A Youth Development Lens on Education 2030 (SDG4)
Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development

“Youth” has the advantage of being one of the few concepts with dual meaning in policy, research and practice. It is recognized as both a life stage and a group of individuals with specific characteristics and considerable demographic evolution and strength. As such, applying a youth development lens on SDG4 implies a dual recognition that:

- Youth development is a policy area and a policy objective with which targets under SDG4 interact and are closely interlinked;
- Young people are, by right, a legitimate stakeholder group in any development effort (including the effort for the realization of SDG4) that aspires to be relevant, efficient and inclusive.

There are significant benefits to applying a youth development lens on SDG4:

- **From a life-course perspective**, it allows understanding and capitalizing on the formative and transformative influence education can have during this crucial stage of an individual’s life. Youth is globally recognized as the life stage when social norms, self-concept and self-efficacy are formed and where individuals make a series of transitions based on decisions that will affect their lives and their communities. These choices are directly influenced by the quality and relevance of the knowledge, skills and competencies one possesses in that specific moment, as well as by the information, counselling, support and opportunities provided. As such, youth development prospects are linked with SDG4 targets and are affected by the way these are pursued, as well as by the level of their attainment. And, in turn, this correlation between youth development prospects and education may influence further lifelong learning decisions.

- **From an education perspective**, it allows for a more in-depth exploration of the specific needs and characteristics of different age categories within the youth cohort (10-14; 15-19; 20-24 years old) that are concerned differentially by education targets. The same applies for the various intersections within the youth cohort, particularly those based on gender, background, political and socio-economic conditions.

- **From a stakeholder perspective**, applying a youth development lens to SDG4 allows to mobilize and engage the expertise, innovative thinking and first-hand experience of a group that is directly concerned by SDG4 and poised to significantly contribute to its achievement. Such an approach would look at how young people engage in the realization of SDG4 at different levels both as stakeholders involved in governance of education systems, as well as providers of education (young teachers, non-formal and peer-educators) through the ways in which they organize, create spaces and take action.

Having a clearer understanding of the different levels of influence, interaction and correlation between education and youth development would help render more relevant actions for the achievement of SDG4, as well as contribute to the attainment of other SDGs with which SDG4 interlinks. In other words, when SDG 4 is viewed from a youth lens, it becomes a powerful enabler for other SDGs.

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1 Such as learning and continuing to learn; going to work; growing up healthy; exercising citizenship; forming relationships and families, among others (World Development Report, 2007)
In view of the above, a number of indicators under SDG4 are particularly relevant to youth development and young people themselves, namely:

- **target 4.3 and target 4.4**, on affordable and quality Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and relevant skills for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship. Young people are the primary users and stakeholders of sectoral reforms as well as efforts to achieve gender parity and increased access. For TVET education to translate into increased decent youth employment, close communication between education decision-makers and young people is essential.

- **target 4.7**, on the acquisition of knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development – such as gender equality, sustainable lifestyles, and global citizenship. Young people are not only beneficiaries of this type of education, but also have the capacity to concretely contribute to efforts toward achieving SDG4. Youth-led organizations play a central role in supplying non-formal education and concrete experience on these particular skills, as well as shaping formal education policy and practice.

- **target 4a**, on safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments. Young people are key actors and advocates in the promoting of inclusion and diversity in learning spaces. In addition, young people are key in defining the ways in which learning environments are effective, including through services and facilities that may be infrastructural as well as technological.

- **target 4c**, which calls for the substantial increase in the supply of qualified teachers, is directly connected to young people as they are the ones potentially/eventually becoming teachers to the next generation. In that sense, young people need to play an active role in ensuring they acquire all appropriate knowledge and life skills (e.g. critical thinking, problem solving, team work, health, gender equality, responsible production and consumption, financial literacy, etc.), to have a positive impact in the empowerment of the next generation.

- a crucial cross-cutting perspective in all SDGs, and especially SDG4 and its target 4.5, it is essential to remember that marginalized groups such as refugees, migrants and minorities, and especially girls and young women in fragile situations, face particular challenges related to access to quality education and skills training. Considering this, the specific needs of marginalized youth need to be examined in greater details and more attention needs to be given to those groups when it comes to evidence building, policy change and monitoring.

The achievement of several targets under SDG4 heavily relies on the development and use of evidence-informed methods and policies. For the importance of youth development in the realization of SDG4 to come to light even more clearly, additional efforts to gather and analyze relevant data, as well as to build related knowledge, are essential.

In light of this, and as a contribution to the progress review of the implementation of SDG4, the Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (IANYD) proposes to explore in greater details the linkages between SDG4 and youth development to provide substantive and evidence-informed recommendations on the above areas for consideration by all concerned stakeholders. In preparing these, the Network will discuss and consult with relevant experts such as members of the academic sector, policy specialists, practitioners, CSOs including youth organizations, etc. The findings and recommendations will be submitted for preliminary consideration at the Global Education Forum (December 2018) and then further refined as the SDG4 review process progresses.