



INTERNATIONAL
**YEAR OF
YOUTH**
AUGUST 2010-2011
OUR YEAR OUR VOICE

Dialogue and Mutual Understanding

Fact Sheet: Youth Participation

- In 1995, the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) was adopted to address the challenges facing youth into the next millennium.
- In 2003, the General Assembly reaffirmed its commitment to youth by adopting resolution 58/133, reiterating the importance of youth participation at all levels.
- In 2009, through resolution 64/134, the General Assembly proclaimed the International Year of Youth: Dialogue and Mutual Understanding.

Participation is a fundamental right. It is one of the guiding principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that has been reiterated in many other Conventions and Declarations. Through active participation, young people are empowered to play a vital role in their own development as well as in that of their communities, helping them to learn vital life-skills, develop knowledge on human rights and citizenship and to promote positive civic action. To participate effectively, young people must be given the proper tools, such as education about and access to their civil rights.

United Nations and Youth

The UN has long recognized that young people are a major human resource for development and key agents for social change, economic growth and technological innovation. Participation in decision-making is a key priority area of the UN agenda on youth.

In 1995, on the tenth anniversary of International Youth Year, the United Nations strengthened its commitment to young people by adopting the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY), an international strategy to more effectively address their problems and increase opportunities for participation in society.

The WPAY, covering fifteen priority areas, looks in-depth at the nature of the challenges facing youth and presents a blueprint for action. Since its adoption, the World Programme of Action has guided the formulation of national youth policies in many countries.

The international community has reaffirmed its commitment to youth participation through UN General Assembly resolution 58/133, which reiterates the "importance of the full and effective participation of youth and youth organizations at the local, national, regional and international levels in promoting and implementing the World Programme of Action and in evaluating the progress achieved and the obstacles encountered in its implementation".

Subsequent resolutions have also dealt with policies and programmes involving youth as well as promoting youth participation in social and economic development.





Progress

Young people have opportunities to participate in civic life through volunteerism, community service and service-learning. In some countries they serve as members of youth committees in local Governments offering their views on community issues or participating in student governments and influencing youth policy

In some countries National Youth Councils, umbrella organizations for youth organizations, are key stakeholder in decision-making on youth issues. They have purely symbolic status in others.

At the community level, young people can establish university or school clubs aimed at educating each other on youth rights and civic education. They often set up internet fora and discussion groups to exchange ideas and inspire each other to take action in their respective communities.

At the international level, there are a number of youth fora and conferences organized by young people like the World Youth Congress series. They may also participate in international and UN policy processes by becoming youth delegates to the General Assembly, the Commission on Sustainable Development or the Commission for Social Development.

The way forward

There is a need for a collective and better understanding of what youth participation involves, how it can be implemented for all youth ages. Furthermore, it is crucial to develop a set of verifiable indicators to complement the goals and targets developed to assess the progress achieved in the 15 priority areas contained in the WPAY.

Participation can be strengthened by including youth in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of instruments, strategies and programmes.

Youth participation can also be improved through a number of approaches, such as education and capacity building. Youth-friendly information and materials can be developed with young people themselves, through both traditional and progressive technology mediums, such as internet, sms, etc. The material must be accessible to youth with disabilities.

Structures and mechanisms can also be created to advance youth participation. These can be developed for institutionalising youth participation in decision-making processes that affect young people, such as establishing youth advisory groups, youth networks for positive civic engagement, etc.

Efforts can be aimed at achieving appropriate representation and participation of youth in decision-making bodies, as young women and men entitled to the same rights.

When drafting laws that affect young people, facilitate their participation through consultation processes ensuring their contributions to debates on policy- and law-making, resource allocation and parliament's efforts to hold Government to account.

Youth should also be encouraged to participate in issue-based programmes that affect them, such as the education, social protection, reproductive health, environment, etc.

Another approach is to invest in youth participation by supporting programmes for young people's civic engagement initiatives, networks and organizations.





Finally, to ensure that youth participation is inclusive, equitable and gender sensitive, social, economic and cultural barriers affecting young women must be removed. They should have equal access to education and vocational training to be properly equipped for full participation in society, especially political involvement. Adopt a special inclusive measure for enabling participation of young people from marginalised and excluded groups such as young people with disabilities, indigenous young people, etc.

For further information

- www.un.org/youth
- <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/ga60.htm>
- http://www.unicef.org/adolescence/cypguide/resourceguide_intro.html
- <http://www.unicef.org/voy/>, the Voice of the Youth homepage
- <http://www.youthpeer.org/web/guest/home>
- <http://www.unfpa.org/adolescents/participation.htm>
- www.worldbank.org/participation/ World Bank site on participation and civic engagement, with direct links to sources on participatory tools methods
- www.unesco.org/most/growing.htm for the “Growing Up In Cities” Initiative
- www.ids.ac.uk/ids/ homepage of the Institute of Development Studies, Sussex, a leading centre for research and teaching on international development, includes a page on participatory approaches.

This Fact Sheet was prepared by the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Programme on Youth. It is part of a collaborative effort of the Inter-Agency Network for Youth Development, coordinated by the United Nations Programme on Youth.

