

Briefing for Member States and Permanent Observers on the Secretary-General's Five-year Action Agenda related to youth, pursuant to resolution 51/1 entitled "*Policies and programmes involving youth*" adopted at the fifty-first session of the Commission for Social Development

29 April 2013, 10 am – 12 pm, ECOSOC Chamber

Presentation on the System-wide Action Plan on Youth

By Thomas Stelzer, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs at DESA

I am very pleased to have this opportunity to brief you on the work that has been carried out over the past year to develop the United Nations System-wide Action Plan for Youth.

Let me start with the background.

In recent years, Member States have repeatedly requested the UN system to intensify efforts towards a more coherent, comprehensive and integrated approach to youth development within the context of the World Programme of Action for Youth. These calls were made, for example, in several resolutions of the General Assembly as well as in the Outcome Document of the High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly on Youth.

We have taken these requests very seriously. In response, the Secretary-General asked the UN system to develop and implement an action plan on youth, as one of the three pillars of his Five-year Action Agenda related to youth.

To develop the System-wide Action Plan on Youth, or Youth-SWAP, as we call it, a consultative and preparatory process was carried out under the leadership of UN-DESA and UN-HABITAT, in their capacity as 2012 co-chairs of the Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development.

To seek input from youth and other relevant stakeholders for the development of the Youth-SWAP, the Inter-Agency Network conducted an online survey in all official UN languages in July-August 2012. Over 13,000 respondents from 186 countries participated in the survey. The results of the survey identified young people's development priorities and their views on how the UN system could best promote youth development. The survey results served as inputs to develop the System-wide Action Plan on Youth.

The development of the Youth-SWAP also benefited from strong participation of the UN system. A total of 49 UN entities were consulted and/or provided input to the process. Of these, 27 UN entities actively participated in the thematic sub-working groups which developed the System-wide Action Plan under specific thematic areas, and/or in the Youth-SWAP working group, which was responsible for ensuring coherence throughout the process.

I am happy to report that the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination endorsed the System-wide Action Plan on Youth at its spring session in early April.

What are the objectives of the Youth-SWAP and what exactly does it look like?

The importance of youth development has gained recognition within the international community in recent years. In response, UN system entities have increasingly developed programmatic initiatives in their respective areas of expertise and have been mandated to promote the well-being of young people.

Since its establishment in 2010 in response to calls from Member States for increased coordination and cooperation, the UN Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development has contributed to strengthening collaboration and exchange among relevant UN entities. The Youth-SWAP provides a concrete opportunity to harness the strengths of the UN system in the area of youth development and to promote joint programmatic work on the issue.

The main purpose of the Youth-SWAP is to provide strategic guidance to the UN system as a whole in its work on youth within the framework of the World Programme of Action for Youth. It is intended to enhance coherence and synergy of UN system-wide activities in key areas of importance to youth development.

Based on the Secretary-General's Five-year Action Agenda, the System-wide Action Plan focuses on the following thematic areas: employment, entrepreneurship, political inclusion, civic engagement and protection of rights, education, including comprehensive sexuality education, and health with ICTs, being a being a cross-cutting tool.

The Action Plan leverages the potential and benefits of the work of the United Nations in other areas affecting youth development, such as sustainable development, climate change and culture as well as in both peace and conflict-affected settings.

For each thematic area, the Youth-SWAP includes one overarching goal, which represents the long-term objective to which the UN System should contribute in this area. Each thematic area further consists of commitments (or outcomes) towards which to work, the measures (or results) that need to be achieved in order to meet these commitments, and indicators to monitor implementation of the measures. For each measure, a list of Lead and Supporting entities, which are responsible for the implementation of the measure, was also developed.

Let me give you a specific example. The overall goal for Employment and Entrepreneurship is to "Ensure greater opportunities for youth to secure decent work and income over the life-cycle, contributing to a virtuous circle of poverty reduction, sustainable development and social inclusion". One of the commitments in this area is to "Strengthen mechanisms for promoting youth entrepreneurship, in particular for young women" and a related measure is "Innovative approaches to entrepreneurship expanded, with a view to increasing job opportunities for young women and men".

Within the context of the thematic areas, the Youth-SWAP aims at promoting joint programmatic work on youth development and to identify ways in which activities undertaken by individual entities can complement each other.

How is the Youth-SWAP linked to existing mandates?

I would like to stress that the commitments, measures and related indicators are all grounded in existing mandates received from intergovernmental bodies.

The Youth-SWAP includes commitments made by UN entities to promote young people's rights and development priorities, based on their entities' respective mandates. It values the comparative strengths of individual entities, builds on their corporate strategies and articulates how UN entities are working individually and collectively with, and for young people in a changing global context.

In addressing the thematic areas outlined above, and considering gender perspectives in all areas, the Youth-SWAP is closely aligned to the World Programme of Action of Youth. Although the Youth-SWAP focuses on a smaller number of thematic areas than the fifteen priority areas outlined in the World Programme of Action for Youth, the remaining priority areas of the Programme of Action are addressed within the commitments, measures and indicators contained in the Youth-SWAP.

You may be wondering what the financial implications of the Youth-SWAP are.

Close attention was paid in developing the Youth-SWAP to ensure that it is not only in line with existing mandates, but is also relevant for existing activities. In implementing the Youth-SWAP, the UN system will identify ways in which existing activities can complement each other in order to exploit synergies. In addition, options for joint programming in areas in which entities are in the process of developing programmatic work will also be explored.

Are there any achievements so far?

There is consensus within the Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development that the development of the Youth-SWAP has already been instrumental in energizing the Network and in helping to rally the UN system around a common framework for youth development. As mentioned earlier, 27 UN entities were actively involved in the development and another 22 provided inputs or were consulted.

There is also recognition that, while the Youth-SWAP represents a framework for the UN system as a whole, implementation will largely take place at the regional and country levels. Close collaboration with regional and country networks will therefore be crucial for monitoring and evaluation of the Youth-SWAP, as well as reporting on the outcomes. This has led the Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development to encourage the formation of regional and country networks working on youth where they do not yet exist.

In addition, the Inter-Agency Network has agreed to develop a joint communication strategy for the Youth-SWAP. This illustrates entities' commitment to working together in all aspects of the Youth-SWAP.

What are the next steps?

Following the endorsement by the CEB, the Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development has begun to develop an implementation framework for the Youth-SWAP under the leadership of DESA and UNFPA – the Network’s co-chairs for 2013.

There are already regional UN inter-agency networks on young people in Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean and the Middle East and North Africa – which have started the process of developing regional implementation plans for the Youth-SWAP. It is a priority to strengthen existing networks and build new networks in Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Africa.

It is expected that implementation of joint activities carried out within the framework of the Youth-SWAP will be planned in the second half of 2013 and commence in early 2014. Implementation of the Youth-SWAP is an ongoing process. Activities will be developed throughout the timeframe for the Youth-SWAP - that is until the end of 2016.

Pursuant to resolution 51/1 entitled "*Policies and programmes involving youth*" adopted at the fifty-first session of the Commission for Social Development, the Secretary-General will submit to the 52nd session of the Commission for Social Development an update on progress related to young people, in accordance with the Five-Year Action Agenda of the Secretary-General. This will include an update on the implementation of the System-wide Action Plan on Youth.

Additional reporting modalities are currently being determined. The Youth-SWAP contains a number of indicators to facilitate regular monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the Youth-SWAP, as well as reporting on the outcomes.

Following the example of the System-wide Action Plan on Gender, it is envisaged that an assessment of achievements will be carried out on a yearly basis to ensure that lessons are learned for later stages of implementation and that potential weaknesses are addressed in a timely manner. This, in turn, will lead to valuable insights for future youth programming beyond the timeline established for the Youth-SWAP.

How will youth be involved in the implementation of the Youth-SWAP?

Youth participation in the implementation of the Youth-SWAP is essential. There are three levels of youth participation that will be addressed going forward. Firstly, young people need to be adequately informed about the Youth-SWAP.

Secondly, their participation in its implementation needs to be ensured. Efforts will therefore be made to ensure that youth participate in all activities carried out to implement the Youth-SWAP. Also, youth volunteers from the new UN Youth Volunteer Programme will be included during the implementation to the extent possible.

Finally, since youth are the ultimate beneficiaries of the Youth-SWAP, the UN will engage them as partners in the monitoring and evaluation of the Youth-SWAP. This may take the form of shadow reports or a youth participation score card, prepared jointly by inter-agency networks and youth organizations, to assess the quality of young people's participation in the Youth-SWAP.

We are also very happy about the involvement of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth. He is very committed to the Youth-SWAP and will play a crucial role in raising awareness among Member States and young people about the Youth-SWAP.

How will Member States be involved in the implementation of the Youth-SWAP?

The Youth-SWAP will ultimately be implemented at the country-level. It is Member States who set the priorities for youth development in their countries. Through collaboration with UN country teams, Member States are able to ensure that their priorities are addressed within the framework of the Youth-SWAP. We hope that Member States that do not have country teams will be supportive of youth development in the development agenda.

We are in the process of developing a website to provide more information on the Youth-SWAP to Member States and the general public. It is still in its early stages, but will be enhanced over the coming weeks and months.

I thank you for your attention.

.....