

# YOUTH PARTICIPATION



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 information, 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 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<sup>1</sup>.

“...The United Nations is doing a considerable amount to invest in youth. We are acquiring knowledge and best practices about the issues affecting young people today. And we are making greater efforts to engage youth in our negotiating and decision-making processes. Still, I do not think we have gone nearly far enough...” Secretary-General's Remarks to General Assembly High-Level Meeting on Youth, 2011.

## Progress

Parallel to the youth-related work the different UN agencies and programmes are doing, the General Assembly and its subordinate organs are also involved in youth development. Currently, it is the Third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly and the Commission for Social

<sup>1</sup> <http://social.un.org/youthyear/docs/youth-participation.pdf>





Development that are the main intergovernmental bodies which monitor the progress, constraints, and emerging topics related to youth issues within the UN. The Third Committee of the General Assembly considers youth issues once every two years under its resolution, "Policies and programmes involving youth." Similarly, the Commission for Social Development takes youth issues once every two years under its resolution, "Policies and programmes involving youth."<sup>2</sup>

The Joint Statement by Heads of UN Entities of the Inter-agency Network on Youth Development on the occasion of the UN High-Level Meeting on Youth in 2011 further retreated the commitment on youth participation "FULL AND EFFECTIVE YOUTH PARTICIPATION in society and decision-making, in both rural and urban settings, striving to include young people with disabilities, young people living with HIV, indigenous young people, young people from minorities, young migrants, young people who are stateless, internally displaced, young refugees or those affected by humanitarian situations or armed conflict."

Furthermore, paragraph 26 in the *Outcome Document of the High Level Meeting (General Assembly, A/RES/65/312 - 2011)*<sup>3</sup>, provide key opportunities to build on, and consolidate greater accountability within the UN system to respond to youth globally. With the changing face of the world, the UN needs to work in partnership with young women and young men to ensure that they are meaningfully engaged and their human rights respected, fulfilled and protected. In addition The Secretary-General's Five-Year Action Agenda in his 2nd Term priorities have clearly made commitment to boost Youth agenda in the UN system. He stated "Address the needs of the largest generation of young people the world has ever known by deepening the youth focus of existing programmes on employment, entrepreneurship, political inclusion, citizenship and protection of rights, and education, including on reproductive health. To help advance this agenda, the UN system will develop and implement an action plan, create a youth volunteer programme under the umbrella of the UN Volunteers and appoint a new Special Adviser for Youth"

The UN system is coming together to develop the UN system wide action plan on youth. This process saw engagement of young people by bringing their voices on an online platform that got over 16,000 replies. There is a stronger focus on youth participation and greater recognition to youth led organizations. The proposed changes at the UN mark a shift that needs to be recognised in the time to come and the greatest test will be how youth worldwide are recognised through their voice, action and partnership in the UN systems and beyond.

<sup>2</sup> List of resolutions: <http://social.un.org/index/Youth/Resourcesandtools/Youthresolutions.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> Requests the secretary-general to submit a report, with due regard to existing reporting obligations, to the Commission for Social Development at its fifty-first session, on national experiences, lessons learned and good practices on how to address problems affecting youth, which report shall also evaluate the achievements and shortcomings of ongoing United Nations programmes related to youth and put forward concrete recommendations on how to more effectively address the challenges hindering the development and participation of youth, including through volunteer activities; how to improve the United Nations programmes and structures related to youth, including their coherence; how to better foster dialogue and mutual understanding among youth worldwide; and how to assess progress in these fields, and should be prepared in consultation with Member States, as well as the relevant specialized agencies, funds and programmes, and regional commissions, taking into account the work done by the United Nations system; and also request the Secretariat to consult, as appropriate, with youth-led and youth-focused organizations to ensure that various youth inputs are duly shared with the Commission for Social Development during its deliberations;"





## 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, reporting 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 inclusive 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 institutionalizing youth participation in decision-making processes that affect young people, such as establishing youth advisory groups, youth networks for positive civic engagement, etc.

A call for inclusive youth participation makes a case for stronger gender parity and focus on young women's participation. Focusing on participation of other marginalized groups of youth such as youth with disabilities, indigenous youth, migrant youth, youth affected by conflict and post conflict situation, youth affected by HIV, 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.

## For further information

- [www.un.org/youth](http://www.un.org/youth)
- [http://www.unicef.org/adolescence/cypguide/resourceguide\\_intro.html](http://www.unicef.org/adolescence/cypguide/resourceguide_intro.html)
- <http://www.unhabitat.org/categories.asp?catid=531> UN-Habitat Youth
- <http://www.unv.org/what-we-do/thematic-areas/youth.html> UNV Youth Volunteers
- <http://www.globalyouthdesk.org/> Global Help Youth Desk
- <http://www.unfpa.org/public/home/adolescents/pid/6482>
- [www.unesco.org/most/growing.htm](http://www.unesco.org/most/growing.htm) for the "Growing Up In Cities" Initiative
- <http://www.youthpeer.org/web/guest/home>
- [www.worldbank.org/participation/](http://www.worldbank.org/participation/) World Bank site on participation and civic engagement, with direct links to sources on participatory tools methods.

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