

Growing Together: Youth and the Work of the United Nations

63rd session of the General Assembly: Side-event, 7th October 2008

Outcome Summary

On 7th October 2008, the United Nations Programme on Youth hosted the Interactive Discussion “Growing Together: Youth and the Work of the United Nations.”

The event was the New York launch of the publication *Growing Together: Youth and the Work of the United Nations*, and was aimed at garnering the views of Member States, UN entities and youth on the ways that the UN system could foster better collaboration in its efforts to promote youth development.

The event was attended by country delegates (including youth), UN entities, representatives of major global youth organisations, and representatives of other members of the NGO community.

The event featured a presentation of the publication *Growing Together*, as well as impromptu presentations by attending entities, on the work of the UN in the area of youth development. The event also included an interactive segment, in which participants were asked to address six (6) questions, within the context of the UN’s work with and for youth:

1. How do you envision the UN working collaboratively at headquarters level?
2. How do you envision the UN working collaboratively in the field?
3. How do you envision the UN working collaboratively within priority areas?
4. How do you envision the UN working collaboratively across priority areas?
5. How do you envision the UN working collaboratively with young people?
6. How do you envision the UN working collaboratively with Member States?

Working Collaboratively at Headquarters

Meeting participants commended the UN for some of the current efforts to work collaboratively within and beyond the system at the level of headquarters.

The development of goals and targets was highlighted as a best practice example, and it was noted that the bringing together of experts at headquarters has been excellent in encouraging high-level collaboration, and raising the visibility of the World Programme of Action on Youth within the wider development agenda. It was noted; however that greater follow through was necessary to make collaboration at this level meaningful.

Some ways to improve collaboration at this level were also discussed:

- Increased co-management and co-decision-making
- More youth participation in UN bodies
- More formal employment of youth at UN
- Mainstreaming youth sensitivity: Having representatives from all of the offices reporting to a coordinator for youth affairs who reports to an Under Secretary-General.
- Increased information sharing

Working Collaboratively in the Field

It was noted that UN work on youth in the field seems to be undertaken in a somewhat piecemeal fashion. As such the need for greater co-ordination among agencies, office, programmes and funds was highlighted. The following suggestions were issued:

- Closer collaboration with government agencies and NGOs, both in planning and implementation
- Expansion of the mandate and visibility of mechanisms such as the UNFPA – Youth Advisory Board, currently established in some countries. This should be linked to all UN agencies, National Youth Councils and similar structures.
- Establishing country-team offices organised around issues/priority areas

Working Collaboratively within Priority Areas

Participants noted that work within priority areas was at times duplicitous and seemingly fragmented. Greater information sharing was highlighted as the best means of promoting efficacy in programming on specific issues. The agreed upon rationale, was that greater awareness was needed among UN agencies, offices, programmes and funds, so as to encourage more co-ordinated collaborative activities.

Working Collaboratively across Priority Areas

In discussing UN work across priority areas, participants noted a need for more information sharing/awareness among the UN agencies so that the links across the agencies are addressed within programmes while each agency is still able to focus on its specific mandate.

Working Collaboratively with Young People

In discussing this question, participants addressed many cross-cutting issues, with marked focus on strengthening the presence and role of youth delegates within the General Assembly and other intergovernmental bodies, as well as both broadening and deepening UN outreach to youth organisations and young people in general.

Participants noted that efforts should be made to increase the percentage of member states bringing youth delegates to the General Assembly and the functional Commissions of ECOSOC. To facilitate this end, it was recommended that there be more information sharing among countries about the various selection processes for youth delegates, and the role(s) these individuals play within country delegations. In promoting increased numbers of youth delegates, it was suggested that there be central coordination of youth delegate selection efforts, so as to better facilitate fund-raising efforts to support youth delegates for countries for whom financing is a problem. Participants suggested working along with relevant agencies such as UNICEF to ensure that all youth delegates are democratically selected. It was also noted that the national role of youth delegates was also important, and there needed to be greater accountability of youth delegates at the country level.

Participants also noted a need to widen the scope of UN outreach to youth, while simultaneously deepening, or detailing, this outreach so that it is tailored to local needs. Increased use of ICT was a major point of discussion, with suggestions for more youth-focussed conferences/meetings that use ICT to involve youth who may have travel/visa problems. Also discussed was the prospect of creating an interactive forum for youth where problems and solutions can be discussed. In similar vein, there was also a call for decentralisation of UN meetings to enable more varied participation, and the need to involve small, locally focused organisations in programmes and decisions with a local focus. Also discussed was the need to encourage grass-roots youth organisations to attend international gatherings.

Capacity-building for youth organisations was also discussed as highly significant. Within this discussion much emphasis was placed on the African continent, and the magnified importance of empowering youth in this context. It was deemed imperative that the UN system work together to strengthen grass-roots youth organisations both structurally and substantively and support the development of new organisations. It was noted that UN support should focus primarily on democratic practices and transparency and accountability within youth organisations, regardless of size. Participants here discussed using country offices or specific coordinators to vet youth organisations seeking ECOSOC accreditation.

Emphasis was also placed on the need to seek youth input, and to target youth energy. Participants suggested targeting youth experts on social development issues when they are being addressed at the international level. Similarly, there was a call for greater institutionalisation and better organisation of Youth Caucuses, and a suggestion for specialised consultative meetings with youth NGOs.

Working with Member States

In working with Member States, participants highlighted the need to pay attention to democracy and youth, in ensuring that youth are fully involved in the democratic system of their various countries. One suggested way of reaching this end was having UN entities working more directly with the Ministries directly responsible for youth in the various countries.

Also noted was the need to encourage Member States to have more youth participation at the international level. It was suggested that Member States could be encouraged to bolster their capacities for youth participation through public-private partnership. Participants noted that it needs to be made more evident to Member States that youth are a UN priority, by making youth participation in delegations a priority, or even mandatory.

Follow Up

Suggestions from this meeting will be discussed among the participating agencies of the fledgling United Nations Youth Development Network, to begin refining and/or expanding on these ideas to solidify a systemic approach to social development with and for youth.