

# #KindnessMatters

Be the change for the SDGs. A Global Youth Campaign.

## Background

On the occasion of the International Day of Non-Violence, October 2, 2018, UNESCO MGIEP launched an international youth campaign on kindness for the Sustainable Development Goals, titled #KindnessMatters for the SDGs to mobilize the world's youth to achieve the 17 SDGs through transformative acts of kindness, compassion, care towards self, others and the environment. The campaign aims to highlight the power of youth in achieving the SDGs through compassionate action, inspiration and storytelling. #KindnessMatters was simultaneously launched in India, Pakistan, South Africa and Mexico with support of the country partners of the campaign.

The purpose of the #KindnessMatters Campaign is to mobilize the world's youth to achieve the 17 SDGs through transformative acts of *kindness*. The overall goals of the campaign are to:

- Create a positive culture of kindness where a person's individual act matters, and show how it can contribute to/make a difference to the SDGs.
- Provide a comprehensive, independent, fun and engaging pathway for youth to demonstrate how an act of kindness is powerful and transformative.

Guided by the principle that youth are key actors to achieve the SDGs, the Kindness campaign provides a platform for young people and youth driven organizations to share their positive stories of change, driven by compassion, care and kindness in a world characterised by rising intolerance, apathy, indifference, social exclusion, fear, gender-based violence, climate change and extremism. The campaign is youth centric, however, does not exclude the possibilities of non-youth participants to submit their stories.

In line with UNESCO MGIEP's social and emotional learning framework, the #KindnessMatters campaign draws from research in the field of neurosciences, which has clearly demonstrated the positive impact of kindness not only on recipient but also on the provider. The campaign is being executed in conjunction with a wide range of national and international partners, including governments, academia, youth organizations and young people.

The #KindnessMatters campaign is being rolled out in two phases. The first phase from 2018 to 2019 is focused upon building youth momentum on kindness by generating 250,000 inspiring stories by young people through story telling. The second phase from the year 2020 onwards will mobilize United Nations Member States to declare an International Decade on Acts of Kindness.

## **Main Partners for the #KindnessMatters Campaign**

1. Young people in the age group of 15 to 35 years who are motivated and inspired to contribute to Sustainable Development Goals.
2. Youth led/youth focused organizations, governments, corporates, policy makers, development agencies, civil society, academicians, universities, schools, media agencies and individuals who are committed to enhance the youth participation in the development agenda.
3. Educators, scientists, policy makers, artists, students, parents, leaders and all those who believe in power of youth to create positive social change.

## **Why #KindnessMatters Campaign?**

Implementing the 17 SDGs represents a formidable challenge of addressing issues as diverse as changing demographics, migration, climate change, economic slowdown as well as better co-ordination among organizations, measuring indicators, reporting on progress, and communicating results to motivate further action.

A key component often ignored when designing strategies to address social, ecological and economic problems are social and emotional capacities that motivate individual action. Behaviours anchored on the competencies of kindness, empathy and compassion form the foundation of a more sustainable future. These acts performed especially by the youth, institutionally recognized and reinforced, initiate social and economic changes key for the success of the SDG implementation and progress towards more sustainable societies.

## **#KindnessMatters for the Sustainable Development Goals**

The increasing complexity and interconnectedness of the world is marked by paradoxical developments. Against a background of the rise of knowledge economies, increasing youth population, globalization, are the trends of rising polarization, destructive climate change, extremism, xenophobia, radicalization, discrimination and assertion of religious, social and cultural identities. The need to build inclusive societies and the need to guide and reinforce behavior towards a more sustainable future has never been more pressing.

In the year 2015, the 193 member states of United Nations adopted the Agenda 2030 which formalized 17 Sustainable Development Goals as key development priorities. The adoption of SDGs at varying levels, from national governments to local communities, and the integration

of work towards them calls for greater collaboration, understanding, dialogue and participation in the achievement of the goals.

A year before the adoption of Agenda 2030, the world's population also recorded the highest youth population in the world. As per the report *State of the World Population: The Power of 1.8 Billion* (2014) by The United Nations Population Fund, "Our world is home to 1.8 billion young people between the ages of 10 and 24, and the youth population is growing fastest in the poorest nations". Being among the largest set of stakeholders in the outcomes, there is a requirement for an all-inclusive, multi-sectorial programme that enables young people to engage creatively and responsibly with the world.

Furthermore, it is estimated that 90% of 18 to 24 years old are connected to the internet and actively engage in some form of social media.<sup>1</sup> These digital spaces provides a unique avenue for engagement, mobilization and exposure where youth can be recognized and reinforced in their roles as formidable agents of change.

## What is an Act of Kindness for the SDGs?

An Act of Kindness by any person is a generous, intentional gesture or action towards another person, being, or the environment. These acts may range in scale and impact, such as organizing a beach clean-up, working on clean energy projects, campaigning against gender inequality or violent extremism, or mobilizing a community drive to save an endangered species.

## Neuroscience behind the Acts of Kindness

Practicing kindness can be a transformative process. Neuroscience has established that emotion, motivation, learning and experiences are represented in the brain in the form of linkages among specific neurons.<sup>2</sup> The ability to form new connections (neuroplasticity) and reinforce them forms the basis of new habits which develop in humans, new knowledge, skills and attitudes. Through neuroplasticity, positive behaviors such as empathy and kindness can be reinforced, demystifying the idea that personality and temperament are incapable of being changed.

With regards to neurochemicals, dopamine<sup>3</sup> and oxytocin<sup>4</sup> are established as key to regulating individual behavior. Oxytocin contributes to relaxation, trust, and psychological stability and

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<sup>1</sup> Bah, Chernor, "Youth Support; Panel discussions: 'Enabling conditions for the delivery of quality global citizenship education: Where are we? Where do we want to go?', Youth Advocacy Group for Global Education First Initiative (GEFI), Global Citizenship Education: Enabling Conditions & Perspectives, 16 May 2014, UNESCO Paris. <https://bit.ly/2sR2fel>

<sup>2</sup> Davidson, Richard J., and William Irwin. "The functional neuroanatomy of emotion and affective style." *Trends in cognitive sciences* 3.1 (1999): 11-21. <https://bit.ly/2JGGog6>

<sup>3</sup> Pessiglione, Mathias, et al. "Dopamine-dependent prediction errors underpin reward-seeking behaviour in humans." *Nature* 442.7106 (2006): 1042.

<sup>4</sup> Kosfeld, Michael, et al. "Oxytocin increases trust in humans." *Nature* 435.7042 (2005): 673

also reduces stress responses, including anxiety. Thus increased prosocial behavior not only has a strong impact on human mental health, helping reduce stress levels, depression and anxiety but also leads to improvements in the quality of life and academic and professional performance.

## How can you collaborate with UNESCO MGIEP on #KindnessMatters ?

1. Become a **Kindness catalyst** by undertaking and communicating your positive story of change on Kindness. Kindness Catalysts shall be defined as those individuals who have made / are making significant contribution towards raising awareness on peace, global citizenship and sustainable development goals.
2. If you are a Kindness catalyst and want to report your own story, share your story here: <https://mgiep.unesco.org/kindness>
3. Be a kindness promoter, by submitting stories of change of others who have made an impact in the society by submitting their stories here <https://mgiep.unesco.org/kindness>
4. If you have a compelling and powerful story of change, reach out to the Kindness team (details written at the end of the concept note) and register your participation for the World Youth Conference on Kindness here at <https://mgiep.unesco.org/wyc2019>

### Contact Information

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Zak, Paul J., Angel, A. Stanton, and Sheila Ahmadi. "Oxytocin increases generosity in humans." PloS one 2.11 (2007): e11-28



**#KindnessMatters**

**Be the change 4 the SDGs  
~ A Global Youth Campaign**

**Submit your story now!**

**South Africa SDGs Kindness Partners:**



**Pakistan SDGs Kindness Partners:**



**Indian Red Cross Society**



**India SDGs Kindness Partners:**



**Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports**  
Government of India



Mexico SDGs Kindness Partners:



Media Partners:

