

Helpdesk Research Report: Youth and Governance

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Query: What are the key governance issues in relation to the role of youth and how are these shifting? Are there acknowledged good practices in relation to programming in this area?

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1. Overview

This report seeks to identify the key governance issues in relation to youth, and to examine how these may be shifting. It concludes by identifying a few emerging good practices in relation to youth and governance programming. For the purposes of this report, the UN's definition of youth which refers to persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years old will be adopted.

Over the last six years, there has been growing awareness of the need to develop comprehensive and integrated approaches to youth policy, which move beyond sectoral interventions, and which address governance challenges alongside education, training and skills barriers (UNFPA no date, UNDP 2006, Walton 2010). Youth-related goals have increasingly become mainstreamed into donors' core

development policy. DANIDA (2007), for example, state that ‘empowering, organising, capacity-building and partnering with young people is...a key to good governance and accountability in the public and private sector’. It is difficult to determine the extent to which these policy approaches are reflected in practice, although one review has argued that there may be a significant gap between policy and practice in this area (Walton 2010).

The central challenge highlighted in the literature on youth and governance – that youth participation in governance should be enhanced at all levels – has been a prominent theme in donor literature since at least 2005. In the last few years, there has been a shift away from more general calls advocating this approach, towards a growing emphasis on how this change can be made actionable. The focus has increasingly been on the mechanisms through which youth participation can be enhanced.

The report highlights nine key issues. Some of these have been prominent issues for several years (e.g. participation and empowerment, information and communication technologies (ICTs), unemployment, conflict and violence), while others appear to have risen to prominence more recently (e.g. climate change, urbanisation). The key issues relating to these nine areas are summarised here and explored in greater depth in the sections below:

- **Participation and Empowerment:** Most countries and major donor agencies have sought to promote youth participation in governance at all levels. Civic engagement of youth is increasingly seen as critical for broader economic and social development goals. Youth leadership remains uncoordinated and fragmented (LR comments).
- **ICTs:** The growing use of ICTs can have profound effects on governance, and donor agencies have sought to promote the use of ICTs amongst youth for a number of years. There has been insufficient work to understand how ICTs can sustain engagement of youth in governance.
- **Conflict and Violence:** In line with broader trends in youth policy, donors have shifted away from narrow, sectoral approaches to addressing youth violence, towards more comprehensive programmes that incorporate youth participation and citizenship issues. There may be a gap between donor rhetoric and practice in this area. Donor youth employment strategies have been widely criticised.
- **Urbanisation:** Poor rural governance and misplaced anti-urbanisation strategies have led to youth violence. Youth moving to cities face particular governance challenges and are often poorly served by existing civil society organisations.
- **Climate Change:** Young people have played a prominent role in campaigning on climate change issues. Although young people are often consulted on climate change issues, youth participation needs to be institutionalised.
- **Coordinating Action on Youth:** Donors should develop standard measurements, indicators and assessments to coordinate their work on youth. Regional organisations are becoming more active in coordinating youth policy.
- **Unemployment:** Donor support for youth unemployment policies is growing but there have been widespread calls to ensure that these policies are more comprehensive.

- **Corruption:** A number of donors are supporting work with youth that addresses corruption issues.

A number of emerging good practices are highlighted in section ten of this report. These include the need for more comprehensive, integrated and active approaches to youth; the need to institutionalize youth participation; to adopt a rights-based approach; to prioritize youth-adult partnerships; to harmonise definitions of youth; and to develop a greater awareness of gender issues.

2. Participation and Empowerment

The broad aim of boosting the participation of youth in government decision making has been one of the main strands of donor youth policy for several years. Programmes have sought to engage youth through a variety of mechanisms (youth boards, national youth councils, advisors, networks and civil society organisations) at the local, national, regional and international levels. In some countries, National Youth Councils are key stakeholders in decision-making on youth issues, while in other contexts they have served a merely symbolic function (UNICEF 2010). A number of donors and NGOs have supported national youth coalitions and virtual networks, with the aim of boosting youth participation at the national level.¹ At the local level, young people establish university groups, school clubs or internet forums to exchange ideas and to provide civic education (UNICEF 2010). One significant problem at this level is the growing gap between the leadership of Southern civil society organisations and youth (SC comments). Another key issue is the fragmented and uncoordinated nature of youth leadership (LR comments).

At the international level, a number of conferences are organised by young people such as the World Youth Congress series. The Commonwealth has organised a regular forum for member countries to share experiences about engaging youth in local governance.² Youth delegates are another important mechanism for engaging youth in global governance. Youth delegates have been active in the General Assembly, in the Commission on Sustainable Development and in the Commission for Social Development (UNICEF 2010). International commitment to increasing youth participation in development processes was reaffirmed by the UN General Assembly in 2009, through a resolution which, resolved to 'consider including youth representatives in their delegations at all relevant discussions in the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and its functional commissions and relevant United Nations conferences' (UN Programme on Youth 2010).

Civic engagement is increasingly seen 'not only as important in itself, but as critical for the economic and social health of local communities and nation-states' (Kassimir & Flanagan, 2010, p. 92). Civic engagement is seen as a critical means of tackling social exclusion. Education is intertwined with strategies to enhance civic engagement in a number of ways. The World Development Report of 2007 (World Bank 2007), cited a 30-year study in Brazil that found that as successive generations became better educated, they became more aware of their political exclusion. In contexts where formal governance institutions exclude young people, civil society organisations or private companies may

¹ For example see Transparency International's 'Youth in Governance' programme in Pakistan: <http://www.ying.edu.pk/node/5>

² See the most recent report at:

http://api.ning.com/files/v6rxX39PebfeUHNtFE7j*yDXLR*EvOFAb*lefXKfU5NcE*48arlzvX5vmHjatE63ng2oLktlCUfVKHpJAyNUmdeVUchJFqW/CLGYPPFFinalReport.pdf

provide an important channel through which young people can achieve feelings of agency and social capital formation (Kassimir & Flanagan 2010).

UNICEF (2010, p.2) argues that youth participation can be strengthened by 'including youth in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of instruments, strategies and programmes' and by supporting the establishment of youth advisory groups or youth networks. The importance of adopting a comprehensive approach to youth participation that builds both the capacity of young people to engage with adults and the capacity of adults to engage with youth has been stressed by a number of donors (see UNDESA 2011). UNICEF also emphasizes the importance of removing barriers to the engagement of young women and other marginalised groups of young people such as young people with disabilities and indigenous young people (UNICEF 2010). Several agencies have emphasised the importance of involving young people in participatory budgeting processes. GTZ, for example, supported a successful annual participatory youth budget programme in one municipality in Argentina.³

3. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)

The emergence of new ICTs has made it much easier for young people to connect with their peers across borders and continents. This can have profound impacts on governance, as suggested by the recent events in the Middle East and North Africa. In Nigeria, it has been argued that ICTs provide a channel for young people to become more engaged in electoral politics (Ruhl 2011). A number of donors have explicitly used new ICTs as a mechanism for increasing youth participation in government. One of the key objectives of the Commonwealth youth programme, for example, is strengthening 'the ability of young people and their networks, governments and civil society to take advantage of technological opportunities to bring about change and improve efficiency and effectiveness of youth development programmes and interventions'.⁴ A symposium report by CPBI/SFCG (2011) noted that the growing use of ICTs among young people may allow them to engage more constructively with donor communities. Although this issue has been acknowledged for some time (the 2005 World Youth report focused on ICTs for example), 'little work has been done beyond the acknowledgement of the use of ICT to figure out how ICT resources could sustain engagement of youth in governance' (SC comments).

4. Conflict and Violence

In line with more general trends in youth policy, donor strategies for dealing with youth violence have shifted from a focus on sectoral issues such as education and employment (see, for instance, UNDP 2006) towards more comprehensive approaches that bring in issues such as youth participation in governance and citizenship (SP comments).

A review of the literature on youth, violence and job creation programmes found that there has been a shift towards more ambitious and more comprehensive youth programming. Calls for more holistic approaches were found to be widespread, both in the academic and policy literature and in donors' own policy statements. There has also been a greater recognition that young people turn to violence as a result of a complex mix of economic, political and social factors and that in order to prevent youth violence, donors will need to adopt integrated approaches to tackle them. Similarly, there is also greater

³ See <http://www.ygproject.org/case-study/participatory-budgeting>

⁴ See http://www.thecommonwealth.org/Internal/190725/190734/main_priorities_and_initiatives/

recognition of the heterogeneity of youth and a greater willingness to consider the positive roles played by youth in post-conflict contexts (Walton 2010). The report finds, however, that 'an assessment of past and current programming by the main donor agencies suggests that a significant gap may exist between a rhetorical commitment to comprehensive youth programming and current practice. In post-war contexts, 'jobs for peace programmes have continued to be criticised on the grounds that they are failing to address root causes of social exclusion' (Walton 2010, p. 4).

There have been a number of common criticisms of donor-funded youth employment programmes. First, interventions have not been based on a context-specific analysis of conflict, market-demands or an understanding of young peoples' grievances, motivations or expectations. Second, there has been a widespread failure from donors to articulate clearly how youth employment projects contribute to armed violence reduction, peacebuilding or conflict prevention. Third, there has been a tendency to focus on the supply-side of job creation (e.g. training and skill development, job counselling), while the demand-side (e.g. public works programmes, targeted wage subsidies, and self-employment or entrepreneurship schemes) has been neglected (Walton 2010).

5. Urbanisation

Poor rural governance policies and misplaced anti-urbanisation policies have contributed to youth violence in Rwanda. Sommers (2006) argues that in pre-genocide Rwanda, anti-urbanisation policy severely limited the educational and employment opportunities available to male youth. Forced immobility meant that while young men had few rural opportunities, they were not allowed to migrate to find better employment. These issues are 'highly likely' to have contributed to the high participation rates of young men in genocidal violence in Rwanda in 1994. In a more recent article Sommers (2010, p.329) has argued that national and international governments should abandon restrictive policies on land and housing that 'stymie youth efforts to become adults and stabilize their lives'.

As youth move away from rural areas there is a growing need for new youth organisations that allow them to voice their demands and needs to government (SC comments). Some donors have sought to address this problem. UN-Habitat, for example, established an 'Opportunities Fund for Urban Youth-led Development' in 2009, which made awards to organisations led by young people conducting programmes in slums (SWP/DFID 2010). A recent review of the literature on youth and urbanisation identified 'a significant disconnect between, on the one hand, policy-oriented concerns of youth participation (often seen as participatory approaches in research and practice) and, on the other, the lived experiences of young people' (Abebe with Kjærholt 2011, p.2). It notes that a number of recent studies have advocated a political economy approach, which may generate 'a contextualized understanding of the social worlds of youth whose positions in society are not always clarified' (ibid.).

6. Climate Change

Young people have played a prominent role in campaigning for climate change issues at the local, national and international level (FAO 2010). The World Youth Report of 2011 focused on climate change and argued that for young people to be successful in driving change they require a strong support system that includes 'parents, teachers, community and religious leaders, the Government, the private sector, the media, and civil society' (UN 2010). Even where there is strong intent to engage young people in decision-making around climate change, youth involvement tends to be heavily subscribed and although

youth are consulted, they remain on the fringes of the decision-making process (ibid.). 'Institutionalizing collaboration requires the establishment of a formal relationship in which mutual rights and responsibilities are legally defined and social sanctions are imposed if such engagement fails to occur' (UN 2010, p.69). The report advocates the use of 'broad-based partnerships – including Governments, the United Nations, the private sector, civil society and the scientific community' – to provide stakeholders with a platform to share knowledge and good practices (UN 2010, p.70).

7. Coordinating Action on Youth

The monitoring and evaluation of youth programming has been undermined by a lack of standardised measurements, which would allow donors to collaborate and compare programmes (CPBI/SFCG 2011). A number of donor agencies, including the World Bank and the Commonwealth Secretariat have sought to develop a set of indicators to measure countries' progress towards youth goals (SWP/DFID 2010). The Youth Development Index developed for Brazilian youth has helped to drive youth-centred policy development (UNFPA no date). Better indicators are particularly needed in aspects of youth development that are difficult to quantify such as cultural change, social exclusion, networking and mentoring (CPBI/SFCG 2011).

Regional organisations have become more involved in co-ordinating youth work. The African Union has become quite active in supporting youth development, empowerment and leadership issues in Africa (UNFPA no date). They have supported a 'Pan-African Youth Charter', which has been adopted by African Youth Ministers and have also supported the idea of a Pan-African Youth Federation.

8. Unemployment

In 2009, 81 million young people were unemployed across the globe – the highest number ever (ILO 2010). Although youth programming in post-conflict contexts has been underfunded there are signs that funding may be increasing (Walton 2010). The World Bank has increased its investments in youth since 1995 from around \$750 million to \$1.1 billion per year (World Bank 2009). Most interventions have combined job and life skills training with service provision (Puerto 2007).

Although most countries have developed strategies to tackle youth unemployment, most have been narrow in scope and limited in time (ILO 2010). Current best practice stresses that policies should be adapted to national circumstances and be part of an integrated framework that promotes economic development and employment growth (ibid.). Policies should also disaggregate between different categories of youth. One way of ensuring this is to involve young people in drawing up national youth action plans (ibid.).

9. Corruption

There are a small number of youth-led anti-corruption initiatives. IREX, for example, support several youth arts projects in Lebanon, Egypt and Russia that highlight problems caused by corruption (PS comments). Youth were also brought together to form a nation-wide youth anti-corruption coalition. The World Bank has an ongoing 'Youth and anti-corruption' initiative (KH comments), although no information about this

programme is publicly available. The global youth anti-corruption network 'Voices Against Corruption' addresses a number of corruption related governance issues.⁵

10. Emerging Good Practice

The following emerging good practices in the area of youth and governance programming have been identified:

- **Comprehensive and integrated approaches:** One of the most important elements of current best practice concerns the importance of developing integrated or comprehensive programmes. Youth policies should be multi-sectoral and mainstreamed (SWP/DFID 2010). Agencies should be aware that broader issues such as poor education and training and social exclusion may act as a barrier to youth engagement. As a result, donors should ensure that youth policies are pursued in a comprehensive manner alongside other development objectives (SWP/DFID 2010). Williams and Kantelberg (2010) argue that young people's capacity to engage in governance work can be increased through the provision of economic empowerment activities. The SWP/DFID (2010) report encourages donors to see formal youth dialogue as the tip of a youth participation iceberg, masking a number of deeper issues including youth-adult partnerships, group formation, the enabling environment and capacity building.
- **Institutionalising youth participation:** Policymakers should focus on creating mechanisms and standards that ensure sustainable youth engagement in policymaking at all levels (UNDP 2006, UN 2010). They should ensure that youth participation (and in particular the participation of marginalized youth) is enshrined in all aspects of programme design, monitoring and evaluation (UNDP 2006, Williams & Kaltenberg 2010, SWP/DFID 2010, Sommers 2010). A symposium for practitioners organized by CPBI/ SFCG (2011) argued that setting standards for youth assessments and using common tools that agencies could collectively adhere to would help to boost the accountability of youth programming to youth. Agencies should develop standards that require youth to be systematically involved in monitoring and evaluation (UNICEF 2010). Most key UN and donor agencies have stated a commitment to enhancing youth participation in their own decision-making and at the national level, by supporting mechanisms that allow young people to be more involved in global and national institutions (UNDESA 2010).
- **Rights-based approach:** There is growing recognition of the importance of pursuing a rights-based approach to youth programming. According to a recent report by the Commonwealth Secretariat (2007), a rights-based approach to youth development involves the following elements: express linkage to rights, accountability to all stakeholders, empowerment, participation, and non-discrimination and attention to vulnerable groups (Commonwealth Secretariat 2007).
- **Active approach:** There has been a shift away from seeing youth merely as beneficiaries towards a more active approach that values them as assets (SWP/DFID 2010). DFID has adopted a 'three lens approach' to youth participation that works for the benefit of youth (as target beneficiaries), with youth as partners, and is shaped by youth as leaders (SWP/DFID 2010). This approach represents a shift away from the 'problem-oriented' approaches that have dominated

⁵ See <http://voices-against-corruption.ning.com/>

youth programming in the past, or the ‘opportunities, capabilities, second chances’ approach advocated by the World Bank in its 2007 World Development Report – ‘Development and the next generation’ (World Bank 2007).

- **Youth-adult partnerships:** A number of reports emphasise the importance of building ‘youth-adult’ partnerships and understanding local attitudes towards youth (SWP/DFID 2010, UNFPA no date). Williams and Kantelberg (2010, p.ii) argue that ‘the development of mutually beneficial relationships between young people and duty bearers’ should be prioritised. They found that ‘change occurs when young people and duty bearers come together and collaborate on jointly identified priorities. It is this i) opening of political space ii) shift in attitudes and iii) collaboration in the process of change between young people and duty bearers that bring about outcomes in citizenship, institutional and policy changes’ (Williams & Kantelberg 2010, p.ii).
- **Harmonising the definition of youth:** The lack of clarity around the term ‘youth’ and in particular how this relates to the ‘child’ category has been widely highlighted. There is a fine line between empowering youth and undermining legal frameworks and mechanisms that protect children in violent areas (CPBI/SFCG 2011). A number of reports have argued that harmonising definitions of youth can be an effective tool for enhancing co-ordination and collaboration between agencies (Commonwealth Secretariat 2007). A working definition should nevertheless account for diversity and not treat youth as a homogenous group (UNDP 2006).
- **Gender:** Ensure that girls and young women do not ‘disappear’ by recognizing that youth includes young men and young women, boys and girls. In some contexts, girls and young women may be harder to reach, but this obstacle should not be an excuse for overlooking them (UNDP 2006).

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12. Additional Information

This query response was prepared by Oliver Walton, oliver@gsdrc.org

Selected websites visited

Commonwealth Youth Programme, DFID, Restless Development, Scribd, Voices Against Corruption, United Nations, UNDESA, UNECA, UNICEF, World Bank, Youth Guidance Project

Experts consulted

Peter Salloum, IREX
Saji Prellis, Search for Common Ground
Stephen Commins, UCLA
Kevin Hempel, World Bank
Layne Robinson, Commonwealth Secretariat
Tina Ho, Commonwealth Secretariat
Maya Brahmam, World Bank
Kavita Watsa, World Bank
Melanie Mayhew, World Bank
Wendy Cunningham, World Bank

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