Report of the
Workshop on Global Youth Media Culture

Division for Social Policy and Development, United Nations DESA
New York, 28-29 April 2004

Background

1. The Workshop on Global Youth Media Culture was held at New York from 28 to 29 April 2004. The Workshop was organized by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

2. The purpose of the Workshop was to explore the impact of a powerful global media-driven culture on young people, and how it has affected their socialization and their values (both as a unifying and diversifying influence). The specific objectives were to:

    (a) Determine the impact of a global media-driven youth culture on young people's socialization process and values, including the gender implications and changing generational relationships; and

    (b) Build the capacity of young people to understand, analyze, participate actively in, and benefit fully from, a media-driven youth culture.

3. The Workshop was organized to serve, *inter alia,* as a follow-up to the World Summit for an Information Society (Phase I: Geneva, December 2003) and the role of youth as acknowledged in paragraph 11 of the Declaration of Principles: "…*We recognize that young people are the future workforce and leading creators and earliest adopters of ICTs. They must therefore be empowered as learners, developers, contributors, entrepreneurs and decision-makers. We must focus especially on young people who have not yet been able to benefit fully from the opportunities provided by ICTs*". In addition, information and communication technologies (ICT) has been recognized as a key global priority for youth, as reflected in the additional priorities adopted for youth by the General Assembly in 2003 (A/RES/58/133).

4. The Workshop was thus designed to provide participants with increased knowledge and skills about how the changing global media landscape is shaping the socialization processes, values, and activism of young people, and impacting on young people's decisions, in areas such as educational choice, employment, leisure, as well as sexual and reproductive health. In addition, outcomes from the Workshop would serve as inputs to a report on the global media-driven youth culture, for the 60th session of the General Assembly in 2005, which will review the situation of youth since the adoption of the 1995 World Programme of Action on Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (WPAY).

5.   A list of participants is attached to this report as Annex I.

Opening of the Workshop

6. Mr. Sergei Zelenev, Chief, Social Integration Branch, Division for Social Policy and Development, United Nations Secretariat, made the opening statement. Mr. Zelenev referred to the ten priorities of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, adopted by the General Assembly in 1995, as well as five new issues of concern to young people which have emerged since its adoption, and which were noted by the General Assembly in 2003. Mr. Zelenev reviewed two of these areas of concern, namely, globalization and information and communication technologies (ICT).   Globalization is powered in part by tremendous and rapid advances in information and communication technologies (ICT), and young people are often among the first to take advantage of their introduction. He noted that these technologies offer a culture of information, pleasure and relative autonomy, all of which are of particular appeal to young people. This has implications, not only for young people themselves, but also for their relationships within the family and between generations. Mr. Zelenev also stated that for many young people, the sphere of experience has become global and local at once. The challenge is to give culturally valid meaning to the use of new technologies.

7. Mr. Joop Theunissen, Focal Point for Youth, Division for Social Policy and Development, United Nations Secretariat, then provided a detailed review of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (WPAY). He reviewed the situation of young people in each of the 10 areas of WPAY: education; employment; hunger and poverty; health; environment; drug abuse; juvenile delinquency; leisure-time activities; girls and young women; and youth participation in decision-making. He also outlined five new areas of concern, noted by the General Assembly in 2003:   globalization; information and communication technology; HIV/AIDS; conflict prevention; and intergenerational relations. He noted that the General Assembly in 2005 will review the situation of youth, and re-commit to actions to better the lives of young people.

Summary of deliberations

The Workshop agreed on the following agenda:
> 1: Presentation and discussion on topic 1: "Global youth media as new forms of socialization
> 2: Presentation and discussion on topic 2: "Global youth media culture as a unifying and diversifying influence on youth values"
> 3: Presentation on "Youth Development Index"
> 4: Small group discussion on "Socialization and Values"
> 5: Presentation and discussion on topic 3: "A global youth media culture: Bridging the global and the local in youth activism"
> 6: Presentation and discussion on topic 4: "Young people and a changing media"
> 7: Small group discussion on "Media and activism"

8. A presentation on "Global youth media as new forms of socialization" was given by Mr. Tommi Hoikkala, Research Director, Finnish Youth Research Network. Mr. Hoikkala's presentation began by defining socialization in this context, as the process by which youth adopt values in a social context. That meant, partly, the process by which the culture of that social group in that society was transmitted to younger generations; but also included a process in which the young generation was instructing the older generation. The latter was said to be the contemporary, dominant form in the information age, because of rapid cultural change and eroding of traditions. He then highlighted different agents of socialization, and how a global (mass) media fitted into socialization processes. Young users of media products have mediated relations with global culture but peer groups were always local by nature. Peer groups had also different characteristics and even different functions in different cultures and societies – how much leisure time children and teenagers spent time with family or solely with friends, was a culturally varying fact.

9. Mr. Hoikkala noted that traditional forms of socialization (such as parents and schools) are being surpassed as young people themselves had become socialization agents. Global youth media could have tremendous effects only because its messages and moods were resonating with the moods of young audiences. The statement that global youth media was acting as a socialization agent generated the question about norms, mores, values, and expectations inherent to it. Mr. Hoikkala also spoke about the relevance of ICT as a tool for development. He then ended his presentation by discussing some examples in his paper of concrete *learning by doing*, highlighting media projects which have had empowering effects on youth.

10. Mr. Alexander Söllei of the World Organization of Scout Movement began the discussion by presenting on the ways in which the Scouts view socialization of young people. He noted the importance of involving young people in decision-making. Challenges included how to provide access to information, and how to make formal and non-formal education more interactive.

11. The ensuing discussion focused on notions of Western dominance in global influences. It was agreed that local and global influences are not mutually exclusive, and did not need to polarize each other. In the same manner, new forms of socialization (through the media) did not preclude traditional forms (parents, schools). Global influences had been felt for a long time, so it was necessary to determine what was different about the current age. This may be related to new technologies or the global economic situation. It was not always possible to distinguish between school influence and media influence, for example. Finally, the notion that young people could "socialize" themselves was important. Participants rejected the assumption that young people were not full members of society until they had completed the process of socialization.

12. Mr. Mitchell Stephens, Professor of Journalism and Mass Communication, New York University, made a presentation on "Global youth media cultures as a unifying and diversifying influence on youth values". Mr. Stephens told a story of his trip to a

village in northern Senegal with ten people between the ages of three and twenty-three. He noted that there was much that seemed attractive about the lives of these apparently non-globalized young people: they fashioned, for example, their own creative toys. But there was also much in their unvarying daily routine of walking to the well to fetch water, of following cattle, that seemed not only narrow but stultifying.

13. Mr. Stephens argued that there had been much that seemed unattractive in the loud, crass, commercial and homogenized store-bought media culture in which so many of their contemporaries elsewhere seemed encased. He posed the question whether this culture helped open young people around the world to a sense of our common humanity, to unfamiliar ideas, to new ways.

14. Ms. Peris Wakesho of Global Youth Partners Kenya noted how ICT was a powerful tool for development and for self expression. Young people in developing countries might not be exposed to a global youth media culture, but believed in its importance. Young people were hungry for more information, and it was important to ensure that all young people have access to it. The challenge for young people was to determine the fate of their parents' culture. Questions remained as to how much a global youth culture has included youth values, and whether access to global media culture was a right.

15. Topics in the discussion centered around the difficulty of presenting young people in developing countries with images of better life styles, via the media, that they could not obtain. "Values" remained a controversial issue, and it was important to note who was imposing values on who. Participants agreed on the need for media literacy to equip young people with the tools to deconstruct media. It was also important for young people to learn how to produce media. The media and the older generation often portray moral panic about young people's values which may always reflect reality. It was also important to distinguish between what the media portrays as global youth values and real youth values.

16. Dr. Maria Inês Bastos, UNESCO Brazil, presented on the Youth Development Index in Brazil. The Youth Development Index was established based on the criteria of the Human Development Index, with certain indicators adapted to address issues that pertain specifically to youth. The areas selected to determine the Index were: education, health, and income. The objective of the Index was to obtain a comprehensive view of the locations, aspects and degrees of development of Brazilian youth, and to contribute to greater precision in planning and establishing social policies for youth in Brazil.

17. Mr. Ron Kassimir, Program Director, Social Science Research Council presented on "A global youth media culture: bridging the global and the local in youth activism." He noted that researchers take four viewpoints through which to think about youth and citizenship: generations (generational tensions, shared experiences); adolescence (socialization, civic engagement), youth (resistance, activism), and children (right to

protection and participation). These different "lenses" allowed for different perspectives in addressing young people in politics. There were two different notions of young people in this respect, either as political actors now ("being") or as future global citizens ("becoming"). He defined activism as participation in activities, such as protest events, ongoing advocacy campaigns, consumer boycotts, and information gathering and dissemination. He questioned whether activism was always regarded as a positive phenomenon.

18. Mr. Kassimir defined transnational youth activism as the international or globally-oriented political engagement in which young people may be involved. He discussed several types of transnational youth activism. His presentation also highlighted the different audiences and targets for transnational youth activism: transnational corporations, policies and actions for powerful countries and regions; international financial institutions; United Nations, NGOs and humanitarian agencies; and the media. He remarked that the issue of accountability was a key aspect to transnational activism. However, he noted that there were limits to transnational youth activism, including the small number of young people involved, the involvement of youth in local or national issues, and defining activism closely with social movements could leave much out with social movements.

19. Mr. Kassimir remarked that more research was needed to study at what types of youth activism had emerged, how and to what degree did young activists achieve their goals, why did young people get involved, and what the organizational forms were. He then concluded by highlighting some questions regarding the organizational form of transnational youth activism, including its effective use of ICT in getting young people involved and generating awareness of global issues, and questioned whether there existed a youthful preference for horizontal networking and loose coalitions, rather that institutions and hierarchies.

20. Mr. Michael Furdyk, TakingITGlobal, followed up to Mr. Kassimir's presentation, with an additional overview of youth activism. He remarked that it was only those young people who are privileged with education that can have a mainstream awareness of global issues. He noted the importance of personalizing some of these global issues, to make connections for young people to make the issues more relevant. Activism was raising this awareness, although it was usually through independent media or videos. Furthermore, as noted in the presentation, there can be a blend of consumerism and activism. It was important, however, to mainstream conscious consumerism and to recognize the over-consumption people often partake in, and ways in which young people can have choices. He noted that the loose model of youth activism allows for it to be more flexible, and for more people to be involved. Youth independent media were driving transparency and accountability. The question was how one could regulate regular media to get the right messages through to young people. He concluded by noting the importance of having discussions with young people with different points of view.

21. The discussion on this topic concentrated around the issue of accountable globalization. Furthermore, the issue of consumerism was discussed, in both negative ways and positive ways, such as "conscious consumerism" by young people, which included the potential tool of youth to boycott or highlight negative aspects of global companies' production and marketing methods. (A question was raised on the issue of youth global activists being from middle class in their societies). It was agreed that activism among youth was a positive value, even though not everyone might agree with all activist opinions. The important of networking, through e-mail list serves or other means, was agreed upon as a positive method for young people to connect with each other. The question of youth participation as a means in itself, versus as a means to an end, was also raised. However, it was important to recall that young people often aim to represent other youth, even if they represent only a small constituency. Young people also wanted careers in which they could believe in. Finally, it was noted that in some countries, young people did not have the full ability to influence their government.

22. Mr. David Buckingham, Director, Centre for the Study of Children, Youth and Media, Institute of Education, University of London presented on "Young people and a changing media." He began his presentation by noting that often within everyday youth cultures, there were political issues which arose, and that popular culture was indeed political, albeit in complex ways. Mr. Buckingham noted that the media construct youth in their own way. There was now a sense that the end of childhood is happening quicker, and that the period of youth goes on longer. The sociological construction of youth was thus more flexible. The values of youth were increasingly used in marketing. He also discussed the interaction between youth, media and generational change. One argument was that the media were intervening in the socialization of children, and they are disrupting what used to be a more staid process, by offering children a chance at youth earlier on. A different argument was that media were offering young people access to powerful tools for self-expression and self development. He underlined that both these views assumed it was technology that produced although in reality, these developments had become complicated by other factors.

23. Mr. Buckingham remarked about the changing media, noting its proliferation, convergence between media types, and increasing access. Many of these changes were due to economic changes, such as privatization, integration (companies increasingly have interest in both vertical and horizontal integration), and globalization. The texts of the media were also changing, increasingly with convergences, intertextuality, and interactivity. With regard to audiences, there was increasing "choice" with the proliferation of media, interactivity, fragmentation, and media literacy. Mr. Buckingham remarked on the implications for young people, which include blurring boundaries, increasing access to media, the marketing of youth; while at the same time there is a re-drawing of boundaries in which young people re increasingly being seen as a distinct and separate market. The question was to what extent did this "empower" young people.

24. Mr. Buckingham next discussed young people's media rights. These rights are often defined in terms of protecting young people from harm. He noted that problems with this approach, as it is getting increasingly difficult for governments to regulate. It was increasingly hard to stop young people from getting access to things that adults thought were harmful for them, and there was a regulatory move towards self-regulation. However, it was crucial to have information and education to accompany this. The second approach to rights refers to the right to provision of media. It was important to have good quality and diversity within this provision, to support non-profit production, to provide access by young people, and to address inequalities of material and cultural capital. The third approach was participation, which should include production, distribution and policy, as well as targeting the excluded. The fourth approach, education, was noted as crucial to all other approaches. Media education was crucial for young people, including critical analysis of media, and production. He concluded with posing questions on the ownership of youth culture; citizenship versus consumerism; globalization leading to homogenization of media content; on the relation between cultural rights and political rights.

25. Ms. Katrina Lynne Baker, NextNext Entertainment/Chat The Planet began discussion by talking about the need for authenticity and relevance for young people in the media. Mainstream media appeared to be ignoring young people and their needs, so young people were increasingly creating their own content. Production was relatively easy, but distribution was increasingly difficult. Young people are not following the traditional rules of media. Young people were mixing forms of media and activist journalism. They were often also using unlicensed music and profanity which made their work difficult to broadcast. One big question was what to do with these products that did not fit into the formats of mainstream media. Finally, a big concern with news content was the need to make it relevant to young people's lives.

26. Ensuring discussion included a focus on the issue of rights for young people, and the need to mainstream youth rights. In addition, there was a discussion whether young people cared at all whether they were represented in mainstream media. The issue of ownership of youth culture was agreed upon to be very relevant. With regard to homogenization, many TV shows were being adopted internationally, but also adapted at local levels. Access to technologies, in terms of both production and consumption, was important for young people.

27. Group presentations were made on a set of questions related to socialization, values, activism and a changing media.

28. The workshop adopted its report on 29 April 2004.