Empowering youth for peace and sustainable development

Around the world, youth are driving change and claiming respect for fundamental freedoms and rights, improved conditions for them and their communities, together with opportunities to learn, work and participate in decisions that affect them. At the same time, due to persistent crises, many young women and men are disengaged, at the extreme margins of society and have lost hope in the future. More than ever, it is now time to improve investment in research, policies and programmes to create an enabling environment for youth to prosper, exercise rights, regain hope and a sense of community and engage as responsible social actors.

The starting point is to consider youth as the solution and not as the problem. It is vital that they are fully engaged in social change. Their energy, creativity and critical spirit in identifying innovative solutions and building bridges and networks across groups have been demonstrated in several regions. If provided with an enabling environment, they can channel this energy into efforts that will benefit sustainable development, democratic consolidation and a culture of peace, for both present and future generations. The integration of youth among the priorities of the United Nations Secretary-General’s Five-Year Action Agenda, in January 2012, reflects this position.

Since 1999, UNESCO has advocated the importance of working with and for youth, including the most vulnerable and marginalized. Building on this foundation, the Organization will continue, more focused than ever, to engage youth as beneficiaries, actors and partners. The objective is to provide them with the skills and opportunities to be agents of change for peace and sustainable development.

Increasing our focus

One of the main lessons learned through the revision exercises of UNESCO’s work on youth to date is that the best way to increase focus and tangible results is to reinforce the holistic response to youth issues by consolidating, in a strategic and efficient manner, UNESCO’s multidisciplinary expertise and work on youth within and across work streams: from education to culture, sciences, humanities and communication. The potential for such a multidisciplinary response makes UNESCO unique in the UN system, addressing a majority of youth development issues in an evidence-based, holistic and non-fragmented manner. Such a response should also combine bottom-up and top-down approaches that fully respond to UNESCO’s humanistic mission, core functions, intergovernmental nature and network of partners. Building on these lessons, work on youth would be articulated around three complementary, transversal and interlinked axes, as follows:

**Axis 1**
POLICY FORMULATION with the participation of youth

**Axis 2**
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION and SOCIAL INNOVATION

**Axis 3**
CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT for the transition to adulthood
contributing to the overarching objectives of the medium-term strategy 2014–2021: specific actions

the work on youth lies at the heart of the efforts to achieve the two overarching objectives proposed for the medium-term strategy 2014–2021. reflecting the complexity of youth issues, its transversal and interdisciplinary nature contributes directly, in a complementary manner, to both objectives. the end goal is to allow duty-bearers and rights-holders to create and sustain an enabling environment for youth to fulfil their rights, to prosper as human beings, to be heard and included, and to be engaged and valued as social actors. this is key to unleashing their potential to promote a culture of peace and sustainable development and to eradicate poverty. in this perspective, the work on youth would allow to: (i) capitalize on their creativity, innovation and potential to drive change; (ii) address challenges that affect their development, render them vulnerable and impede them from fulfilling their potential; and (iii) reach the unreached, those who have lost a sense of community and hope in the future.

axis 1: policy formulation with the participation of youth

public policies on youth provide the overarching vision for youth programming and touch upon multiple policy areas: from education to employment, from social development to democratic representation, from scientific research to innovation, culture, sports, communication and health, among other aspects. policies should stem from evidence-based research, be developed with the participation of youth, regularly monitored and evaluated in terms of implementation, and reviewed to adjust to ongoing social transformations. unesco has the unique capacity to consolidate expertise across its fields of competence and to partner with specialized un entities and development actors for the elaboration, implementation, revision or evaluation of inclusive public policies on youth, also in terms of ensuring representative youth participation (such as through national youth councils). this work can directly inform legislation at national level, thereby bearing normative functions. it will build on the unesco guidelines for participatory policy formulation, developed in 2005, and on lessons learned from previous policy work in cameroon, the pacific (tokelau,marshall islands, nauru, tuvalu), lebanon and brazil, among other countries. it will also incorporate the results of the unesco international institute for educational planning (iiiep) policy forum on engaging youth in planning education for social transformations, the expertise emanating from the science policy reviews, the technical and vocational education and training (tvet) upstream policy work and the cultural diversity programming lens. in line with the 2005 convention on the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions, this work will also

empowering youth for peace and sustainable development
promote (i) cultural policy measures enabling youth participation in cultural and creative industries, and (ii) the participation of young cultural practitioners in policy-making. Youth concerns will also be mainstreamed in normative efforts to implement the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

In Zambia, in the context of the Strategy on African Youth, UNESCO is now leading the review of the current policy on youth, with the collaboration of the national government and in partnership with the UN country team and the Commonwealth Youth Programme, as well as the National Youth Development Council and community youth organizations. The revision, which is in line with the current United Nations Development Action Framework (UNDAF), will be followed by further policy advice and capacity development for the implementation of the recommendations. UNESCO is also supporting policy revisions in Sierra Leone and Liberia and the development of a representative National Youth Assembly in Ghana. Similar processes will soon be launched in Côte d’Ivoire.

In Asia, UNESCO is supporting youth participation in determining Mongolia’s youth policy. Policy recommendations were also developed for the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries on mechanisms for youth participation in social transformations and intercultural dialogue.

**AXIS 2: CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT FOR THE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD**

This specific area of work will focus on developing the necessary set of skills to empower youth to become autonomous, to make risk-free transitions to adulthood and to engage as valued social actors. UNESCO has the unique capacity to address three major transitions that youth undergo: continuing to learn, starting to work and exercising citizenship. In this context, the Organization will build literacy and life skills, TVET and employability, in both green and social sectors, civic and intercultural skills. Building the capacities of teachers, researchers, trainers and youth workers will also be a key action under this axis as a means to ensure sustainable interventions and in-country capacity development.

Within the Education for All by 2015 process, UNESCO emphasizes the promotion of learning and training opportunities for vulnerable youth and addresses school drop-out through equitable access to quality education at all levels, teacher training, literacy and skills development for employability and lifelong learning. UNESCO has also been leading work on Education for Sustainable Development, including through the joint United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)-UNESCO YouthXchange initiative on youth and sustainable lifestyles. Building on current experiences in the Arab States, South Sudan and Côte d’Ivoire, UNESCO will continue building TVET and entrepreneurial skills for youth, including introducing entrepreneurial and cultural management skills in higher education programmes and providing entrepreneurship training for young cultural practitioners. Support for arts education programmes for young artists, designers and artisans will be maintained, particularly via fellowships for exchange programmes.

Recognizing the power of information as a vehicle for social transformation and development, UNESCO will also empower youth to access and engage in a knowledge-based society, particularly through information and communication technologies (ICTs). This would include improving access to multilingual information and knowledge sources, strengthening ICT literacy and technical skills, fostering the participation of young women in the ICT sector and enabling youth with disabilities to access ICT training.

In 2012, UNESCO and UNAIDS are implementing a long-term project in Eastern Europe and Central Asia focusing on empowering youth on sexuality, health and life skills, particularly through the Internet and social media.

In China, Nepal and Mongolia, UNESCO is developing a pilot interactive toolkit on gender-based violence to strengthen the related capacities of youth, particularly of young women.

A toolkit on freedom of expression and press freedom for high school and pre-university students has just been developed to strengthen youth capacity and literacy in critically using media and information as a means of enabling them to exercise fundamental human rights on freedom of expression. This can be incorporated into normal school curricula and is a good resource for extra-curricular activities.

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**Main beneficiaries to be prioritized following needs assessment on a case-by-case basis**

**Groups:** most vulnerable and marginalized; youth with disabilities; adolescent girls and young women; youth leaders and social entrepreneurs; members of community youth organizations.

**Countries** with demographic prevalence of youth; Priority Africa; Least-Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS); combination of settings to build critical mass (high-, middle- and low-income countries; countries in transition, etc.); countries with a UNESCO presence.

Continuing interagency collaboration, through the Interagency Network on Youth Development and at UNDAF level, would allow less duplication and maximize results within available resources. UNESCO will also advocate and engage with key stakeholders in the public sphere and the private sector, particularly civil society actors, including youth NGOs, National Commissions and UNESCO Chairs and Institutes to support the Youth Programme and to strengthen its quality and plurality. Cooperation with the Joint Programmatic Commission on Youth would be strategically anchored to the implementation of work on youth. UNESCO will also capitalize on successful networks, such as the World Association of Young Scientists (WAYS), the largest grass-roots collaborative scientific community and social network for young scientists in the world, which allows young researchers and scientists to promote their work, share information, look for job opportunities and develop knowledge and relationships.
Awareness-raising and pedagogical materials for youth will be developed to provide new perspectives on the history of Africa, the slave trade and slavery, focusing on contemporary cultural expressions and productions and using the potential of ICTs. Youth-friendly versions of the General and Regional Histories, in particular the General History of the Caribbean, will also be produced. The Diversity Kit for Youth, an educational tool to spread awareness among young people (12 to 16 years) of the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions will be further developed and implemented.

In addition to the above, capacity-development work will be inherent to the actions proposed under axes 1 and 3.

Axis 3: Civic Engagement, Democratic Participation and Social Innovation

Civic engagement is the process through which young women and men exercise their rights and assume their responsibilities as citizens and social actors. They put their skills and experiences to the service of their communities, by taking action, directly addressing an issue, working with others to solve problems, or interacting with the institutions of representative democracy. Civic engagement takes different forms, including youth volunteerism, social innovation, leadership, social entrepreneurship, youth media and participation in decision-making. The work under this axis is fundamental as it not only complements but allows investments in the previous two axes to be maximized. It puts skills to the test and further strengthens them; it builds civic competencies, enables social inclusion, dialogue and non-discrimination; it cultivates and sustains a culture of human rights where youth are both rights-holders and duty-bearers. It is also a key strategy to prevent youth becoming affected by violence, both as perpetrators and as victims. UNESCO will work around three specific aspects of engagement:

Youth participation in decision-making and democratic consolidation

- In Tunisia, UNESCO is leading the Working Group ‘Civic Education’ under the Governance thematic group of the UN country team. In this context, building on the gender-sensitive training manual on democracy for youth in Tunisia (2011), UNESCO is working to support the participation of vulnerable young women in advocacy and decision-making processes. Similar experiences are under way in Egypt, Morocco and Mauritania.
- In Egypt, through workshops on human rights and democracy for rural and urban youth, UNESCO will continue to support political participation through formal and non-formal education.

Youth-led action to prevent conflict, build and consolidate peace

- Based on the successful experience of the Open Schools in Brazil, which was repeated in five countries in Central America and in Guinea-Bissau, UNESCO will continue engaging, or re-integrating in society, youth affected by violence through artistic, cultural, social entrepreneurship, leisure and sports activities.
- In recent years, the World Heritage Education Programme has been engaging youth in leading dynamic heritage preservation projects. Youth participation and volunteerism in awareness-raising on heritage as a vector of dialogue and social inclusion will be further encouraged through an integrated Heritage in Young Hands programme.
- The Power of Peace Network (PPN), a time-bound project which took place in 2010–2011, provided an interactive platform enabling youth to develop media products to promote peace. UNESCO will continue stimulating online youth networking to promote the values of intercultural dialogue, tolerance and peaceful co-existence, as well as community-building.
- Museums will be used as platforms for youth civic engagement to stimulate dialogue and cultural exchange, thereby contributing to building inclusive social development.

Endnotes

1. Emanating from cross analysis of: (i) findings and recommendations of the Thematic Working Group on Youth (2010–2011); (ii) analysis of the work of global and regional actors on youth, including the UN system (2008–2012); (iii) assessment of UNESCO action on youth to date based on review of previous DVA documents and on information provided by all sectors; (iv) examination of the situation of youth globally and of the evolution of youth organization patterns; (v) evolution of the international community’s approach to youth; (vi) mapping of national policies on youth and of national representation structures on youth.

2. Overarching Objective 1: Contributing to lasting peace (…), Overarching Objective 2: Contributing to sustainable development and the eradication of poverty (…).


4. With the support of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

5. With the support of the Kingdom of Spain.

6. With the support of Japan.

7. With the support of Brazil.