



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

General Conference

34th session, Paris 2007
Information document

Conférence générale

34^e session, Paris 2007
Document d'information

inf

34 C/INF.10
17 October 2007
Original: English

REPORT OF THE UNESCO GENERAL CONFERENCE YOUTH FORUM (2007)

Paris, 12 and 13 October

Preamble

Half of the people in the world are children and youth, so we have the right to participation, influence and power. At the fifth UNESCO Youth Forum there were 261 participants, of which 174 were delegates from 116 different countries, and a number of observers from NGOs. That makes the fifth Youth Forum the largest in history. Co-determination and real influence in decision-making processes is our right but also our responsibility.

“Since wars begin in the minds of men it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.”

Getting youth together generates a mutual understanding of different cultures, while creating common policy and gaining a mutual understanding of each other to begin the journey of creating peace through people's minds.

The fifth Youth Forum wishes to send the message of young people to the General Conference and to all the Member States of UNESCO to read what youth around the world are thinking on the topics of education and economic development, as well as science and technology for sustainable development. After reading this report, we strongly suggest that action is taken in accordance with the Youth Forum and that the youth perspectives of legislation and policy-making are not overlooked.

The Forum was opened by Dr Musa bin Jaafar bin Hassan, President of the 33rd session of the General Conference. Other authorities that addressed the Youth Forum were:

- Mr Xinsheng Zhang – President of the Executive Board;
- Mr Koïchiro Matsuura – Director-General of UNESCO;
- Mr Pierre Sané – Assistant Director-General for Social and Human Sciences.

The Youth Forum encourages UNESCO to involve youth, and thereby reduce the gap between the places where decisions are made and where they are implemented. We hope that UNESCO, in close dialogue with young people, can develop the Youth Forum, strengthen its meaning and influence and be more in harmony with the General Conference.

The experience of the UNESCO Regional Youth Forums

Recognizing that the UNESCO Regional Youth Forums constituted an innovative and effective mechanism of identifying regional needs and reaching out to young leaders around the world,

Stressing the importance of the online discussion spaces, created in the context of the Regional Youth Forums, in promoting dialogue among the young participants and consolidating regional youth networks,

The Youth Forum recommends that:

1. Concrete action plans and funding mechanisms should be identified in order to ensure a sustained and long-term follow-up of the recommendations adopted at the Regional Youth Forums in cooperation with their participants;
2. The online discussion spaces should be maintained as a means to encourage regional dialogue, exchange and networking.

Education and Economic Development

Sustainable education for economic development

Our right and responsibility is to contribute here and now, with our full potential, creativity and force.

The fifth UNESCO Youth Forum is convinced that peace and stability are the foundation for a sustainable society, and that our ultimate goal – creating a better world – is not going to be achieved if the international community does not take an active role in the promotion of these universal values.

A founding principle of this document is that every human being's right to education is universal and everybody's right to education is unquestionable. Age should not be a ground for exclusion from education. Access to quality education should be available to all with respect for cultural diversity. Basic education should be compulsory for all. Some delegates supported free education at all levels.

The idea of lifelong learning is strongly supported, and the fifth UNESCO Youth Forum recalls that schooling should provide the basis for lifelong learning. Lifelong learning is understood as the chance for putting things into use in life, encouraging critical thinking and creating an environment of independence.

Young people's full participation in all decision-making processes, at local, regional, national and international levels, is essential to obtain a sustainable society where long-term and responsible decisions are taken.

The Youth Forum believes that education for all with its purpose to fulfil the Millennium Development Goals is one of the most essential challenges that UNESCO and its Member States are facing.

Empowering young people

Referring to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the United Nations World Programme of Action for Youth, the Youth Forum strongly believes that children and young people should have the right and responsibility to participate in decision-making processes affecting their everyday lives,

The Youth Forum recommends that:

1. Youth should actively participate in shaping their education through curricula and policies that concern their life, affecting education and economic development, considering their social needs and cultural diversity. To that end, concrete and country-specific youth participation mechanisms should be established;

2. Students and student organizations should be considered as the main stakeholders in this process and governments should create more spaces for youth associations to participate in decisions about education.

Non-formal education and informal learning

Recognizing that through non-formal and informal education in youth-led NGOs and in the community, young people can gain skills that foster creativity and entrepreneurial capacities beneficial to economic development, the Youth Forum strongly believes that education should promote both universal values and consistent skills that are relevant to the Member States needs,

Further, the Youth Forum believes that education can be used as a tool to create new industries, supporting the idea that education should be considered from a holistic perspective and it should encompass formal, informal, and non-formal educational frameworks, bearing in mind that non-formal and informal learning cannot replace formal education,

The Youth Forum recommends that:

1. Skills obtained through non-formal education should be officially recognized in school curricula;
2. Youth organizations are playing a leading role in providing non-formal education, and should be recognized;
3. Youth-led NGOs are committed to collaborate with National Commissions for UNESCO, governmental structures, educational institutions, the private sector and other organizations to identify best practices on how non-formal education and practical life skills can be integrated in formal education.

Accessibility

Believing that accessibility to education should be ensured and affirming that gender equality is a cornerstone of civilized societies, the Youth Forum reiterates the need for adolescent girls, young women and indigenous groups to have access to education,

Taking into consideration that modern technology is becoming an essential part of economic development around the world,

The Youth Forum recommends that:

1. Access to information and communication technology in the educational and scientific field becomes a reality for all, to bridge the digital divide and prepare young people for a global labour market;
2. School infrastructure in developing countries is established;
3. Equal access to education, for boys and girls, in the scientific field is fostered;
4. Transportation to school is ensured for all young people attending primary and secondary school.

Sex education

Recognizing that the health and the well-being of young people are crucial for their individual and social development, and concerned with the spreading of HIV/AIDS and its effects on young people's lives, and also preoccupied by gender-based discriminating perceptions and acknowledging cultural diversity,

The Youth Forum recommends that:

1. Special emphasis in the curriculum is placed on sex education and should be introduced in primary, secondary and higher education, as ignorance leads to the spread of various sexually transmitted infections (i.e. HIV/AIDS) that are hindering social and economic development.

Economic development

Pointing out that entrepreneurship is a fundamental tool to ensure economic growth, and knowing that cooperation with the labour market is fundamental in identifying job opportunities for young people – it is essential for economic growth to ensure this cooperation works,

The Youth Forum recommends that:

1. Mechanisms and initiatives are developed in order to support entrepreneurship among the youth and women;
2. Labour and education ministries should address the connection between the labour market and education;
3. The public should encourage private-sector investment at local and community levels. This should be made through stronger liaising with private-sector parties;
4. Education funding can be reinforced through cooperation between public and private sectors, without losing the independence needed for the education sector.

Brain drain

Recognizing that the free movement of people is beneficial for the individual and the global economy, the Youth Forum expresses its concern on the negative impact it can have on local communities in many countries. Further recognizing that youth in developing countries are migrating from their communities because of lack of job availability,

The Youth Forum recommends that:

1. Individuals should be encouraged to contribute to their communities, even though they are not present physically, through the use of information and communication technologies;
2. Developed countries should continue to support developing countries whose population decide to go abroad and work;
3. Governments should make additional efforts to provide a conducive environment to encourage people to work within their societies, and provide the community with alternative work;
4. The social responsibility spirit should be incorporated into educational programmes and curricula;
5. Awareness programmes must be made available to migrants regarding the recipient society, the work environment, and their labour rights in the new place of work outside their country of origin.

Science and technology for sustainable development

The fifth UNESCO Youth Forum recognizes that the ultimate goal of science and technology is to serve for the betterment of society. The world is experiencing rapid technological and scientific

progress, and while these tools hold great potential, we must also ensure that such change proceeds in a sustainable fashion. Therefore, we should ensure that scientific and technological progress evolves with consideration for cultural diversity, and respect for the environment,

Acknowledging that science and technology affects everyone, it is necessary to provide each person with the opportunity to educate themselves so they can contribute to the developments that shape their daily lives. While we place a specific importance on the education of youth, it is important to ensure equitable and fair access for women and marginalized groups as well. Through policies at the national level, governments should take an active role in ensuring science and technology is applied in a sustainable manner. Similarly, the international community, corporations, non-profit groups and other members of society must act with social responsibility through active monitoring and participation of technical and scientific projects.

Education and knowledge dissemination

Ensuring that science and technology is accessible to all people requires the active participation of educators and pedagogical institutions. Complementing formal education with informal and non-formal teaching strategies promotes scientific and technical literacy among a large group of people, and the recommendations below take this into account,

The Youth Forum recommends:

1. Promotion of the use of science and technology to facilitate intercultural dialogue at all levels;
2. Encouragement of interest and participation of youth in science and technology through informal and non-formal education, including the combination of science projects with artistic forms of expression. One such project could include an art-based competition where old and obsolete technological tools are recycled and turned into works of art;
3. Encouragement of governments to promote science and technology education through increased funding and policy-making. This includes regularly educating teachers, ensuring their knowledge is kept up to date;
4. Integration of cultural and ethical information into science and technology curricula, through formal lessons and informal techniques like peer-to-peer mentorship and presentations by civil society organizations.

Access to technology

The challenge of the digital divide is one that cannot be overlooked in discussions surrounding science and technology. While the challenge is immense, UNESCO can play a leading role in finding solutions by acting as an intermediary between governments, corporations and other stakeholders, as well as interfacing between scientists, researchers, policy-makers, and individuals at all levels of the socio-economic ladder,

The Youth Forum recommends:

1. Exploring how technologies can be localized to fit specific regional contexts and, through its ethical and social scientific paradigm, explore the role of intellectual property rights in such cases;
2. Encouraging governments to promote research and development of environmentally friendly technology;
3. Facilitating collaboration between governments, the private sector and civil society in the development of technical infrastructure, specifically in overcoming the digital divide. In such cases, UNESCO's social scientific and ethics-focused approach could greatly contribute to

corporate and governmental deliberations in this field, and in highlighting the negative effects of lack of access to technology and information;

4. Continuing support for exchanges between scientists and researchers, as well as continuing its work in open-source software and open access. Furthermore, Member States should be encouraged to adopt a policy of open access with regard to publicly funded research.

The role of UNESCO

As an international institution with National Commissions, UNESCO has unique strengths and opportunities to contribute to the international, regional and national work surrounding science and technology for sustainable development,

The Youth Forum recommends that UNESCO should:

1. Act as a clearing house and promote international and interdisciplinary cooperation in the fields of science and technology;
2. Encourage the use of science and technology to overcome problems encompassing environmental sustainability, global climate exchange, and conflict resolution;
3. Facilitate the training of scientists and technologists to promote the dissemination of research results and encourage increased media coverage of scientific concepts among the general population.

Project recommendations

The recommendations below refer to specific project ideas and suggestions raised during the Forum.

The Youth forum recommends:

1. Utilization of the Associated Schools Project Network to teach about sustainable development, incorporating universal days and special observances into the curriculum to raise awareness about the importance of natural science, social science, and technology. The project can be used as a model for other schools and educational institutions;
2. Promotion of field-based youth exchange programmes that lead to sustainable development and North-South and South-South cooperation;
3. Organization of awards that recognize private-sector companies that promote environmental protection, in order to encourage environmentally friendly practices;
4. That Member States should deal with environmental protection through the promotion of industrial forests and prevention of deforestation;
5. Development of a policy statement and set of guidelines regarding methodologies surrounding solid-waste management, water management, alternative energy, agricultural development, and life-saving technologies;
6. Fellowships to promote research in both the natural and human sciences through annual, open competitions. These competitions should maintain regional parity, and their themes should vary by year, ensuring the benefits of the fellowship do not exclude certain branches of science.

Effective implementation

Convinced that no policies can be effective without a proper implementation process, and pointing out that a sufficient monitoring and reporting mechanism regarding the Youth Forum recommendations does not exist at present,

The Youth Forum recommends that:

1. The UNESCO youth section should be adequately equipped in human and financial resources to allow the continued participation of young people in UNESCO's decision-making processes;
2. A report on the follow-up of the recommendations from the previous Youth Forums is presented to the sixth Youth Forum. Youth Forum participants should be encouraged and supported by UNESCO to get involved with their National Commissions and UNESCO-affiliated organizations;
3. Participants noted the number of events organized by local UNESCO-affiliated institutions has decreased and that such events are important in promoting youth involvement in the institution and its related activities. Furthermore, National Commissions should be encouraged to organize national youth consultations to encourage more feedback and involvement in the Youth Forum;
4. UNESCO should support youth-led initiatives and enable their long-term sustainability and independence. This should be applied in different types of projects;
5. UNESCO should reinforce its efforts in developing and making available youth-friendly documents and tool kits. Youth should be directly involved and supported in the creation of such documents;
6. UNESCO should spread and develop best practices in the field of youth participation that should be applicable to different cultural contexts. In this regard, the establishment of youth-led youth desks within UNESCO National Commissions is highly recommended;
7. UNESCO should foster deeper and wider cooperation with regional (both intergovernmental and supranational) networks, by complementing their efforts and resources for projects directly linked to UNESCO's know-how and thematic expertise, such as youth, education and sustainable development.

Future Youth Forums

In the closing plenary session, questions were raised about the structure and the procedures of the Youth Forum and strongly pressed for a change. Therefore the fifth UNESCO Youth Forum formed an Advisory Committee in order to make recommendations on the structure, the functioning and the impact of the Youth Forums. Input on the development of future Youth Forums will be collected and circulated by the participants and the Advisory Committee. During the Youth Forum the delegates contributed substance in order to develop and update the concept of UNESCO Youth Forums.

1. We urge Member States to take an interest in becoming more involved in the process of making the Youth Forum develop in a constructive way.

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Due to lack of time the fifth UNESCO Youth Forum did not have the opportunity to vote on the final version of the report. The elected drafting committee was given the confidence of the Youth Forum to finalize the report.