

Finnish Youth Co-operation Allianssi, seminar organised to evaluate the World Programme Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, April 7th, 2005

WORLD PROGRAMME ACTION FOR YOUTH IN FINNISH POINT OF VIEW

GENERAL

Finnish Youth Co-operation Allianssi (National Youth Council of Finland) has been actively taking part the processes of the evaluation of the World Programme Action for Youth in the year 2005. We have organized several events related to this matter and in April 7th we collected representatives from our member organizations to one-day seminar in Helsinki to evaluate the WPAY areas from Finnish perspective. This document is result of this seminar.

Before the seminar we narrowed the areas of interest to five: **1. Education, 2. Employment, 3. Environment, 4. Drug abuse and 5. Full and Effective Participation.** The selection was made in co-operation with our Committee of International Affairs. These areas were seen as most important parts of lives of young people in Finland and maybe those of biggest development areas as well.

WORKING METHODS

Working groups were formed for each topic and in each working group there was a leader who prepared some background material for the participants. Working groups met in the seminar and produced the evaluation by using the material and the questions from the Toolkit: Making Commitments Matter. In the beginning of the seminar we had a speaker from Finnish Youth Research Network, Mr. Tommi Hoikkala, who gave us some general viewpoints on the WPAY development during past 10 years. We also had presentations from UN Youth Representative 2004, Mr. Henri Heikura and UN Youth Representative 2005 Mr. Antton Rönholm. In the end Mr. Juha Mustonen from Crisis Management Initiative (also UN Youth Representative 1998) gave input to the future of the WPAY and some general ideas about youth and global affairs.

The working groups were instructed to be creative and they were permitted to choose any specific part of the Toolkit questions and also they were welcome to add any preferred areas of interest within the topic.

After the seminar each working group sent their input to the Allianssi office and this final document was produced by Secretary of International Affairs, Ms. Karoliina Reijonen. Please note that since the approach to the topic varied from topic to topic, also the results have various shapes, I hope it does not make it more difficult to understand.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Even though Finnish youth policy is very well developed in general and youth participation is common procedure in all levels of decision making processes, there nevertheless seemed to be many areas to be improved. For example:

- teacher education has to be improved regarding peace education, multicultural issues, youth with special needs and environment education
- more alternative methods for young people for learning a profession should be developed and improved (for example apprentice training)
- voluntary work and alternative military/civil service should be more closely linked
- concept of drug abuse should be broadened to alcohol and other substances, because there are major problems among Finnish youth
- more co-operation and third sector (NGO's etc.) involvement should be encouraged in efficient prevention mechanisms of drug abuse
- better possibilities for young people for hobbies and recreational activities regardless their background
- more innovative and creative means for participation
- more quality citizenship education to schools
- coherence to funding of youth organisations in local level
- etc. (More comprehensive reports on the working groups on each topic can be found below.)

In general we found out that the World Programme Action for Youth is very handy and concrete tool for developing our youth policy. Toolkit developed for evaluation is very valuable tool for getting in depth of the programme. It is also good tool to gather different stakeholders together. In this seminar, for example, many different actors (youth organisations, researchers, municipal youth workers) really got in fruitful discussions and debates about Finnish youth policy reality today.

In our organisation we have also tried to bring the EU's Commission White Paper on Youth Policy to the grass root level the same way. We are sure that using the same method of evaluation and discussions using the White paper will be also more efficient.

We especially welcome the creative and initiative way of giving youth itself the possibility for the evaluation. Also we think that the new way of grouping the different themes presented in the Secretary General World Youth Report 2005 is very good and we also see the relations to the Millennium Development Goals when talking about the global priorities for youth. In our opinion it would be very beneficial to link the WPAY and MDG's as wide programme for improving the quality of life of millions of young people.

1. EDUCATION (priority area 1)

Action 1:

Governments agreed to “Improving the level of basic education, skill training and literacy among youth”

Action 2:

Governments agreed to promoting “Cultural heritage and contemporary patterns of society”

Action 3:

Governments agreed to “Promoting mutual respect and understanding and the ideals of peace, solidarity and tolerance among youth”

Action 5:

Governments agreed to “Promoting human rights education”

Promoting cultural heritage, diversity and peace

Cultural identity, human rights, intercultural learning are part of the curriculum in the Finnish comprehensive school. However the **Finnish curriculum is not binding and those subjects are in a form of cross-sectional teaching meaning that no-one is really responsible of teaching them.** Textbooks used in schools are not required to follow the actual curriculum and teachers often follow directly the books which may not contain anything about different cultures. Textbooks can also contain hidden attitude towards different culture and nationalistic thoughts. Neither there are these subjects in the study programme of the teacher education. This means a teacher has to be a very active person to educate her/himself in these subjects in order to teach them and this rarely happens. So the reality is quite different to the theory in many of the schools.

What is worrying is that **Finnish pupils in general have quite racist opinions and even some teachers have them.** These opinions occur towards all differences, not only colour or culture, also size or any other personal features different from majority. Finnish schools and pupils/students participate actively in different EU exchange programmes. These programmes most likely increase tolerance towards other cultures. Down side is that mostly it is those pupils/students already having positive attitudes attending these exchanges, not the ones with racist attitudes. New programme called eTwinning has been very popular in the Finnish comprehensive schools.

Attitudes towards the minorities in Finland vary a lot. It seems there are classes of minorities. The most positive attitudes there is towards Sami and Swedish speaking minority, but more negative towards Roma and some new immigrant groups such as Somalians. The culture of the minorities is not considered as the part of the Finnish culture but something different and separate from it. For example in the textbooks of the Swedish language is hardly ever mentioned the culture of the Finnish Swedish speakers. Also the elements of the Finnish culture are seen as separated and unique from all the other cultures and these concepts are changing more slowly than the world around us. Also the language barrier between the two language groups seems to be big. **Finnish and Swedish speaking pupils/students do not do much cooperation and they are even in the separate school buildings.**

What is positive in the Finnish education system is that it is possible to do the **matriculation examinations of the upper secondary schools in three languages:**

Finnish, Swedish and Sami. Also in many schools the immigrants get teaching in their mother tongue two hours a week. Some of the smallest municipalities do not have resources to organize this though.

Finnish NGO's do a major part of the intercultural learning, human rights education, and cultural diversity education in Finland as teachers are not prepared to do it. This should be more as a task of the government to do even though NGO's are supported very well in public funding to teach and inform youth about cultural heritage, human rights and cultural diversity issues.

2. EMPLOYMENT (Priority area 2)

Action 1:

Governments agreed to promoting “Opportunities for self-employment”

Action 2:

Governments agreed to providing “Employment opportunities for specific groups of young people”

Action 3:

Governments agreed to providing “Voluntary community services involving youth”

Action 4:

Governments agreed to addressing “Needs created by technological changes”

Lately there has been lot of discussions about introducing so called ”society guarantee” for young people, which means that they do not have to be without work or education placement for too long time. This development is not too visible yet.

There are special funds for young people to start their own entrepreneur if they do not have job. Private sector and government works together mostly in finding short term vacancies (so called summer jobs) for young people. NGO sector has also been involved in finding alternative solutions for young people who has been unemployed for longer periods. This service is mostly for young people over 25 years old.

Government has planned many improvements to the employment situation of youth but these measures seem quite inadequate.

Immigrants have been one of the main target groups for some time now, since their unemployment rates in Finland are far higher than the ones of Finnish origin. Also women have possibilities of getting some entrepreneurship loans on gender basis and for handicapped people there are special arrangements in the supportive employment schemes (for example longer periods than normally). On the other hand there is no specification on age, which means youth is not any specific priority group. **Minority groups should be considered more widely, for example people with mental or physical restrictions or problems with substance abuse.**

There are also some government projects to involve Roma youth and project to take special consideration on sexual minorities.

Voluntary work and civil service have not been closely linked. Usually civil service is made in some community service sector, such as hospital, nursery etc. In general most of the voluntary work in Finland is made in organisations and voluntary work and public sector are not co-operating almost at all. **There is a need to link better civil service and voluntary work. Also military/civil service should support more personal development and career opportunities of an individual.**

Parenthood is still a great risk for young women both in studying and working life. Discriminating young women in working life is common, and creates short term jobs instead of giving stability for the future.

ICT and technological innovations are seen as huge resource for employment and enhance living quality, and it could benefit especially youth. Authorities should give support to global internet and other projects that are designed to help youth with special needs. **In a country with small population it is crucial to connect without**

boundaries. There should be less regulation from government side, for example internet phone calls should be tax free to improve young people's possibilities to entrepreneurship. These are new ways of finding employment and new possibilities should be encouraged, not restricted.

Also we call for new appreciation of quality vocational training and more possibilities for alternative methods of profession training, such as **apprentice training and learning-by-doing.** In this development NGO's can play a big role as partners.

3. ENVIRONMENT (Priority area 5)

Action 1:

Governments agreed to “Integration of environmental education and training into education and training programmes”

Action 2:

Governments agreed to “Facilitating the international dissemination of information on environmental issues to, and the use of environmentally sound technologies by, youth”

Action 3:

Governments agreed to “Strengthening participation of youth in the protection, preservation and improvement of the environment”

Action 4:

Governments agreed to “Enhancing the role of the media as a tool for widespread dissemination of environmental issues to youth”

In general, the situation in Finnish schools is satisfying. The education on Sustainable Development is included in the official teaching programme as a horizontal theme. It's supposed to penetrate the whole educational system. However, **since the concept of SuDe as well as the aims of the SuDe education are very broadly defined, the whole issue may be neglected in teaching.**

For the time being, the main **challenge lies in the training programmes for teachers.** Although teachers are obliged to include teaching on SuDe in their programmes, they are not trained for that in their studies. Additionally, when it comes to so-called horizontal environmental themes, such as consumption issues, it's unclear if they are taught in an appropriate way.

In general, there is still great need in developing concrete tools of action and administration for environmental education. Headmasters of schools have the power and responsibility in the Finnish school system to implement environmental education in order to make it an integral part of the education.

Case: Green Flag

At the moment, there's a so-called Green Flag project running in Finnish primary schools. The project was established by the Finnish Association for Environmental Education in order to provide more developed environmental education to pupil as well as to show teachers concrete methods for their work when teaching environmental issues. The Green Flag is voluntary for schools; for the time being it provides environmental education for more than 100 Finnish primary schools. The main challenge for the project is to ensure the continuation of financial support after the agreed five-years the project period is finished.

There are several environmental youth NGOs in Finland which are active on the field of environment education. The EYNGOs such as Luonto-Liitto and Maan Ystävät (FoE Finland) are disseminating information on environmental issues. They receive annual state support for their activities. Since these organisations are actively

involved in political debates on the Finnish environmental policy, they also reproduce information on hot environmental topics for the youth.

Additionally, the EYNGOs such as Luonto-Liitto and BirdLife Youth are functioning as **experts on some special fields of the Finnish environmental policy**, especially in forest issues and for providing information on migrating birds.

So-called environmental science programmes are usually provided through the school system by different kinds of foundations, companies and other organisations. They include competitions, games for teaching etc.

Finnish environmental youth NGOs are filtering information on important issues for their members and public. Since these EYNGOs are also political actors, they bring their own perspectives to given information. Environmental related information is produced by different kinds of social/political/economic actors. There's surely enough information available.

There are representatives of Finnish EYNGOs involved in panels and working units on environmental issues which are set up by the government. Participations in panels and working units provide information on political strategies and processes to EYNGOs, and respectively, provide a channel to EYNGOs to express their views in political preparation processes. Furthermore, EYNGOs can participate in preparation and commenting on regional zones and the landuse.

In the municipal level there are youth councils which may be provided with their own budget and the right to participate in the meetings of municipal commissions. In the town of Tampere, there's the Parliament of Children as well which provides kids to get their voice heard in the municipal decision making processes.

Although there are nice institutions for the youth and even kids, **it's questionable if they really have possibilities to influence decision making processes on essential issues.** The main problems seem still lie in attitudes of adult actors; the youth opinion is far too often consulted without real influence on political decisions.

On a municipal level it's often criticized that the **participation and (financial) support is made available only through officially registered associations.** The bureaucracy caused by running an association is often time-consuming, and consequently, it causes frustration among the active youth.

As it was mentioned earlier, there're possibilities for EYNGO representatives to participate in governmental panels and working units concerning Finnish environmental policy. There're environmental youth representatives e.g. in the governmental panel on SuDe as well as in the panel on the Sustainable Production and Consumption.

4. DRUG ABUSE (Priority area 6)

Action 1:

Governments agreed to “Participation of youth organizations and youth in demand reduction programmes for young people”

Action 2:

Governments agreed to “Training medical and paramedical students in the rational use of pharmaceuticals containing narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances”

Action 3:

Governments agreed to “Treatment and rehabilitation of young people who are drug abusers or drug-dependent and young alcoholics and tobacco users”

Action 4:

Governments agreed to providing “Care for young drug abusers and drug-dependent suspects and offenders in the criminal justice and prison system”

1. Key target groups discussed (in order of importance):

- Teens
- Young adults
- Parents
- Other interest groups

2. It is important to recognize that drugs do not only include such substances as marijuana or heroin but also tobacco and alcohol. This is very often forgotten in Finland since both are used commonly they are not seen as that harmful even though many diseases that strain the national economy are clear results caused by them.

3. Actors of the field should get organized (cooperation still functioning very poorly, even though some projects been launched)

- Families
 - Schools
 - Actors in preventive work
 - Actors in treatment
 - Officials
- ⇒ Important to recognize the:
- risks and act to disarm them
 - preventive measures and practices and use them to safeguard the youth
- ⇒ Especially the actors within preventive work and the actual treatment phase should cooperate more
- ⇒ There has been programs and papers targeted in diminishing the drug abuse problem
- but only few of them have actually proven out to be meaningful or capable of making any difference since it is difficult to involve the actors to these projects
 - and measuring the results is difficult since there is no sufficient resources nor will to invest in it
- ⇒ youth organization should take a clearer stand against drugs and get more involved in solving the problem

4. In Finland the problems are especially related to:

- Attitudes, values and social pressure
 - ⇒ Favour binge-drinking and especially weekend and party drinking
- No or too little continuity within the third sector activities in this field
- Officials do not recognize the importance of third sector in solving the problem
- Funds and other resources scarce
- Education for the drug prevention field still very unorganized and not necessarily up-to-date
- Edification in schools on drugs very problem-centred and preaching
 - does not reach its target group sufficiently
 - may cause only resistance and counter reactions which lead to unwanted results

5. What should be done (in addition to the above mentioned cooperation-side):

- More projects and programs for involving the youth
- More opportunities for youth with problematic backgrounds
- Campaigns for altering the attitudes towards a drug-free life
- Target segmenting - means and measures that appeal to the target groups
- More psychiatric aid should be available since mental and drug problems are often closely interlinked
 - Seeing a trained professional may be perceived as shameful in some communities (even though we are in the 21st century) but it should be stated that it is better to get help than to cover the problems up and let them mushroom into huge proportions
- Youth should have more chances of developing their skills in sports, arts and handicrafts if they are drawn to those fields regardless of their monetary situation (since it may be that poorer families do not have enough money to pay for such hobbies)
- More peer group therapy possibilities since in that way it is often easier to tackle problems

6. FULL AND EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION (Priority area 10)

Action 1:

Governments agreed to “Improving access to information in order to enable young people to make better use of their opportunities to participate in decision-making”

Action 2:

Governments agreed to “Developing and/or strengthening opportunities for young people to learn their rights and responsibilities”

Action 3:

Governments agreed to “Encouraging and promoting youth associations through financial, educational and technical support and promotion of their activities”

Action 4:

Governments agreed to “Taking into account the contributions of youth in designing, implementing and evaluating national policies and plans affecting their concerns”

Action 5:

Governments agreed to “Encouraging increased national, regional and international cooperation and exchange between youth organizations”

Action 6:

Governments agreed to “Strengthening the involvement of young people in international forums, inter alia, by considering the including of youth representatives in their national delegations to the General Assembly”

In general youth participation in Finland is in very good shape. There are lot of possibilities to take part in different levels of decision making. Biggest problems are how to reach the “un-organised youth” and how to prevent sort of apathy of young people regarding society.

New forms of participation also need to be found. Young people are not so interested in party politics or even voting but NGO’s and networks are more tempting to the youth. According to study made by Finnish Advisory Council on Youth Affairs (2001) 51 % of Finnish youth between 10-29 are involved in NGO activities. Most of the youth are involved in sports, student activities, hobby organizations or denominational activities. Only 2 % of young people belong to political youth- or student organizations.

There are many web- based democracy projects, and these should be developed since free access to Internet is 100% among Finnish young people. This can be seen as a tool to reach also those youngsters who are not active in organizations. It is only matter of how to do it.

Other points in Finnish model of youth participation can be found below.

Good at the moment:

- Pupils’ councils in schools
- Youth elections in schools beside real political elections
- Local Youth Councils (but there could be more of them)
- Committees on Youth functioning under the municipality (but there could be a lot more of them)

- Funding of youth NGO's at the national level
- Very well functioning National Youth Council

Missing:

- Learning in school how to participate in society – NGOs coming to schools. This has tried to be improved with for example government programmes on citizenship, web democracy projects, youth elections etc.
- Learning in school how to debate and how participate in dialogues (not just listening to monologues)
- Recognition and promotion of non-formal learning
- More consultation of youth organisations in political processes on local level (municipalities)
- Effective means how to reach non-organized youth. In this question the municipal youth work is in key position.
- No funding from the companies – giving money to youth NGOs should be made favourable to companies eg. by giving them tax reductions
- The financial support and recognition of youth organisations varies a lot at the local level – there should be more coherency and more funding at the local level
- Horizontal approach to youth policy should have more concrete appearance