

# Part I

## INTRODUCTION



# INTRODUCTION

## ABOUT THE WORLD PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR YOUTH

### ■ How is youth defined?

Youth generally refers to the transition period from childhood to adulthood. Though variations exist in the circumstances, difficulties, and culture of young people around the world, the physical, psychological, intellectual and emotional changes are universal. The United Nations and this Guide define youth as all people aged 15 to 24 years old, though each country may define youth according to its unique situation. For the purposes of this guide, “youth” and “young people” are used interchangeably.

### ■ What is the World Programme of Action for Youth?

The World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) is a blueprint for national action and international support to foster conditions and mechanisms to promote improved well-being and livelihood among young people.

The WPAY covers fifteen priority areas: education, employment, poverty and hunger, the environment, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, leisure-time activities, health, girls and young women, HIV/AIDS, information and communications technology, inter-generational issues, armed conflict, the mixed impact of globalization, and the full and effective participation of youth in society and in decision-making.

In each of these areas, the Programme looks in depth at the nature of the complex challenges and presents proposals for action. The WPAY thus seeks to assist governments in responding to the aspirations and demands of youth for a better future for all.

These priority areas are interrelated and intrinsically linked. For example, juvenile delinquency and drug abuse are often direct consequences of insufficient opportunities for education, employment and participation. Education for girls and young women can delay the age of marriage and first birth, thus decreasing maternal mortality. Investing in one area affects other areas of the programme of action as well thereby creating a multiplier effect in the lives of young people. United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan has urged Governments to take the World Programme’s recommendations seriously, and to work together with young people for its implementation.

The WPAY’s 15 priority areas are grouped into three clusters of issues in which young people grow up and become active members of their societies. Taken together, the clusters form a comprehensive environment for young people, despite differences in cultures, societies and communities. The three clusters are described as: (a) youth in the global economy, including the issues of hunger and poverty,

education, employment, and globalization; (b) youth and their well-being, encompassing the priority areas of health, drug abuse, girls and young women, delinquency, conflict and HIV/AIDS; and (c) youth in civil society, related to concerns of information and communication technologies, environment, leisure, participation in decision-making and inter-generational relations.

## Youth in the Global Economy

**Poverty and hunger:** Over 200 million young people, or 18 per cent of all youth, live on less than one dollar a day, and 515 million on less than two dollars a day. Data on income poverty do not accurately capture the situation of youth. Youth experience poverty not only through financial limitations, but also through limitations in access to public services and non-fulfilment of, and a lack of protection of fundamental human rights. Poverty is inextricably linked to a lack of access to or control over resources, including land, skills, knowledge, capital and social connections. Without these resources, people have limited access to institutions, markets, employment and public services. Hunger and malnutrition remain among the most serious and intractable threats to humanity, often preventing youth and children from taking part in society.

**Education:** Though progress has been achieved in enrolment in primary, secondary and tertiary education, challenges still remain. Many parents in developing countries are still unable to send their children to school because of local social and economic conditions. A paucity of educational opportunities persists for girls and young women, migrants and refugees, displaced persons, street children, indigenous youth, young people in rural areas and young people with disabilities. Though the current generation of youth is the best-educated so far, the quality of education and its capacity to prepare young people for the labour market are major concerns.

**Employment:** Despite the fact that youth are receiving more years of education, youth unemployment has increased to record levels and youth are two to three times as likely as adults to be unemployed. The youth unemployment rates are highest in sub-Saharan Africa and in the Middle East and North Africa regions. The difficulties young people face in finding suitable employment with a decent income are compounded by other problems including illiteracy, insufficient training and the difficult transition from school to the job market.

**Globalization:** Youth are perhaps best able to adapt to and make use of new opportunities offered by globalization. Though some parts of the world have seen unprecedented growth as a result of the integration of economies and societies, the benefits of globalization are unbalanced. Negative and positive trends characterize globalization's impact on youth employment opportunities and on migration patterns. Globalization has also led to deep changes in youth culture and consumerism, and in new manifestations of global youth citizenship and activism.

## Youth and Their Well-Being

**Health:** Health problems of young people include the lack of safe and sanitary living environments, malnutrition, risk of infectious, parasitic and water-borne diseases, the consumption of tobacco, and unwarranted risk-taking and destructive activity resulting in injury. In many countries, there is a lack of information and services available to help youth understand their sexuality and prevent the spread of HIV. Although early pregnancy has declined in many countries, its dangers and potential complications are still of concern.

**HIV/AIDS:** Ten million young people currently live with HIV/AIDS, mostly in Africa and Asia. Poverty, the lack of essential information to protect themselves, stigma, access to education and gender inequality are just a few of the elements that fuel the vulnerability of youth. Young women and girls are particularly at risk and disproportionately serve as caregivers when families and communities are devastated by HIV/AIDS.

**Youth in armed conflict:** Despite the international legal framework to protect minors and prevent their engagement in conflict situations, youth are still recruited as combatants, or forced labour, and young women and girls are vulnerable to being targeted for sexual violence or exploitation. While most youth avoid engaging in violence (even in conflict prone areas), young people are both the victims and perpetrators in times of insecurity and instability. Whatever their role, exposure to conflict can deprive young people of educational, social, economic, and socialization opportunities.

**Drug abuse:** There has been an unprecedented increase in drug abuse and addiction among youth worldwide, mostly in recreational settings. The consequences of drug abuse are widespread and range from violence to accidents and injury. Intravenous substance abuse raises the risk of communicable diseases, including HIV/AIDS and hepatitis.

**Juvenile delinquency:** Delinquency committed by youth continues to be perceived as a threat to society. However, most young offenders do not commit violent crime but participate in less serious offences such as graffiti, petty theft, or nuisance behaviour. There are myriad elements that may fuel youth delinquency ranging from economic downturns and high unemployment to early exposure to violence in their communities or in the family.

**Girls and young women:** Equal access to higher education and labour markets continues to be a concern in some countries, while negative stereotypes of women continue to be perpetuated. With limited access to justice, social services or law enforcement to address the issue, gender based violence continues to invade every economic level and social strata; its persistence threatens the ability of women and girls to live without fear and pursue their dreams in a safe and secure environment.

**Participation in decision-making:** The past decade has seen a growing recognition of the importance of youth participation in decision-making. Greater involvement of youth in the home, school and the community not only benefits their socio-economic environment but also builds their own capacity and contributes to their personal growth. The voices and participation of youth are vital to the implementation of the WPAY as a whole.

**Information and communication technology:** The proliferation of ICT that has accompanied the process of globalization has presented both opportunities, particularly in the areas of participation, employment and education, as well as challenges for young people. Though youth in many countries make up the majority of users of internet technology, there are still disparities in access between urban and rural youth, between young women and men, as well as within and between countries.

**Leisure:** The last decade has seen a growing recognition of the role of leisure time in the promotion of social inclusion, in defining young people's identities, and in exploring their culture. Leisure time should not just be an element in the lives of privileged youth as this time enhances personal growth and the well-being of communities. Many youth devote their time to volunteering, educating their peers, and making a difference in their societies.

**Environment:** Young people have demonstrated a consistent concern and often have proved to be leaders advocating for the environmental integrity of their communities. Knowing that the quality of their environment is vital to their health and opportunity, youth have highlighted sustainable development at the local, national, and international levels and have initiated the adoption of sound environmental practices.

**Inter-generational relations:** In the context of global ageing, the share of youth in the world's total population is gradually shrinking while the share of those over 60 grows. Youth development today should increasingly be viewed as integral to the welfare of older generations as, by 2050, 8 in every 10 older persons will be living in a developing country (compared with 6 in every 10 in 2005).

### How did the World Programme of Action for Youth come about?

The United Nations has long recognized that the successful passage to adulthood of young women and men is vital for the continuing development of the societies in which they live. This was acknowledged in 1965 by the Member States of the UN when they endorsed the Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples.

Two decades later, the call by the UN General Assembly for the observance of the 1985 International Youth Year: Participation, Development and Peace drew international attention to the important role young people play in the world, and, in particular, their potential contribution to development and the goals of the United Nations Charter.



That same year, the General Assembly also endorsed the guidelines for further planning and suitable follow-up in the field of youth, focusing on young people as a broad category comprising various subgroups, rather than a single demographic entity. In 1995, on the tenth anniversary of International Youth Year, the United Nations strengthened its commitment to young people by directing the international community's response to the challenges of youth into the next millennium. It did this by adopting an international strategy—the World Programme of Action for Youth—to address more effectively the problems of young men and women and to increase opportunities for their participation in society.

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

### ■ Why this action Guide?

The World Programme of Action for Youth encourages governments to be more responsive to the aspirations and needs of youth to usher in a better world. Young people in all countries are both a major human resource for development and key agents for social change, economic development and technological innovation. Recognizing and addressing the special needs of young people and their right to enjoy fundamental human rights and freedoms will influence current social and economic conditions and the livelihoods and well-being of future generations.

There is a need for new impetus to be given to the design and implementation of youth policies and programmes at all levels. While there are many publications that provide a deeper understanding of the obstacles and challenges to improving the lives of youth, this guide provides recommendations and ideas for concrete action for the people who make and carry out policies and programmes that affect the everyday realities and struggles of youth. However, readers should note that the ideas and recommendations contained in the guide are not to be interpreted as fit for all countries, all youth, or all situations. Local circumstances should always be taken into account.

### ■ For whom is this Guide written?

The General Assembly has called on governments to base initiatives regarding youth on the agreed international strategy of the World Programme of Action for Youth. The target audience of this action guide is: government ministries, parliamentarians, agencies that serve youth, and local and regional governments.

In addressing this audience, the Guide also refers to the role of the main stakeholders, such as civil society, the media, the private sector, parents, the international community and, of course, youth themselves.

## ■ **How is this Guide organized?**

This Guide seeks to improve the situation of young people and enhance their participation in various dimensions of society. It is based on the agreed upon actions in the WPAY and is divided into the three clusters that reflect the challenges youth encounter across borders and cultures. It is important to note that the sections of the WPAY are interrelated and are dependent on each other.

The content of each section of text moves from examining the concept of each priority area and how it is experienced by youth, to methods and specific policies that can enhance the enjoyment of rights, opportunities, and the quality of life of young men and women. For each area of the WPAY, the most relevant “how to” questions are asked and then responded to in detail; this format was chosen because it would have the most practical resonance with policy makers.

Though most of the actions and recommendations are directed towards governments, their design, implementation and evaluation are all dependent on the participation of other stakeholders, chiefly: youth, civil society, the private sector, parents, United Nations agencies and donors and the international community. Thus it is important for all these actors to read the action guide as investing in youth calls for cooperation, institutional support and vital partnerships across society and the different spheres of governance.

This book draws from many guidelines, tools, standards, and research developed by the United Nations, non-governmental organizations, and academic institutions, as well as the input of youth. As some areas will be more of a priority depending on the local context, sources listed at the end of the text can guide those who wish to explore particular issues in more detail.

## **ABOUT YOUTH POLICY AND PROGRAMMES**

### ■ **Why is investing in youth important?**

Investing in youth is a highly strategic and cost-effective answer to the development challenges of today, including the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Information on the current investment in youth is scattered and dispersed; sometimes it is hard to pin down as data on funding and spending is typically divided into the two categories of children and adults while interventions may lack continuity. However, we do know that investing in youth is a commitment not only to their well-being but to the economic, social and cultural health of communities everywhere.

Today’s global youth population, ranging in age from 15 to 24 years, is over one billion strong, or 18 per cent of the people inhabiting the earth, and the majority of these young men and women live in developing countries. The challenges are clear: 200 million youth live on less than US\$1 a day, 130 million are illiterate, more than 10 million live with HIV, and 95 million are unemployed. However, United Nations



Member States and United Nations Agencies increasingly recognize the importance of investing in youth. This Guide supports the call to scale up the investment in youth so that they have the proper resources, information and opportunities to realize their full potential.

## ■ How can sound programmes for youth promote and respect their rights?

A combination of factors is required to create an enabling environment for the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth. First, it starts with ensuring the full enjoyment by young people of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. It also requires that government take effective action against violations of these rights and freedoms and promote non-discrimination, tolerance, respect for diversity and for the various religious and ethical values, cultural backgrounds and philosophical convictions of young people, equality of opportunity, security and participation of all young women and men.

The social development of young people can be viewed from a rights-based perspective. The human rights framework at large, ranging from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Declaration on the Right to Development to a large number of International Labour Organization conventions dealing with labour standards related to young persons, contains ample evidence of the concern expressed by the international community for the rights of young people. The rights of young women and men to education, employment and health have been declared in a variety of international instruments and programmes of action; the needs of specific groups of youth, such as urban youth, rural youth, students, young workers and youth with disabilities have also been articulated. The right to development is an essential component of the youth development process and is directly related to the other rights mentioned above.

When designing policies that affect the lives and experiences of youth, the following elements of the rights-based approach should be kept in mind<sup>1</sup>:

- Express linkages to rights
- Accountability and rule of law
- Empowerment
- Participation and inclusion
- Non-discrimination and attention to vulnerable groups

<sup>1</sup> More about this rights-based approach is available at: <http://www.unhcr.ch/development/approaches-04.html>

While some human rights obligations call on government to refrain from doing things that impinge on the rights of individuals, many others claim that governments should take positive steps such as *protecting* vulnerable people and *providing* services that go beyond legislative measures. However, this process of prioritizing and developing new programmes can be difficult in settings with severe resource constraints. Often, devoting resources to one area necessarily implies sacrificing in others. However, it is also vital to remember that not every policy or programme requires great investments as some of the most successful can be low-cost, targeted initiatives.

Thus, whatever the stage of a country's development, there are always steps that can be taken immediately. One approach enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights calls on governments to take measures "to the maximum of its available resources, with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of the rights recognized in the present Covenant..."<sup>2</sup> This call acknowledges that there may be limited physical, human and financial resources for programmes and activities, but at the same time recognizes the importance of the rights framework and the process and partnerships needed to move forward towards achieving the full spectrum of rights. Setting benchmarks in relation to these obligations is useful because they can be tailored to a specific context while holding firmly to a foundation of these universal rights, their indivisibility, and the responsibility to monitor their fulfillment.

## ■ Why should there be a national youth strategy?

A national youth strategy represents a vision that helps to ensure public engagement, sets the rules of the game and defines clear roles for the vital participation of all levels of government as well as other necessary actors. (See Part II for a description of the roles of those who take part in the process of implementing the WPAY.) The formation, articulation and implementation of this strategy should be an inclusive process to establish high levels of participation, to create a general consensus on the vision, and most importantly, to take into account the needs of youth.

One way to integrate and carry out such a strategy is through mainstreaming. Countries should consider mainstreaming youth into national policy agendas to bring issues important to young people, especially those that have often not received the visibility they deserve, into relevant core planning and decision-making processes. Many issues that are vital to youth have suffered from a chronic lack of attention, and mainstreaming works to consistently raise awareness among the public and policy makers. Mainstreaming can serve as an effective tool in strengthening the collection of data across sectors and can also include opinions and views that have remained on the periphery or have been previously excluded altogether from the policy dialogue. Serving to increase the responsiveness of government to the needs and challenges of youth, mainstreaming can highlight these issues in programmes, budgets, laws, and throughout the policy formation process.

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<sup>2</sup> see article 2(1) ICESCR

## ■ What are the ten steps in designing effective youth policy?

Many countries have established youth policies, using the World Programme of Action for Youth as a guide. In this process, it is imperative to note that the WPAY mentions that governments and youth organizations should promote an “active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programmes”. In the process of formulating any youth policy, specifically a national plan, governments and other stakeholders may consider the following guidelines:

- **1. Participation for an inclusive process:** involve and empower all stakeholders right from the beginning in the design, implementation and evaluation of youth policy. The participation of youth, NGOs, all related government departments and levels, as well as United Nations agencies can contribute to the success of the policy. The participation of these actors facilitates the creation of a policy that best fits the needs and capacities of youth as a distinct population group, and helps to foster support and understanding of the policy objectives, which are necessary for the implementation.
- **2. Know the situation and conduct a needs analysis:** make profiles of the development situation of young people in your country. The priority areas for youth development contained in the WPAY could serve as a means for organizing this analysis. As the design of youth policy should aim at ensuring the full enjoyment by young people of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, these principles should also inform the analysis of the situation of youth. To sketch an accurate picture of the situation to influence youth policy, it is vital to open a meaningful dialogue with youth on the questions that affect their lives, from the initial planning stages of policy through monitoring and evaluation. In conducting a needs analysis, it is important to make distinctions according to age, sex, rural/urban, education level and family income to identify the most vulnerable groups and to set priorities accordingly. Frequently, data on funding and spending is divided into the two categories of children and adults; tracking the financial resources devoted specifically to youth can improve the impact of the investment.
- **3. Define vulnerable groups:** as part of the needs assessment and situation analysis, determine what groups of youth live in vulnerable situations created by either current circumstances, political conditions or long histories of social exclusion and discrimination. The WPAY and international standards of human rights apply to all people equally, but to meaningfully commit to this principle, policy makers should determine if there are youth who are invisible to existing services or whose needs are not reflected in the national youth policy itself. In some cases, ignoring these groups can impede national economic growth in the long run. Capturing the situation of vulnerable youth can sometimes require expanded data collection.
- **4. Understand your resources:** know what you have and what you need to invest in youth by making a profile of the available and the needed resources in the country that are specific to youth. Resources may include policies, programmes and financial means of the government, NGOs, youth organizations and private initiatives, as well

as existing networks, expertise and legal frameworks. Resources also describe the time and energy of different institutions and branches of government devoted to youth. Defining resources also involves examining less tangible elements such as factors which hinder access to services such as poor information, unaffordability, and the trust between youth and service providers. Above all, resources are determined by budgetary allocation. It is necessary to compare the actual needs of young people to the stock of available resources and to make sure costs of policy are taken into account in local and national budgets.

**5. Establish a budget allocated for implementation of youth policy:** even though youth policy is a cross-sectoral development field that requires action within several departments, ministries and agencies, it is central that the established lead agency have a specific budget for youth policy implementation that can be distributed by responsible actors. Failing in this role may lead to a loss of motivation from all the actors, including youth groups, involved in designing and drafting the vision of the youth policy.

**6. Learn from past experience:** study past successes and failures. Knowledge of what works should be documented and a repository of good practices established; good practices are ways of doing things that have proven effective in one situation and may have applicability in another. Many governments have developed successful policies and run a variety of youth development projects. This research and expertise should be made available to all parts of government. The exchange of experiences can reach beyond the scope of government and may also include civil society and youth organizations.

**7. Develop a clear vision to implement youth policy:** develop a national action plan based on the needs of youth and the available budget. The national plan or youth policy should be known and understood on the national and local levels to create the necessary political and societal commitment. National policies and programmes may need to be translated to the regional and/or local level, and directed to the specific needs of youth in that area. Establishing and maintaining communication channels improves relationships with beneficiaries and with those who are implementing the policy. These channels can facilitate dissemination of information, but they also exist as a two-way street; experiences from 'the field' can enrich a government's understanding of the situation of youth. Political commitment is also necessary to successfully adopt and enact a national youth policy. Advocacy and outreach are necessary to inform citizens of new programmes and of existing legislation that affect their well-being.

**8. Create an institutional structure conducive to implementation of youth policy:** establish a lead agency (or focal points in different government ministries) as part of an effective structure to coordinate youth policies. Youth development implies a cross-sectoral approach. A lead agency creates coherence between implemented policies and programmes and ensures coordination between departments and

ministries; for example, some programmes may require the collaboration of the ministries of justice, education, and labour. The agency can be a ministry or a department within a ministry with an aim of coordinating the activities on youth matters in order to secure the effective integration of youth policy into national development planning.

**9. Engage in partnerships for action:** though most youth-oriented policies are led by governments, their design, implementation and evaluation are all dependent on the participation of other stakeholders, chiefly: youth, civil society, the private sector, parents, and sometimes UN agencies and donors, and the international community. Cooperation, institutional support and partnerships contribute to forming more solid investments in youth. Partnerships should be guided by the goal of promoting youth themselves as valuable assets and effective partners. See Part II for more information on partnerships.

**10. Increase knowledge and design better programmes through monitoring and evaluation:** redefine goals and objectives according to new trends and needs in young people's lives and according to the achievements and shortcomings of existing programmes. Monitoring may be defined as the routine tracking of priority information about a programme and its intended outcomes, while evaluation is the set of activities designed to determine a programme's effect or value. Youth can benefit from participating in these exercises. Specific questions related to the needs and aspirations of youth should be included in population censuses or national surveys. In addition, qualitative indicators concerning perceptions, attitudes and aspirations could be developed through special surveys and studies. ●