



Young People and Inequalities

Online Discussion Synopsis

Moderated by: Restless Development, World Vision International, United Nations Volunteers (UNV) and Canadian Crossroads International.



“As we strive towards post-2015 agenda and positively changing the societies we live in, we need to address the overall lack of the key catalysts of change that are critical for young people: Communication, Education and Civic participation.”- Rob Rass*

Introduction As part of the Global Thematic Consultation on Addressing Inequalities, UN Women and UNICEF convened a global, online discussion on how to address inequalities faced by children and young people. The discussion was jointly moderated by four organizations: Restless Development, World Vision International, United Nations Volunteers (UNV) and Canadian Crossroads International, together with four youth co-moderators**. With nearly 9,500 individuals visiting the forum between 17 December and 18 January 2013, and hundreds engaging actively from all over the world, the discussion marked one of the first opportunities for young people globally to engage virtually in the process to design the post-2015 development agenda.¹

Through the course of the discussion participants shared examples of inequalities faced by children and young people and underlined the need to address the particular inequalities faced by girls and young women. Participants

shared actions that have been successful in challenging inequalities and proposed suggestions for a post-2015 agenda covering a broad range of key themes and issues outlined below.

Box 1: Key Recommendations for the post-2015 agenda

1. Increase access to quality **education** for both girls and boys, with particular attention to girls' completion of secondary education and access to non-formal education opportunities.
2. Ensure equal access to non-biased **sexual and reproductive health** information and services.
3. Protect **human rights of girls** and advance gender equality, especially from all forms of child abuse, violence, exploitation, trafficking, and work towards the elimination of harmful practices.
4. Create **decent employment and livelihood opportunities** for young people, with attention to equal opportunities for young women and young people with disabilities.
5. Address the **root causes of discrimination** against young people, including women, those with disabilities and LGBTI youth through education campaigns.
6. Mainstream the needs of children and young people with **disabilities** into development goals, as well as with specific targets and indicators.
7. Ensure young peoples' **participation in decision-making** and in transparent accountability mechanisms to ensure states, development partners, donors and INGOs meet their obligations and commitments.
8. Facilitate meaningful **participation** of children, young people and youth-led organizations in developing the new agenda at global, regional and national levels, and ensure their voices are reflected in the new development goals.
9. Recognize that **climate change** is one of the biggest challenges facing young people this generation and ensure that a sustainable development agenda (including integrating the SDGs**) is central to the new development goals.

The discussion looked at both initiatives at the grassroots level as well as national and global policy changes. Particular emphasis was placed on how to ensure better access for young people to decision-making on policies, particularly ensuring that the post-2015 agenda listens and responds to the needs of children and young people.

Finally, participants proposed recommendations (Box 1) to address inequalities faced by children and young people in the post-2015 development agenda focusing on addressing discrimination and root causes of

inequalities, increasing participation of young people in decision-making and adopting rights-based approaches.

* E-discussion contributor, 18 January 2013

** Michelle Alvarez from the Philippines, Bahaa Atallah from Palestine, Liana Enli from Armenia and Esther Eshiet from Nigeria

*** Sustainable Development Goals

Inequalities faced by Young Peopleⁱⁱ

Discrimination in access to education

“Despite progress, 71 million young adolescents are still not in school, and less than a quarter of young people complete secondary school. Girls of primary-school age from the poorest 60% of households are three times more likely to be out of school as those from the wealthiest households, and twice as many girls of secondary-school age are out of school compared to their wealthier peers.”

Sarah Green, High-Level Task Force for the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), New York. Increasing access to education was cited as key – focusing specifically on improving access for girls and young women, and ensuring other key target groups – such as minorities and those from low income families and rural areas have the same opportunities. As important is improving the quality of education delivered. There was also recognition of non-formal education and learning that takes place outside the classroom as also crucially important, particularly the role of peer education to inform young people of their rights.

Recommendations: Encourage skills-based and practical skills by establishing internship schemes as part of secondary education; establish new targets for closing the gender gap in secondary education to build on the gains of MDG3; establish an Education Fund targeting young people in slums, with special consideration for female education to reduce future income disparity.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights

“most of the people designing policies in the area of adolescent reproductive health do not have an understanding of the problem and lack access to evidence. with advocacy and presentation of evidence based information to policymakers, we were able to get the Edo-State Government in Nigeria to sign a bill into law to abolish the act of female genital mutilation.”
Nurudeen, WHARC. Access for young people to sexual and reproductive health rights was a key theme. Participants gave examples where, due to age, culture, religion, socio-economic status, sexual orientation or gender identity, young people are often denied services and information, provided with inaccurate information, stigmatized and discriminated against.

The right to sexual and reproductive health services needs to be recognised and global policy should also acknowledge the link between population, climate change and reproductive health. At a national level it was emphasised that laws which create barriers to young people accessing sexual and reproductive health (such as

requiring parental consent) should be removed. There also needs to be a link made between advocacy for sexual and reproductive health rights and laws and the research that supports this.

Recommendations: The new development agenda should ensure sustained action and accountability for universal access to quality, comprehensive, integrated sexual and reproductive health services, counseling and information, with respect for human rights and emphasising equality, equity and respect for diversity.

Girls, Young Women and Gender Equality

After three weeks of discussion, UNV and Canadian Crossroads International closed the forum with a week of discussion dedicated to inequalities experienced by girls.

“Girls are less likely to be literate and to have completed secondary schooling, and they are less likely to have the means to defend their rights and access justice.”
German Foundation for World Population (DSW). Inequalities faced by girls and young women was also a cross-cutting theme throughout the main discussion – it was highlighted that girls and young women across the world face violence, unequal access to education, and even challenges accessing basic services such as adequate sanitation facilities. A number of participants shared examples of inequalities faced by young women in the form of forced or early marriage, child labour or sexual abuse. These inequalities deny girls their right to education and put them at high risk of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases and gender-based violence.

Recommendations: Investing in young people and gender is a social justice imperative but also a key strategy for poverty reduction and socio-economic progress; Looking beyond 2015, governments, UN agencies, civil society and all stakeholders must adopt a zero-tolerance approach to all cases of violence, discrimination and stigma committed against young women and girls; Reflecting on the MDGs, there is a need to move beyond solely focusing on maternal health, to a comprehensive and integrated approach to healthcare. Young women and adolescent girls need the protection and promotion of their right to bodily autonomy by guaranteeing their right to make free and informed choices regarding their sexuality and reproductive health.

Unemployment

“Employable skills are an important factor to be considered by the government, schools, the private sector, communities and municipals. It is essential that youths are provided with skills that are suited to the local economy.” - **UN Habitat.** In the current economic climate

young people are finding it harder to access jobs and opportunities, leading to wider inequalities and divides. Participants emphasized the role of the education system in empowering young people to think creatively about creating opportunities and becoming employers after they leave school. Schools, NGOs, businesses and governments all have a role to play in ensuring that young people are given the skills needed to enter the job market, and that opportunities are there and accessible to all.

Recommendations: Improve **access to credit** for young people to establish their own business opportunities; Promote the **social responsibility of large companies and multinationals** including offering internships to new graduates, and by ensuring that a percentage of those internships result in paid opportunities; Include **youth employment targets** in national development frameworks; Support young people transitioning from institutional living with training schemes, internships and on-the-job support.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Ensuring access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities can help to address inequalities. Lack of access to clean drinking water and sanitation facilities poses particular challenges for girls and young women who often spend significant amounts of time collecting water or finding safe spaces to defecate.

Recommendations: Prioritize increased access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene for health, dignity and safety in the new agenda; Speak out about the importance of providing facilities for girls and women to manage their menstruation hygienically and with dignity; Ensure young people, particularly girls, are involved in water and sanitation and hygiene programmes so that their perspective and needs are addressed; Raise awareness of the importance of water, sanitation and hygiene among young people so they understand the connections with their health, wellbeing and dignity, and can demand better services; Campaign with governments, donors, service providers, education and health authorities to prioritise the provision of safe drinking water, safe sanitation and good hygiene.

Disabilities

Inequalities faced by children and young people with disabilities were another key theme. The Young Voices global statement asks that, ***“persons with disabilities around the world enjoy full educational opportunities, gainful employment, political representation, social security entitlements, access to public spaces, health services and are living free from torture, abuse and discrimination.”*** The range of recommendations for

reducing inequalities faced by children and young people with disabilities covered many areas: education, health, political participation and challenging discrimination. As with gender inequalities, there was a clear call for disabilities to be mainstreamed into development goals, as well as for specific indicators and targets.

Inequalities faced by LGBTI young people

“LGBTIQ young people’s rights are often neglected because they are considered against the traditional values, cultures, religions, or laws.” - Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights. A number of participants mentioned that one of the most challenging inequalities faced by young people is prejudice against LGBTI people. An example was shared from Brazil of bullying of LGBTI young people and hate crimes committed against them. Participants felt that, while there are different causes of inequalities in different societies, prejudice against LGBTI people is experienced worldwide. Public policies are needed at national level to target both the causes and the consequences of prejudice.

Recommendations: Address the root causes of discrimination against young people, including women, those with disabilities and LGBTI youth through education campaigns; Mainstream the needs of children and young people with disabilities into development goals, as well as with specific targets and indicators.

Inequalities in participation and governance

“Unfortunately, young people experience many challenges when attempting to have their voices heard in formal decision-making spaces, at local, national, regional and international levels.” - Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights. Participants felt that these challenges occur due to decision-makers’ unwillingness to engage young people, persisting levels of stigma and discrimination (particularly among the most marginalized groups of young people, including young sex-workers, LGBTI youth, migrant youth and others), and other biases against young people. Young people are too often seen only as beneficiaries or vulnerable groups, rather than partners or leaders in providing effective solutions.

Recommendations: Recognize young people as active (rather than passive) actors in development; Youth participation matters - systematic inclusion of young people and girls as a cross-cutting issue in the post-2015 framework is essential to integrating human rights principles into the global development agenda and strengthening poverty reduction policies.

Violence and Conflict Resolution

Young people across the world, particularly girls and young women, face violence on a daily basis. Several inputs to the consultation gave examples of ways to work with young people to address violence in their communities. For example, PIDT (People's Institute for Development and Training), a grassroots intervention in India, runs programmes “catalysing consistent non-violent participatory conflict resolution at the local level” with the aim of building a “culture of zero-tolerance for violence and active experience of non-violent resolution”. They describe their approach to change and reconciliation as “a kind of social engineering process, which though slow is steady and sustainable.”

Climate Change and Sustainable Development

“[Young people] must be given a formal place in the UN climate negotiations from now on. It is their human right. This is their Earth” - Dr Peter Carter, Climate Emergency Institute. Inequalities faced by young people are exacerbated by climate change. Participants argued that links should be made between the post-2015 process and other global processes addressing sustainable development and climate change.

Recommendations: Recognize that climate change is one of the biggest challenges facing young people of this generation, and ensure that a sustainable development agenda (including integrating the sustainable development goals) is central to the post-2015 development agenda.

Recommendations and Conclusionⁱⁱⁱ

Addressing Root Causes and Discrimination

Many contributors spoke about the need to tackle the discriminations inherent in society through methods such as public education campaigns. Contributors emphasized that change starts with education and removing the barriers that make inequalities possible. One example shared demonstrated campaigns to highlight the positive contributions that young people make to society.

Rights-based Framework

Human rights and the protection of those rights was another thread that ran through many of the responses, particularly ensuring that the rights of all to education, sexual and reproductive health, work, and water and sanitation, were fulfilled. An enabling environment to exercise those rights needs to be created, including full participation of young people in parliamentary and policy-making processes.

Youth Participation and Access to Post-2015 Process

“The UN needs to know that Africa still grapples with the question of corruption, war, poverty etc that can't be

solved in workshops and seminars. We need to build a network with the communities and create practical dialogues with the common people” – Morris Chris Ongom. A repeated theme was providing a space for young people to access and participate in decision-making processes, including the creation of the post-2015 agenda. It was emphasised that the UN needs to consider the best ways to reach young people – online discussions such as these are a good platform for some to contribute but still exclude many. The UN must look at how to conduct effective consultations within local communities, including establishing mechanisms for consultations with children.

It was also highlighted that creating the space is not sufficient - views need to be listened to and then acted upon. Crucially, young people facing inequalities in their daily lives need to hear their voices reflected in a new development framework, ***“Unless young people are mobilized, [sensitized] and empowered to demand accountability and participate in decision-making, youth will continue to be marginalized and suffer the consequences of inequality.” - Awal Ahmed.***

It was also highlighted that it is key to recognise ‘youth invented traditions’ (for example the use of art for social activism), ***“by recognizing youth invented traditions, youth may be reconceptualized as peacebuilders while also serving as catalysts for identifying inequalities or local issues that affect them and the society of which they are a part.” - Kathryn Moore, Columbia University, USA.***

Crucially, young people should participate in all decision-making processes that affect their lives. The need for self-advocacy was highlighted – equipping young people, particularly those who face the most discrimination, such as young people with disabilities and young women – with the skills to articulate and advocate for their own needs.

About this discussion The discussion was moderated by Katy Chadwick, Restless Development, Arelys Bellorini, World Vision International, UN Volunteers’ Gender Equality team and Canadian Crossroads International, together with youth co-moderators: Michelle Alvarez, the Philippines, Bahaa Atallah, Palestine, Liana Enli, Armenia and Esther Eshiet, Nigeria.

ⁱAt the time of writing, 4,400 people had registered to the Inequalities site, 241 comments were posted to the Young People discussion.

ⁱⁱNote: Brackets indicate where a change was made to a quote.