

Part V

YOUTH in Civil Society



YOUTH IN CIVIL SOCIETY

YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING

Too often, youth are left out of the processes that shape their futures. Participation is part of the process of the empowerment of young people. Nevertheless, societies often do not view young people as indispensable contributors to policy formulation, evaluation and implementation. In recent years, some governments have taken significant steps in promoting a place for youth in decision-making. Greater involvement of youth in the home, school and the community will not only benefit their socio-economic environment but also their own capacity and personal development. Participation must be seen as a means and an end. Active and informed participation by young people is not only consistent with, but also demanded by, the rights-based approach discussed in Part I because the international human rights normative framework affirms the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs. Without the voices and participation of youth, the vision of the World Programme of Action for Youth cannot be achieved.

■ Why is youth participation important?

Though youth participation itself can cost time and money in the short run, the process will result in activities that are based upon issues facing youth and upon their understanding of problems and will be therefore more relevant to the needs of their generation. Their participation can lead to better targeting of benefits to youth, the group that can best identify the impact of specific laws and policy. It can also help to secure the sustainability of activities as youth, as primary stakeholders, will be more invested in their momentum. Types of participation range from consulting and consensus building, to partnership, evaluation and management.

Youth participation in policy formation can help to highlight the link between public spending (budgets) and youth development, to sensitize people in ministries to the concerns of young people, and to monitor progress in fulfilling the WPAY. In addition to influencing budgets so that they reflect the needs of youth, young people can also help to reform institutions that affect their lives. Institutions should provide mechanisms for youth to participate in deliberations on policy and to help guide and set priorities within such discussions. Youth should be engaged not just with governments or in policy-making but in all aspects of society, setting the stage for their continued participation throughout adulthood.

■ What conditions help provide a good environment for youth to meaningfully participate in society?

- Freedom to organize without restriction, prejudice or discrimination (freedom of association).
- The ability to meet regularly without impediment (right of assembly).

- The freedom to say what they want without fear of intimidation or reprisal (freedom of expression) and to stay informed (right to information). With improved access to information, young people can make better use of their opportunities to participate in decision-making.
- The ability to receive support from, and collaborate with, other segments of civil society and the media.

■ **How can government facilitate the capacity building of youth organizations?**

- Allow youth organization to open bank accounts.
- Provide space for student councils in all universities and secondary schools to represent the interests of students.
- Provide safe and convenient meeting spaces for youth.
- Facilitate national and international cooperation between youth organizations.

What does it mean to describe good governance for youth participation? It means that youth derive a sense of empowerment from their participation in the decision-making process. While youth participation can be praised, it has to be actively promoted and thus it involves different approaches and methods.

■ **How can government promote and include youth in government and policy formation?**

- **Give young people increased access to the decision-making process and policy implementation at the local level.** Many youth do not see a connection between politics and their daily realities; however, this does not mean that they are not interested in their futures. A process of building trust may be initiated when young people have increased access to the decision-making process. Young people can emerge from such exposure with increased self-esteem, better communication skills and better knowledge about their communities and effective leadership. Such opportunities are likely to arise in community-level activities, and youth are more likely to flourish within an institutional framework of representative local government. Thus, one element of the decentralization of government and a deepening of democracy is the institutionalization of opportunities for youth.
- **Offer civic education in schools for young people to learn about their rights and responsibilities as citizens.** Research has shown that most youth have a strong desire to actively engage with their communities but know little about the decision-making process. By knowing more about the political system, young people will be better equipped to identify, support and monitor the elections of candidates who press for economic progress, social justice, and peace.

- **Assess the organizational structures of institutions so that youth may play a role in their core functions.** Young people’s role should not be limited to that of bystanders or advisors. Institutional reform allows youth to participate on a consistent basis and not only in ad hoc or project-based activities. Organizations at every level have felt the pressure to change their structure at some time; adapting government structures to facilitate the participation of youth should be seen as part of the progress of their transformation over time. Ministries can appoint a focal point who is consistently accessible to youth organizations. However, participation itself can become over institutionalised and become a part of the bureaucratic routine. Being conscious of this possible outcome can serve to avoid complacency.
- **Explore the creation of national youth parliaments and local youth councils as mechanisms to include youth in the decision-making process.** Some local governments have recognized these forums as permanent statutory bodies that guide the development of policies by serving as a resource for civil servants and legislators. They have also traditionally served as major channels for the cooperation and exchange of information with national governments. Networks of local youth councils can foster exchange between different cultures and regions of a country as well.
- **Include youth representatives in national delegations to the General Assembly and other relevant United Nations meetings.** Youth delegates enrich the debate and policy dialogue and strengthen existing channels of communication and cooperation between governments and young people. An open and transparent selection process should target a diverse array of youth organizations and include youth in the decision-making process itself. Selected youth should receive a briefing before their arrival so they are familiar with the procedures and work of the UN. Support for youth delegates should continue upon return to their home country—this support should help leverage their experience so that their role as a representative of their country in an inter-governmental forum may inspire other young people and have a continuing impact. Information for governments on how to bring young people as delegates to UN headquarters is available at: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/youthrep.htm>
- **Promote the accessibility of elected officials to youth.** Elected leaders should be encouraged to keep “office hours”, through an established minimum per month, designated specifically for an exchange with youth representatives and youth organizations. Young people may hear the leader’s proposals and hear feedback and offer avenues for follow-up to keep lines of communication open. As part of this effort, leaders should also participate in interviews with youth media.

- **Facilitate the input of youth in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) process.** Though donors and the United Nations advocate for country ownership of the PRSP process, this should not be interpreted narrowly to mean ownership on the part of the government alone. The strategy has to be owned by all relevant stakeholders within the country, including youth. Little more than half of the PRSPs to date were drafted with the consultation of young people. Being better informed by the views and ideas of poor youth can lead to a more integrated approach based on local, regional and national assessments of the specific challenges lived by poor youth.
- **Conduct a survey on the voter participation rates of eligible youth and launch campaigns to increase young voter participation among identified inactive youth.** Voting is one powerful sign of youth connectedness. Though much of the information gathered on voter participation reflects national averages, disaggregated data from these national statistics can be helpful in reaching out to youth who are not participating.

Organizations made up primarily of young people have specific needs. For example, they often face difficulties accumulating resources. To address this challenge, they should have access to financial services to open bank accounts. So that youth civil society can flourish, youth should be regularly permitted to use city premises, such as schools or meeting halls, to meet.

Youth at the United Nations

At the sixtieth General Assembly, Member States:

Welcomed the participation of youth representatives in national delegations, and urged Member States to consider being represented by youth representatives on a continuing basis during relevant discussions in the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council and its functional commissions, bearing in mind the principle of gender balance. (A/RES/60/2, para. 9)

The underlying principle of youth participation in the work of the United Nations is that it leads to better policy and programmatic responses to the problems facing young people today. Not only do youth delegates enrich the debate and policy dialogue, they strengthen existing channels of communication and cooperation between governments and young people. Youth may participate in the general work of their Missions through attending a range of meetings, receptions, and informal negotiations and by providing assistance in monitoring general debates and drafting reports. Very often they liaise with youth representatives from other countries to exchange information and build upon their experiences. They may be invited to speak at various side events or panel discussions organized by their Mission, the United Nations Secretariat, or non-governmental organizations.

Missions should provide a briefing to youth delegates before their arrival to discuss and determine their role in the delegation. The selection process is frequently overseen by the government authority directly responsible for youth (e.g., Ministry of Education, Department of Youth and Sport, Ministry of Cultural and Social Affairs, or equivalent) or is delegated to a National Youth Council. The name of the selected delegate is then transmitted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (or equivalent) and later to the country's Permanent Mission to the United Nations. It is also helpful to inform the United Nations Programme for Youth, so that the youth delegate can be appropriately directed to resources and supported in understanding the work of the United Nations.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Youth are often trailblazers when it comes to new technologies. They also learn and adapt quickly, and are hungry for information. With youth at the forefront as users and also as providers, information and communication technology (ICT) has the ability to transform people and communities. There is also a clear role for ICT in achieving global youth priorities such as education, employment, and the engagement of young people in civil society. However, while ICT plays a significant role in youth culture and has become a significant driver of development, its promise remains out of reach for many youth, especially those in the developing world.

Shared access to ICT increases its impact; thus, addressing disparities in access is the most pressing issue today. Governments should evaluate inequalities in access that exist between urban and rural youth, and between young women and men, and develop national strategies to overcome this “digital divide” in each country. These plans can decrease the number of information-poor youth.

■ Why are information and communication technologies important to the empowerment of youth?

Using ICT to Enhance Education and Youth Employment

ICT has the capacity to enhance the educational experience of both students and teachers in a manner incomprehensible to past generations. ICT can be used in schools to improve the quality of education and better prepare youth for the demands of the information society. Technology as a tool and a medium has made the learning environment more interactive and has brought an expanded array of subjects to more students in more places. Young people with IT skills are making the work force more knowledgeable and therefore making the youth labour market more attractive.

Beyond the classroom, ICT can also improve the dissemination of labour market information so that young people will be better equipped in choosing a career path. More and more youth are utilizing online websites, both commercial and government-run, dedicated to career resources, job searches and training. Youth have proven to be both business and social entrepreneurs using technologies ranging from mobile telephones to email, to instant messaging, radio, TV and computers. While ICT reduces distances and generates new markets for creating opportunities for young entrepreneurs, youth are creatively using technology to invigorate local economies and address the needs of their communities.

Using ICT to Enhance Youth Engagement and Participation

Access to technologies is spreading rapidly and has proven to be an effective tool for development with its ability to foster the sharing of information and opportunities for youth to express their ideas and opinions. With young people in many areas as the principle users of computers, communications technology and new media have challenged traditional forms of engagement. New technologies have been a force for advancing youth participation in civic activities and youth organizations are using



technology and the media to expand their networks, raise funds and build the membership of their organizations. Internet technologies are increasingly serving as hubs for the communication, identity formation and social networking of youth. Youth across borders have used ICT to discuss the challenges they face, find common causes and act collectively.

With a great deal of content emanating from young people, one of the most salient observations of youth internet use is the power they have in this medium to share ideas and express themselves. Simple ways to produce content and instantly disseminate information have created conditions favourable to outlets for creativity, avenues for knowledge building, new expressions of citizenship and new forms of advocacy and mechanisms to connect to others. While there is clearly a distinct culture among youth on the Internet, youth are also creating strong links with their school, community, teachers, government and the workplace. Accessing information through the internet is a phenomenon that also is observed in developing countries.

At the World Summit on the Information Society in Tunis, participants affirmed their commitment “to empowering young people as key contributors to building an inclusive Information Society” and to “actively engage youth in innovative ICT-based development programmes and widen opportunities for youth to be involved in e-strategy processes.”

■ **How can government use information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance education and employment for youth?**

- **Facilitate the introduction of IT systems into all universities as well as primary and secondary schools.** The Ministry of Education should include ICT in curriculum development and teacher training. It should not simply be presented as a new subject, but mainstreamed so that youth can conduct research to embrace the amount of information available and transform it into knowledge. Developing such an infrastructure, commonly referred to as a “schoolnet”, cannot be achieved without the participation of multiple ministries as well as private sector partnerships. The far-reaching impact of these projects usually exceeds the mandate of one ministry alone. Professional development of staff should complement the physical integration of IT in schools; workshops should focus on using the Internet to enhance teaching, on schoolnet communities and on better preparing youth for the job market.

- **Target skill building and job training in the technology sector.** Such policies automatically target youth by focusing on a sector that employs a good percentage of young people and has a profound linkage to the growth of other sectors creating new jobs where youth are viewed as desirable employees.
- **Integrate new technologies beyond urban centres to mitigate feelings of rural social and economic isolation among youth.** In remote areas, there may not be sufficient market incentives to establish the connectivity of rural youth; thus, an extra investment by the government or the international community is needed so that wireless technology can greatly improve upon the communications infrastructure. The internet can also be used to incorporate distance and e-learning so rural youth have access to educational and vocational training. Technology can also import libraries to classrooms that do not have access to books, thereby decreasing urban-rural gaps in the quality of education.
- **Provide opportunities and training in e-commerce to enhance the growth of youth- owned and operated business.** E-commerce can open up livelihood opportunities for young people and provide them with markets for their goods and services that they would not otherwise have. Without relocating, young entrepreneurs as well as independent artisans can reach information, suppliers, and more customers.
- **Improve the educational prospects of low-income students by providing them and their families with home computers.** The younger generation has been busy teaching the old to use emerging technologies; computers in the home can enhance this trend of inter-generational learning. For students without proficiency with computers, youth and their parents may be invited to the school for training programmes that can increase parental involvement in their children's education, help students become more engaged in their own learning, and use computers in the home.
- **Ensure that young women and people with disabilities have equal access to ICT training.** If these groups have the skills to access ICT, they are less likely to suffer further social exclusion. As female youth are often steered away from technical sectors in choosing career paths, the Ministries of Labour and Education should develop initiatives to inform female youth about opportunities in the field of ICT. Programmes that target traditionally disadvantaged groups may be part of a larger effort for social inclusion in development. ICT literacy should be seen as part of the effort to foster a contemporary definition of citizenship.

Schoolnets

“Schoolnets” promote the development of knowledge societies by connecting schools to the Internet, building connections among students, teachers and schools, sharing information and resources and supporting e-learning in online, networked environments.

Governments should articulate a rationale for the use of ICTs in education that is linked to national economic and social development objectives. Enabling conditions or components for “schoolnets” include sufficient computers with good connectivity, a financial commitment for sustainability, ongoing technical support, and a receptive educational environment where teachers are willing to learn and adapt to new methods and means in the classroom. Support for ICTs in education by political and educational leadership is also key to the effective delivery and success of the project.

Though the goals of national-level schoolnets are similar across countries, their organizational structures exist in many forms. For example, in some cases, providers of connectivity and educational services are separate.

Where the education system is not already changing in response to new needs, schoolnets should consider promoting broader educational system change as a component of the programme.

Australia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, South Korea, and Thailand have established national schoolnets. More information is available about their country experiences at:
http://www.unescobkk.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ict/e-books/SchoolNetKit/SchoolnetKit.pdf

Source: UNESCO Schoolnet Toolkit (2004).

■ How can government facilitate the contribution of ICT to youth participation in society?

- **Use ICT to advance youth participation in government and decision-making through encouraging all elected members of parliament and ministries to maintain information on their accessibility to youth on the world wide web.** Public information improves the quality of leadership and governance and enhances public trust so that the needs and aspirations of all segments of society, particularly those of young people, are met. What has, in some areas, become known as “e-government” works to make local and national government and the provision of services more efficient and more accountable in delivering better outcomes for people. It also can provide a modality for two-way communications or “internet discussions” between authorities and youth. This objective can only be a reality if digital content is consistently developed and updated.
- **Provide accurate and up-to-date information on government resources and programmes for youth on the internet.** Many youth regard the internet as the primary source for information on anything from leisure activities to health. For some, it is the first place they look when they want to access reliable information. It is also the first place they post information and communicate when seeking to raise awareness about issues important to them. Accurate information on issues important to youth, such as health and employment, can have the effect of increasing the use of available services.

- **Give youth a prominent role in any national ICT task forces or inter-ministerial bodies that develop ICT national strategies.** On the international level, youth were one of the most organized and successful stakeholder groups in the World Summit for the Information Society; on the national level they should have a role in drafting national strategies to design and incorporate ICT into education and job training.
- **Provide incentives for television and radio stations to broadcast youth-produced programming a set number of hours per week.** New technologies can be harnessed as an outlet for youth expression and as a way for youth to influence other youth. When young people themselves are involved in the production of journals, or radio and television programmes, they are often more accessible to their peers and more user-friendly.

YOUTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT

While every segment of society is responsible for maintaining the environmental integrity of the community, young people have a special interest in maintaining a healthy environment because they will be the ones to inherit it. Many youth have responded to this challenge by making sustainable development a key element in the programmes of youth organizations throughout the world. Young people have worked with traditional and new media to influence their peers and disseminate potentially behaviour-altering messages concerning the environment. In addition to their intellectual contribution and their ability to mobilize support, they bring unique perspectives that need to be taken into account.

The connection between the health of young people and the environment is clear. Access to clean water, sanitation, the right to housing in safe areas that are not contaminated by garbage dumps and factories, and access to basic cooking fuel and energy sources have an impact on the lives of youth. One result of poor air quality is the growing prevalence in young people of chronic conditions such as asthma. The belief that chronic diseases afflict only the elderly or that they arise solely from engaging in risky behaviour (and not due to environmental contaminants) is incorrect and also expensive in medium and long-term planning.

During recent years, governments have strengthened the concept of sustainable development and the linkages between poverty, the environment, and natural resources. For example, access to clean water in or near the home affects access of female youth to education. Under international human rights law, water is implicitly and explicitly protected as a human right; it is regarded as an integral component of the right to life, to an adequate standard of living, to health, to housing and to food. Access to water is explicitly protected under the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the 1989 Convention on

the Rights of the Child. There are many dimensions of the right to clean water essential for the development of young people, from food security and nutrition to sanitation and health to housing.

Giving attention to the environment and sustainability also means promoting energy conservation, decreasing carbon emissions and other contributors to climate change, or ensuring proper reuse and recycling of consumer materials—all areas where youth have shown leadership.

■ **Why are youth well suited to design, implement, monitor and create awareness around environmental policies?**

Youth have demonstrated that environmental action starts in the local community. Many schools have environmental clubs or science clubs that focus on the preservation and use of renewable resources, and through these youth have gained experience and knowledge in environmental projects and advocacy. Increasing the participation of youth in environmental protection depends on strengthening opportunities for young people to participate in the decision-making of government-supported organizations and NGOs.

Youth have initiated lifestyle changes that reflect sound environmental practices. For example, due to political action and public education campaigns, recycling has become universal in many societies and part of everyday life within a generation. In some areas, environmentally-friendly habits that aim to protect water sources have also become integrated into day-to-day behaviour. Youth are at the stage of life when environmentally-friendly habits are shaped.

■ **What is environmentally sustainable development?**

Environmentally sustainable development is the management and conservation of natural resources, and the orientation of technological and institutional change to ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability to meet future needs. These efforts work to conserve land, water, plant and animal resources, in an environmentally non-degrading, economically feasible and socially acceptable manner. Embedded in this definition is a vital role for youth.

■ **Recognizing that youth will bear the consequences of current environmental policies, how can government support and mobilize youth in environmental protection and sustainability?**

- **Mainstream environmental education into school curricula. The UN General Assembly proclaimed 2005-2014 as the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.** To achieve visible gains from environmental education, countries should develop a role for youth. Integrating environmental education into school curricula, and offering training programmes to teachers on the environmental aspects of their subject-matter may enable them to educate youth concerning environmentally-friendly behaviour.



- **Initiate programmes to promote youth participation in tree planting, forestry, combating desert creep, waste reduction, eco-tourism, recycling and other sound environmental practices.** The participation of young people and their organizations in such programmes can provide good leadership training and encourage awareness and action. Waste management programmes and eco-tourism in particular may also represent potential income-generating activities.
- **Increase production and encourage widespread dissemination of informational materials illustrating the global dimensions of environmental protection, its origins and the interrelated effects of environmental degradation.** Part of this awareness raising effort should include the creation of an awards programme to recognize young people for projects which demonstrate their commitment to the environment.
- **Prioritize support for local projects that improve water availability and build capacity at the community level.** The costs of inadequate access to water and basic sanitation are steep, especially for girls and young women. Lack of adequate access to water affects their privacy, dignity, health and hygiene and represents an economic burden for the country as a whole. The time and energy of young women and girls devoted to carrying water long distances translates into lost opportunities for education or paid work.

■ **How can government enhance the role of youth in designing good environmental policies?**

- **Consider the establishment of a task force that includes youth and youth-led organizations to develop educational and awareness programmes specifically targeted to the youth population on critical environmental issues.** Such a task force should use formal and non-formal educational methods to reach a broad audience. National and local media, non-governmental organizations, businesses and other organizations may assist in these task forces.

- **Appoint a youth focal point or advisory committee in the Environmental Ministry.** Chapter 25 of Agenda 21 calls for the active participation of youth from all parts of the world in all relevant levels of decision-making processes because it affects their lives today and has implications for their future.
- **Support the spread of environmentally sound technologies in developing countries and in countries in transition, and train youth in making use of such technologies in protecting the environment and conserving resources.** These initiatives require cooperation among different areas of government and partnership with the private sector as well as the sharing of good practices and successful initiatives. Specifically, the WPAY invites United Nations organizations and governments of more technologically advanced countries to help spread the use of environmentally sound technologies.

YOUTH AND LEISURE TIME

Many young people complain that there is not enough for them to do in their communities outside of school or work, or that they do not have the means to explore their chosen interests. Other youth have little or no leisure time due to obligations as caregivers, or cannot find the time with cumbersome work and school schedules.

Resources must be allocated to meet the leisure and recreation needs of young people as this time should be viewed as a right rather than a luxury to be earned or reserved for more privileged youth. Though “leisure” may imply a casualness of purpose, many youth already devote their time to volunteering either in service-oriented organizations, educating their peers, or engaging in activism thus making a tangible difference in their community

■ What is it important to support the leisure activities of youth?

Leisure time gives young people the chance to define and understand their identity, explore their culture and learn more about the world around them. Where the leisure needs of youth are not met, there is a greater chance that they will engage in high-risk activity that threatens their well-being. High levels of youth unemployment and the rising costs of higher education highlight the need for leisure time activities to be viewed in the context of the personal growth and the development of their communities. Leisure time contributes to the development of human and social capital as time to expand skills sets and social networks. The leisure needs of youth must be considered in urban planning and rural development so that a range of constructive voluntary

opportunities are built into their landscape. Due to misperceptions of the role of leisure in a young person's life, initiatives and spaces for leisure are often the first to get cut when budgets get tight. However, the elimination or under-funding of extracurricular or recreational programmes can endanger the physical, emotional and social well-being of youth.

■ How can government support leisure-time activities for youth?

- **Facilitate the development of partnerships between community/government and youth groups so youth can engage in volunteer work and serve their community.** The commitment and contribution of youth who spend their unstructured time volunteering often goes un-praised. Recognizing the efforts of youth can further promote and support this constructive and collaborative use of their time. Local governments should also provide vouchers for public transportation for youth to travel to sites where they are volunteering their time.
- **Integrate areas for sports, recreation, and cycling into urban and suburban development plans.** Sports contribute not only to one's health and a positive self-image, but can also serve as a platform for inclusion. Adults should be encouraged to coach youth leagues and serve as role models in sportsmanship.
- **Facilitate access to public buildings such as schools or theatres for youth to hold meetings, pursue creative interests and carry on leisure-time activities.** The provision of space is particularly important for areas with high population density where youth may be living in close quarters. Facilities for youth should also be maintained to sustain the activities of youth over time.
- **Develop leisure activities and sports teams for youth with disabilities.** Youth with disabilities need to access opportunities to develop their physical fitness and gain self confidence. Disabled youth may require specialized transportation to facilitate their participation in sports and the arts.
- **Create a special fund to be administered by an umbrella of youth organizations to finance local cultural and enrichment activities for youth.** In some areas, funding for sports receives the bulk of resources earmarked for youth leisure activities. While the value of sports is universally recognized, art and cultural organizations and institutions provide programmes open to all and should not be short-changed.

INTER-GENERATIONAL ISSUES

In the context of global ageing, the share of youth in the world's total population is gradually shrinking. By 2050, eight of every ten older persons (age 60 and over) will be living in developing countries. Thus, youth development will increasingly be viewed as integral to the welfare of older generations. Investing in youth can initiate a powerful virtuous cycle of development that can both dramatically affect the lives of poor youth and promote growth and stability over generations.

Inter-generational aspects of poverty play a major role in youth education and youth employment. If parents have decent work, there will not be the economic stress and pressure that often forces parents to take children out of school to contribute to the family's day-to-day survival. Poverty experienced in youth, marked by inadequate shelter, poor health, and low educational attainment, is most often linked to parental poverty. Addressing the health, education and employment needs of young people can generate additional income and opportunities for both individuals and communities that may fuel human development as well as national growth. The success and opportunities of youth also contribute to the foundation for a secure and independent old age in the form of savings, pensions, social security and health care. Thus effective youth policy can, in turn, make older persons less dependent with better means to maintain themselves and their family. A "life course" approach to policy, specifically to poverty reduction, emphasizes viewing policies in a way that looks beyond a single age cohort to see how, for example, healthy children and youth translate into a healthy more secure old age.

■ What is the inter-generational contract?

In some societies, the welfare of the older generations is more a community concern while in others it is a matter that stays within the family; what is universal is the idea that there are certain moral obligations between generations. These relationships are evolving and the role of the state in this regard has also been changing. However, what remains is the importance of ensuring that no generation lives at the expense of the other, highlighting the need for strong ties, or social cohesion, among generations. With global life expectancy increasing, the ratio of young to old will decline raising issues about the socio-economic impact of this trend.

In addition to well-documented demographic shifts, family and community networks are under strain due to shifting responsibilities and economic requirements; for example, HIV/AIDS has disrupted family life and created a generation of orphans, young caregivers, grandparents caring for their adult children and altered pathways of socialization. Even outside the context of the AIDS epidemic, it should be noted that the flow of resources among generations is multi-directional. For example, in many cases the elderly transfer resources to their adult children regardless of a country's stage in the development process. In South Africa, with universal pensions for older



people, there is evidence that recipients use these funds for the benefit of the whole family reducing poverty and elevating the economic status of the family (as well as increasing consumption of local goods); thus, in this case, resources directed at one age group may indeed be utilized to help multiple generations, thereby underscoring the message of interdependency. Dependency or retirement should not be seen as an absolute state as older persons continue to contribute to family and society in reciprocal arrangements.

The inter-generational contract does not only encompass the generations within a family but also the relationship between workers and retirees. The ability of government to respond to these changing needs and mounting social demands in the face of rising costs will affect the well-being of both youth and older generations.

Youth participation is key to communication and understanding between generations. Partnerships among generations are also vital to achieving the priority areas of the World Programme of Action for Youth. For example, one of the central actions in stimulating youth employment is the promotion of entrepreneurship. However, young people are less likely to have business experience or be aware of the legal or regulatory requirements to start a business. At the same time, they may have a propensity to innovate and take risks. Successful initiatives may be inspired by established private sector ventures and veterans of the business world who can help refine business plans and offer expertise to those who are just starting out.

Culturally, every society conveys the message that young people can learn both skills and values from the older generations. Policies should promote this exchange of knowledge as it should be viewed as social capital that is necessary to support the inter-generational contract.

■ How can government support inter-generational cohesion?

- **Set up a database of local businesses who want to share their skills and knowledge either through the provision of internships or mentoring programmes for young people.** As part of the policy to help small and medium-sized enterprises grow, assistance to young people may be provided through a commitment of older persons (either retired or part of thriving businesses) that goes beyond limited ad hoc help to the provision of ongoing mentorship and expertise. While youth can greatly benefit from these strong relationships, established businesses may also gain. The relationship may be reciprocal; young people, with a solid command of new technologies, can transfer their mastery in a manner that serves to upgrade any outdated systems used by older generations, exposing them to needed information.
- **Encourage school and public library inter-generational programmes which provide services (such as tutoring, leisure activities, and sharing of books, ideas, hobbies) that benefit youth and older people.** For increased social cohesion, young people should be given more chances to interact with older people through community, social, and volunteer programmes.
- **Provide support to young people who are caregivers.** Some youth have to take care of children, and at the same time, tend to the needs of parents or grandparents. Policies should aim to limit their time away from gainful activities, such as school or training. Where applicable, additional training or support groups can build capacity while direct compensation programmes can lessen the burden of young people caring for people living with HIV/AIDS.
- **Establish partnerships between youth organizations and local and national government to promote mentorship programmes.** Mentorship is particularly useful to young women who may lack the confidence or skills to navigate traditionally male-dominated career tracks. While mentorship is not a substitute for necessary structural reforms designed to achieve equal opportunities for women and men, mentorship projects may equip young women with leadership and communication skills that they are not able to acquire through school or the workplace. Established programmes have had an effect beyond the individual being mentored; the mentor also typically gains knowledge of the challenges and perceptions of young people. ●

Bibliography

- Bartlett, S. (2005). Integrating Children's Rights Into Municipal Action: A Review of Progress and Lessons Learned. *Children, Youth and Environments* 15(1): 18-40.
- Building Local E-Government Projects through Public-Private Partnerships (2005). E-Government Eastern European Conference, Conference Conclusions. Romania, Sept 12-13, 2005.
- CDC (2004). Asthma Prevalence Health Care Use, and Mortality. Hyattsville, Maryland: US Department of Health and Human Services, CDC, National Center for Health Statistics.
- Department for International Development (2005). DFID Guidelines for the Monitoring and Evaluation of Information and Communication for Development Programmes. UK: DFID (available from <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/icd-guidelines.pdf>).
- Kolodinsky, J., Cranwell, M. and Rowe, E. (2002) Bridging the generation gap across the digital divide: Teens teaching Internet skills to senior citizens. *Journal of Extension*, 40 (available from www.joe.org/joe/2002june/rb2.html).
- La Cava, G. Clerf, C., and Lytle, P. (2004). Investing in Youth Empowerment and Inclusion: A Social Development Approach Insights from the ECA and LAC regions. Washington: World Bank.
- Search for Common Ground. Media & Youth for Peace (available from http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/children/programmes_children.html).
- Seel, F. (2005). *Draft Review of the ICT & Youth Chapter*, Submitted by the World Summit on the Information Society Youth Caucus.
- UN Environmental Programme Governing Council (2005). Tunza Youth Strategy. Nairobi: UNEP/GC.22/3/Add.1/Rev.1
- UN Habitat Global Campaign on Urban Governance (2004). Policy Dialogue Series: Youth, Children, and Urban Governance. pp. 11-23. Nairobi: UN Habitat.
- UNESCO (2004). *Schoolnet Toolkit*. Bangkok: UNESCO Asia and the Pacific Bureau for Education (available from http://www.unescobkk.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ict/e-books/SchoolNetKit/SchoolnetKit.pdf).
- United Nations Development Programme (1998). *Empowering People: A Guidebook to Participation*. (available from <http://www.undp.org/cso/resource/toolkits/empowering/intro.html>).
- Varney, D. and van Vliet, W (2005). Local Environmental Initiatives Oriented to Children and Youth: A Review of UN Habitat Best Practices. *Children, Youth and Environments* 15(2): 41-52.
- Yach, D, Hawkes, C, Gould, L, and Hofman, K. (2004). The Global Burden of Chronic Diseases: Overcoming Impediments to Prevention and Control. *JAMA*. 2004;291:2616-2622.