

Part II

The Need for



PARTNERSHIPS

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WHAT IS THE ROLE OF PARTNERSHIPS IN FULFILLING THE WPAY?

Only with the commitment of governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental entities at the national, regional and international levels, will the World Programme of Action for Youth be “more than a global statement of intent and general standard for action.” (A/RES/50/81 13 March 1996). Political leadership is intrinsic to the process of marshalling support for partnerships that work to fulfil the vision of the WPAY and carry out the projects and programmes presented in this Guide.

The strategies for implementation of the WPAY discussed here should be led by government but are designed to engage all stakeholders. Governments are responsible for the safety and health of their citizens and should ensure that actions are comprehensive and far-reaching with effective coordination among the relevant actors. Sustained government involvement in youth development should complement the capacity of other actors, such as civil society organizations involved in youth programmes, to avoid duplication, fragmented actions or initiatives with insufficient capital or human resources.

Inclusive policy planning to implement the World Programme of Action for Youth requires more than just consultation with young people and other relevant stakeholders. Governments should consider reforming structures and institutions so that policy makers can maintain communication with national and local actors and establish the means to engage communities and listen to their views. When looking at institutional reform it is necessary to refrain from simply tacking youth on to existing efforts. Profound change for youth is dependent on altering organizational frameworks.

Before launching a programme or designing a policy affecting youth, it is necessary to clearly identify the roles of all who will take part in the process. Choosing the leaders and groups that are important in implementing a certain aspect of the WPAY, whether they are parents, civil society, the private sector or a specific ministry, is an important first step toward creating effective policies for youth. Although the selection of principal actors in policy making may differ across contexts, these partners play critical roles in addressing the concerns and challenges of young people.

All principal partners overviewed below have a role in the actions and recommendations discussed in Parts III through V of this Guide.

■ **Parliamentarians**

Parliamentarians and other elected officials are leaders in society. They have the mandate, moral obligation and public trust to act in the interests of their constituents and they bear a special responsibility to set examples that spur others into action, especially young people. They enact laws, mediate conflicting interests and engage in

debate to establish priorities. Legislative control over national resources and the power to set agendas and determine budgets needed to secure progress underscore the imperative of political leadership.

National legislation accompanied by adequate funding with the corresponding rules and administrative measures are needed to implement the WPAY. There is often a discrepancy between the many commendable policy initiatives and the financial capacity to implement them. At other times, financing is adequate and districts are without the human resource capacity for programmes or materials for service provision. Legislators should be aware of the potential shortcomings that come in many forms which, in effect, can detract from the positive intent of legislation. It is both useful and necessary to overcome capacity deficits through partnerships with the private sector or civil society, community leaders, and young people themselves.

Many governments now actively promote decentralisation as part of their policies and development programmes through new legislation and the augmentation of local powers. However, this transfer of responsibilities is not always met by the necessary local resources or training. Even when the resources are present, the capacity to deliver might not be there. Parliamentarians and government ministries therefore have a vital role to play in providing a supportive national framework to encourage and enable both regional and local authorities to efficiently administer policies that are responsive to the challenges and aspirations of youth.

■ **Government Ministries and Agencies**

Government ministries and agencies carry the ultimate responsibility for administering policies and programmes that affect youth. To do this, they must develop tools to support data collection, opinion polls and other reporting systems on youth and the fulfillment of their rights and opportunities. Their research capacity and ability to conduct needs assessments and to monitor and evaluate the impact of existing legislation and policies are essential to effective programmes. It is also important for government ministries and agencies to have the structures in place to translate a national youth policy to the local and regional levels (governments should consider the establishment of a Ministry of Youth).

Ministries often do not administer programmes that focus specifically on young people; instead, youth are mainstreamed into generalized planning. When youth are addressed in planning, it is sometimes assumed that the benefits will trickle down to them when a whole community is targeted. In order to promote societies that are fully inclusive of youth, ministries are responsible for determining the most appropriate course of action, such as deciding whether a mainstreamed or more targeted approach will yield the best results. Relevant issues important to young people that may merit targeting include: the incorporation of rural youth into employment/training programmes, addressing the prevalence of young women in the informal sector, and increasing the opportunities for young women in higher education.



Government funding, channelled through ministries, can be limited by mandates, a lack of funds, human resources, or expertise. When there doesn't seem to be a government agency with the appropriate qualifications to successfully carry out a specific project or programme, it may be necessary to explore agreements with the other actors who possess the appropriate expertise or to create inter-agency collaboration. For maximum impact and to guarantee equality of access to services, commitments to strengthen and expand the coverage of institutions should be considered in the cost of programmes and legislation.

Important to both a parliamentarian's and a ministry's ability to set and carry out good programmes and policies is the establishment of mechanisms to engage youth and their organizations and to listen and be responsive to their views. This process should be conducted with equity in mind. If for example, a youth advisory board is set up by the Ministry of Health to guide positive messages and outreach strategies, the youth selected should represent a cross-section of the country's youth.

Governments should also bring together the relevant stakeholders and ensure that young people's needs are met either by government agencies, through partnership, or by others, such as civil society or the private sector.

■ Local Government

Local governments are closest to the neighbourhoods and communities in which their citizens live and are often the most visible to youth. They therefore have an indispensable role in fostering the inclusion of young people into society.

Local governments are immediately responsible for upholding the rights of youth, ensuring community cohesion, a healthy environment, a good quality of life, and sustaining social and economic development. Local governments must provide political leadership and a vision for the future for both individuals and civil society organizations. They need to encourage the participation of youth not just in municipal policy making but also at the family, school and local community levels.

Locally elected officials and administrators sometimes tend to work in isolated spheres. To remedy this and raise their awareness, they should consistently engage with youth groups and those who have everyday interactions with youth, such as social workers, teachers, and health care providers, with the aim of addressing needs and improving the provision of services. This process can also serve to help evaluate the services in terms of their specific impact on the lives of youth and to increase the transparency of funding and decision-making.

Though many policy prescriptions are generated locally, some are universal and emanate from international treaties and covenants. These international agreements have implications for local governments. Compliance may require regulations, law enforcement, and the provision of services and activities designed to prevent discrimination.

Youth

Youth participation is crucial to fulfilling the vision of the WPAY and should be seen as a process through which young people influence and share control over the decisions, plans and resources that affect them. Involving young people in this process is empowering to them though it is up to the other stakeholders, who often act as gatekeepers in policy formation, to involve youth and youth organizations in the interventions that affect their lives.

There are different levels of youth participation. The higher the level of participation, the more control, influence and responsibility young people will have on their lives and the future of their communities. There is a difference between ad-hoc and structural participation. Ad-hoc refers to one-time participation in a certain project or conference, while structural participation represents a more continuous involvement over a longer period of time. There is also a difference between direct and indirect participation. Direct participation implies direct contact with the decision-making person or body. Indirect participation refers to having one's opinion represented by someone else, for example by a youth council or youth parliament.

Young people can decide on which level, and in what ways, to participate, although the choice may be dependent on the willingness of the level of government or organization and its representatives to listen to youth. Ideally, local and national governments, as well as ministries, should support young people in their endeavours to obtain resources and to meaningfully participate in youth empowerment programmes and in the formation and implementation of youth policy. With this in mind, a critical first step in the implementation of the World Programme of Action is the expansion and regularization of effective channels of communication between non-governmental youth organizations and local and national governments.

Empowering young people means allowing them to make informed decisions that affect their lives. Empowerment is more than the opportunity to influence policy; it is a process of capacity building that includes and often requires access to education, employment, health, and resources. If youth are encouraged and given the tools to fully participate in society, they will become more knowledgeable about their rights, more responsible citizens, and often more self-confident. Young people should be given the platform to take an active role in addressing key questions, such as what capacity deficiencies exist that are preventing effective local development and good governance. Enhancing opportunities for youth participation builds their skills and knowledge base and also serves to better cultivate policies that affect their lives.

Parents and Caregivers

Parents and caregivers (including extended family) play many roles in young people's social networks. Despite many ongoing changes in the structure of families as an institution, parents remain vital for the socialization of children. Parents are also educators and can fulfill this role by openly discussing issues and concerns with their children.



The dialogue they conduct with their children should be a two-way street where youth feel comfortable to speak with their parents without fear. Parents also have the power to direct the behaviour, capacities and intellectual and emotional character of their children. The investment of parents and caregivers in youth, in terms of time and resources spent on their general care, is not limited to early childhood and their influence should not be underestimated; despite the independence of youth, they often inherit their parents' perceptions of the world.

Parents transfer physical assets (such as capital or a home) as well as intangible qualities, such as their values, to their offspring. Ideally, they are engaged in the process of the human development of youth throughout their lifetimes. When their children are youth, parents can serve as educators and can reinforce messages their children learn in the classroom by openly speaking about health concerns, relationships and social behaviour. When young people may be at risk, parents and caregivers should know when and how to intervene.

Youth are sometimes parents themselves. These young parents are more likely to earn a lower or more erratic income than their older counterparts. This experience may cause them to postpone or cut short their own education or invest less in that of their children. However, sufficient support for young parents can interrupt the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

■ Media

Media help us to understand and interpret the world, communicate with one another, and participate in public life. According to the WPAY, governments should, to the extent consistent with freedom of expression, encourage the media to ensure widespread dissemination of information on issues that affect youth with the aim of raising their awareness. For example, in many areas of the world, media campaigns have shown striking successes in providing young people with vital HIV prevention information. Day-to-day contact with accurate and independent reporting is part of the informal education of young people.

National and community media is crucial to the infrastructure of public life and, when shaped by factual information and high quality research, truly represents the public interest. Often, issues important to youth are absent from reporting even though media continue to target youth in terms of advertising and entertainment. New media such as the news outlets on the Internet have, however, proved to be powerful in increasing the visibility of youth in policy making, representing diverse viewpoints, facilitating youth connectivity around the world and creating innovative youth-owned communications. As youth are not passive consumers of news, the media enhance the ability of youth to enter a national discussion and be active members of their society.

■ Civil Society

Civil society comprises the multitude of associations around which society voluntarily organizes itself. Independent from the State, it represents a wide range of interests and ties, from ethnicity and religion to shared professional, developmental and leisure pursuits, and to issues such as environmental protection and human rights.

Either membership-based or formed to produce a public benefit, civil society includes women's groups, business associations, elders, religious leaders, intellectuals, community associations, cooperatives, NGOs and, of course, youth organizations—associations set up and managed by individuals in the age bracket that defines youth in a specific country—which make up a vital part of civil society. Youth organizations themselves engage in a unique dialogue where they learn from their peers, share information, and act collectively.

Civil society can be a force for scrutiny of government or the market, can mitigate conflict, and inspire policies for change with the power to mobilize and inform. Existing separately from organs of the government, military, or the private sector, civil society plays an indispensable role in developing an overall system of enabling mechanisms to fulfill the vision of the WPAY. The three general functions of civil society may be summed up as: articulating citizens' interests and demands, defending citizens' rights, and directly providing goods and services.³

Of particular relevance to policy makers, civil society enjoys strong ties to the community and often has the trust of marginalized or at-risk youth. Having such roots at the local level is a key strength of civil society organizations. However, while these organizations can be effective partners, government in some areas are leaving too much of the responsibility of providing basic social services to civil society. While successful collaboration has contributed to the development of youth, few civil society organizations have the national scope, structure or resources to take over large-scale responsibilities from the State.

■ Private Sector

Youth are an integral part of the private sector either as consumers, employees of large cooperatives, corporations or small family-owned businesses, or as entrepreneurs and innovators themselves. With its own set of resources and expertise, an innovative private sector develops distribution links, provides needed products and services, creates employment and stimulates income growth; it can also integrate young people into the labour market, develop infrastructure and bring information technology to young people. More and more, the private sector, with its interest in a healthy, well-educated population of consumers and workers living in a stable society, is engaging in partnerships that touch on every area of the WPAY to support national development.

³ For more information on partnerships with civil society see: United Nations Development Programme (2002). Sourcebook on Building Partnerships with Civil Society Organizations. New York: UNDP.

■ The International Community

The international community refers to the nations of the world and their inter-governmental associations. While it plays multiple roles in the lives of youth, an essential role for the international community is cooperation in promoting conditions conducive to the implementation of the World Programme of Action at all levels. According to the WPAY, translating proposals for action into specific plans, targets and law will be influenced by national priorities, resources and historical context, though governments can be assisted, at their request, by regional and international organizations. The exchange of good practices among countries can be useful, especially for countries that have few resources, share a common culture, or whose youth experience similar social and economic challenges.

Specialized agencies of the United Nations and regional commissions are encouraged to promote the WPAY through the “incorporation of its goals into their plans, to undertake comprehensive reviews of the progress achieved and obstacles encountered, and to identify options to further regional level action.”

International donors need to ensure that development assistance programmes provide sufficient flexibility and coherent policies to support both national and local governments in adopting a framework for the implementation of the WPAY. However, one current gap lies in the limited resources devoted to youth-headed organizations. In assessing how much aid relates to youth, donors should scale up outreach to these youth-driven initiatives. ●

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