

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Young people ages 15 to 24 are 1.2 billion of the world's human capital. Many of them around the world are already making contributions to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and their work should be further acknowledged and strengthened. Increasingly, youth are recognized as key participants in decision-making and development, as reflected in the growing presence of non-governmental youth organizations and the upsurge of youth advisory boards and committees to international institutions and programmes. Yet building the capacity of and creating sustained partnerships with young people are crucial strategies to achieving the MDGs that have not been realized fully by the international community.

This paper aims to provide an overview of youth participation as it currently exists; to outline the ways in which youth are directly involved and affected by each Goal; to demonstrate the ways in which young people are contributing to the MDGs, and to provide 'Options for Action' that governments, the United Nations system, donors and other actors can harness, support, and scale-up in order to support young people in making significant contributions to achieving the MDGs.

Successful models of youth participation should be adapted and replicated to specific political and socio-economic realities, taking into consideration the challenges facing youth-led and youth-serving organizations. The existing mechanisms for youth engagement outlined in Part 1 are channels that governments and institutions can currently strengthen and use to mobilize young people as partners in achieving the MDGs.

Part II presents youth participation as it relates directly to the MDGs. Each goal is analyzed with respect to its effect on young peoples lives as well as how young people can play – and indeed are playing — a role in its implementation. Under each goal are a number of "Options for Action" that governments, the UN and multilateral organizations can use to fully harness the contributions that youth can make to achieving the MDGs.

Goal 1, To Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger, outlines the linkages between youth and poverty and raises concerns such as the lack of data on youth living in poverty and the need for increased youth engagement in Poverty Reduction Strategy Processes (PRSPs). It addresses youth poverty and rural development, as well as youth in urban slums, and finishes with a review of youth vigilance in combating corruption. Some of the options for action outlined are:

- To devote UNDP's 2006 Human Development Report and the 2006 or 2007 World Development Report of the World Bank to youth development, as a means of gathering information on youth and poverty that can be used in monitoring progress towards the MDGs.
- To request national governments to create mechanisms that ensure young people are involved in the development of PRSPs, through National Youth Councils where possible, or other youth organizations. This will ensure that youth perspectives are heard and that PRSPs are relevant to local concerns. It will also promote widespread participation in their implementation.
- Development policies must prioritize the growth of rural areas, where a high percentage of youth are unemployed and where there exists little public infrastructure. Young people should be engaged in creating the necessary services and infrastructure in rural communities, such that income and skills can be gained for young people involved in rural food production.
- There is a need to develop community-driven projects with urban youth living in poverty, as young people are already creatively working in entrepreneurial projects such as ecological waste management projects. UN-HABITAT's work in slum development must be strengthened and young people must be at the core of these efforts.
- Widespread support must be extended to the World Bank's Youth and Governance Program, particularly in countries most affected by ongoing corruption. Youth must be furthered trained in the eliminating all types of corruption and whistle-blowing strategies through country-specific youth driven anti-corruption projects.
- Young people must have better information on and access to anti-corruption commissions.

PART I: EXISTING YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Young leaders represent our hope for the future, and have the greatest potential to push for realization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for 2015, established by the United Nations.

Prime Minister of Thailand His Excellency Thaksin Shinawatra¹⁰

The contributions that young people are making to their communities and nations are not entirely understood or utilized. Young people are making a difference as activists, as leaders in community development, and by their record levels of volunteerism. Young people in many parts of the world may be perceived as apathetic or disengaged, but this is largely inaccurate. All over the world, youth are surpassing the avenues of traditional political participation (i.e. voting) through their activism and volunteerism. However, the global youth movement is characterized by fragmentation resulting in isolated actions that do not reach their full potential due to lack of resources, access to knowledge and information, and institutional barriers. Without the guidance, understanding, support, and recognition of government leaders and other decision-makers, young leaders are often unequipped to fully participate in the decisions that are affecting their lives.

A. YOUTH AND NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS

Youth Policy

Over the past several decades, several countries have initiated processes of designing and implementing national policies and strategies focused on youth. However, most countries do not have specific structures in place for youth, nor have they successfully managed to mainstream youth concerns, as the issues relating to young people fall across thematic public policy areas such as education, health or juvenile delinquency. Despite youth being upwards of 50% of the population in some countries, governments rarely consult young people on matters affecting their lives, such as poverty reduction Strategy efforts. Even governments which have developed legislation on youth issues often lack comprehensive and holistic approaches to the challenges faced by the younger generation. A progressive national youth policy obliges traditional decision-makers to not only work for young people, but with them in order to let their experiences inform the development of appropriate interventions and services.¹¹

Each country is urged to develop a long-term, consensus-based, integrated and cross-sector youth policy, but because this is a relatively unknown and underdeveloped field, there is a great need to share experience in this specific field of public policy and to produce tools to assist national governments in addressing youth issues systematically.¹² There is a high potential for cooperation, particularly through networking of both governmental and non-governmental youth organizations on a regional and international scale. Furthermore, various international agencies assist with the formulation of national youth policies and action plans.¹³

Extensive experience has shown that good practice in youth participation provides choices, is enjoyable, challenging and fun; relates to issues perceived as relevant by young people; raises young people's awareness of social, political, economic, cultural and personal issues affecting them; involves training and skills development; ensures that young people are given ongoing support in their role; provides them with a sense of belonging and ownership in relation to decision-making; makes them feel that their participation is valued; involves adequate resource allocation (including time, space, funding and information); acknowledges their contribution; acknowledges that young people often experience financial and transport constraints (getting to meetings for example); secures support at this level is based on a careful recruitment and selection process; gives them a sense of ownership and belonging, and involves a review process for both young people and adults.¹⁴

Given the wide diversity of political cultures and political systems, countries need to establish their own priorities and mechanisms in order to create a youth policy that is authentic and relevant. The formulation of a national youth policy should not be a top-down process. The development of a sound youth policy requires that a wide variety of social actors are involved, a large-scale cross-sector consultation takes place and a close

GOAL 2: ACHIEVE UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION

Target 3: Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling

Education and cooperation are very important to achieve the MDGs. Education is necessary in every field, in health, employment, awareness all needs good education to do good work.

- Nour Mosawy (Iraq) 20 years-old.⁴⁶

One big thing is that students at my university (Rhodes University in South Africa) are using Open Source free computer software to provide free Internet connectivity to disadvantaged schools. We raise money to buy second hand computer hardware and software which we donate to the schools in our area.

- Haru Mutasa (South Africa) 24 years-old.⁴⁷

Introduction

The World Declaration on Education for All, Article 1, paragraph 1 states “Every person - child, youth and adult - shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs. These needs comprise both essential learning tools⁴⁸ and the basic learning content⁴⁹, required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning.”⁵⁰

Ensuring primary education for all people is the key to unlocking the potential of all societies. It enables people to take care of themselves and their families; to take control of their futures; and most importantly, to raise themselves out of poverty. Furthermore, ensuring education for all people will benefit all MDGs: it will help fight poverty, promote gender equality; it will create awareness in matters of HIV/AIDS and maternal health, and promote environmental sustainability.

Encouraging School Participation

Option for Action: *There is a need for strong policies to increase youth enrolment in primary and secondary education. The delivery of primary and secondary education must be free of charge.*

More than 113 million children are denied access to primary education and more than 150 million people have never completed it. Girls are particularly excluded from primary education. In addition, approximately 250 million children from ages 5-14 in the developing world cannot go to school because they are subject to child labour.⁵¹ Despite several declarations, such as the World Declaration on Education for All and the Dakar Framework for Action adopted by the World Education Forum, primary education for all children is still not the norm in many countries.⁵²

According to a World Bank study, only 37 of 155 developing countries analyzed have successfully achieved universal primary education. Based on trends of the 1990s, another 32 are likely to achieve that goal, but 70 countries are at risk of not reaching the goal unless progress is significantly accelerated. In several countries, completion rates have stagnated or even fallen in recent years.⁵³ This is a bleak representation of the priorities that are given to children and primary education.

Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia are extremely challenged areas in the world where progress in education has been very difficult. Sub-Saharan Africa lags farthest behind, with little progress since 1990. South Asia is the other region with chronically low enrollment and completion rates.⁵⁴ The root-cause of this is a lack of resources, particularly in rural areas. It is important to underline that the lack of resources exists because national governments do not make primary education top priority in their budgets.⁵⁵ In order to allow all

PART III: CROSSCUTTING RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE STEPS

