and take ownership of their assigned task. I reminded each participant that this was voluntary research and that their participation was not a requirement. The selected members responded that this was their understanding and that they were still interested in participating in the study, which was confirmed with a signed consent form. Table 4.2 provides information on the demographics of the participants recruited.

Table 4.2

Demographics of Participants

Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	3	25%
Female	9	75%
Total	12	100%

I followed-up the emails with a telephone voice message to all 14 potential participants. Thirteen of the potential participants responded, of which 12 members submitted signed consent forms to participate in the study. I divided the 12 participants that submitted their consent forms into two groups. The first four members on the list were selected and classified as the "action research team." The remaining eight participants comprised a group classified as the

"eight-interviewee group." Both groups completed an individual seven-question survey to provide information on HAITI5's efforts to support the professional and personal endeavors of its members. For the AR team, I created an online group for better communication and to facilitate dialogue among group members.

AR Cycle 1 Phase

Plan

This phase of the study focused on retrieving the perspectives of HAITI5's members. Once the members of the action research team completed the one-on-one seven-questions survey, the first action research virtual team meeting was scheduled. In this meeting, I introduced the AR team to the learning objectives of this action research study. Then, each member answered four reflection questions centered around the seven-question survey that was completed in the preparation phase:

1. What skills do you possess that will be an asset to the action research team?
2. What do you hope your participation in this study will teach you?
3. What did the survey allow you to discover about yourself that you did not know before?
4. In what way did the survey make you understand yourself better?

After answering the reflection questions, the team was instructed on the next steps. Each team member received the names of two participants. They were asked to reach out to their participants to explain that a one-on-one seven-question survey was to be completed. After the meeting, I emailed each team member the names of their two participants and a deadline of 2 weeks for the seven-question survey to be completed and submitted.

Act

 The action research team members reached out to their assigned participants. The eight-interviewee group received the seven-question survey, which was to be completed within the allotted 2 weeks. The action research team members followed up with their assigned participants and sent reminders for them to complete the survey before the deadline. Once all eight surveys were received, I was notified to confirm that all the surveys were transmitted.

Observe

 I was able to monitor the progress of each AR team member by sending updates on the group chat online. I analyzed the information collected using MAXQDA. This software is designed for qualitative and mixed methods data, which was used to analyze the seven-question survey. I conducted a thematic analysis of each question and prepared a summary of the data that was presented to the action research team at the next team meeting.

Evaluate

 A second team meeting was scheduled with the action research team. During this meeting, I reviewed each question on the seven-question survey, and the results. Once all the results were discussed, I asked the team members to reflect on the results and to express what they considered an important intervention design that would support the work of the organization. Table 4.3 provides a summary of the AR Cycle 1.

Table 4.3

AR Cycle 1 Summary

Step	Focus Area	Objective	Time frame
Plan	Host first meeting with the action research team.	Agree on the objectives of the research	Two weeks
Act	Action research team to contact their assigned participants to complete the seven-question survey.	Collect initial data for the study	Two weeks
Observe	Action research team members communicate to the primary researcher progress with participants.	Guide the process as needed	Two weeks
Evaluate	Analyze the information received. Host second meeting with the action research team to discuss the results.	Review initial data for feedback	One week

AR Cycle 2 Phase

Plan

The Plan phase of AR Cycle 2 began during the second AR team meeting. After each team member provided their opinion on the services that they wanted the organization to continue providing for its members, each member selected two services that they thought should continue being offered to organizational members. For the two interventions, I employed a voting session, asking each member to select their preferred interventions. Each member voted and was tasked with presenting the two interventions to their assigned participants to get their input on the matter. I gave the action research team 1 week to complete the assigned task.

Act

The action research team contacted their assigned participants to get their input on the two interventions selected by the majority of the action research team. Each action research team member explained that the two interventions were chosen as a priority and that additional input was key to narrowing the selection to one intervention. I was notified by each action research team member when a response was received from their assigned participants.

Observe

The 1-week timeline yielded a response rate of six out of eight participants. These six participants provided their selections and the justifications for the selection. These responses were included with the responses received from the action research team members. The votes were tallied and one of the interventions received the majority of the votes.

Evaluate

Next, I emailed a feedback survey to the eight-interviewee group. The survey provided details on the intervention that received the majority of the votes. The participants were asked to provide feedback on their level of satisfaction with the voted-upon intervention. In addition, the feedback survey included a reflection question on their participation in the study.

Once the feedback surveys from the eight-interviewee group were received, I held a third meeting with the action research team to discuss their level of satisfaction with the results and get their feedback on this AR study focused on youth outcomes. I provided the action research team members with the following reflection questions:

1. What did you learn during the process of asking participants to complete the seven-question survey?

2. What value did you find in participating in the collection of data as a HAITI5 member?

3. Do you believe that the programs and activities of HAITI5 help youth with employability in Haiti?

4. Do you think that being a member of ACTVEH has contributed to your choice to remain in Haiti as a young person?

Table 4.4 provides a summary of AR Cycle 2.

Table 4.4

AR Cycle 2 Summary

Step	Focus Area	Objective	Timeframe
Plan	In the second meeting, the action research team selects the intervention. Team members vote on a plan.	Design intervention.	One meeting
Act	Team members reach out to participants to get votes on the intervention. Participant vote is sent to the primary researcher.	Get input on which intervention should be selected.	Two weeks
Observe	The primary researcher reviews the votes received. Feedback survey on the final selection is sent to participants.	To select one intervention from votes received.	One week
Evaluate	Results are reviewed at the final action research team meeting.	Agree on the final intervention selected to be presented to the leadership of the organization.	One meeting

Post Cycle Phase

For the final phase of the study, which is detailed in Table 4.5, the members of the action research team received an evaluation survey to provide their perspectives on their participation in the study. The survey consisted of 10 questions that included final reflections on the study. The responses of the AR team are provided later in this chapter. These were the 10 questions on the evaluation survey:

1. What is your satisfaction with the overall research process?

2. What is your satisfaction with the final results of the study?

3. What was your top accomplishment on the action research team?

4. As a member of the action research team, what strategies worked well for you to accomplish the tasks you were assigned by the primary researcher?

5. What would you do differently if you were to participate in this action research study again?

6. How do you think this study responds to improving opportunities for youth?

7. What do you think about the results of this study to improve youth outcomes?

8. Overall, what did you hope to achieve from your participation on the action research team?

9. Did you achieve it? Why or why Not?

10. What final reflections would you like to share on this action research study?

Table 4.5

Post Cycle Phase

Step	Focus Area	Objective	Timeframe
Post Cycle	Action research team receives an evaluation survey on the study.	Agree on the final intervention selected to be presented to the leadership of the organization.	One week

Seven-Question (One-on-One) Survey Data Collection

I designed the seven-question survey. In addition to gathering information to design an intervention, the questions on the survey allowed me to collect additional information that was beneficial to the AR process. Since AR focuses on promoting a participatory process, the questions allowed the participants to reflect and provide information on their level of participation as an organizational member. The participants expressed that this reflection process motivated them throughout the study because they realized the importance of remaining engaged and committed to an activity until an outcome is achieved.

The first round of the seven-question survey was given to the action research team members to complete. This survey was semi-structured and was deployed using Kobo Toolbox. I gave each participant a number to protect their anonymity. The eight-interviewee group completed a second round of the seven-question survey, which was overseen by the action research team members. The survey included the following seven questions:

1. (Q1) How many years have you been involved with HAITI5?

2. (Q2) Please describe the role and activities you have participated in that were hosted by HAITI5.

3. (Q3) What part of the HAITI5 program have you greatly benefited from? How is this contributing to improving your well-being as a young person?

4. (Q4) What positive impact does your participation in HAITI5 have on other youth?

5. (Q5) When you faced challenges in establishing or advancing your education, training, and employment goals what strategies did you use to overcome those challenges to make progress?

6. (Q6) Overall, please explain what being a member of HAITI5 has done for you personally and professionally as a young person.

7. (Q7) What should HAITI5 continue to offer more so that it can continue to be relevant to youth such as yourself?

The information collected on Kobo Toolbox was uploaded to MAXQDA for a thematic analysis. The analysis was intended to capture the experiences of the participants. First, I grouped the answers to each question. Second, I captured keywords and phrases considered as noteworthy responses to the questions posed on the seven-question survey. Third, I consolidated all repetitions into a set of themes. For the thematic analysis, valuable information was provided for each question. The thematic analysis of the seven-question survey (see Table 4.6) was applied by the action research team to determine the intervention design that would be selected as a priority for organizational members.

Table 4.6

Seven-Question Survey Thematic Analysis

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7
Minimum: 3 Years	Roles: Trainer, Community Services and Volunteering Committee, Human Rights Group, Technology Group, Cultural Group, The Economy and Finance Group, Environment Group, Organize Conferences	Leadership Development	Be A Role Model	Take A Break	Build Community	More Training: employability, technology
Maximum: 7 Years	Events: Anniversary, Good Deeds Day, Meetings, Conferences, Orphanage Visit	Connection with Others	Share Experiences with Others	Ask for Help	Build Network	More locations in other departments of Haiti
Median: 3 Years	Activities: English Club, career awareness, participate in training, awareness campaigns in schools, volunteer work, workshops, networking activities	Employability	Inspire Others	Find Motivation	Build Leadership	More Volunteer opportunities
	Topics: Human Rights, QuickBooks, Women's Rights, Excel, Work, Computers, Technology	Organizational Activities	Encourage Others	Take Personal Time	Work experience	More Job opportunities

Feedback Survey Data Collection

I designed the feedback survey that the eight-interviewee group was to complete. I emailed the survey to each participant to be completed on Google Forms. Each participant continued using their participant number assigned to protect their anonymity. The questions on the feedback survey were the following:

1. Does the intervention the action research team designed align with what you consider a priority?

2. How confident are you that this intervention will be able to help members of the
   a. organization?

3. What should the action research team do with the intervention that has been chosen?
   a. Make a few changes to the proposed intervention.
      i. The start date of intervention is too early.
      ii. The start date of intervention is too late.
      iii. The location of the intervention needs to be changed.
      iv. The target group of intervention needs to be changed.
      v. The duration (length) of the intervention is too short.
      vi. The duration (length) of the intervention is too long.
   b. Keep the intervention the same.
   c. Change the intervention completely.
      i. Instead, what should the team select for their planned intervention?
      ii. Other?

4. What are your reflections about your participation in this action research study?

Thematic Analysis

In Figure 4.3, the participants' views on the priority level of the intervention selected was assessed. From the six responses received, the mean of 7.5 shows that participants considered the intervention selected as a moderate priority. This level of priority and not achieving a higher level of priority level satisfaction could be attributed to what participants mentioned in their reflections. They share that more partnerships are needed with institutions in Haiti for the intervention to be as successful as possible. I also observed that some participants were concerned with the feasibility of this intervention in the current sociopolitical context of Haiti.

Figure 4.3

Question 1(Q1) Feedback Responses
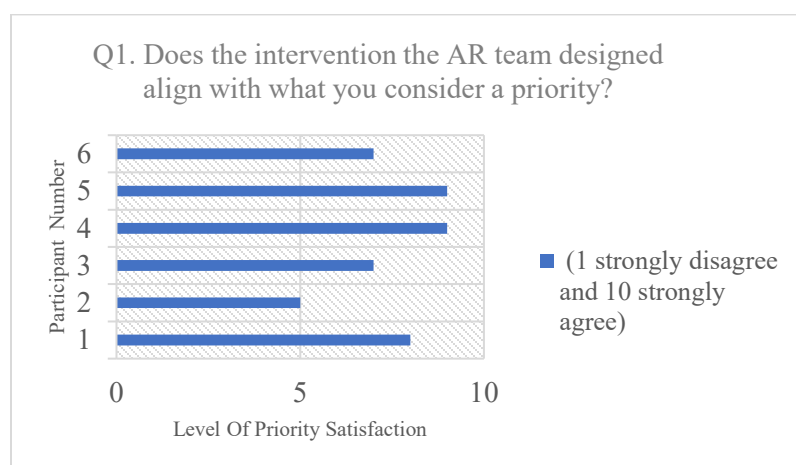
In Figure 4.4, the participants' levels of confidence in whether the intervention would benefit members of the organization was recorded. From the six responses received, the mean of 8.5 shows that participants were confident that the selected intervention would benefit members.

Figure 4.4

Question 2(Q2) Feedback Responses

Q2. How confident are you that this intervention will be able to help members of the organization?
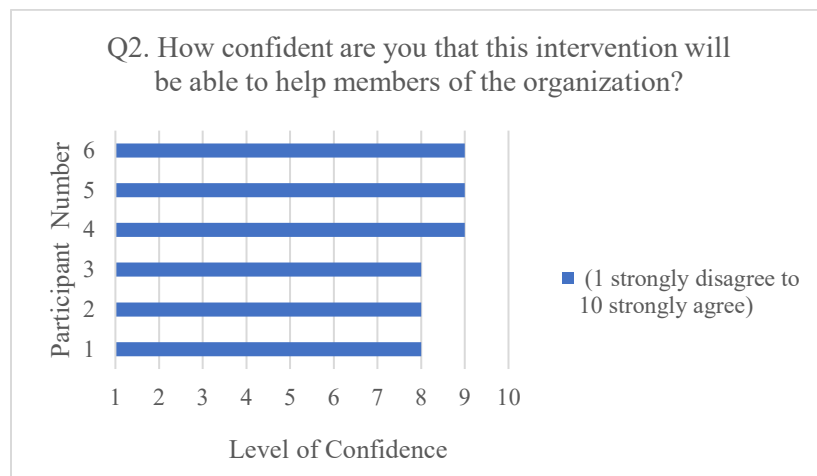
From the six responses received, five of the respondents selected to keep the intervention the same, and one participant selected to make a proposed change. The proposed change was about the duration of the proposed intervention; they thought one year was too short. Then, the six participants that submitted the feedback survey were asked to reflect on their participation in the AR study. The responses were coded, and the following three themes emerged:

1. There was an appreciation for the sharing of ideas.

2. There was a recognition of the importance of the organization.

3. There was hope for organizational improvements.

Action Research Team Evaluation Survey Data Collection

Once the eight-interviewee participants completed the feedback survey and the third meeting was held with the action research team, I emailed each action research team member an evaluation survey on Google Forms. The evaluation survey consisted of 10 questions. Question one on the evaluation survey asked the four members of the action research team about their

overall satisfaction with the AR research process. The results produced a mean of 7.75, which indicates that the team members were moderately satisfied with the research process.

Question two of the evaluation survey asked the four members of the action research team about their overall satisfaction with the agreed upon results of the study. The highest score was a satisfaction of nine out of 10, and the lowest satisfaction score was 7.5 out of 10. This result produced a mean of 8.25, which shows that the team members were quite satisfied with the results of the study. I resolved that the action research team members were quite satisfied with the results of the voting process and the final intervention selected.

In Table 4.7, question three (Q3) provides a summary of the top accomplishments mentioned in the survey. Then, for question four (Q4), the members provided information on what worked well with completing assigned tasks. For question five, team members were asked what should have been done differently. Two members preferred face-to-face meetings and two members would not want to do anything differently.

Table 4.7

Summary of Questions 3 and 4 Themed Evaluation Responses

Q3. Top accomplishments
The follow-ups
My availability
My engagement with participants
Q4. Strategies that worked well to accomplish tasks assigned by the primary researcher
The reminders
Following the process

Table 4.8 consists of themed responses for questions six (Q6), seven (Q7), and eight (Q8). For question six, the members provided information on how this study could improve opportunities for youth. The following question, question seven, asked members to reflect on the ability of the results to improve youth outcomes. For question eight, members expressed what they hoped to achieve from participating in the study. When asked in question nine if they had achieved their goal(s), one member said they did not, one did not yet have a definite response, and two members said they achieved their goal.

Table 4.8

Summary of Questions 6, 7, and 8 Evaluation Themed Responses

Q6. How this study responds to improving opportunities for youth
Activates the youth into action
Results will benefit the youth
Q7. Thoughts on the results of this study to improve youth outcomes
Results reflect reality
Youth priorities are taken into account
Q8. What is hoped to be achieved for participation in the study
Members benefit from the findings
A plan is developed
Leaders are renewed

Table 4.9 shows team members' final reflections on the action research study. The members were: (a) content to contribute to the study, (b) noted the importance to reflect on Haitian youths, and (c) supposed that the work of the organization should continue.

Table 4.9

Question 10(Q10) Evaluation Responses

Q10. Final reflections on this action research study
Content to contribute
Important to reflect on Haitian youths
The work of the organization with youth should continue

Researcher's Reflection Journal

I used a reflection journal to trace how I may have influenced the study, including meetings and follow-ups. Reflective journal writing allows researchers to own the centrality of their research process, which contributes to the legitimacy of the knowledge claims (Jasper, 2005). This record can also be used by external individuals to interpret and authenticate the results of the study. The reflection journal was an opportunity to write down my emotions and experiences as a primary researcher throughout the action research study. After each noteworthy event, I documented a reflection. The entries were straightforward and included lessons learned for that day. Overall, the reflection journal was a useful tool to keep a record of the learning process. I found it beneficial for organizing thoughts and brainstorming what interventions should be considered to benefit members.

The reflection journal allowed me to write down the challenges faced, which centered around conducting a virtual study. In the virtual setting, I had to remind the action research team members to attend meetings. For the eight-interviewee participants, the team members had challenges with getting participants to check their email and complete assigned tasks. Then there was the group dynamic, which was important and noted in the journal. The action research team was equally divided between males and females. A leader emerged from the group, which was

an advantage to the team's cohesiveness. For the eight-interviewee group, the motivation of two participants shifted when it was time to vote for one intervention and complete the feedback survey. The deadline had to be extended and even then, the two participants failed to complete the tasks assigned in the AR Cycle 2 phase, despite follow-up emails. I also journaled about assumptions. I assumed that participants would not have time to participate in the study. This assumption was pleasingly counteracted by the participants' commitment to the study and to be of service to the organization and its mission.

The reflection journal entries allowed me to reflect on the following three points:

1. What was accomplished,

2. What could be improved, and

3. My general observations with the research process.

As the primary researcher, I learned that the best strategy to remain on task was to maintain constant and consistent communication with the participants. I was able to keep communication more consistent through telephone messages than through emails. Also, planning during the preparation phase and creating a workplan allowed for a better execution with the other work phases of the study.

The amount of time each participant took to complete an assignment could have been improved. The participants were motivated and very engaged from the beginning of the study. So, as the primary researcher, I was interested in keeping motivation high so that the participants would complete assigned tasks. Some tasks, such as the completion of the surveys, required additional time and adjusting the timeline allowed for the surveys to be submitted for analysis.

I noted general observations throughout the research process. First, the action research team was interested in keeping more than one intervention. Still, they decided that since the

majority of participants selected a specific intervention, that it would be best to keep the intervention. Second, there was a discussion about a possible third intervention. However, I encouraged the action research team to stay focused on an intervention that would align with the current realities in Haiti. When discussing the possible interventions, the action research team members reminded each other that any intervention would need to be well-planned to ensure a successful launch. Therefore, the team decided that it was best to do one intervention at a time. It was very encouraging to observe the dedication of the action research team for the selected intervention to succeed.

Intervention Design

The intervention design occurred during the second action research team meeting and was finalized during the third meeting. The second action research team meeting was focused on the seven-question survey that I analyzed and then presented to the action research team. From the list of responses, two were selected as priorities. From the two selections, the action research team was asked to choose only one of the interventions as a priority. The eight-interviewee group was also asked to select only one intervention as a priority. During the second action research team meeting, the team members also discussed the possibility of keeping both interventions as an option.

The following are excerpts of the action research team meeting on the selection of an intervention after the second action research team meeting ended. First, Team Member 4 said, "Even the volunteer opportunity is a good intervention because the volunteer opportunity can be used as an internship. Therefore, the volunteer option can give more opportunities." Next, Team Member 1 said:

> Unfortunately, there is a reality in the streets of Haiti. Many institutions are in crisis and even if you consider looking for unpaid internships, they may not be available. Also, the execution of the internship opportunity may take a lot of time due to needing to establish a steering committee. The volunteering opportunity may come in different forms and may be more than work, it can be organized as a training activity.

Then, Team Member 2 said, "It can also be an event." Team Member 1 replied, "Yes, the members need experience, it is true, and this study can add value to the organization, which will give it more visibility." Team Member 2 noted that, "Volunteering is considered a position; Therefore, it put more weight on my CV than my internship," and Team Member 1 added that, "Notably at the national level, we are pioneers in the matter of volunteering in Haiti. Even the hiring institutions are asking for volunteer experience. They also asked, "Or do we do a 50/50 synchronization of both volunteering and internship opportunities?" Team Member 2 thought, "Both opportunities will require partnerships." Team Member 3 said, "That is a key element," and Team Member 4 agreed.

Internship

This intervention focused on the services the organization provides frequently for its members. The team discussed the value of this intervention with its members. For example, Team Member 1 said that "Since an internship is difficult to find at an institution, I think focusing on it would help someone like me in their professional career. I want to be able to go in the field and put theory into practice." Team Member 2 added that:

> I think an internship/partnership would be more beneficial. Not only will HAITI5 have the opportunity to expand its framework, but it will also be able to help young people to strengthen their knowledge during the internship period. It is not easy for a young person to participate in an internship not covered by the school, and it depends on your discipline as well. At the same time, I acknowledge that the possibility for the organization to find these partnerships is not easy.

Volunteer Opportunities

Participants viewed this intervention as equally important to the development of its members and remarked that it is the signature activity of the organization. Team members expressed the need for more volunteer opportunities. One said, "I think this will allow many young people to make a demarcation from other youth." Another team member added that:

> Volunteer opportunities are one of the most needed components of the organization. Voluntary activities allow the organization to remain active, more people discover it, and get the opportunity to visit the work it does (visibility). It allows young people to develop their abilities, put into practice their knowledge and skills, and increase their experience. It is also a way to contribute to the advancement of communities, help others in need through activities, and create connections.

Aside from these two interventions, the team discussed expanding the organization to other areas of Haiti. This was the third intervention selected. A member of the action research team argued that if the organization remained limited to the capital city of Haiti, there would be a challenge to achieve the desired intervention. It was also argued that the expansion of the organization into other areas of the country that are considered safer than the capital city would allow more youth to join the organization. It would also allow the organization to establish partnerships with more institutions, organize more volunteer activities and provide more opportunities for professional development. Another member also mentioned how important it would be to continue providing professional development training to members on a more consistent basis; this could be done as peer-to-peer mentorship. The intervention designs, internship and volunteer opportunities are summarized in Table 4.10.

Table 4.10

Intervention Designs

Description	Intervention One	Intervention Two
Intervention	Organization to offer members more opportunities for internship	Organizations to offer members more opportunities to do volunteer work through partnerships with institutions
Why?	The internship will help members find the opportunity to develop skills in their domain	It gives youth work experience, and many youths can participate
Where?	In all accessible departments	In all departments of Haiti
When?	In the Summer (Starting in July)	In the Summer (Starting in July)
For how long?	Up to one year; minimum of four months	Up to one year; minimum of four months
Who will manage it?	Set up a steering committee by choosing one person from each department in the organization	Set up a committee, choose one person from each department
What resources are needed?	A budget, more partnerships with institutions, communication fees, technology, marketing, and access internet	Find volunteers, transport fees, a budget, and more partnerships

The Results and Overall Study Objective

The overall study objective was to determine how HAITI5 effectively aligned its youth focused programmatic work with the Sustainable Development Goals. Findings based on action research provided important insights to help address this overall aim. I summarize and relate those findings to the study objectives below. With the focus on youth outcomes, the work of HAITI5 notably aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 8 of substantially reducing the proportion of youth not in education, employment, or training (NEET). Each method used to collect data addressed the overall study objective.

One-on-One Interview Survey

This survey was the preliminary method that launched the first AR cycle and all 12 participants in the study answered the seven questions on the survey. This survey was key in allowing me, as the primary researcher, to make observations on the level of engagement of the members, the contribution of members to the function of the organization and what was considered the core programmatic work(s) of the organization. During the preparation phase, I received basic information about the organization, which provided me with a general understanding of the function of the organization. However, the one-on-one surveys allowed me to gather in-depth information that was not provided in the preparation phase. This in-depth information included learning about the various committees and sub-committees that existed within the organization. These committees provided youth with an opportunity to be leaders of change to improve outcomes for young people.

Since HAITI5 has existed for over 10 years, the survey results also allowed me to see the years that each participant committed to the organization, which was an average of 3 years. This membership longevity has allowed youth to build their professional capacity over time. It has

also allowed the organization to maintain its programmatic work through the contribution of members actively involved in the work of the organization over a period of time. Finally, through the open-ended questions on the survey, the participants were able to express their perspectives on the direction the organization should take to continue being of service to members and the community. The youth mentioned programs and activities that personally benefited them as young people seeking to develop as young professionals, and at the same time, benefited the work of the organization through their active participation.

The survey responses consistently highlighted how the youth considered the organization's activities as crucial to their professional development, which provided them with the necessary experience and increased their employability. The organization has been able to create an environment for professional learning. At the same time, the organization is building members' leadership as they participate in the committees to plan and implement the programmatic work of the organization. The organization has also been able to plan and implement youth-led activities and that has allowed the members to influence their peers and maintain their participation within the organization.

Feedback Survey

The feedback survey, which consisted of four key questions, was the preliminary method that launched the second AR cycle. The feedback survey provided information that captured if the participants were satisfied with the results the AR team designed and provided suggestions on making the design more appropriate to the needs of members. Since the AR team narrowed the intervention design to the two options of internships and volunteer work, the feedback from the survey was decisive in continuing the focus of programs on needs that exists with education, employment, and training. The results of the feedback survey showed that the participants

supported the selected intervention but cautioned the AR team on the duration of the intervention. The duration of the intervention was considered important since a short duration would limit the number of members that could participate in the program. The availability of internships and volunteer opportunities would be dependent on the number of partnerships established during the launching of the selected intervention.

When the AR team reviewed the feedback, they discussed the level of satisfaction with each of the proposed interventions and the intervention that remained as the final selection. The AR team noted that other listed interventions would have been just as beneficial if selected. Some participants argued that many other listed interventions, such as expanding services to other locations in Haiti could have possibly led to a higher satisfaction level with the intervention design. At the same time, the AR team agreed that the final selection of providing more volunteer opportunities is likely to be implemented to address all the concerns of members that are seeking training and educational possibilities, which would eventually improve their employment opportunities.

Evaluation Survey

The evaluation survey was the follow-up method to the feedback survey in the second AR cycle. The evaluation survey, which consisted of 10 questions, revealed how satisfied the AR team was with both their participation in the AR process and with the results agreed upon at the end of the study. The team was asked to reflect on what could be improved. From the summary of the results, the AR team agreed the results did reflect reality and that the organization should continue providing youth-focused program opportunities. The AR team agreed on the importance of peer-to-peer interactions, which would allow young people to influence others to be involved in initiatives that promote improving youth outcomes. All participants mentioned how their

participation in the organization had a positive influence on other young people in their community. Their focus on youth concerns encouraged and motivated other young people to become active members of their community.

Researcher's Reflection Journal

The recording of my personal reflections in a journal on a regular basis created data I was able to review. I was able to write down notes on the AR process and how it was addressing the objective of the study. The study was a collaborative process that considered the perspectives of the participants and how the organization was addressing the needs of its members. Thus, the participants enhanced my understanding of what was being implemented and what was still desired to be addressed. I was able to write about the workflow as a collaborative process. The participants and I negotiated and constructed meanings from the shared experiences throughout the study and advanced our individual and collective knowledge.

The participants and I constructed meaning together on how valuable the organization was to the professional development of each member. I remarked that all the participants in the study were either in school or in some form of employment. It was mentioned that the experiences gained through the organizational activities provided them with the advantages needed to be competitive in the job market. It was explained by the participants that there is an existing challenge to be employed as a youth in Haiti. When an institution partners with HAITI5, it provides an opportunity for young people to gain the professional experience that they lack but is necessary for employment. The reflection journal allowed me to capture these thoughts and develop reflection questions. These questions allowed participants to further discuss existing challenges and proposed solutions during the AR team meetings. The meetings, the surveys, and

the journaling of my journey through the AR study allowed me to see how the youth were

framing both the challenges and the opportunities for youth in this youth-focused organization.

Chapter Summary

The information gathered from the AR study contains insightful information on how

youth are framing available opportunities. The results also contain valuable information on what

the members of a youth-focused organization have experienced on a personal and professional

level. The data-driven and collaborative approach of this study allowed members to participate in

deciding the appropriate intervention for their professional advancement. This yielded

constructive information that can be further explored in a subsequent study.

In terms of the effectiveness of the AR process, when looking at Shani and Pasmore's

(1982) four factors, the following have been realized:

1. For the degree of organizational improvement and helping the organization to better

   accomplish its goals and missions, the selected intervention aligned with the mission

   of harnessing the passion and potential of members to develop professional

   internships and volunteer opportunities for community development programs in

   Haiti.

2. For the degree of improvement of the quality of work-life, the study provided a

   reasonable timetable for the intervention to be conducted to maintain the   work-

   life balance of members that will be selected for the steering committee.

3. For the degree to which the organization can learn about itself and act on this

   learning, it was noted that there was a high level of participation in organizational

   activities with participants in the study. This study showed the organization that the

   level of participation of members is important for social change.

4. For the generation of new knowledge, the perspectives of members from a   youth-focused organization were considered and harnessed to identify and undertake challenges specific to their communities.

Overall, the results of the AR study provided:

- Insights on the challenges youth are facing in their current context, which can hinder the improvement in youth outcomes,

- Insights on what youth value from all the services available to them as members,

- What youth consider as opportunities for personal and professional advancement, and

- Recommendations the organization should consider that would benefit members long-term.

It is important for young people to have skills to promote poverty reduction. Thus, in Chapter V, I discuss findings from the AR study conducted in collaboration with the members of HAITI5. I also reviewed the objectives of the study and how the study addressed the research question. In addition, in Chapter V I discuss key factors for improving youth outcomes and the contributions of this study to the general knowledge of youth outcomes and the Sustainable Development Goals. Overall, the discussion will be based on the rationale for youth empowerment and its application for sustainable development.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR CHANGE

Sustainable Development Goal 8 highlights the importance of developing the skills of the labor force to promote poverty reduction. Failure to invest in opportunities for youths can quickly lead to energy turned into destructive rather than constructive directions. Youths need to be provided with knowledge and opportunities to develop their skills and expertise, which will support them in advancing their ideas (Guglielmi et al., 2021). Therefore, fostering an environment that promotes and provides this opportunity is crucial. Unfortunately, the Caribbean region where Haiti is situated has experienced poor growth performance over several decades. The nation has unsustainable levels of debt despite its middle-income status and moderate to high human development classification (United Nations Development Group [UNDG], 2016). The UNDG (2016) explains the Caribbean region also has one of the highest rates of adolescent pregnancy, youth unemployment, rising crime, and gender-based violence. Though the Caribbean has made progress in critical areas of its development priorities, it has been slow, and in some cases, the progress has been reversed (UNDG, 2016). Therefore, the Sustainable Development Goals are an opportunity for Caribbean countries to reverse their lagging economies and transition to holistic growth and sustainable development.

For this AR study, I collaborated with youth from the Caribbean. This was an opportunity to explore the youths' perspectives and proposed interventions for improving youth outcomes. The information collected during this study provides a snapshot of youths' lives in Haiti. Since Haiti has a high population of youth, governmental decisions have the potential to impact their futures. Therefore, decisions should be made to positively impact Haitian youth. This action research study provided an opportunity to assess—at the local level—how decisions made by a youth-focused organization are impacting the reality of its members. There was a collective data

collection process executed with the action research team and the analysis of data by the primary researcher. The information was presented to the action research team and the team designed an intervention aimed at positively impacting the well-being of members within the organization.

The Study Objectives and Research Questions

This action research study focused on designing an intervention considered beneficial to members of a youth-focused organization in Haiti. During this study, it was important for me, as the primary researcher, to frame the study around the SDGs and youth-specific targets. When looking at how a youth-focused organization such as HAITI5 can improve youth outcomes, this study addressed the overarching question, which was: *How can an organization aiming to improve youth outcomes align its programmatic work with the Sustainable Development Goals*?

In this AR study, I collected information on the work of the organization, including youth reflections on the work of the organization and the possibilities to improve their well-being. The results in Chapter IV show that the programmatic work of the organization that participants considered invaluable was the volunteering and internship program. The youths mentioned various activities and programs the organization had implemented that they considered beneficial to the growth of young professionals. The organization was able to provide access to training, volunteering, and internships as workforce experience, which has been a challenge for the professional advancements of Haitian youths. Therefore, the organization was considered useful in addressing these challenges.

My next research question asked: *What are the opportunities to improve youth outcomes in a Least Developed Country*? In this study, I observed that the activeness of the participants provided them with opportunities that would not have been available to them if they had decided not to engage in the local initiatives HAITI5 organized for its members. The organization

provided activities and consisted of core programs the youths could participate in. The youths had the opportunity to participate as a member of the organization in various positions and activities; this allowed for scholastic, personal, and professional development. The actual opportunity of providing more volunteer opportunities to members was seen as the ability to offer more volunteer positions to members. The volunteer positions could exist for a certain period within the organization and with other institutions with whom the organization had an established partnership.

I also asked the following research question: *How do youth frame responses to address identified opportunities*? The youths framed their responses based on their level of engagement with the organization. During discussions throughout the study, the youths realized how involved they were in the organization. I observed this realization in the seven-question survey, when participants were asked about their activities in the organizations. Participants mentioned being part of sub-committees and holding leadership positions within the organization.

The last research question I asked was: *How could these opportunities support progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals*? The youth participants viewed partnerships with institutions as necessary to establish and expand youth opportunities. These opportunities—internships and volunteer positions—could provide an experience that can be leveraged in the recruitment process for employment. Previous volunteer opportunities available to members allowed the youths to get the necessary training as well as internship positions considered as work experience. Some participants mentioned that volunteer work experience was considered relevant to potential employers.

The Theory of Change and Youth Outcomes

The organization HAITI5 aims to change the narratives of youths living in Haiti. These endeavors provide opportunities for equal access to educational and employment opportunities for youths. The United Nations Development Group's (2016) theory of change is a model that HAITI5 can utilize to apply the identified priority intervention and the desired outcome when implemented in the organization. Hence, when I applied the United Nations Development Group's (2016) theory of change model to the AR study process and outcomes, I arrived at the summaries in the following sub-sections for each category.

Analysis of Situation and Context

This study was conducted against the backdrop of ongoing political instability, in addition to the already limited opportunities for youths in Haiti. The population of Haiti consists of 19% of youth, all of whom are living in this challenging context. Members of HAITI5 expressed that this unstable environment is a concern as they consider opportunities the organization will be able to establish for its members.

Identify Preconditions

HAITI5 desires to continue providing members with workforce experience and skills. The action research team members identified that continuing and expanding volunteer opportunities would allow youths to gain needed workforce skills that could qualify as work experience. Volunteering is at the core of what the organization provides to its members and has built its notoriety among youths and partners, and therefore should be continued and strengthened.

Identify the Role of Related Parties

The action research team determined that partnerships with institutions are key to the success of the proposed intervention. Partnerships are vital to the organization and would allow the organization to expand services provided to members. Therefore, as efforts are made to establish new partnerships with institutions that can provide work experience for members, maintaining and strengthening existing partnerships was considered equally important.

Make Assumptions and Risks Explicit

The action research team reflected on the feasibility of the designed intervention, drafting a time frame based on the current reality in Haiti. The team initially was interested in an immediate start date for the intervention, but after reflecting on the possibilities, a more plausible timeline was suggested and maintained in the plan. The intervention plan includes a steering committee to guide the implementation of the intervention and a 1-year deadline from the start date.

Validate It

To validate the initial theory of change, there should be a clear and plausible solution based on evidence, and engagement with key partners should be included (UNDG, 2016). The two proposed interventions were presented with clear details and all the participants voted for a final selection. All participants expressed their thoughts on why they considered one intervention more advantageous compared to its counterpart. This discussion was held in the second action research team meeting, where members were very engaged and expressed their perspectives on the two interventions that had to be voted on before the final intervention was agreed upon.

Turn it Into a Narrative

The results of the study, including participant reflections, provide an encouraging narrative concerning youths and their framing of how to improve the well-being of members. These narratives, depicted in Chapter IV, are based on information provided by participants. It is from this information that I, as the primary researcher, noted key findings and factors to consider when aiming to improve youth outcomes and to make progress toward achieving the SDGs. HAITI5 can build on the theory of change I mapped out above. The organization can use the information as a blueprint to create a theory of change model to implement the intervention selected by the action research team. The members of the action research team hoped that the intervention would be approved by the leadership team of HAITI5 without delay, so that the plan would be put into action by the summer of 2023. Therefore, I highlighted the theory of change example as valuable information for HAITI5's leadership team.

Key Factors to Improving Youth Outcomes

Monitoring the SDGs directly contributes to achieving the SDGs through timely, robust data on the SDG indicators (Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data [GPSDD], 2019). In this study, I collected information provided by the members of a youth-focused organization, including the opportunities provided to members through their participation in organizational activities. It was important to examine the information provided to determine how the work of the organization aligns with improving youth outcomes, specifically for youth living in a Least Developed Country. I noted key factors from the seven-question survey collected in the AR study.

On the seven-question survey completed by the 12 participants, the members stated that HAITI5 provided an environment to network and develop workforce skills. This aligns with

Target 8.4 to promote youth education, employment, and training categorized under Sustainable

Development Goal 8. It is important to substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in

education, employment, or training by providing an environment for this opportunity. When

youths can network, they can identify and undertake challenges specific to their communities.

This would not only drive forward solutions related directly to their objectives, but also

consequently advance a common global agenda, independently of direct governmental support

(Barber & Mostajo-Radji, 2020). Suitably, I argue that the ability of HAITI5 to provide youths

with an avenue to network with their peers and partner institutions contributes to improving

youth outcomes.

While networking can advance a global agenda and a youthful population can be an

economic asset, challenges will continue if there are economic troubles and perpetually high

unemployment rates (Bhattacharya et al., 2018). The National Sustainable Development Strategy

from 2010–2021 highlighted specific strategies to improve youth outcomes:

1. The creation of both self and wage employment opportunities for the youth labor
   force.

2. Providing skills development training to the youth labor force.

3. Creating an enabling environment for the employment generation of youth.

4. Creating venture capital funds for innovative/creative young information technology
   business professionals.

Indeed, when looking at these proposed strategies and the key findings mentioned in this

action research study, it is evident that there are existing opportunities to improve youth

outcomes in Haiti. First, HAITI5's commitment to develop its members' skills through training

should be continued. The youths considered training in Microsoft Excel and QuickBooks as

valuable to their professional development. For self-employment opportunities, members were trained on personal branding and provided with leadership training. Second, participants were satisfied with HAITI5's attempts to provide digital technology opportunities. The use of digital technology provides the capacity for youths to mobilize society and provides an additional opportunity to network. Access to digital technology can empower youths to develop and collaborate on initiatives that can provide solutions to problems they face today.

Contribution of the Study to the General Knowledge

Research conducted at local, national, and international levels can add to current understanding of the various interventions. Yet, narrow institutional interests often lack resources and knowledge, trust, or leadership. These interests often inhibit the effective use and sharing of knowledge, and the application of the right information at the right time to solve global problems (GPSDD, 2019). This study conducted at the local level in Haiti supports virtual action research and the prioritization of youth, as well as the value of youth-focused organizations.

Support for Virtual AR

This action research study was conducted virtually. Action research in a virtual setting was favorable since face-to-face meetings posed a risk to safety due to the volatile state in Haiti at the time the study was conducted. There are disadvantages to not being in the same room, such as conflict being more prevalent with virtual teams (Sarkar & Valacich, 2010). Still, this AR study advanced with success in the virtual setting. Therefore, this study provides support for virtual AR studies having the potential to produce results that are as beneficial as face-to-face action research.

The Prioritization of Youth in the 2030 Agenda

When considering opportunities to advance the 2030 Agenda, this study supports the prioritization of youth in Least Developed Countries. The Haitian government is the lead in developing and implementing strategies that would allow advancement with the SDGs by 2030. The Haitian government must provide frameworks that ensure the well-being of its youths and encourage their participation in the different social spheres and agendas at the community and national levels. If necessary, the government should also reformulate existing norms to ensure youth participation and engagement in existing and new initiatives for sustainable development.

The Youth-Focused Organization is Value-Added

Based on the results of this study, youth-focused organizations should be considered as essential in the discussion on sustainable development. Many youth start-ups develop from a problem youths see in their communities, or their sense of general exclusion and the desire to develop their own collective identity as a group (Ilkiw, 2010). More youth groups are organizing to create positive change and challenge local decisions in efforts to improve conditions in their communities. Youth-focused organizations tend to be more successful at meeting the needs of youths on the ground because they know what is going on in the youths' environments. The members from the organization HAITI5 communicate more easily with other youths, understand their cultures, create more appealing programs, and identify with youth issues more effectively. The participants in this study expressed that HAITI5 was able to create appealing programs that address their need for personal and professional development. Therefore, it would be fitting for governments to establish partnerships with such organizations when targeting youth outcomes.

Awareness and a Rationale for Youth Engagement

Youth engagement is dynamic. The people, processes, and outcomes of engagement vary depending on the motivations of organizations and stakeholders, and youths' surrounding circumstances, which may change over time (Swist & Collin, 2021). Young people around the world are already extensively involved in a vast range of partnerships addressing issues that can help advance the SDGs; these range from youth-led to adult-led, from community-driven to institutionally driven, and from the local to the global level. Through the U.N. Major Group of Children and Youth—and informally through worldwide grassroots coalitions—the youths were heavily involved in shaping the agenda, successfully calling for specific goals and targets (ActionAid International & OECD Development Communication Network, 2015). Appropriately, their concerns were recognized in the 2030 Agenda adopted by world leaders at the U.N. Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015. Youth concerns should not remain with the inclusion of specific goals and targets but should continue with the collection of data focused on tracking progress on youth outcomes.

When young people are involved in actions to create a positive change, these changes can be a catalyst to motivate other young people to engage and make decisions that will influence their future. Since engagement with young people should aim to maximize their agency, initiatives to promote youth participation should address both immediate and long-term structural inequalities that prevent their participation in social and political structures (Swist & Collin, 2021).

Swist and Collin (2021) highlighted four categories of SDG-specific youth engagement initiatives and opportunities:

1. Partnership driven platforms: diverse infrastructures that can support young people and adults in organizations, institutions, and networks to work together. It highlights a way to engage in conversations in connections that inform SDG progress.

2. Youth-led solutions: initiatives founded by young people that need to be examined in relation to the structures by which young people can influence the form of their participation and hold decision-makers and policy-makers accountable.

3. Crowdsourcing and mapping: gathering data from people and mapping provides another opportunity to innovate youth engagement and partnerships to progress the SDGs.

4. Gameplay: playing both nondigital and digital games as a pedagogical tool to learn about the SDGs and to engage young people in partnerships.

Since youth engagement is dynamic, these various initiatives that actively engage youths are important to progress the SDGs.

When looking at data available on youth engagement, there are case studies that have yielded favorable results from engaging youth in different sectors for development. For example, Project SHINE (Bastien & Holmarsdottir, 2017) was a hygiene and sanitation project piloted in two secondary schools in Tanzania, which is classified as a Least Developed Country. The project used a science education and social entrepreneurship model to engage youths in developing locally relevant and sustainable strategies for improving education, health outcomes, and livelihood prospects.

Another case study, Case UniWASH (Subra et al., 2017), highlights youth engagement efforts in another LDC, Uganda. Case UniWASH piloted a multi-partnership approach to innovation work that focused on building new strategies to address persistent water and

sanitation (WASH) challenges. The project was able to apply a youth-led approach to engage a multidisciplinary university student team. The team provided new approaches, concepts, and product prototypes to the everyday water, sanitation, and hygiene problems faced in the Northern Uganda rural schools.

Such case studies support the idea of including youth as future innovators and agents of change in international development for sustainable development. When youths are engaged in the design and development of an initiative, then their questions, insights, and concerns are more likely to be integrated. Therefore, continuous data on the efforts made to improve youth outcomes is needed. Information that brings awareness to both the challenges and advancements in improving youth outcomes is beneficial for developing and implementing strategies that will positively impact this demographic. In this AR study, I was able to examine youths' need and proposed intervention to address that need. Hence, learning about the visions and values of the youths has the potential to richly inform how the SDGs advance.

The AR Study Process and Organizational Context

This AR process was iterative and balanced problem-solving actions implemented in a collaborative process. Throughout the AR process, there was also ongoing evaluation through the reflections, which led to new improved learning for the participants. This process to improve occurred through two AR cycles. Each cycle was comprised of periods of action, reflection, and new actions informed by insights that emerged from the reflections. The ongoing process of reflection and new actions provided information that can enable organizational change.

Critical conversations occurred throughout the different phases of this action research process. Foremost, the AR process allowed for direct and immediate feedback. Direct feedback encourages social actors' participation in real time by providing evidence of how the research

results contribute to methodological adaptations and the construction of collective processes (Ferraz De Toledo & Luiz Giatti, 2014). The AR team's participation, feedback, and critical perspectives informed the research. The team's contributions throughout the study demonstrated that they were active participants and not simply providers of data.

Next, the participatory approach promoted collective learning through the inclusion of various perspectives and knowledge. As the primary researcher, I worked collaboratively with the AR team. We shared our perspectives and were able to collectively agree about the findings. The surveys were strong sources of data and were discussed collectively for accountability. Action research requires people to hold themselves accountable and accept responsibility for their own actions (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). Action researchers can decide what is important and base their decisions for action on how they understand, and they think the world should be.

Finally, perhaps the most powerful aspect of action research is that practitioners become aware of their capacity to influence the future, especially in relation to new forms of social and cultural practices (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). Action research focuses on improving learning to improve action and one individual can influence the thinking of other individuals through collaborative work. By making accounts of practice a public process, other people can learn from those accounts and perhaps improve their own learning and practices (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010), which is what occurred in this AR study. The participants mentioned an improved understanding of how critical HAITI5 had been to their professional development, how they can positively influence other youth in their communities, and how they can continue to learn as they remain engaged in organizational activities.

This action research study revealed a very active and engaged group of participants, the construction of new knowledge, and the re-signification of values as organizational members.

The AR process allowed participants to work collectively to improve their social situations, influencing each other's thinking about what they understand as meaningful actions. Participation in this AR process was fundamental because it allowed members to search for solutions to a complex situation. They were also able to develop a proactive stance that sustained the process of interaction, control, mitigation, or elimination of challenges with improving youth outcomes (Ferraz De Toledo & Luiz Giatti, 2014). The participants in this AR study designed and improved an intervention considered beneficial to support to the education, employment, and training endeavors of young people. As a result, they also supported the organization's work.

In 2020, HAITI5 decided to develop a 5-year plan to better meet the needs of members. To do so, they conducted an evaluation with members that reviewed activities carried out from 2016 to 2019. They assessed the quality of programs and learnings from the members of the organization. The evaluation report contained recommendations on how the organization could better serve its members through future initiatives and provide them with more professional and personal opportunities. The recommendations included improving members' commitment to the organization and better integration of members in organizational activities. The evaluation report provided useful information on:

- The former priorities of the organization,

- The leadership capacity of its members,

- The stability of the organization, and

- The previous achievement(s) of the organization.

I consider this information from the evaluation report valuable to supporting the findings in this AR study. The evaluation report supported what members expressed to me in the AR team meetings and on the surveys. For example, the evaluation report recommended providing

members with more professional training to boost their competitiveness in the job market. This recommendation was also mentioned by participants in the team meetings. Professional training was not the intervention selected as a priority. Still, the AR team members thought HAITI5 could include this recommendation under the umbrella of the volunteer program and seek opportunities for young people to receive more professional training. The members expressed the need for more training in digital technology; young people quickly adapt to technological advances. The participants agreed that the selection of the volunteer program as the ultimate intervention design could be expanded. There could be various volunteering categories, including community/social development, personal development, professional development, economic development, and political development.

Through their engagement in HAITI5 and the action research study, participants sought to influence the narratives that prevent young people from being considered as experts on their own needs and priorities, while also building their leadership capacities. The participants agreed that such opportunities to review the challenges and create and implement solutions provided meaningful engagement for them. Overall, the AR study provided an inclusive environment. Respective contributions were valued, and young people's ideas, perspectives, skills, and strengths were integrated into the intervention design to have a positive impact on the lives of young people, their communities, and their country.

Implications of the Study

There is a need to continue creating opportunities to improve youth outcomes. When a youth is active and wants to participate in the sustainable development of their country, it should be supported. It is pivotal that, as stakeholders, the youths educate themselves on the Sustainable Development Goals. Some of the foundational SDGs specifically address youth issues, such as

quality education, empowering women and girls, or ensuring decent work for all. The findings

from this study aimed to enhance the understanding of how the youth population in LDCs can

participate in sustainable development. These youths can add to the body of scholar-practitioner

knowledge of opportunities for advancing progress toward achieving the 2030 Agenda.

Institutions interested in improving youth outcomes and aligning their efforts towards sustainable

development can use this study as an example of youth-focused action research for the

advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

There have been efforts by the U.N. to connect with and consult young people through

various platforms. This includes having regional and subregional offices actively engaging with

youth by facilitating youth conferences and forums that invite young people to share their

perspectives and ideas for the post-2015 Agenda. I argue the benefits of establishing youth

platforms are limited if youth are unaware of their existence or have limited access to these

platforms, particularly if the network only functions online or is located a considerable distance

from their communities. And since youths are a diverse group of individuals who live in both

rural and urban locations, their level of education and economic conditions differ greatly

depending on the conditions prevailing in their country.

Therefore, understanding the perspectives of youths is important, especially when

examining barriers to achieving the 2030 Agenda. Several analyses have revealed that the

COVID-19 pandemic worsened inequalities throughout the world and active interventions from

governments are needed to address these issues (Barber & Mostajo-Radji, 2020). The

participants in the study, who were all members of a youth-focused organization, could identify

the challenges and opportunities existing in the organization and were able to respond with

clear-cut actions.

Application of Study

To the SDGs, synergies must be maximized at all levels. It is important to consider how the contributions of an entity affect the implementation of all the goals and targets (UNDG, 2016). The SDGs are—in and of themselves—a change project. Thus, a notable change management effort is needed not only by the U.N. system but also by governments, the private sector, civil society, and the international community to be ready to support the implementation of the SDGs. There is a need for data to monitor and measure progress toward the 17 Goals. This study, which focused on Goal 8 about youth outcomes, provides data that can contribute to discussions on the SDGs.

Research such as this AR study can provide governments, civil society organizations, and companies with data on the insights of youth and ways to improve youth outcomes. Having such data available from many sources may help to inform decisions and track progress (GPSDD, 2019). GPSDD (2019) explained that information shared must be useful or it will not contribute to a sustained change in any sector. So, having data from youths relating to the SDGs allows for tracking progress, identifying what is working, and making needed resources available to advance the 2030 Agenda. And though Haiti is the only listed Least Developed Country from the Latin America and the Caribbean region, this could substantiate the development efforts of countries in other regions with a similar context to Haiti to navigate the challenges towards a sustainable future for their citizens.

Conclusions

Partnerships with young people need to be formed and reinforced where youth partnerships or youth-led initiatives already exist (Swist & Collin, 2021). Thus, up-to-date disaggregated, evidence-based data on youth are needed. This will inform the design,

implementation, and review of youth policies, programs, and initiatives, including the creation of a central repository of youth data with standardized questionnaires and methodologies (Camarinhas, 2019). When examining efforts to advance the 2030 Agenda, there is a continuous need to prioritize youth who are typically marginalized. Governments and development agencies need to create an enabling environment for youth inclusion, while formal institutions need to be flexible in giving young people opportunities to participate in the development of their countries. Institutions also need to actively support youth groups and organizations. Institutions that are recruiting can strategize, create short-term positions, and incorporate the possibility of a transition into full-time employment for satisfactory performance. Institutions can also create entry-level positions that are specifically for the employment of youth. Institutions should uphold these efforts, which can provide a sustainable solution for youth lacking the minimum work experience that employers require. Also, when appropriate, young women and men should be supported by such influential stakeholders through policy and action.

Sustainable development calls for a world in which economic progress is widespread, extreme poverty is eliminated, social trust is encouraged through policies that strengthen the community, and the environment is protected from human-induced degradation (Sachs, 2015). Sustainable development recommends a holistic framework, in which society aims for economic, social, and environmental goals. Further, the aspirational side of sustainable development envisions four basic objectives of a good society: (a) economic prosperity; (b) social inclusion and cohesion; (c) environmental sustainability; and (d) good governance by major social actors, including governments and businesses (Sachs, 2015). If applied appropriately, the SDGs framework can be a compass for the future development of the world.

Reflections on the Action Research Process

Coordinating action research may take additional planning time, but it provides participants with an opportunity to reflect and improve their participation as members of the organization. This investment could increase program quality and grow the capacity of the organization. In addition, the researcher's reflection journal provided an opportunity for me to reflect on the AR process. For the preparatory phase, I had a good understanding with the selected organization on the benefits of conducting the study as a partnership. I conducted action research with active youth in the Haitian community. In turn, the organization provided an opportunity for talented youth to build their capacity to co-research and provide their input on the intervention that would be beneficial to members. When I received the list of members who fulfilled the criteria and were contacted, each member seemed very motivated to participate in the study and provided consent within 2 weeks.

In the first AR cycle, once the action research team and the eight-interviewee group were separated, each participant completed the task that they were assigned. I observed that all assigned tasks were completed on time, and I considered this a success. In the second AR cycle, there was a challenge with the timely completion of tasks. I observed that two of the eight-interviewee participants had difficulties completing the assigned task. Their failure to complete the assigned tasks in the second AR cycle was the first obstacle that could not be resolved. The members had the option to discontinue their participation in the study without the need to warn me. In the post-cycle phase, I was satisfied with all the data collected, analyzed, and reviewed. From the completion of the AR process, I had the following reflections:

1. It was possible to respect the timeline when the youth remained motivated.

2. In a volatile and unstable country, it was best to reduce the movement of participants and conduct the study virtually, which allowed the study to be completed on time.

3. The follow-ups and check-ins were appreciated by participants, which motivated them to complete assigned tasks.

4. The two proposed interventions would have remained had the votes been equal for each option.

Limitations

I observed some limitations in this study. First, the study was conducted exclusively online, which limited the interactions between members of the action research team and the primary researcher. Two members of the action research team expressed how face-to-face activities would have been a more enriching experience. It would have helped them to get to know me and to develop a closer connection with other participants. There was also the limitation of internet connection for the virtual meetings. At times, both the action research team members and I had to reconnect online when the internet disconnected during meetings. Another limitation was how small the sample of members that could participate was; this list was of members who fulfilled the criteria to participate in the research that was provided to the primary researcher for recruitment. Therefore, maintaining the autonomy of members selected as research participants was a challenge. Also, since this study focused on a Least Developed Country, there is a possible limitation on the transferability of the information to Developed Countries. Haiti experienced political tensions and economic volatility during the period that this study was conducted. This could limit the transferability of these results to another Least Developed Country not experiencing such tensions and volatility. Another limitation was the collection of

data from only one organization on opportunities to improve youth outcomes from a limited sample.

Final Thoughts

The clearest takeaway from this study is the need for data that will shed light on the possibilities to improve youth outcomes. The Sustainable Development Goals should be considered as a valuable framework. Data collected to monitor progress on the SDGs has the potential to illuminate trends, inform narratives, and contribute to understanding the challenges youths are facing today. Ongoing investment in youth is required to harness the Sustainable Development framework's full potential for young people now and in the future. Investments in youth include supporting their technical, vocational, business, and creative skills (Guglielmi et al., 2021). Youths should have the option to take advantage of current or future economic, cultural, and social opportunities. For example, an opportunity could be establishing or strengthening government-sponsored funding for youth business start-ups.

The future of humanity and the planet lies in the hands of the young people of today. Thus, initiatives promoting youth participation should address immediate and long-term structural inequalities to participation. These should not only include how young people should participate but also how adults in positions of power should engage with young people (Swist & Collin, 2021). Youth initiatives around the world are empowering young people to strengthen their contributions. The potential of the SDGs to catalyze action and ensure equity through equal access to resources, services, and opportunities presents a tremendous opportunity for partnerships with youth who are integral to achieving these SDGs.

Thus, an enabling environment where youths can be active agents of change in their communities, can contribute significantly to the 2030 Agenda. This study provides an example

of the efforts of members of a youth-focused organization and their engagement as change agents through volunteerism, while developing workforce skills, which is important to advancing the agenda of improving youth outcomes. Therefore, the government of Haiti should capitalize on the efforts of active Haitian youth for the sustainable development of the nation. The Haitian government can strategize to provide funds to institutions that have established partnerships with youth organizations. In addition, other Least Developed Countries can use this study as an example to encourage youths to be change agents for the development of their countries. I hope that providing and strengthening youth support and youth-focused organizations will contribute to the advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals. This study provides this hope by demonstrating the importance of youth engagement and investing in interventions beneficial for the personal and professional development of young people.

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APPENDIX A: INVITATION TO AR STUDY CONSENT FORM

Action Research (AR) Study Consent Form (Action Research Team)

This informed consent form is for **active members** who we are invited to participate in a study titled **"Navigating Opportunities to Improve Youth Outcomes in a Least Developed Country: An Action Research Study"**

Name of Principle Investigator: Naomi Docilait
Name of Organization: Antioch University, PhD in Leadership and Change Program
Name of Study: Navigating Opportunities to Improve Youth Outcomes in a Least Developed Country: An Action Research Study
You will be given a copy

Introduction

I am **Naomi Docilait**, a PhD candidate enrolled in the Leadership and Change program at Antioch University. As part of this degree, I am completing a study to **identify opportunities to improve youth outcomes in a Least Developed Country**. I am going to give you information about the study and invite you to participate. You may talk to anyone you feel comfortable talking with about the study and take time to reflect on whether you want to participate or not. You may ask questions at any time.

Purpose of the

The purpose of this study is to **identify opportunities to improve youth outcomes in a Least Developed Country.** This information may help me to **explore the opportunities young people are taking advantage of which may improve youth outcomes.**

Duration of the Study

This study will involve your participation on the action research team **The duration of participation will be for three months from January 9, 2023, to March 31, 2023**

Participant Selection

You are being invited to take part in this study because **you are an active member of HAITI5 (18 to 29)** and should not consider participation in this study if **you are not an active member. Your consent means you agree to participate in the following:**

1. **To be a member of the action research team (team will have four (4) members) and follow the work plan***
2. **Participate in one (1) interview conducted by primary researcher (One hour)**
3. **Participate in three (3) scheduled action research team meetings (Two hours each team meeting)**
4. **Will conduct two (2) interviews with participants and provide primary researcher with recorded interviews (One hour each interview)**
5. **Will present the intervention plan to the two (2) participants and will send them link to complete the feedback survey (one hour)**

6.   Completes an evaluation survey at the end of the study (One hour)

*Work plan is on Page 5.

Voluntary Participation

> Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate. You may withdraw from this study at any time. You will not be penalized for your decision not to participate or for anything of your contributions during the study. You will not be affected by this decision or your participation. None of your data will be used if you choose to withdraw from the study.

Risks

> I do not anticipate that you will be harmed or distressed as a result of participating in this study. You may stop being in the study at any time if you become uncomfortable.

Benefits

> Your participation may help me to learn more about **youth empowerment and youth outcomes and will benefit you as a member of the organization.** Some costs associated with the research study, such as communication fees and research materials needed can be covered.

Reimbursements

> The primary researcher will reimburse participants with a communication fee (for scheduled meetings) (maximum 10 meetings) so participants can attend digital meetings, conduct interviews, and complete survey.

Confidentiality

> All information will be de-identified, so that it cannot be connected back to you. Your real name will be replaced with a pseudonym in the write-up of this study. I will be the only person with access to the list connecting your name to the pseudonym. This list, along with any tape recordings will be kept in a secure, locked location.

> Also, please note that this confidentiality of all participants will only be maintained from those only outside of the research team since confidentiality is not guaranteed on the action research team, but the data collected will be password protected and only accessed by the primary researcher.

Limits of Privacy Confidentiality

Generally speaking, I can assure you that I will keep everything you tell me or do for the private and the action research team will be asked to keep matters discussed within the group. Yet there are times where I cannot keep things confidential. I cannot keep things confidential

- a child or vulnerable adult has been abused
- a person plans to hurt him or herself, such as commit suicide
- a person plans to hurt someone else

Your identity may well be known to the organization as a participant since it was provided on a list of members that met the criteria to participate in the study, although their specific comments are de-identified.

Please ask any questions you may have about this issue before agreeing to be in the study. It is important that you do not feel betrayed if it turns out that cannot keep some things private.

Future Publication
> This study will be published. Documentation of the study will be shared with the Antioch University, PhD in Leadership and Change Program learning community and will be published on sites that Antioch University publishes dissertations.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw
> You do not have to take part in this if you do not wish to do so, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without your job being affected. If you choose to withdraw from the study, none of your data will be used by the primary researcher.

Who to Contact?
> If you have any questions, you may ask them now or later. If you have questions later, you may contact NAOMI DOCIAIT

If you have any ethical concerns about this study, contact Lisa Kreeger, PhD, Chair, Institutional Review Board, Antioch University Ph.D. in Leadership and Change

DO YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY?
To be filled out by the person taking consent:
I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been provided to the participant.

Print Name of Participant _____

Birthdate_____

Signature of Participant_____

Date_____
        Day/Month/ Year

DO YOU WISH TO BE AUDIOTAPED AS PART OF THIS STUDY?
I voluntarily agree to for this study. I agree to allow the use of my recordings as described in this form.

Print Name of Participant _____

Signature of Participant_____

Date_____
        Day/Month/ Year

	Action	Location	Duration	Date	Timeframe
			Action Research (AR) Team's Work Plan		
1	Each member meets with Naomi for individual interview (1 meeting)	Zoom (will be recorded)	1 Hour	Between January 9 and18, 2023	Naomi will set time with each member
2	**1ˢᵗ action research team Meeting Held (1 meeting)**	Zoom	1 Hour	January 20 or 21	Between 7:00pm-9:00pm
3	Each action research team member interviews their 1ˢᵗ participant	Zoom or another platform that records	1 Hour	Between January 22ⁿᵈ and January 31st, 2023	AR member will schedule time with participant
4	Each action research team member interviews their 2ⁿᵈ participant	Zoom or another platform that records	1 Hour		AR member will schedule time with participant
5	**2ⁿᵈ action research team Meeting Held (1 meeting)** Action research team will be presented with results from interview Action research team will create an intervention plan based on the findings	Zoom	1 Hour	February 10 or 11, 2023	Between 7:00pm-9:00pm
6	Each action research team member will explain intervention plan to participant 1	WhatsApp	30 minutes	Between February 12 and February 24, 2023,	AR member will schedule time with participant
7	Each action research team member will explain intervention plan to participant 2	WhatsApp	30 minutes		AR member will schedule time with participant
8	action research team will send each participant the Kobo Collect Link to participant to complete the feedback survey	WhatsApp	30 minutes		Any time before the deadline specified

9	**3rd action research team Meeting Held (1 meeting)** Feedback survey results will be presented, and intervention plan finalized	WhatsApp	1 Hour	March 3 or 4, 2023	Between 7:00pm-9:00pm
10	Each action research team completes evaluation survey that Naomi will send	Kobo Collect	45 minutes	March 4 and March 13, 2023	Any time before the deadline specified
End of Workplan March 31, 2023						

Action Research (AR) Study Consent Form (Eight-Interviewee Group)

This informed consent form is for **active members** who we are invited to participate in a study titled
"**Navigating Opportunities to Improve Youth Outcomes in a Least Developed Country:**
An Action Research Study"

Name of Principle Investigator: Naomi Docilait
Name of Organization: Antioch University, PhD in Leadership and Change Program
Name of Study: Navigating Opportunities to Improve Youth Outcomes in a Least Developed
Country: An Action Research Study

You will be given a copy

Introduction
>   I am **Naomi Docilait**, a PhD candidate enrolled in the Leadership and Change program at Antioch University. As part of this degree, I am completing a study to **identify opportunities to improve youth outcomes in a Least Developed Country**. I am going to give you information about the study and invite you to participate. You may talk to anyone you feel comfortable talking with about the study and take time to reflect on whether you want to participate or not. You may ask questions at any time.

Purpose of the
>   The purpose of this study is to **identify opportunities to improve youth outcomes in a Least Developed Country.** This information may help me to **explore the opportunities young people are taking advantage of which may improve youth outcomes.**

Duration of the Study
>   This study will involve your participation on the action research team **The duration of participation will be for from January 10, 2023, to March 1, 2023**

Participant Selection
>   You are being invited to take part in this study because **you are an active member of HAITI5 (18 to 29)** and should not consider participation in this study if **you are not an active member. Your consent means you agree to participate in the following:**

- **To be interviewed by an action research team member for a one (1) one-on-one conversation (One hour interview)**
- **1 discussion on the action research team's intervention plan (Thirty minutes)**
- **To be sent a link to complete the feedback survey on the intervention plan (Thirty minutes)**
- **The interview and discussion will be Zoom (unless otherwise specified)**

Action Research (AR) Participant Work Plan					
	Action	Location	Duration	Date	Timeframe
1	Complete Interview with action research team member	Zoom or another platform that records	1 Hour	Between January 22nd and January 31st, 2023	AR member will schedule time with you the participant
2	Meet with action research team member to discuss intervention plan	Zoom or another platform that records	30 minutes	Between February 12 and February 24, 2023	AR member will schedule time with you the participant
3	Complete Feedback Survey	Kobo Collect	30 minutes		

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate. You may withdraw from this study at any time. You will not be penalized for your decision not to participate or for anything of your contributions during the study. You will not be affected by this decision or your participation. None of your data will be used if you choose to withdraw from the study.

Risks

I do not anticipate that you will be harmed or distressed as a result of participating in this study. You may stop being in the study at any time if you become uncomfortable.

Benefits

Your participation may help me to learn more about **youth empowerment and youth outcomes and will benefit you as a member of the organization.** Some costs associated with the research study, such as communication fees and research materials needed can be covered.

Reimbursements

The primary researcher will reimburse participants with a communication fee (for digital interview and feedback survey) (3 meetings maximum) so participants can participate in digital meetings and complete the survey.

Confidentiality

All information will be de-identified, so that it cannot be connected back to you. Your real name will be replaced with a pseudonym in the write-up of this study. I will be the only person with access to the list connecting your name to the pseudonym. This list, along with any tape recordings will be kept in a secure, locked location.

Also, please note that this confidentiality of all participants will only be maintained from those only outside of the research team since confidentiality is not guaranteed on the action

research team, but the data collected will be password protected and only accessed by the primary researcher.

Limits of Privacy Confidentiality

Generally speaking, I can assure you that I will keep everything you tell me or do for the private and the action research team will be asked to keep matters discussed within the group. Yet there are times where I cannot keep things confidential. I cannot keep things confidential
- a child or vulnerable adult has been abused
- a person plans to hurt him or herself, such as commit suicide
- a person plans to hurt someone else

Your identity may well be known to the organization as a participant since it was provided on a list of members that met the criteria to participate in the study, although their specific comments are de-identified.

Please ask any questions you may have about this issue before agreeing to be in the study. It is important that you do not feel betrayed if it turns out that cannot keep some things private.

Future Publication

This study will be published. Documentation of the study will be shared with the Antioch University, PhD in Leadership and Change Program learning community and will be published on sites that Antioch University publishes dissertations.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

You do not have to take part in this if you do not wish to do so, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without your job being affected. If you choose to withdraw from the study, none of your data will be used by the primary researcher.

Who to Contact?

If you have any questions, you may ask them now or later. If you have questions later, you may contact NAOMI DOCIAIT

If you have any ethical concerns about this study, contact Lisa Kreeger, PhD, Chair, Institutional Review Board, Antioch University Ph.D. in Leadership and Change

DO YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY?
To be filled out by the person taking consent:
I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been provided to the participant.

Print Name of Participant _____

Birthdate_____

Signature of Participant_____

Date_____
 Day/Month/ Year

DO YOU WISH TO BE AUDIOTAPED AS PART OF THIS STUDY?
I voluntarily agree to for this study. I agree to allow the use of my recordings as described in this form.

Print Name of Participant _____

Signature of Participant_____

Date_____
 Day/Month/ Year

APPENDIX B: ACTION RESEARCH TEAM ONE-ON-ONE SURVEY

One-on-one conversation survey redo

What is your participant number?

_____

Age

_____

Please select your sex

⭕ Male

⭕ Female

1. How many years have you been involved with ⬛⬛⬛⬛?

_____

2. Please describe your role and activities you have participated in hosted by ⬛⬛⬛⬛

_____

3. What part of ⬛⬛⬛⬛ program has you greatly benefited you? How is this contributing to improving your wellbeing as a young person?

_____

4. What positive impact does your participation as a member in ⬛⬛⬛⬛ have on other youth?

_____

5. When you faced challenges in establishing or advancing in your education, training, and employment goals what strategies did you use to overcome those challenges to make progress?

_____

6. Overall, please explain what being a member of ⬛⬛⬛⬛ has done for you personally and professionally as a young person?

_____

7. What should ⬛⬛⬛⬛ continue to offer more of so that it can continue to be relevant to youth such as yourself?

_____

APPENDIX C: FEEDBACK SURVEY

Action Research Feedback Survey

Thank you for completing the 7 questions. These were the results from everyone:

1. More Training
2. More locations in other departments of Haiti
3. More Volunteer opportunities
4. More Job opportunities
5. More Women focused activities
6. More Internships/ partnerships
7. More Skills Development

The intervention that will be presented to ACTIVEH leaders is # 3

- More Volunteer opportunities (It is ▓▓▓▓▓ start in the summer of 2023 and will exist for up to 1 year in as many departments as possible in Haiti. It will be managed by a committee established for this intervention)

* Required

1. Participant Number *

_____

2. Does the intervention the AR team designed align with what you consider a priority? (1 strongly disagrees and 10 strongly agree)   *

Mark only one oval.

1 ⬭

2 ⬭

3 ⬭

4 ⬭

5 ⬭

6 ⬭

7 ⬭

8 ⬭

9 ⬭

10 ⬭

3. How confident are you that this intervention will be able to help members of the organization? *
organization?
(1 strongly disagrees and 10 strongly agree)

Mark only one oval.

1 ⬭

2 ⬭

3 ⬭

4 ⬭

5 ⬭

6 ⬭

7 ⬭

8 ⬭

9 ⬭

10 ⬭

4. What should the AR Team do with the intervention that has been chosen? *

Mark only one oval.

○ a. make a few changes to the proposed intervention   *Skip to question 5*

○ b. keep the intervention the same   *Skip to question 7*

○ c. change the intervention completely   *Skip to question 6*

○ Other: _____

Requested Change

5. A change should be made to the: *

Check all that apply.

☐ a. The start date of intervention is too early
☐ b. The start date of intervention is too late
☐ c. The location of intervention needs to be changed to another department
☐ d. The target group of intervention needs to be changed
☐ e. Duration (length) of intervention is too short
☐ f. Duration (length) of intervention is too long
☐ Other: _____

Skip to question 7

Change to Different Intervention

6. Instead, what should the team select for their planned intervention? *

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Skip to question 7

Reflections

7. What are your reflections about your participation in this Action Research Study? *

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Google Forms

APPENDIX D: EVALUATION SURVEY

1. What is your satisfaction with the overall research process? *

   Mark only one oval.

   Least Satisfied

   1 ⬭

   2 ⬭

   3 ⬭

   4 ⬭

   5 ⬭

   6 ⬭

   7 ⬭

   8 ⬭

   9 ⬭

   10 ⬭

   Most Satisfied

2. What is your satisfaction with the final results of the study? *

Mark only one oval.

Least Satisfied

1 ⬭

2 ⬭

3 ⬭

4 ⬭

5 ⬭

6 ⬭

7 ⬭

8 ⬭

9 ⬭

10 ⬭

Most Satisfied

3. What was your top accomplishment on the Action Research Team? *

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. As a member of the Action Research Team, What strategies worked well for you to *
    accomplish the tasks you were assigned by the primary researcher?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

5. What would you do differently, if you were to participate in this action research *
    study again?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

6. How do you think this study responds to improving opportunities for youth? *

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

7. What do you think about the results of this study to improve youth outcomes? *

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

8. Overall, what did you hope to achieve from your participation on the action   *
   research team?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

9. Did you achieve it? Why or Why Not? *

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

10. What final reflections would you like to share on this action research study? *

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

APPENDIX E: RESEARCHER REFLECTION JOURNAL

Researcher's Reflection Journal Entry:	
Question	Response
What was accomplished?	
What went well?	
What could be improved?	
Lessons learned?	
Daily Summary?	

APPENDIX F: INVITATION LETTER TO THE ORGANIZATION HAITI5

HAITI5
9, Rue Debussy Turgeau,
Port-au-Prince, Haiti

December 10, 2022

My name is Naomi Docilait, and I am a doctoral candidate at Antioch University located in Yellow Springs, Ohio. As part of my doctoral dissertation, I will be conducting an action research study, looking at how a youth-focused organization is improving youth outcomes in Haiti. I am interested in conducting this action research with HAITI5, an active organization working in Haiti to improve the personal and professional lives of Haitian university students and recent university graduates.

The participation of the organization is voluntary and there are no consequences if the organization chooses not to participate in the study. The confidentiality of all participants will be maintained from those only outside of the research team since confidentiality is not guaranteed on the action research team, but the data collected will be password protected and only accessed by the principal(primary) researcher.

If HAITI5 agrees with its participation:

- Naomi Docilait will be the principal researcher and the organization members of HAITI5 will participants and co-designers in the study.

- HAITI5 agrees to provide the principal researcher with a list of all the names of members that meet the following criteria:

  o Education: Currently pursuing post-secondary education/training or has completed post-secondary education/training

  o Age: Between the ages of 18 to 29

  o Membership Status at the Organization: Minimum of One Year

  o Nationality: Haitian Citizen

  o Residence: Must Be Currently Living in Haiti

  o Language: Must be able to read and understand the documents provided in English.

- An action research team will be established consisting of four (4) active members between the ages of 18 to 29.

- In addition to the action research team, eight (8) members will be recruited for interviews between the ages of 18 to 29.

- Participation in the study is voluntary and is not an offer of employment.

- The principal researcher will provide the participant with monetary means to cover communication costs associated with the research study.

- Each action research team member will participate from January 1, 2023, until March 31, 2023,

  - In one interview conducted by principal researcher (One hour each interview)

  - In three team meetings (Two hours each meeting)

  - Conduct four interviews with participants (One hour each interview)

  - Provide principal researcher with recorded interviews.

  - Complete an evaluation survey at the end of the study (One hour survey)

- Eight members selected for interviews will each participate from January 1, 2023, until March 31, 2023,

  - In one (1) one-on-one survey (One hour)

  - In one (1) feedback survey (One hour)

Questions regarding the research can be directed to me, Naomi Docilait

Respectfully,

Naomi Docilait

Naomi Docilait
PhD Candidate

APPENDIX G: COPYRIGHT PERMISSION FOR TABLES 1.1, 2.1, 2.2, AND 2.3

Dear United Nations Representative,

I am writing to ask open-ended permission to use the following tables in my dissertation:

- Table 1.1: 17 Sustainable Development Goals

- Table 2.1: Summary of Results for Each MDG

- Table 2.2: Least Developed Countries

- Table 2.3: Youth-Specific SDG Targets

 Adaptions have been made to each table. I am attaching how it appeared in the original and how it will appear in the following:

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I have also attached the UN permission forms for the above requests. I have also attached my adaptations, which is how it will appear in my dissertation.

Sincerely,

Naomi Docilait,

PhD Candidate Antioch University

Graduate School of Leadership and Change

4 attachments

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1. Original presentation of the 17 SDGs:

2

Sustainable Development Goals

Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries

Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts[*]

Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

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[*] Acknowledging that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change.

My adaptation to the 17 SDGs table:

Table 1.2

17 Sustainable Development Goals

Goal #	Description
Goal 1	End poverty in all its forms everywhere.
Goal 2	End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.
Goal 3	Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.
Goal 4	Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
Goal 5	Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
Goal 6	Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
Goal 7	Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all.
Goal 8	Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all.
Goal 9	Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation.
Goal 10	Reduce inequality within and among countries.
Goal 11	Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.
Goal 12	Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.
Goal 13	Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

Table 1.3

17 Sustainable Development Goals

Goal #	Description
Goal 14	Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development.
Goal 15	Protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.
Goal 16	Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels.
Goal 17	Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

United Nations General Assembly (2015)

2. The original presentation of the results of the Millennium Development Goals is as a narrative in the Millennium Development Goals 2015 Report.

My adaptation is a table summarizing one result for each MDG:

Table 2.1

Summary of Results for Each MDG

Goals	Results
Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.	Extreme poverty declined significantly from 1990; nearly half of the population in the developing world lived on less than $1.25 USD per day, and that proportion dropped to 14% in 2015.
Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education.	The number of out-of-school children of primary school age worldwide reduced by almost half to an estimated 57 million in 2015, from 100 million in 2000.
Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women.	Between 1991 and 2015, the proportion of women in vulnerable employment as a share of total female employment declined by 13%.
Goal 4: Reduce child mortality.	The number of deaths of children under age 5 declined from 12.7 million in 1990 to almost 6 million in 2015 globally.
Goal 5: Improve maternal health.	The global maternal mortality ratio declined from 330 deaths per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 210 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2013.
Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases.	New HIV infections fell by 40% between 2000 and 2013, from an estimated 3.5 million cases to 2.1 million.
Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability.	In 2015, of the 2.6 billion people who gained access to improved drinking water since 1990, 1.9 billion gained access to piped drinking water on premises.
Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development.	Official development assistance from developed countries increased by 66% between 2000 and 2014, reaching $135.2 billion.

United Nations General Assembly (2015)

3. The original presentation of the Least Developed Countries List:

United Nations | Committee for Development Policy

List of Least Developed Countries (as of 24 November 2021) *

Country	Year of inclusion	Country	Year of inclusion
Afghanistan	1971	Madagascar	1991
Angola[1]	1994	Malawi	1971
Bangladesh[5]	1975	Mali	1971
Benin	1971	Mauritania	1986
Bhutan[2]	1971	Mozambique	1988
Burkina Faso	1971	Myanmar	1987
Burundi	1971	Nepal[5]	1971
Cambodia	1991	Niger	1971
Central African Republic	1975	Rwanda	1971
Chad	1971	São Tomé and Príncipe[3]	1982
Comoros	1977	Senegal	2000
Democratic Republic of the Congo	1991	Sierra Leone	1982
Djibouti	1982	Solomon Islands[4]	1991
Eritrea	1994	Somalia	1971
Ethiopia	1971	South Sudan	2012
Gambia	1975	Sudan	1971
Guinea	1971	Timor-Leste	2003
Guinea-Bissau	1981	Togo	1982
Haiti	1971	Tuvalu	1986
Kiribati	1986	Uganda	1971
Lao People's Democratic Republic[5]	1971	United Republic of Tanzania	1971
Lesotho	1971	Yemen	1971
Liberia	1990	Zambia	1991

* The list will be updated when new decisions become available.

[1] General Assembly resolution A/RES/70/253 adopted on 12 February 2016, decided that Angola will graduate five years after the adoption of the resolution, and General Assembly resolution A/RES/75/259 adopted on 11 February 2021, decided that Angola will be granted a three-year extension to the preparatory period and will graduate on 12 February 2024.

[2] General Assembly resolution A/RES/73/133 adopted on 13 December 2018, decided that Bhutan will graduate five years after the adoption of the resolution, i.e. on 13 December 2023.

[3] General Assembly resolution A/RES/73/133 adopted on 13 December 2018, decided that São Tomé and Príncipe will graduate six years after the adoption of the resolution, i.e. on 13 December 2024.

[4] General Assembly resolution A/RES/73/133 adopted on 13 December 2018, decided that Solomon Islands will graduate six years after the adoption of the resolution, i.e. on 13 December 2024.

[5] General Assembly resolution A/RES/76/8 adopted on 24 November 2021, decided that Bangladesh, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Nepal will graduate five years after the adoption of the resolution, i.e. on 24 November 2026.

My adaptation of the above table is as follows:

Table 2.2

Least Developed Countries

Least Developed Countries	
Afghanistan	Angola
Bangladesh	Benin
Bhutan	Burkina Faso
Burundi	Cambodia
Central African Republic	Chad
Comoros	Democratic Republic of Congo
Djibouti	Eritrea
Ethiopia	The Gambia
Guinea	Guinea-Bissau
Haiti	Kiribati
Lao People's Democratic Republic	Lesotho
Liberia	Madagascar
Malawi	Mali
Mauritania	Mozambique
Myanmar	Nepal
Niger	Rwanda
São Tomé and Príncipe	Senegal
Sierra Leone	Solomon Islands
Somalia	South Sudan
Sudan	Timor-Leste
Togo	Tuvalu
Uganda	United Republic of Tanzania
Yemen	Zambia

United Nations Committee for Development Policy (2021)

4. The original presentation of the information on SDG targets:

countries, provide access to affordable essential medicines and vaccines, in accordance with the Doha Declaration on the TRIPS Agreement and Public Health, which affirms the right of developing countries to use to the full the provisions in the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights regarding flexibilities to protect public health, and, in particular, provide access to medicines for all

3.c Substantially increase health financing and the recruitment, development, training and retention of the health workforce in developing countries, especially in least developed countries and small island developing States

3.d Strengthen the capacity of all countries, in particular developing countries, for early warning, risk reduction and management of national and global health risks

Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

4.1 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes

4.2 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education

4.3 By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university

4.4 By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship

4.5 By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations

4.6 By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy

4.7 By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development

4.a Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all

4.b By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries

4.c By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States

6.a   By 2030, expand international cooperation and capacity-building support to developing countries in water- and sanitation-related activities and programmes, including water harvesting, desalination, water efficiency, wastewater treatment, recycling and reuse technologies

6.b   Support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management

Goal 7.   Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

7.1   By 2030, ensure universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services

7.2   By 2030, increase substantially the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix

7.3   By 2030, double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency

7.a   By 2030, enhance international cooperation to facilitate access to clean energy research and technology, including renewable energy, energy efficiency and advanced and cleaner fossil-fuel technology, and promote investment in energy infrastructure and clean energy technology

7.b   By 2030, expand infrastructure and upgrade technology for supplying modern and sustainable energy services for all in developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and landlocked developing countries, in accordance with their respective programmes of support

Goal 8.   Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

8.1   Sustain per capita economic growth in accordance with national circumstances and, in particular, at least 7 per cent gross domestic product growth per annum in the least developed countries

8.2   Achieve higher levels of economic productivity through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation, including through a focus on high-value added and labour-intensive sectors

8.3   Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services

8.4   Improve progressively, through 2030, global resource efficiency in consumption and production and endeavour to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation, in accordance with the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production, with developed countries taking the lead

8.5   By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value

8.6   By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training

8.7 Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms

8.8 Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment

8.9 By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products

8.10 Strengthen the capacity of domestic financial institutions to encourage and expand access to banking, insurance and financial services for all

8.a Increase Aid for Trade support for developing countries, in particular least developed countries, including through the Enhanced Integrated Framework for Trade-related Technical Assistance to Least Developed Countries

8.b By 2020, develop and operationalize a global strategy for youth employment and implement the Global Jobs Pact of the International Labour Organization

Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

9.1 Develop quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure, including regional and transborder infrastructure, to support economic development and human well-being, with a focus on affordable and equitable access for all

9.2 Promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and, by 2030, significantly raise industry's share of employment and gross domestic product, in line with national circumstances, and double its share in least developed countries

9.3 Increase the access of small-scale industrial and other enterprises, in particular in developing countries, to financial services, including affordable credit, and their integration into value chains and markets

9.4 By 2030, upgrade infrastructure and retrofit industries to make them sustainable, with increased resource-use efficiency and greater adoption of clean and environmentally sound technologies and industrial processes, with all countries taking action in accordance with their respective capabilities

9.5 Enhance scientific research, upgrade the technological capabilities of industrial sectors in all countries, in particular developing countries, including, by 2030, encouraging innovation and substantially increasing the number of research and development workers per 1 million people and public and private research and development spending

9.a Facilitate sustainable and resilient infrastructure development in developing countries through enhanced financial, technological and technical support to African countries, least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States

9.b Support domestic technology development, research and innovation in developing countries, including by ensuring a conducive policy environment for, inter alia, industrial diversification and value addition to commodities

12.8 By 2030, ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature

12.a Support developing countries to strengthen their scientific and technological capacity to move towards more sustainable patterns of consumption and production

12.b Develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products

12.c Rationalize inefficient fossil-fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption by removing market distortions, in accordance with national circumstances, including by restructuring taxation and phasing out those harmful subsidies, where they exist, to reflect their environmental impacts, taking fully into account the specific needs and conditions of developing countries and minimizing the possible adverse impacts on their development in a manner that protects the poor and the affected communities

Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts[*]

13.1 Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries

13.2 Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning

13.3 Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning

13.a Implement the commitment undertaken by developed-country parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to a goal of mobilizing jointly $100 billion annually by 2020 from all sources to address the needs of developing countries in the context of meaningful mitigation actions and transparency on implementation and fully operationalize the Green Climate Fund through its capitalization as soon as possible

13.b Promote mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in least developed countries and small island developing States, including focusing on women, youth and local and marginalized communities

Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

14.1 By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution

14.2 By 2020, sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their resilience, and take action for their restoration in order to achieve healthy and productive oceans

14.3 Minimize and address the impacts of ocean acidification, including through enhanced scientific cooperation at all levels

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[*] Acknowledging that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change.

My adaptation to the original:

Table 2.3

Youth-Specific SDG Targets

SDG #	Description
SDG 4.4	By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs, and entrepreneurship.
SDG 4.6	By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.
SDG 8.5	By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value.
SDG 8.6	By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in education, employment, or training.
SDG 8.b	By 2020, develop and operationalize a global strategy for youth employment and implement the Global Jobs Pact of the International Labour Organization.
SDG 13.b	Promote mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in least developed countries and small island developing States, including focusing on women, youth, and local and marginalized communities.

United Nations General Assembly (2015)