



# UNITED AMBASSADORS MUN YOUTH ASSEMBLY (MUN-YA)

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# **The MUN Youth Assembly**

## **Fifth Committee: Model United Nations as a Youth Development Platform**

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First Session  
Agenda Item 5

### **Enhancing the effectiveness of Model United Nations as a platform for Youth Development & Employability.**

#### **Report of the UA-MUN Youth Assembly Secretary General**

#### **Introduction:**

The objective of this committee is to address the present and future status of Model United Nations (MUN) and UN4MUN as a means of facilitating youth development and employability.

It is a fact that the most sought after forms of employment remain extremely competitive in the developed world, as per the UN Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth.<sup>1</sup> In many developing nations, where employability is often a matter of life and death, fortunes are more dire still. The global youth unemployment rate is approximately 13%, while the youth working poverty rate is almost 37%. In such an environment, it is only natural that youth pursue all avenues which might lead to prosperity.

#### **I. Background:**

As a platform for youth development, MUN is appealing as a vector to increase one's employability.<sup>2</sup> It is critical that, as a community, we understand the extent to which this effect is a consequence of the skill development facilitated by MUN or rather a result of the prestige with which it is associated.

Since the founding of the United Nations in 1945, MUN has struggled to mirror the genuine functions of the United Nations.<sup>3</sup> As a consequence of the opacity of UN procedure following the Second World War, much of MUN has emulated the familiar parliamentary procedures. Consequently, generations of young diplomats have become most familiar with this manner of debate. The UN4MUN program, developed with the support of the UN itself, is one initiative to resolve this rift. It is possible that, by instilling skills which are relevant to modern diplomacy in youth, UN4MUN will prove more useful for those seeking employment.

If MUN should prove a viable pathway through which to advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it will most likely be a result of increasing youth exposure to the UN SDGs (including fostering global citizenship) and developing promising youth through the ideals of MUN. The former will

persist regardless of the motivations of youth, so long as UN4MUN remains popular; however, this alone may not justify the volume of investment currently associated with MUN. Conversely, though the latter is highly desirable, it is contingent upon both the motivations of delegates and the actual effectiveness of MUN as a platform for skill development.

It should be recognized that the prevalence of awards and rankings in the MUN culture is in part the result of a demand from participants which may be driven by their appeal to future employers or professional schools.<sup>4</sup> Though the value placed on awards varies between cultures globally, there may be evidence suggesting that the pursuit of accolades may detract from the overall quality of debate.

## ***II. Committee Discussion:***

When considering aspects of MUN which are beneficial to youth development, common themes include: fostering a capacity for open-minded debate; developing youths' confidence and public speaking abilities; increasing the collective understanding of the agendas of nations; and producing a generation of youths more aware of the global ramifications of policies enacted by their governments. In addition to this, the UN4MUN format also attempts to: increase awareness of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the SDGs; convey the importance of consensus in realizing implementation; and to more accurately simulate the contemporary operations of the UN.<sup>5</sup>

It is also within the realm of possibility that many of the traits associated with veterans of MUN are the results of their self-selection, rather than the benefits of their development throughout their experiences. Central to the discussion is the fact that the perceptions youth hold concerning MUN and UN4MUN may play a role in shaping the motivations of future participants. However UN4MUN becomes viewed by the public today will influence its ultimate ability to achieve its stated goals.

<sup>1</sup>International Labour Organization News, Global Youth Unemployment is on the Rise Again, August 2016, News for Youth, Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, <http://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2016/08/global-youth-unemployment-rise/>

<sup>2</sup>Hubbard, Dylan J., Modelling your career around core skills, April 2015, Griffith News, Griffith University, <https://app.secure.griffith.edu.au/news/2015/04/27/modelling-your-career-around-core-skills/>

<sup>3</sup>The 4 pillars of the United Nations, n.d., UN Outreach, <https://outreach.un.org/mun/content/4-pillars-united-nations>

<sup>4</sup>Chan, Kevin F., Why Awards Exist in Model United Nations, January 2016, Best Delegate, <http://bestdelegate.com/why-awards-exist-in-model-united-nations/>

### **III. Points of Discussion:**

#### ***Evaluating the power of MUN in increasing future employment opportunities for youth & preparing its practitioners for success in the practical world.***

Three key generators of employment opportunity for MUN participants are personal development (discussed at greater length in IV.C.), networking potential and the prestige associated with MUN. Described here are some factors which have contributed to the real and perceived success of MUN participants.

Foremost among these is the capacity for awards to open the doors of employers and professional schools alike. The role of awards in MUN has traditionally been a point of contention. Detractors have voiced opinions suggesting that discussions where all parties are focused primarily on the pursuit of an award fail to maximize for variables such as quality of debate and the pursuit of diplomatic ideals.<sup>4</sup> Conversely, in the 2016 session of MUN-YA, delegates “highlighted the potential of competition and award incentives in MUN to become catalysts for more productive participant motivation level and constructive behaviour.” It appears that, when the incentives for awards are properly aligned with the objectives of the conference, more fruitful debate will ensue, producing output of greater quality.<sup>6</sup> The 2016 delegates recommended the basing of awards on combined criteria such as “negotiation skills, public speaking, debating, resolution drafting, and appropriate use of procedure,” in addition to the provision of perpetual, individual feedback, in order to accomplish this alignment.<sup>6</sup>

However, whether the quality of output is proportional to the increased employability of MUN participants remains for debate and future study. It is likely that the desirability of the awards themselves roughly correlates to their (presumed) effectiveness in securing future opportunity; to this end, the quality of the debate may be secondary to the perception of prestige. The extent to which this particular phenomenon persists is also unknown.

With regards to producing professional standards of conduct and dialogue, MUN is often recognized as a means of developing one’s skills in debate, diplomacy, international awareness and confidence, among other traits.<sup>2</sup> Beyond this, it serves as a platform for ambitious and devoted youth to interact with like-minded peers. The probability that these benefits do exist ranges from likely to certain; however, their quantification is difficult. In addition, there are confounding factors which are not easily controlled. For example, though MUN veterans are generally excellent at diplomacy, their baseline upon entering MUN may be much higher than the general population. It is likely greater still for those who prove successful and choose to continue pursuing MUN. In addition, we have little objective insight into how the format and quality of MUN affects the quantity of growth observed. It remains possible that it is the interactions between a particular set of individuals, more so than the specificities of any given conference, that confers the major benefits of MUN.

<sup>5</sup>Model United Nations: What is UN4MUN?, n.d., UN Outreach, <https://outreach.un.org/mun/>

<sup>6</sup>The MUN 2016 Youth Assembly, Understanding the Resolution - Practical Report Summarizing “Global MUN Strategy” Discussions & Recommendations, August 2016, United Ambassadors

[https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/Fo6a9e\\_273c268cb27b4af3b467e288cd369430.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/Fo6a9e_273c268cb27b4af3b467e288cd369430.pdf)

<sup>7</sup>Povey, Sam, MUN has an elitism problem: here’s how to fix it, February 2017, Best Delegate <http://bestdelegate.com/mun-has-an-elitism-problem-heres-how-we-fix-it/>

***Addressing the limitations of MUN in facilitating future employment opportunities or ensuring the success of its practitioners in the workplace.***

The failures and limitations of MUN are a matter of much debate. In regards to the employability dividends which benefit MUN participants, there remain a number of potential roadblocks. Despite being sanctioned by the UN, the UN4MUN format has gained relatively limited traction. To many organizations and delegates, UN4MUN is a foreign concept, alien to their familiar practices. However, so long as UN4MUN remains stunted, it is unlikely to achieve significant recognition within the workplace. Furthermore, interest in improving the success of UN4MUN will be driven, at least in part, by its past growth. Delegates should consider which aspects of UN4MUN and its culture have helped or hindered its acceptance among the broader MUN world. Additionally, practices which might accelerate its proliferation should be considered.

Another limitation of MUN is achieving a diversity and inclusivity which extends not only across nations and cultures, but also privilege and wealth. There are significant expenses associated with participation in MUN, which prove prohibitive to some.<sup>7</sup> These issues are further exacerbated in international conferences, with pose additional costs for travel, accommodation and visas. Furthermore, when these conferences are held in countries where currencies hold different purchasing power, under representation of all but the most affluent delegates of certain countries is inevitable. This risks depriving large, international conferences of some of the most insightful perspectives on achieving sustainable development—the opinions of those who would benefit most. One potential avenue for resolving this issue is through the provision of additional funding for underprivileged delegates.

Furthermore, supporting both local conferences, where there is likely a greater diversity of wealth, and international conferences, where there is a greater diversity of culture, may increase the spectrum of viewpoints proliferated throughout the MUN community. In a more diverse community, the values we share and develop will have greater context and thus be more useful in practice as we enter the professional sphere. With any luck, the community will also grow with regards to different values, including perseverance, resilience through adversity and empathy for those less fortunate.

Should MUN prove to be an effective method of accomplishing the aforementioned goals, then its expansion would represent an investment in the advancement of said goals. However, this expansion is contingent on the availability of funding and interest in MUN projects.

The most promising sources of funding are those whose interests are aligned with the goals pursued by MUN. Fortunately, this includes multiple classes of organizations, including many governments, educational institutions, non-governmental organizations, and the UN itself, among others. Delegates would be wise to consider which sources are most promising. Beyond this, it would be valuable to examine the most likely methods of soliciting such support.

The pathways through which employers and recruiters come to understand MUN, UN4MUN and their participants play key roles in determining their benefits to potential candidates. It is possible that a disconnect remains between the actual MUN experience and how it is viewed by employers. Where this is true, there exists an asymmetry between the benefits conveyed to participants and how they are accounted for by potential employers. In order to resolve this difference, it should be considered how best to convey the benefits of MUN and UN4MUN specifically to the professional world and the public at large.

***Evaluating the impact of MUN on a young person's life and choices and addressing its impact on the role of youth in society.***

It is equally important that all parties consider not only the magnitude of the benefits of MUN, but also the future impact of these improvements. Launched in 2009, UN4MUN is, in part, the UN Department of Public Information's attempt to reconcile the traditional structure of MUN with the values and contemporary practices of the UN.<sup>5</sup> UN4MUN adopts consensus as its goal, rather than the traditional style, where blocs try to push their resolutions through currying favor with some, while obstructing the plans of others. This reconciliation, along with a shift to focus on the pursuit of the UN 2030 agenda and the SDGs, has resulted in a style of MUN whose stated goals are the development of realistic solutions and improvements to contemporary policy disputes, in addition to developing the skills already associated with MUN.

By resolving the rift between MUN and UN goals, recent UN4MUN conferences have realigned themselves with the 4 pillars of the United Nations.<sup>3</sup> As such, all UN4MUN conferences ultimately pursue Peace and Security, Human Rights, The Rule of Law and Development. Consequently, youth participating in MUN have, on average, greater exposure to these concepts than their peers. However, determining the value of this exposure for youth and the future of the UN is not simple. Furthermore, the effectiveness of any form of MUN as a means for youth to shape future UN policy remains uncertain. It should be considered whether the current form of UN4MUN is worth promoting as a liaison between youth and the UN, or whether we should instead prioritize the developmental aspects of the programme.

On a more granular level, it is useful to understand the impact of MUN on individual youths within society. There is significant overlap between those qualities which make effective leaders in both MUN and activism. By its very nature, MUN forces youth to challenge the status quo on difficult questions with far reaching moral and ethical implications. Youth become engaged in the diplomatic process which underpins many aspects of the policies pursued by our nations. It is possible that this will in turn influence their future aspirations, though we lack data to this end. Beyond this, youth are exposed to a diversity of perspective and culture which few other pursuits manage to so comprehensively assemble. Delegates should consider the extent to which this engagement affects their choices and shapes their perceptions of the role of youth in society. However, it remains beneficial to reflect upon whether there exists a more meaningful impact to be imparted to youth through MUN, in addition to the means by which to accomplish this.

**IV. Research Questions:**

- Is competitiveness in MUN a factor that develops better leaders and future professionals? Why or why not?
- Does the existing and prevalent global "MUN culture" today support or hinder youth employability and the role of youth in society?
- Does the focus on MUN serving as a "CV builder" hinder its value in the development of global citizenship and civil social responsibility?
- Is there a correlation between awards won in MUN and future job prospects or professional success during early career stages?

**V. Practical Action Points Recommended to the Committee:**

- How can MUN conferences more effectively prepare their practitioners for professional opportunities and success in the workplace?
- How can MUN as a platform evolve to develop the well-rounded skillsets needed for youth to gain sustainable success in their careers and have a positive impact on society?
- How can the prevalent culture of competitiveness and award hunting be adapted to create future leaders and global citizens through MUN?
- How can valuable MUN initiatives and programmes that develop global citizens seek sustainable funding?
- How can cooperation and partnerships among MUN institutions or other organizations, NGO's and companies be developed with regards to this topic?

## References & Additional Resources

1. International Labour Organization News, Global Youth Unemployment is on the Rise Again, August 2016, News for Youth, Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, <http://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2016/08/global-youth-unemployment-rise/>
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5. Model United Nations: What is UN4MUN?, n.d., UN Outreach, <https://outreach.un.org/mun/>
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7. Povey, Sam, MUN has an elitism problem: here's how to fix it, February 2017, Best Delegate <http://bestdelegate.com/mun-has-an-elitism-problem-heres-how-we-fix-it/>