

Summary of the Panel Discussion
"Working with Young People on Common Goals"
Monday, 14 February 2005 (10.00 a.m.)
Conference Room 4

In 1995, the General Assembly adopted the World Programme of Action for Youth, making commitments to develop policies and programmes for youth development to the year 2000 and beyond. Young people worldwide are involved in consultative activities to evaluate the progress achieved in 10 years. Two consultative meetings were organized by the UN Secretariat with representatives of youth organizations, one in Coimbra, Portugal, from 31 January to 3 February 2005, and the second in New York, from 14 to 17 February 2005.

The panel discussion that took place in New York during the 43rd session of the Commission for Social Development highlighted the youth development agenda of the World Programme of Action for Youth as well as its linkages to the Millennium Development Goals and internationally agreed targets.

Presentations

Mr. Johan Schölvink (Director, Division for Social Policy and Development, DESA) presented the main findings of the Secretary-General's World Youth Report 2005 and its recommendations to the General Assembly, as contained in document A/60/61-E/2005/7. While some progress has been achieved in a number of the priority areas, the report demonstrates that the current generation of young people is facing ever more complex challenges. The report recommended a need for intensified commitment and investment in the child-focused Millennium Development Goals, which will have enormous benefits for the young people in 2015. Governments should see young people as partners in achieving these goals. To formulate better policies and to evaluate progress achieved, a set of verifiable indicators should be developed. At its sixtieth session, the General Assembly may consider requesting the Secretariat to develop a suitable set of indicators, which could be used by Governments and other actors to measure progress achieved by 2015.

Mr. Joao Salviano (bureau member, European Youth Forum) participated in the consultative meeting held in Coimbra, Portugal. He presented some of the views and recommendations that were put forward by the youth representatives during that meeting including the need for interagency collaboration in the United Nations on youth related issues coordinated by the United Nations Programme on Youth. National action plans for youth should be established in order to develop strategies on how to implement the priorities agreed upon at the national level. For this to work, it is advisable that governments encourage the creation of autonomous and independent national youth councils. The Coimbra meeting reaffirmed the need for more youth representatives to be involved in activities of the UN system, and suggested creating a method of co-management between youth NGOs and the United Nations.

Ms Renata Florentino (Co-coordinator, Brazil Youth Voices) participated in the consultative meeting held in New York. She presented her work at the national level on evaluating the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth, using the "Making Commitments Matter" toolkit produced by the UN Secretariat (DSPD/DESA). She highlighted the establishment of an inter-ministerial group for youth and the convening of the first National Conference on Youth which brought 4000 young people together. She also informed the Commission about the work currently underway in Brazil to establish a National Youth Secretariat and National Youth Council. She mentioned her concern about the lack of data

specifically focusing on youth; such data is imperative to policy planning and formulation. Further, she emphasized the need for the greater civil society participation. Young people should be major partners for development. In Brazil, UN offices work with civil society and the Government on various youth issues. The UNESCO office created a Youth Development Index, which is comparable to the Human Development Index. The World Bank moderates a dialogue between the Government and youth organizations. Brazil is a lead country of the Youth Employment Network, in which employers, employees and youth organizations participate as real partners. The UNDP office in Brazil is planning a Youth Leadership Summit to mobilize young people to get involved in the Millennium Development Goals.

Mr. Guido Schmidt-Traub (Policy Adviser, the Millennium Project) presented some of the implementation strategies required to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, with particular emphasis on the need to engage social groups, such as youth. The agenda of the World Programme of Action for Youth fits the agenda of the Millennium Development Goals. He highlighted those issues embodied in Millennium Development Goals that aim to improve the global situation of young people, such as the important focus on education. Besides a focus on primary education, secondary and tertiary education should be addressed. Governments should be bold and pro-active to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers should be in line with achieving the goals. Civil society in general and youth organizations in particular has an important role to play. Developed countries should fulfill commitments to make resources available. Further, there is a need for more investment in a better data collection, while data should be disaggregated by gender and age. There is a lack of trained professionals in various fields needed to scale up development. This year may be considered a “make or break” year regarding the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and establishment of a global partnership for social development.

Discussion

During the discussion that followed the presentations, speakers addressed a number of pertinent issues. One delegate asked which issues governments should address on a priority basis to promote youth development. Mr. Salviano responded that, although youth issues will differ in each country, education is a priority area to all. The important thing for Governments is to collaborate with youth organizations to set their national youth development agenda.

Another delegate acknowledged the importance of the Millennium Development Goals, but also drew attention to the commitments made by Governments during other world conferences and summits. Regarding the five new priority areas, attention should also go to youth affected by natural disasters. Mr. Salviano explained the perspective of the participants to the Coimbra meeting on the five new priority areas. Globalization and its social impact was identified as a cross cutting issue that should not be mentioned separately, but in relationship to all priority areas. Volunteerism was identified as a priority issue by itself that should be added to the list.

Delegates also wished to receive more information on how decisions will be made regarding indicators to measure progress. Mr. Smidt-Traub stated that the discussion on indicators is ongoing, although the general consensus currently is that the list should not be extended much further. The Millennium Project encourages Governments to set national goals and adjust data collection accordingly.

The issue of the globalization of the media was raised, with images and messages that expose many young people to consumption patterns unaffordable to them. Mr. Schölvinck responded that in certain cases the messages popularized by the media are not necessarily

positive, but there is no simplified solutions in this area. For instance, real progress has been made by banning the advertisement of alcohol and tobacco. Mr. Smidt-Traub added that the media can be constructive, and referred to the emerging discussion on international development in the media as positive. Mr. Salviano added that the media should assist in spreading the voices of youth.

Another delegate addressed the link between youth at risk and the family. She referred to research that young people growing up in a family with both a mother and father are less engaged in risky behaviour and do better in school. Mr. Salviano responded that it is more important to look at how the family can be involved in youth development, not matter how it is composed. Mr. Schölvinnck added that Governments cannot create family structures for people. They should focus on how best to assist young people in existing situations.

Various delegates raised questions on youth employment. One asked the panel how to address the problem of youth unemployment, especially among women. Another raised the need to include the private sector in youth employment strategies. A third mentioned various projects running in his country that involve young people in unpaid and paid unemployment. His Government, for example, had established a National Promotion Fund to sponsor and support youth employment. Ms Florentino stated that youth can create their own jobs and asked the Governments to be supportive in that regard. Mr. Schölvinnck said that one of the focuses of the Youth Employment Network is to develop entrepreneurship. Governments should assist young people in starting up their own businesses. Mr. Smidt-Traub said that youth unemployment and the involvement of the private sector are interlinked, and Governments should strive to create conditions for greater job creation, including addressing such issues as the rule of law, property rights and infrastructure.

One delegate stated that the issue of the positive potential of young people was somewhat missing in the presentations. Volunteerism offers an opportunity for youth to contribute to society. He expressed concern with the term “youth at risk”. Being young does not necessarily mean being in a dangerous period in life; rather, it is a very exciting period of growth into independence.

One delegate stressed the importance of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for youth and their competitiveness in the global market. Mr. Smidt-Traub agreed that ICTs are critical to national development. Without access to ICTs it is difficult to participate in the global economy and it is more difficult to deliver services to people, including health services. Governments should support greater investment in new technologies, including through greater private investment.

One delegate observed that all panelists stressed the need for a dialogue between Governments and civil society. In his country, youth are directly involved in the Government: the Minister for Youth Affairs is only 27 years old. Young people are highly represented in the national and local governing bodies. The National Youth Council is involved in policy making from conceptualization to implementation. Ms Florentino provided examples of how young people can be partners for development. Young people can be involved in training for capacity building, in projects on the ground and in local youth councils. Mr. Salviano stated that through non-formal education, young people can help to raise awareness among their peers about issues of importance. “If you give young people the opportunity to participate, they will grab it.”