

UN YOUTH FLASH

>> SPECIAL <<

WORLD YOUTH REPORT 2003

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United Nations launches World Youth Report

Young people must be given the tools to be effective agents of social change, that is one of the main ideas in the World Youth Report 2003, which will be launched on 27 April by UNDESA.

The Report will be launched at a special festive meeting next Tuesday in the Dag Hammarskjöld Library Auditorium of the UN Secretariat building in New York, from 1:15 to 2:45 p.m. Besides various interpretive performances by young artists, there will be three speakers: Johan Schölvinn, Director of the Division for Social Policy and Development at UNDESA; Olli Saarela, Head of the Youth Policy Division of the Ministry of Education of Finland and Catherine Kamping, Chair of the youth caucus of the Commission for Sustainable Development.

JOIN US at the launch! People without a UN pass; to access the Secretariat building for the launch of the report, please contact Sylvie Pailler: pailler@un.org, +1 212 963 2791.

To read the press release, visit:
<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/wyr/documents/wyrrelease.pdf>

The World's 15 Priority Areas for Youth

The World Youth Report describes the situation of young people in fifteen areas of concern. The first ten areas were adopted by the General Assembly in 1995 in the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (WPAY). In 2003 the United Nations Economic and Social Council adopted five additional areas of concern.

The 15 priority areas:

1. Education
2. Employment
3. Hunger and Poverty

4. Health
5. Environment
6. Drugs
7. Juvenile Delinquency
8. Leisure
9. Gender
10. Participation
11. Globalization
12. Information and Communication Technology
13. HIV/AIDS
14. Armed Conflict
15. Intergenerational Issues

 Youth participation according to Gerison Landsdown

Gerison Landsdown is the author of chapter 10 of the World Youth Report 2003 on "Youth Participation in Decision-making". She was the director of the Children's Rights Office in London for eight years until 2000, and is currently working as an international child rights consultant. As a professional from the NGO-field, she is a specialist in advocating and promoting young people's rights.

1) In your chapter on youth participation you state that many key stakeholders support the value of youth participation by mouth, but not by action. What are (some of) the causes and how can we change this?

GL: The barriers to meaningful participation are considerable. Many countries lack democratic institutions and have no culture of political participation or effective processes through which people can engage in political dialogue. The problem is compounded for young people for whom there is too often a lack of respect for their capacities, and the value of their experience. There is an unwillingness to concede power to young people. Furthermore, young people are too often defined by or perceived only in terms of the problems they present - violence, HIV/AIDS, drugs, unemployment, sexual promiscuity. This 'deficit' model of youth can lead to an approach that relies on targeted interventions to change behaviour, rather than a partnership with young people themselves, in which policy is developed on the basis of their own assessment of priorities for action.

From the perspective of young people, this lack of respect for their reality and for their potential contribution towards the realization of their own rights and needs, can lead to a scepticism of politicians and formal democratic institutions. For example, across Europe, one finds a very low level of participation by young people in elections. And in countries where government is associated with corruption, human rights violations and a culture of impunity, it is difficult for young people to feel confidence in the value of participation.

Change is difficult but not impossible. There is a need for:
 - Legal frameworks which establish formal rights to participation across a range of institutions - in schools, in local government, etc. Building a

culture of democracy within the education system would serve both to strengthen young people's capacities in participation and to enhance understanding of the value of their active participation in creating effective learning environments.

- Improved training on human rights, and in particular, the right to participate, for many of the professionals who have contact with young people, for example, teachers, doctors, police, judges and politicians.
- Support for opportunities for young people to create their own spaces through which to develop their ideas, and strategies for achieving change. Young people need opportunities for communication and dialogue with the adult world, but also for dialogue and action amongst themselves.
- Political, educational, non-governmental organizations to recognize young people as stakeholders and to develop partnerships with them through they can become more accountable to young people.
- Greater access to all forms of media through which young people can communicate with each other but also to the adult world.

2) When talking about youth participation mechanisms, we very often talk about forms and instruments that adults use, e.g. youth councils, panels and forums, which are not always appealing to younger youth. What do you think?

GL: It is important to recognize that the formal structures designed for the political participation of adults can be unappealing to younger people. This is why it is necessary to create spaces where young people can meet together to evolve their own mechanisms for participation. In Nepal, for example, many of the child clubs, which are run by children and young people themselves, started out with the traditional hierarchical models of organization they observed in the adult world, but as they gained in confidence and skill, they began to explore alternative and more inclusive models which allowed greater levels of engagement by all the members of the club. A key factor in the changes is that their models are more informal and fun to participate in. Undoubtedly, for those adults who spend many hours every week in meetings, there is a great deal to learn from young people's alternative approaches!!

3) In the UK there is a serious debate about lowering the voting age to sixteen years, a special commission has reported on April 19th to the public and government. Is lowering the voting age a way to secure youth participation?

GL: There is a powerful case for lowering the voting age to 16 years. Not only would it represent an important public statement of recognition of younger people as citizens and contributing members of society, but the process of introducing the change would inevitably promote debate and argument which would give young people opportunities for engaging in political dialogue and for older people to hear their perspectives. However, on its own, it is unlikely to be a panacea for securing participation. Representative forms of democracy are only part of the story. The creation of a culture of participative democracy, through which real engagement is possible at all levels of young people's lives is also necessary. Young people need to believe not only that their views can be heard but that they will be taken seriously and that they can genuinely begin to influence outcomes that impact on their lives.

N.B.: you can read more about the debate and the recommendations of the UK Electoral Commission at: <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/> and <http://www.votesat16.org.uk>

4) What do you perceive to be the role of the United Nations in promoting youth participation?

GL: The UN can play an important role in supporting young people's participation through:

a) Building structures for partnerships with young people. For example, programming should engage young people at all stages - situation analysis, planning, programme design and implementation and monitoring and evaluation. In this way, programmes can begin not only to better reflect the critical issues facing and identified by young people themselves, but can provide opportunities for enhancing the visibility of young people and strengthening their capacities for effective participation.

b) Promoting an asset based and holistic model of youth, in which the strengths, skills and creativity of young people are emphasized, rather than problems they are seen to pose. In focusing on problems, governments fail to construct a vision of what they want for young people - rather they focus exclusively on how they want them to change. Policy is, accordingly, fragmented, negative and often punitive.

c) Using its powerful networks and contacts to build opportunities for young people to gain access to politicians, policy makers and the media. The arguments need to be made that young people's participation is not only a fundamental human right, but also an essential strategy for promoting the realization of all other rights. Furthermore, young people's participation is central to the process of building democratic institutions, promoting development and enhancing political and social security.

Thank you very much!

To order the World Youth Report

The World Youth Report 2003 is available electronically at:
<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/wyr/index.html> (PDF file) or for purchase from UN Publications at publications@un.org or 1-800-253-9646.

For further information on the World Youth Report, please contact:
youth@un.org

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UN Youth Flash is a free service of the UN Programme on Youth, of the Division for Social Policy and Development, within the Department for

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