The Youth Community of Practice (YCoP) global listserv links professionals and practitioners at USAID and its partner organizations to effective youth development ideas, information and best practices to help:

*Design more effective, sustainable youth programs, and
*Better integrate youth participation in USAID development projects

In this Links: Youth Education and Extremism: While the root causes of extremism are varied and complex, poverty and lack of access to education and employment opportunities are widely believed to contribute to youth’s susceptibility to radical ideologies and recruitment into extremist groups. Youth development initiatives can measurably decrease the risk of civil unrest and violent conflict, but it is essential that initiatives designed to combat extremism through education, especially in the Muslim world, do not demonize religion or stigmatize youth, and do maintain a positive, asset-based approach to youth development. Youth projects and programs are currently being implemented with an eye towards improving the possibilities for youth to lead happy, productive lives, and decrease the risk of youth turning down a road of extremism because of feelings of hopelessness and a perceived lack of alternatives and opportunities.

Announcements:

Survey Says: Youth can play role against extremism in Pakistan
According to a poll published in the December 12, 2009, issue of Pakistan’s daily “International: The News,” 85.7% of Pakistani youth believe that youth can play a constructive role in combating extremism in Pakistani society. The survey, conducted by the Centre for Civic Education in Pakistan, gathered responses from more than 1800 youth spread across thirteen districts within Pakistan, including Punjab, Northwest Frontier Province, Sindh, Balochistan, and Kashmir. Using both quantitative and qualitative data, the survey was designed to gauge interest and levels of participation among Pakistani youth in civic affairs. In addition, the survey sought suggestions from the respondents to identify ways and means for increasing civic engagement and volunteerism among youth. Recommendations based on the findings of the report include the need for more meaningful and positive participation of young people in Pakistan’s political and civic institutions aimed at restoring their confidence in governance, and to prevent the kind of alienation that can foster extremism among youth. The full report is available at: http://www.civiceducation.org/Civic%20health%20final.pdf.

Projects and Initiatives:

Cultivating Hope: Documentary Film Competition in Pakistan
In December 2009, Pakistan’s Higher Education Commission (HEC), in conjunction with Samaa TV Pakistan, launched Pakistan’s first-ever inter-university documentary film competition on youth and extremism. The launch occurred at a seminar in which youth had the opportunity to ask questions, debate, and analyze the current socio-political situation in Pakistan. The project, entitled “Cultivating Hope,” focuses on empowering youth to understand the causes and consequences of violence in their country, and is also intended to promote visual and liberal arts in Pakistan and to provide an outlook for the creative expression of ideas. HEC and Samaa TV have requested documentaries on various themes of extremism from HEC-affiliated universities across Pakistan. The top three winning documentaries will receive prize money and a one-year job contract with Samaa TV upon completion of their academic degrees.

**Promoting Tolerance and Dialogue through Interactive Theater in Eastern Indonesia**

[Funding](http://www.irex.org/newsroom/news/2009/1014-epd_indonesia.asp)

Funded by Great Britain’s Strategic Program Fund and implemented by IREX and the Center for Civic Education Indonesia (CCEI), this one-year program aimed to train teachers in the use of interactive theater techniques with youth to prevent and mitigate conflict and to address extremism and ethnic and religious intolerance. The project, which came to a close in December of 2009, also engaged youth in dialogue about conflict, extremism, and intolerance, and hoped to contribute to the goal of reducing the influence of extremist groups among Indonesian youth. The program utilized the “Forum Theater” technique, in which diverse youth of different religions and ethnicities from varying parts of the country were brought together to produce a play based on real-life events. At the main point of crisis in the play, a facilitator enters to solicit ideas from youth in the audience, creating a collaborative environment in which solutions to the problems demonstrated in the play may be found.

**UK-backed UN “Schools of Excellence” Project against Extremism in Gaza**


Great Britain’s Department for International Development is funding a United Nations Relief Works Agency (UNRWA) “Schools of Excellence” project in the Gaza Strip designed to reverse the decline of education in Gaza and promote a curriculum based on justice, tolerance, and human rights. Douglas Alexander, the UK’s International Development Secretary, asserted that “a broad and balanced education is the best weapon against radicalism in Gaza, and that is what we are trying to provide.” UNRWA’s Gaza operation director has indicated that one of the biggest challenges faced by UNRWA schools is tackling extremism among youth in the impoverished and war-torn Gaza Strip. UNRWA provides schooling for more than 200,000 Gazan children.

**Resources for Practitioners:**

**10 Key Steps to Building a Better Future for the Children of Gaza**

[Funding](http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/592CDC474D35DF958525754C0053D354)

This 2009 article from Sweden’s Minister for Development and Cooperation and The Commissioner General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) reminds practitioners that in all conflicts, children and youth are among the most vulnerable, and indicates 10 steps to helping the children of Gaza. In the area of education, the authors point out that schools in Gaza, as in all conflict environments, bring important routines, social activity, and a way for children to escape stressful environments that may make them more susceptible to radical groups that promote violence.
U.S. Aid to Pakistan: Countering Extremism Through Education Reform

In a lecture delivered at the Heritage Foundation in 2007, Lisa Curtis discussed the ways in which a stronger and more effective education system in Pakistan could serve to counter extremism within this conflict-torn country. Curtis praised examples of USAID-led education programs aimed at empowering local communities, but emphasized the need for Washington to encourage the Pakistani government to follow through on its own education reforms. She also pointed to the problem of endemic corruption within the Pakistani education system as a major obstacle to achieving improved education nationwide. Curtis argued that lack of adequate education opportunities in Pakistan has contributed to the development of extremist ideologies that have led to terrorist acts, exacerbated sectarian tensions, and stifled economic growth.

Looking for YOUR input: We would like to hear from you! YCoP welcomes ideas, resources, and best practices on effective youth programs and youth participation. We would also like to encourage nominations of other youth practitioners or youth leaders to participate in the YCoP Links listserv. Hit “reply” to send information and feedback to YCoP Links.

To unsubscribe from the list, users should send an e-mail to listserv@info.usaid.gov with only “unsubscribe youthcop” in the body of the e-mail. (No signatures please).

Mission of YCoP: The Youth Community of Practice provides a forum for professionals and practitioners at USAID and its partner organizations to gather, consolidate, archive, disseminate and exchange information, knowledge, ideas and best practices, particularly related to the incorporation of youth participation in USAID development projects. The Youth Community of Practice is an informal body of volunteer members, reached through a global listserv and Washington-based chapter. Both the listserv and DC chapter forums include USAID staff, youth practitioners outside of the Agency, and youth themselves. It is jointly sponsored by the office of education in the bureau of Economic Growth, Agriculture and Trade (EGAT) at USAID and the Education Quality Improvement Program3 (EQUIP3), and implemented by the Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC).

Disclaimer: The information and opinions expressed in the materials provided through YCoP Links or posted by listserv participants is not official U.S. Government information and does not necessarily represent the views or positions of the U.S. Agency for International Development, the U.S. Government or EQUIP3. For a copy of the guidelines and/or charter, put the request in the subject line of the email and send to: youthcop@lists.info.usaid.gov. Participants should be aware that the list is public and not private communication. When participants voluntarily disclose personal information on a list serve, that information can be collected and used by others and may result in unsolicited messages from other people.