

The Role of Young People in Poverty Reduction



**TACKLING POVERTY
TOGETHER**



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“Poverty reduction is not only about meeting our basic needs, it’s also about participation, influence and power.”

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THE ROLE OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN POVERTY REDUCTION

Young people are seldom recognised as a resource in decision-making processes. Instead, young people are systematically excluded from important arenas of decision-making and development processes. As a result, their perspectives are often absent in policy-making. At the same time, many youth organisations remain drastically under-resourced and ill-equipped to participate in development processes and efforts. In particular this affects their participation in policy making and processes relating to Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs).

The steps involved in the PRSP process are complex. They include undertaking research and poverty diagnostics, prioritising and costing programmes, as well as keeping track budgets. The issues become even more complex when youth organisations want to highlight special needs within their group and require tools, for instance gender-based analysis to address the poverty of young women. Even with the right skills and abilities to discuss, analyse and improve PRSPs, young people do not have sufficient opportunities to influence and affect PRSP processes on their own. Youth organisations require support, particularly at national and local levels, in order to strengthen and put forward their ideas for poverty reduction. Furthermore, the ideas and experiences of young people are crucial in order to achieve efficient and sustainable poverty reduction strategies.

This publication explains what a Youth Perspective is and why it is essential in all efforts to fight poverty. It gives a deeper understanding of why it is important that we as young people are integrated and become visible as actors in global development. As will be shown, a Youth Perspective means placing young people at the centre of what we do in order to move more rapidly and more effectively towards eliminating poverty and achieving the results agreed on in the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

This publication aims at presenting Tackling Poverty Together project as best practice how to implement a youth perspective. Through Tackling Poverty Together project 75 youth organisations have worked to create change and increase young people's role in poverty reduction at a local, national and global level.

LSU – THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SWEDISH YOUTH ORGANISATIONS

LSU (The National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations) is the organisation that cooperates with and represents the interests of youth organisations in Sweden. We develop young leaders and their organisations, as well as aiming to improve the conditions of young people in Sweden and around the world – in Asia, the Middle East, Eastern Europe and Africa. LSU is a meeting point and centre of competence that with a diversity and rights perspective conducts a broad set of activities within leadership and organisational development, as well as promoting its youth policies and advocacy work. LSU currently has partnerships with similar youth organisations in large parts of the world, which share the same goal of promoting the rights and influence of young people.

*More than
500,000,000
young
people live
in poverty.*

TACKLING POVERTY TOGETHER

The project Tackling Poverty Together was initiated to convince stakeholders of the importance of working with a Youth Perspective in poverty reduction. LSU have since 2005, together with UNDESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs) and youth organisations in seven different African countries pursued the Joint Millennium Development Project, called “Tackling Poverty Together – the Role of Young People in Poverty Reduction”. Tackling Poverty Together is intended to highlight and strengthen young people’s role in development policies in general and poverty reduction strategies (Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, PRSP) in particular.

In Tackling Poverty Together LSU and our member organisations, along with UNDESA and several youth organisations from each cooperation country, Tanzania, Uganda, Malawi, Kenya, Zambia, Ghana and Liberia, work to promote the influence of young people on national Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP). The project has initiated and created the capacity for networks of youth organisation networks in seven countries to take actions in order to increase young people’s participation in poverty reduction processes. Through the development and implementation of action plans the TPT country teams have gained hands-on experience in research and analysis, strategic planning, and advocacy for greater inclusion in decision-making processes. As a result, young people have achieved greater recognition and involvement in the national processes of poverty reduction.

A YOUTH PERSPECTIVE IN POVERTY REDUCTION

Development objectives cannot be met if young people are not involved and taken into account. A Youth Perspective in poverty reduction is especially relevant given that 2/3 of the population in low-income countries are under 25 years old. In addition, most of these young people have significantly limited opportunities to exercise their Human Rights such as freedom of expression and freedom of association. Upholding a Youth Perspective is therefore an important means of protecting young people's rights.

Furthermore, a Youth Perspective in poverty reduction is built on the understanding that young people are not merely a target group but also initiators, participants, decision-makers and leaders. Eliminating poverty requires that young people must be recognised as a resource for change in society. A Youth Perspective is therefore to recognise that youth organisations and young leaders need to be strengthened and given more space for participation, influence and power. In realising this it must be considered that alternative forums that give young people influence, for example youth councils and forums, at local, national, regional, and global levels, must originate from the perspectives and real needs of young people. At the same time, these forums must not become replacements for true influence in decision-making bodies.

Definition of a Youth Perspective

1.

Young people should be given the chance to be actors of change and not only be a target for development. It affects the quality and relevance of international poverty reduction.

The issues young people face today, such as unemployment, lack of schooling and exposure to violence represent enormous social costs to society at all levels. Yet young people have little or no voice in shaping the current strategies for development. When young people are actors and resources in poverty reduction it leads to better results. If young people are the target group of a project this should imbue all parts of the project's phases, from planning to final evaluation.

2.

Young people have the right to participate, influence and have power over issues that affect our lives. It's about young people having the same rights as the rest of the population.

Democracy assumes that individuals are equally important. We emphasise that young people and adults should have a mutual influence in our society, irrespective of, for instance, ethnic background and geographical origin. Democracy loses its strength and legitimacy in a society that consistently excludes groups of people. The goal is to effectively build strategies for young people; it is essential to bring our perspectives and participation into the process at all levels – globally, nationally and locally.

SUMMARY

Arguments for a Youth Perspective in Poverty Reduction

- ▶ *Poverty reduction requires knowledge of youth-specific terms and conditions*
- ▶ *Young people are experts regarding our own daily life and in ways of reaching young people*
- ▶ *Youth organisations contribute to the strengthening of democracy and the respect for human rights*
- ▶ *Without a Youth Perspective development policies fail to identify youth organisations as actors of change*
- ▶ *The Millennium Development Goals specifically address young people*
- ▶ *Investing in young people has more potential than ever, since young people today are the most educated generation ever*

YOUNG PEOPLE – A SIGNIFICANT GROUP TO DEFINE

The definition of “youth” is complex and can be defined in different ways. The UN definition of youth is people between 15 and 24. The African Youth Charter defines youth as people between 15 and 35. The Swedish government has defined young people as 13–25 years old. To be a young person is not only a matter of age. Another definition of youth is therefore “a phase when a person moves from a time of dependence to independence”.

It should, however, be remembered that young people living in poverty are not a homogenous group. Young people have different values, experiences, and opportunities. Some of us are in school, others are not; some of us have children of our own, others have not. Many face the difficulties of living with HIV/AIDS or caring for someone who is infected. Because of the incredible diversity among young people, it is more useful to view our needs as being largely determined by where and how we live, and to remember that young people differ from one another just as adults do. It is therefore important to acknowledge and respond to the heterogeneity of young people and act accordingly to each group’s need.

However, what we as young people all have in common is that we are an underrepresented group in decision and policy making processes.

APPLYING A YOUTH PERSPECTIVE IN POVERTY REDUCTION

There are more young people in the world than ever before. This fact makes it even more important to make sure that development policies are reviewed and that young people are given greater opportunities, stronger capacity and a genuine chance. A Youth Perspective in development policies is a potentially powerful tool for policy-makers. It also identifies age-specific vulnerabilities, gaps and opportunities for investment, and it facilitates co-targeting of interventions, leading to synergies across sectors and ages.

A Youth Perspective in poverty reduction contributes to greater efficiency by increasing the probability of making efforts that suit different groups of young people. Young people often have the best knowledge of how to effectively reach out to other young people and the best means of doing so. Supporting young people to organise themselves is also a way of strengthening the work for democracy and human rights.

An essential part of applying a Youth Perspective in poverty reduction is to integrate young people into the shaping, implementation and evaluation of programs and policies. This helps to ensure that the needs of young people are effectively addressed at all levels. This does not only require more research on youth poverty, but also a more general understanding of the needs and aspirations of those affected – and who would be better for the task than the young people themselves?

A Youth Perspective contributes to better results by relevance, efficiency, legitimacy and democratic development.

Added value with a Youth Perspective

1. RELEVANCE

A youth perspective gives greater relevance to poverty reduction. When taking young people's knowledge and experience into consideration any targets set become more relevant.

2. EFFICIENCY

Young people can reach young people, as they often have the best knowledge of what methods, arenas and approaches will reach other young people.

3. LEGITIMACY

When young people have the right to participation, influence and power development efforts can gain greater legitimacy. Goals and actions gain acceptance among young people when they are included in the implementation of activities.

4. DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT

Supporting young people to to organise themselves is a way of strengthening the work of democracy and human rights. A strong civil society with youth inclusion is a precondition for democratic development and a goal in itself.

“The number of people worldwide aged 12–24 years has reached 1.3 billion, the largest in history. It is also the healthiest and best educated – a strong base to build on in a world that demands more than basic skills.”

**Paul Wolfowitz; President World Bank Group 2005–2007
(World development report 2007)**

A YOUTH PERSPECTIVE ON MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The achievements of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), can clearly illustrate the importance of specifically involving and targeting young people. The (MDGs) can in many ways be seen as youth goals, and therefore the UN has recently developed specific outcome indicators targeted for youth. The indicators have been developed to be used both for regional and country based youth assessment and offer a number of indicators relevant for measuring the situation of young people.

Global youth unemployment has risen during the last decade and now amounts to over 80 million people. This is about half the total unemployment in the world. Evidence shows that the costs of not investing in youth are beyond belief for our economies. By contrast, if integrated into the development process, we can be a positive force for change. In order to fight the HIV/AIDS pandemic all young people should have access to basic health services. Maternal health is one of many examples, with one woman in three giving birth before the age of twenty, and pregnancy being the main cause of death in developing countries for women aged 15–19. Given that the young people are especially vulnerable there are obviously many other health concerns to consider. For example, many young people live in rural areas where there is limited access to health services. Also, a substantial part of young people in urban areas live in slums where they are subjected to air pollution, unsafe water and poor sanitation during the most vulnerable period of their life.

75 Youth Organisations Involved in the Project – in 8 TPT Country Teams

1 Country Team Zambia (7 organisations)

National Youth Constitutional Assembly, Young Women in Action, Global Justice Forum, Youth Vision, Youth Association of Zambia, Young Men Christian Association, Youth Development Organisation.

2 Country Team Ghana (26 organisations)

Youth Empowerment Synergy (YES-Ghana), Global Youth Action Network, Federation of Youth Associations of Ghana, Ghana MDG Coalition Campaign, Jaksally Youth Group, Abibiman Foundation, Young People We Care, Northern Development Society, The Green Club, Avert Youth Foundation, West African Students Union, PPAG Youth Action Movement, Vision Care International, ECO CLUB Ghana, Young People We Care, Smart Youth Volunteers Foundation, Ghana Girl Guides Association, Action for Community Development, ICCHRA, Ashaiman Zonal Youth Forum, Educare Ghana, Young Peace Brigades, Adventist Youth Association, National Union of Polytechnic Students, National Union of Private University Students, University Students Association of Ghana.

3 Country Team Malawi (10 organisations)

Center for community Empowerment and Development (CECAD), Youth Net and Counseling (YONECO), Chancellor College Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP), Foundation for Community Support Services (FOCUS), Malawi Girl Guides Association (MAGGA), Young Advocates for the advancement of ICT related development (YAAICTD), Scout association of Malawi (SAM), Center for Youth and Children Affairs (CEYCA), Mzuzu Youth Movement (MYA), Active initiative for Youth Enhancement (AYISE).

4 Country Team Tanzania (5 organisations)

Tanzania Youth Coalition (TYC) host organization, Youth of the United Nations (UNA), Youth serve, Tanzania Youth Vision Association (TYVA), Youth Initiatives Tanzania (YITA).

5 Country Team Kenya (5 organisations)

Youth Alive! Kenya (YAK), Kenya Disabled Network (KEDAN), Kibera Community Youth Programme (KYCP), National Organization of Peer Educators (NOPE), NYC for Habitat.

6 Country Team Liberia (5 organisations)

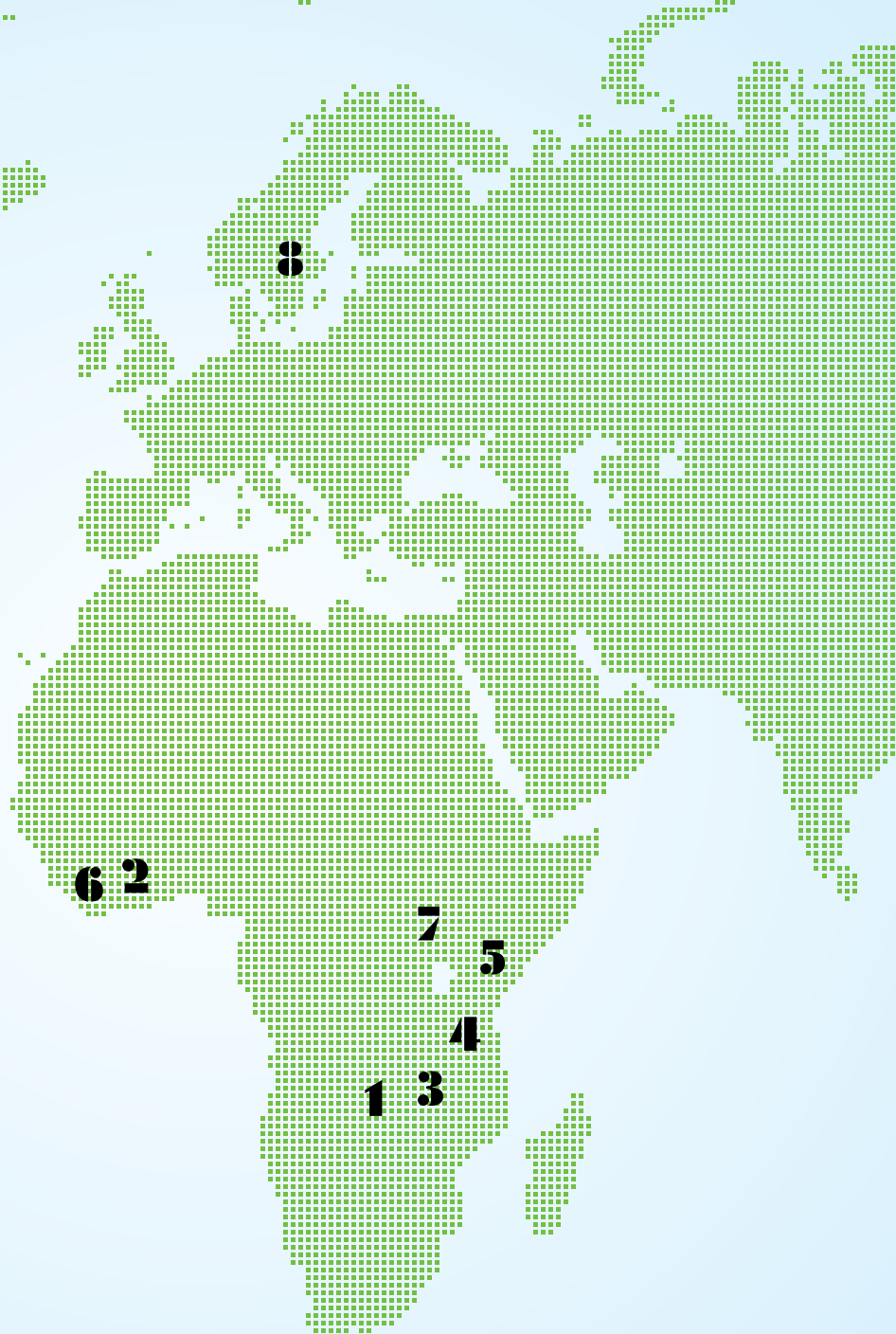
Federation of Liberian Youth (FLY), Mano River Union Youth Parliament, Liberia Youth and Adolescent Network, Children Assistant Program, Helping Humanity in Need of Kindness.

7 Country Team Uganda (4 organisations)

Network Association of youth organizations of Uganda (NAYOU), Uganda Girl guides Association (UGGA), Lyantonde Youth Association, and Youth Alive.

8 Country Team Sweden (13 organisations)

The Swedish Social Democratic Youth League (SSU), The Centre Party Youth (CUF), The Swedish Association of International Affairs (SAIA), Save the Children Youth Sweden (RBUF), The Swedish Red Cross Youth (RKUF), Young Swedish Muslims (SUM), PeaceQuest, YWCA-YMCA of Sweden (KFUK-KFUM), CISV Sweden, Booster, equmenia, Swedish Federation of Young Scientists (FUF) and the Youth League of the Swedish Norden Association (FNUF).



A YOUTH PERSPECTIVE ON UN MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGS)

Source: The Development Goal Report 2009

MDG 1: **ERADICATE EXTREME HUNGER AND POVERTY**

According to the UN's World Youth Reports 724 million young people live on less than USD 2 a day. If youth were given more consideration in poverty reduction strategies, their ability to help themselves escape from poverty would increase.

MDG 2: **ACHIEVE UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION**

115 million children are not in school and 100 million children who start school will be forced to leave before they learn to read and write. It is important for young people to complete their education in order to escape poverty, and youth organisations can support this goal by providing non-formal education.

MDG 3: **PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER WOMEN**

Strict gender norms can be especially harmful for girls and young women who may find their freedom of movement, educational, personal and economical development, and security severely limited. Young people can break traditions and social constructions related to gender inequality and bring about change.

MDG 4: **REDUCE CHILD MORTALITY**

Every year 11 million children in the developing world die before the age of five, and since infants born to teenage mothers are 80% more likely to die, young mothers need to be specifically targeted to help reduce child mortality. A Youth Perspective can thus strategically identify young mothers' special needs.

MDG 5: **IMPROVE MATERNAL HEALTH**

Millions of young women experience complications when giving birth and some of these births end in either long-term morbidity or maternal mortality. A youth perspective clearly links data at a national level on young people's level of education, achievements, child marriage rates, and early childbirth rates to age-specific maternal mortality rates.

MDG 6: **COMBAT HIV/AIDS, MALARIA AND OTHER DISEASES**

An estimated 11.8 million young people live with HIV/AIDS today and many major actors have integrated them into their HIV/AIDS related programs. Youth-led reproductive health education and peer to peer education has proven to be effective in tackling the pandemic.

MDG 7: **ENSURE ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

Young people are more willing to take action to achieve environmental sustainability. This is due to the fact that it is young people that have to deal with the consequences of not taking environmental sustainability seriously today, as many of the effects of pollution will only become evident over the long term.

MDG 8: **DEVELOP A GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR DEVELOPMENT**

Building alliances and forging partnerships with governments, civil society, youth-serving organisations, and the media in order to leverage resources for investing in young people, are crucial to achieving the MDGs. This can, for example, be achieved as LSU and its partner organisations in Tackling Poverty Together are proactively working with this issue through advocacy and raising awareness.

Even though many poverty reduction strategies mention the needs of young people, they are limited in their analysis of the situation of youth and lack consideration of differences in young people's realities.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S RIGHTS & STATUS IN POLICIES & DEVELOPMENT REPORTS

The right of young people to participate, which is also a mean for influence and power in matters that affect young peoples' lives, is to some extent affected by international agreements as well as national policies.

Various policy documents have laid down the rights of youth participation. Several countries have a national youth policy besides the international conditions and documents of the UN General Declaration on Human Rights. These youth policies deal with the living conditions of youth regarding, for example health, education and influence. Organisations can therefore promote the rights of citizens via monitoring and influencing the State to execute the youth policy it has undertaken by signing UN declarations and conventions.

Various organisations critically examine statistics and analysis of the situation for human rights, such as the situation for youth regarding education, work and healthcare. The organisations are able to make alternative interpretations such as shadow reports. An important task for organisations is also to inform young people about their rights and how they can work to guarantee that these rights are respected since many countries lack a national youth policy.

Governing Documents

UN Declaration on Human Rights
– *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*

Human rights are universal – they are for everyone, always and everywhere, without exception. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989 and comprises children and young people up to the age of 18. In article 45 of the Convention civil society is encouraged to report on how the Convention is implemented.

World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY)

In 1995 the UN adopted a strategy for the responsibility of the international community to the challenge of youth – the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY). This policy framework was later improved by UN resolution: “World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond”. The task of this strategy is to identify the problems young people deal with, and increase the opportunities for young people to take part in society. The World Programme of Action for Youth is to a high extent connected to the MDGs. The WPAY acts as a policy document providing frameworks and instructions, and also identifies ten priority areas for youth development, for instance education, employment, hunger and poverty, and the full and effective participation of young people in the life of society and in decision-making.

Policy Reports

World Youth Report – Young Peoples Transition to Adulthood: Progress and Challenges (2007)

The World Youth Report is published every second year and represents the UN’s official report on the situation of young people in the world. The 2007 report encourages decision-makers to note and prioritise obstacles limiting youth participation in the development of their societies. The report notes that the ability of youth to contribute to this development can be constrained by the limited opportunities for development participation as the global economy and social and political institutions undergo major change. For this reason, there is a pressing need for policies that not only build youth potential, but also open doors to youth participation in areas such as employment, political participation and volunteerism.

World Development Report (2007)

The annual report of the World Bank on world development in 2007 focused on youth. It states that youth policy at local, national and international levels cannot be effective unless young people are seen as an asset to society or as key actors for change. Youth participation and representation must be seen at all levels of society. Young people should take part in all issues, both those affecting them directly and indirectly. The report identifies three policy directions for helping young people develop themselves and contribute to society; expanding opportunities, enhancing capabilities and providing second chances.

The Case of Investing in Young People as Part of National Poverty Reduction Strategy (2005)

This paper emphasises that a comprehensive strategy to reduce poverty needs to have a major focus on young people. The wide gap between the Millennium Development Goals' targets and the current existence of poverty among young people calls for a substantial investment in young people. National Poverty Strategies need to be based on appropriate statistics that accurately reflect the situation young people are facing today. A comprehensive strategy to eliminate poverty needs to first identify the gap between present conditions and the poverty reduction target as expressed, for example, in the Millennium Development Goals.

Youth Participation in Poverty Reduction Strategies and National Development Plans (2009)

The desk study states that even though many national poverty reduction strategies mention the needs of young people, these strategies are often limited in their analysis of the situation of youth. Many national development plans lack the consideration of differences in young people's needs, priorities and opportunities. However, this desk review identifies that only seven countries have organised nationwide consultations of youth as part of national planning processes.

Tackling Poverty Together – the Role of Young People in Poverty Reduction

The overall aim of Tackling Poverty Together is to strengthen youth influence in the development and monitoring of work in poverty reduction Strategies. Each participating country has a “country team” which consists of representatives from various youth organisations. As part of the joint platform for capacity building, the country teams have gathered at regional workshops. These workshops have given the country teams a better capacity to work on a national scale, not least through sharing their best practices, and they have developed their advocacy skills and as a result influenced governments and international institutions.

training course called “Youth and PRSPs”. The e-course developed by UNDESA and the United Nation Population Fund (UNFPA) provided a Youth Perspective on the PRSPs and practical tools for how to create change. The participants also got to learn how to become key players in poverty reduction.

All country teams have participated in an Internet

Tackling Poverty Together has organised meetings and cooperation with, for instance, UN bodies and ministries, and this has opened up access to information and material essential to the youth organisations' work. Youth organisations from Malawi and Tanzania, as well as Sweden, have also taken an active part as experts at the World Bank.

AGENTS OF CHANGE

1

Country Team Zambia

The team has implemented school outreach activities in five districts; Lusaka, Choma, Ndola, Chipata and Solwezi, focusing on sensitizing young people on poverty reduction strategies and their role in these important processes. The team has a member that has a seat in the government that investigates issues of Youth, Sport and Child Affairs – it is through such forums that it has succeeded to advocate for its agenda of prioritizing young people’s participation in the development process.

2

Country Team Ghana

Team Ghana has created a nationwide network of 26 youth-serving organizations to achieve their goal of engaging young people in poverty reduction. Based on the country action plan the team has developed a guide to evaluate national youth policy. When completed, the publication will help young people across the country and youth-serving organisations to make input into national youth policy development.

3

Country Team Malawi

Country Team Malawi has conducted outreach activities in rural areas in Blantyre district to raise awareness of the PRSP and the Tackling Poverty Together project to many youth organisations at the local level. The team has been publicizing the TPT project concept with Embassies and private sector partners, but the most successful result was the commitment of a radio station (Zodiak Broadcasting station – ZBS) to allow the team to broadcast air programmes at half the normal price rate.

4

Country Team Tanzania

Country Team Tanzania has at the organisational level incorporated several activities which encompasses youth involvement in decision making systems and influencing change through working with local government authorities. Through their participation in district public Youth Forums, young people have had an opportunity to deliberate with local decision makers on issues concerning their development.



Country Team Kenya

Country Team Kenya has reached several new stake holders, in particular from the government i.e. Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, Ministry of Planning and the Vision 2030 secretariat, National Economic and Social Council. The Country Team Kenya has also sought to engage in a working relationship with UNFPA country office and has recently established a long-lasting partnership with UNDP personnel.



Country Team Liberia

The Liberia TPT Country Team has linked youth policy and poverty issues on youth highlighted in the PRS of Liberia. The team has been working closely with its Ministry of Youth to create and multiply a youth friendly version of the national PRSP. The team has also established contacts with mentors and experts in-country UN-agencies and governmental civil servants.



Country Team Uganda

Country Team Uganda has raised awareness about PRSP processes in 3 districts in Uganda; Mpigi, Lyantonde and Gulu through its member organisations operating in these districts. The team has also targeted the local governments of these districts. The team has established collaborative arrangements with Government Ministries and has managed to enhance the linkage between TPT and the Ministry for Gender and Youth Affairs. The team has also become a member of the African Youth Initiative on climate change.



Country Team Sweden

Other European Youth Councils have been reached through the European Youth Forum, where best practices of the TPT project have been shared as well as common work has been made through capacity building activities to advocate for a youth inclusion in PRSPs and MDGs on a European level. TPT Country Team Sweden also had joint cooperation with UNDP in an awareness raising activity on the Millennium Development Goals “Reaching out reaching our goals”.

*The UN
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