

Expert Group Meeting on Youth Development Indicators New York, 12-14 December 2005

Opening Statement
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to welcome you here at the UN Headquarters in New York to the Expert Group Meeting on Youth Development Indicators. During the next three days, you - international experts on youth from various universities, research institutes, United Nations agencies and programmes, as well as intergovernmental organizations and civil society - will be working together on a very important task.

In an interagency meeting on youth, held in Coimbra, Portugal, in January this year, the idea to develop youth development indicators and possibly a youth development index, was received positively among all United Nations agencies working on youth development. This discussion was furthered in a meeting organized by the Commonwealth Secretariat in London in July.

Just two month ago, during its sixtieth session, the General Assembly commemorated the 10th anniversary of the World Programme of Action for Youth and adopted a resolution on “policies and programmes involving youth”. This resolution requests the United Nations Secretariat, in collaboration with other relevant United Nations programmes and agencies, to establish a broad set of indicators related to youth.

This meeting is organized to continue the debate and respond to this mandate. The main goal is to develop a draft set of indicators that can monitor and measure youth development over time. Why is this so important?

There is an urgent need to invest in young people. They have a great impact on today’s societies and will create the societies of tomorrow. With this regard, the statistics are clear and emphasize the challenges we face. Currently, 1.2 billion people in the world are between the ages of 15 and 24. 20% of these young people live on less than US\$1 a day, almost 50% live on less than US\$2 a day, 130 million are illiterate, 10 million live with HIV, and 88 million in this age group are unemployed. But youth does not just represent a social and demographic group at risk with an uncertain future. They are also key agents for social change, economic development and technological innovation, and do already contribute every day to the creation of a “better world”. To be able to flourish to the benefit of their societies, they should live under conditions that encourage their imagination, ideals, energy and vision.

The importance of investing in youth has been increasingly acknowledged. The World Programme of Action for Youth for example was instrumental in setting a global agenda for young people on the basis of 10 priority areas in 1995, and in 2005, the General Assembly added five new priority areas of concern. Together these 15 priority areas form a comprehensive framework for youth development, which, I understand, will be discussed in detail in the next few hours of this meeting.

It has been recognized that overall goals and therefore ongoing processes within the organization strongly depend on investments made in young people. Considering youth as a large and important population group now and in the future, investing in for example their education and health will have an impact on the achievement of United Nations goals for poverty reduction, employment, HIV/AIDS prevention, maternal health. It will simply not be possible to meet the Millennium Development Goals without serious and sustainable commitment to youth issues.

Acknowledging this, significant effort has been made to improve the situation of young people worldwide. Currently, Member States and United Nations agencies and programmes make a strong argument to scale up the investment in youth development. This is already a great start, but it is important to increase and sustain this investment as well as enhance its quality. Therefore, it is essential to have a suitable set of indicators to measure and monitor youth development, particularly with regard to the progress that has been made in the 15 priority areas of the World Programme of Action for Youth.

Unfortunately, the indicators to measure the progress achieved in implementing the World Programme of Action have not been established yet.

In the World Youth Report 2005, produced by my colleagues in the Youth Programme of the Division it was stated that programmes and policies are insufficiently monitored and most data are not age-disaggregated. Numerous indicators already exist; however, they fail to provide us with sufficient data on youth. We need this information for several reasons:

Firstly, it would enable stakeholders to distinguish between different age groups and their socio-economic situations in order to better understand their specific needs.

Secondly, youth development could be measured over time. This would allow for the comparison of progress in and between countries and regions. The data could also be used to monitor the impact of investment in youth, and help to identify areas that need increased action. Such measurements will make the specific needs of young people visible, and allow for the development of appropriate and efficient action.

Finally, the results could be used to advocate for youth and underline the importance of investing in young people.

To develop this set of indicators is a challenging task. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you in advance for your efforts to be part of this process and for your motivation to share your expertise with us. I wish all of us a successful meeting.

Thank you very much.
