

EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON GOALS AND TARGETS FOR THE WORLD PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR YOUTH:

“YOUTH IN CIVIL SOCIETY” AND “YOUTH AND THEIR WELL-BEING”

19-21 May 2008, UN Headquarters, New York

Concept Note

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE MEETING

The Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on Goals and Targets for the World Programme of Action for Youth: “Youth in Civil Society” and “Youth and their Well-being”, responds to a request by the General Assembly of the United Nations to the Secretary-General to report to it at its sixty-fourth session, on the implementation of the *World Programme of Action for Youth* (WPAY) in the priority area clusters on Youth in Civil Society and Youth and their Well-being, and to include in that report a comprehensive set of goals and targets based on consultations with various stakeholders. The cluster on Youth in Civil Society includes the WPAY priority areas - environment, leisure-time activities, participation in decision-making, intergenerational issues, and information and communication technology, while the cluster on Youth and their Well-being covers health, HIV/AIDS, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, girls and young women, and armed conflict.

The EGM follows a similar effort in May 2007 in which goals and targets were identified for the priority area cluster of the WPAY – “Youth in the Global Economy” that covered the priority areas of globalization, hunger and poverty, education and employment. As in the previous meeting, the discussion will focus on broad issues concerning progress in each of the priority areas in the remaining two clusters and to arrive at specific proposals of goals and targets to be used in promoting youth development. Participants will include experts in the specific areas identified, and representatives of Member States, UN system offices and youth organizations. The recommendations of the meeting will be included in the Report of the Secretary-General, through the Commission for Social Development, to the General Assembly.

It is important to emphasize that the purpose of this EGM is not to produce indicators for measuring the progress of youth in the contexts identified in this note. Although the identification of indicators is indeed important, the task of this Expert Group Meeting is to establish the goals and targets for which appropriate indicators and data collection efforts will be established later.

BACKGROUND

Youth, defined as persons aged 15 to 24 years, account for nearly 18 per cent of the world population. In many ways, youth today are better poised than ever before to participate in, and benefit from, global development. The majority of young people

around the world are healthy, having survived their childhood years, while only a few decades ago, infant and child mortality rates were considerably higher. Compared to previous generations, young people today are the most highly-educated generation ever. In terms of opportunities in civil society, youth today have the chance to influence society in unprecedented ways, especially through their participation in decision-making and their keen abilities and facility in information and communication technologies.

Although youth today exhibit considerable strength and initiative, they also face a complex and rapidly evolving economic and social environment where new opportunities coexist with major constraints and obstacles. Indeed for many young people, opportunities for self-development and participation in civil society are often constrained by a number of challenges. Changes in family structure and the erosion of traditional values mean that while young people have more opportunities to exercise their independence, the support systems they were once able to rely upon in times of difficulty are now, in many cases, absent or weakened. Changes in the global economy that have contributed to early and prolonged separation of youth from their families, has contributed to this process by depriving youth, as well as older members of the household from meaningful intergenerational exchanges. As traditional norms are superseded by contemporary mores and values, new lifestyles are emerging that can place many young people at risk in their personal and social lives.

The fluid socio-cultural environments in which young people are growing today also gives them new and dynamic ways of contributing to societal development through civic engagement. However, there is a growing sense of anomie which could lead them to make poor health choices, engage in non-constructive leisure-time activities, participate in armed conflict, abuse drugs and commit criminal acts, among others.

A MANDATE FOR ACTION ON YOUTH DEVELOPMENT: THE WORLD PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR YOUTH (WPAY)

Recognizing that youth around the world face major challenges to their development, Member States of the United Nations adopted the *World Programme of Action for Youth* (WPAY) in 1995. The General Assembly in its resolution 62/126 in 2007 further adopted a supplement to the WPAY in which objectives and recommendations relating to the five new priority areas were added in 2005.¹

The WPAY represents an unprecedented initiative by the international community to recognize the value of youth as both a major human resource and as key agents for social change and economic development, and to bring the need to address obstacles to their development to the fore. It provides a policy framework and practical guidelines for national and international action to improve the lives of young people worldwide.

¹ These include, the mixed impact of globalization on young women and men, the use of and access to information and communication technologies, the dramatic increase of human immunodeficiency virus infections among young people and the impact of the epidemic on their lives, the active involvement of young people in armed conflict, both as victims and as perpetrators, and the increased importance of addressing intergenerational issues in an ageing society (A/RES/62/126).

Of the fifteen priority areas addressed by the WPAY, the eleven in the clusters named “Youth and their Well-being” and “Youth in Civil Society”, in particular, relate to how youth function as members of society in the context of the changing environment and details new risks and opportunities highlighted in the preceding section.

Although the WPAY identifies principal issues, specific objectives and the actions proposed to be taken by various actors to achieve those objectives, it does not identify specific goals and targets to guide the assessment of progress.

PREVIOUS WORK: IDENTIFICATION OF GOALS AND TARGETS FOR “YOUTH IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY”

As an initial step to address this gap, the General Assembly in its resolution 60/2 of 6 October 2005, requested the Secretary-General to identify goals and targets for the cluster “Youth in the Global Economy”. In response to that request, an Expert Group Meeting on Goals and Targets for Monitoring the Progress of Youth in the Global Economy was held in New York in May 2007. That meeting discussed broad issues related to the assessment of the progress of youth in the global economy and identified goals and targets which were included in a report to the General Assembly in 2007 (A/62/61, E/2007/7).

Many of the goals and targets proposed in the report reflected earlier commitments made by the international community but with adaptation to the special situation and needs of youth. A significant effort was also made to go beyond existing goals and targets, while at the same time being consistent with them. For example, in some cases, existing MDGs and targets were adapted to reflect the need for specific action targeted at youth in these areas. Goals and targets were selected in light of availability of reliable data for documenting progress.

The time frame chosen for achieving the proposed goals and targets is from 2005 to 2015. These starting and end dates were chosen because, on the one hand, they represent the 10 and the 20-year mark since the adoption of the World Programme of Action for Youth. On the other hand, they are also consistent with the reaffirmation of development commitments made at the 2005 World Summit and the target date for achieving the Millennium Development Goals in 2015.

OVERVIEW OF THE PRIORITY AREAS

The cluster “Youth and Civil Society”

Environment

The deterioration of the natural environment is a key concern of young people worldwide, as it has direct implications for their well-being both now and for the future. The challenges of environmental degradation, including climate change, must be addressed and include the perspectives of young people. The WPAY recommends that

Governments should integrate environmental education and training into educational curricula and strengthen participation of youth in the protection, preservation and improvement of the environment.

Leisure-time activities

Leisure-time is no longer seen as “free time” for young people. In many cases, young people's leisure time and activities relate directly to important issues affecting them, including education and employment. Out of both necessity and interest, they are increasingly seeking and finding new ways to spend their free time. The leisure needs of young people must be considered in the processes of urban planning and rural development in order to ensure that they have access to a range of constructive voluntary activities and opportunities. ICT has also affected leisure-time habits and have replaced more traditional pursuits such as sports. The WPAY recommends that Governments, by providing adequate funding to educational institutions and urban authorities, should promote healthy and constructive leisure-time activities for youth.

Participation in decision-making

The past decade has seen a growing acceptance of the importance of youth participation in decision-making. Successful efforts to engage young people in the political process have led to improved policy formulation, adoption, implementation and evaluation. Participation strengthens young people's commitment to, and better understanding of, the concepts of human rights and democracy. The current nature of youth engagement ranges from manipulation and tokenism to the assumption of full responsibility for the design and implementation of programmatic responses. The WPAY recognizes that strategies for youth participation must move away from ad hoc, activity-based approaches and focus instead on making youth input a central component of social structures, institutions and processes. Youth organizations are important forums for developing skills necessary for effective participation in society, promoting tolerance and increased cooperation and exchanges between youth organizations.

Intergenerational issues

In recent times, greater longevity has resulted in situations where many older people live for longer periods in some form of dependency on younger generations. On the other hand, trends in globalization and development have resulted in situations where many young people are cut off from their families. At the family and community levels, intergenerational ties can be valuable for everyone. In light of this, the WPAY suggests that Governments and relevant sectors of society can develop programmes that renew or restore intergenerational solidarity, such as those working to strengthen families and empower young women. Further strengthening of intergenerational solidarity can be achieved by encouraging reciprocity in learning, providing assistance and support to older caregivers, promoting activities that support intergenerational communication and understanding to encourage mutually responsive relationships between generations.

Information and communications technology

ICT can empower youth by providing them with the opportunity to overcome the barriers of distance and socio-economic disadvantage by providing them with access to

information on a range of issues that directly affect them, including health, education and employment. This process can be facilitated if Governments, civil society, the private sector, families, youth-led organizations and other groups work together to open up avenues for a cultural and social exchange among young people. It is recommended by the WPAY that Governments can make information and communications technology and ICT skills-training available to all youth, including those in rural areas, and ensure that ICT is fully and appropriately integrated into education and training at all levels in a manner that is accessible, youth-friendly and protects young people from its harmful aspects. ICT can also be used to empower young people as key contributors, while including persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, to building an inclusive information society for all.

The cluster “Youth and their Well-being”

Health

Young people in many parts of the world suffer from poor health which often caused by an unhealthy environment, missing support systems, unhealthy patterns of behaviour, lack of information or by inadequate or inappropriate health services. In many parts of the world, young people have limited access to quality health care even though they face a more complex health environment. An increasing number of new threats to their health, especially the HIV/AIDS epidemic, have also added to the difficulties that youth face. The WPAY recommends that Governments, with the involvement of youth and other relevant organizations, should promote healthier lifestyles as well as sexual and reproductive health education. Along with young people, Governments should also develop comprehensive and accessible youth-friendly health services.

HIV/AIDS

The HIV/AIDS epidemic is increasingly a problem of youth, as new HIV infections are heavily concentrated among young people that often lack the tools and information required to avoid HIV infection and cope with AIDS. Youth often lack decision-making power and financial resources, and may be the last to receive treatment if they become infected. The WPAY therefore notes that Governments should ensure that prevention of HIV infection among youth is a national priority and intensify efforts to ensure young people have access to a wide range of prevention programmes, including responsible sexual behaviour, including the use of condoms, universal youth-specific HIV education, mass media interventions and the provision of affordable youth-friendly counselling and health services. In addition, Governments should give special attention to aspects of gender and to the disproportionate vulnerability of girls and young women, as well as measures to eliminate all forms of stigma and discrimination connected with HIV/AIDS.

Drug abuse

Evidence suggests that young people in many countries are beginning to abuse substances at earlier ages. Growing alcohol and drug abuse in many countries have contributed to increases in both mortality and HIV infection rates among young people. A major development in the past decade has been the emergence of synthetic drugs. For programmes and policies to be credible and effective in preventing drug abuse,

particularly long-term and high-risk consumption, attention must be given to the underlying factors that cause young people to abuse drugs. A more comprehensive approach to drug policy would include tighter restrictions on the marketing of tobacco and alcohol and a greater emphasis on demand reduction efforts that appeal to youth. The WPAY recommends that initiatives undertaken to address drug use must constitute part of a country's overall strategy to reduce poverty, facilitate social inclusion, and ensure that the benefits of economic growth are accessible to all. Prevention and treatment interventions at the community level devised and implemented along with the help of young people, combined with policies such as minimum drinking age laws and alcohol taxation, have proven effective in some countries.

Juvenile delinquency

Juvenile delinquency covers a range of different violations of legal and social norms, ranging from minor offences to serious crimes. Young people constitute one of the most criminally active segments of the population. Eventually, however, most youth desist from such activity, with few going on to develop criminal careers. The WPAY recommends that Governments should give priority to issues and problems of juvenile delinquency and youth criminality, with particular attention to preventive policies and programmes. The policy options available to address juvenile delinquency and crime cover a wide spectrum but generally reflect one of two opposing perspectives that have emerged from the long-standing debate on whether it is better to “deter and incapacitate” or to “engage and rehabilitate” young offenders. Young delinquents often suffer social and economic exclusion. There is a strong reinforcing and reciprocal link between low crime rates and social inclusion and control.

Girls and young women

Gender discrimination and stereotyping continue to interfere with the full development of girls and young women and their access to resources and services, and prevents them from participating fully in society. Both traditional and web-based media continue to propagate stereotypes that often objectify young women and encourage restrictive ideas about their roles in society. The WPAY notes that it is important that girls and young women have access to training, information and media material on social, cultural, economic and political issues and the means with which to articulate their views. Action should be taken to eliminate discrimination against girls and young women, especially in education and employment. It also recommends that Governments should cooperate at the international level and enact and enforce legislation protecting girls and young women from all forms of violence, including female infanticide and prenatal sex selection, genital mutilation, sexual abuse and exploitation.

Armed conflict

Youth are often among the perpetrators and main victims of armed conflict. Armed conflict destroys the safe environment provided by a stable community, including a home, a family, adequate nutrition, education and employment. Young women and girls face additional risks, in particular those of sexual violence and exploitation. Actions should be taken to promote a culture of peace, tolerance and dialogue through formal and non-formal education. The WPAY in particular notes that Governments should take all

feasible measures in accordance with international law to prevent the recruitment and use of children and youth in armed conflict, as well as protect young persons in situations of armed conflict, post-conflict settings and settings involving refugees and internally displaced persons. Governments should establish programmes to provide opportunities for youth ex-combatants to be reintegrated into society, as well as take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of the young victims of armed conflict.

STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES FOR IDENTIFYING GOALS AND TARGETS

The goals and targets presented in the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDG) framework are a good starting point for identifying goals and targets for youth development. However, the issues addressed by the MDGs relate to all people and do not focus on the many issues that specifically affect youth. Youth, as a part of the general population, clearly benefit from society-wide improvements in the context of the MDGs; however, they represent a specific socio-demographic group with its own, and often unique, challenges.

A challenge in establishing goals and targets for the two clusters “Youth in Civil Society” and “Youth and their Well-being” is how to select forward-looking, yet realistic goals and targets that will be applicable to all world regions. Given the different starting points for countries, it may be impossible to select goals and targets that are applicable to all. The Expert Group may wish to consider establishing tiered targets so that countries at a weaker starting point have lower targets than those already at a higher starting point. It may also be necessary for individual countries to define contextually relevant intermediate goals and targets in consideration of the goals and targets that the Expert Group identifies.

METHOD OF WORK

Contributions have been requested from a group of Experts who will provide contextual information on the areas to be discussed. These presentations will form the basis for an interactive discussion among participants that we hope will lead to the selection of, and agreement on, goals and targets for each of the areas. Participants, including Member States and youth organizations, have had the opportunity to send in their contributions to the goals and targets prior to the convening of the meeting.