



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

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

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

**Interview of Ms Irina Bokova,
Director-General of UNESCO**

**on the occasion of Q&A with the 7th UNESCO Youth Forum
youth bloggers and delegates**

December 2011

Questions collected from youth delegates (through the online platform)

1. What are UNESCO's plans to help orient youth more on the consequences of corruption? Corruption is everywhere in developing nations, how should youth contribute in the fight against corruption worldwide and especially in Asia? (collected online from Dan Bagaporo, youth delegate of the Philippines – asked by youth blogger Rajneesh Bhandari of Nepal)

Answer:

I believe youth play a key role in fighting corruption. We need to raise awareness on the consequences of corruption from an early age. Corruption undermines development, social cohesion, and human security in both developed and developing states. At UNESCO, we work to promote openness, democracy, and transparency by supporting the development of fundamental values among youth and to foster healthy and inclusive governance systems -- particularly through work to promote Human Rights Education, cultural diversity, ethics, sport and anti-doping. Together with conscientious and engaged young people around the world, I am convinced we can enhance transparency and combat corruption.

2. English: We would like to know your plans of keeping youth motivated and alerted to the outcome of this Forum and if the participants will get feedback on the proposed recommendations.

French (original) : Quelles sont les stratégies pour garder les jeunes toujours motivés et alertés par rapport aux étapes de ce Forum, mais aussi savoir si les

participants auront les commentaires à donner sur les recommandations qui ont été proposés. (collected online from Anael Bodwell and Davis Andre, youth delegates of the Seychelles - asked by youth blogger Doudou-Bienvenu Kajangu of the Democratic Republic of the Congo)

Answer:

I am deeply committed to keeping the momentum of the Youth Forum going – this is important to UNESCO and crucial to realizing the recommendations of the Final Report of the youth delegates.

With this in mind, we will support youth delegates in their actions by advocating with Member States and working with all partners to support the follow-up of the recommendations. We plan also to strengthen the Youth Forum network and to provide opportunities for mentoring and exchange with former UNESCO Youth Forum participants that are now driving change in their communities.

I believe the contribution of the 7th UNESCO Youth Forum delegates, and of youth around the world, is crucial – and we need more of it!

We want to hear more from you – how are the recommendations being implemented your country? What are your plans to follow-up on the Youth Forum? What can you do and how can we here at UNESCO better help you realize your objectives?

You count on us here at UNESCO, and we also count on you to take action, to alert young people around the world to the outcome of the Youth Forum and to let everyone get involved.

For all of this, we will seek to make the most of social media and online tools in fresh new ways. I am excited that we launched a groundbreaking campaign called the *Youth Voice Tour* to gather youth voices and feedback from around the world. Conceived and designed by our partner, Grupo ABC and its Chairman, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador Nizan Guanaes, the *Youth Voice Tour* will allow young people from diverse backgrounds to tell the world what change means to them. A *Youth Voice Tour* microphone will travel the world being passed from one young

person to the next in a relay, similar to that of the Olympic torch, in a 24-month campaign building up to the 8th UNESCO Youth Forum in 2013.

3. Many people have different perspectives on the value and proper function of the United Nations. If the UN were to become everything you aspire it to be, what would it look like? What are the biggest challenges facing the UN, and are these issues fixable in a world of competing powers with differing interests? (collected online from Andrew Leon Hanna of the USA but not selected by youth bloggers to be asked on stage)

Answer:

The world is increasingly interconnected – we see this with the youth uprisings in the Arab world and with the economic, financial, social and environmental crisis affecting all of our societies.

Looking at these challenges, I believe global governance requires a stronger United Nations, to protect the most vulnerable in a more coherent and efficient manner. From its establishment, the United Nations has focused on enhancing dialogue and cooperation between member states, and we have worked to create more inclusive, just, and equitable societies through sustainable economic and social development. A key challenge we are addressing for the United Nations system is to work better as one voice and one actor – we pursue this goal every day, on the ground and at the global level.

4. We hear about conferences every day and (from) many people around the globe, but for the UNESCO Youth Forum, (particularly) this year and exactly at this time how are you going to ensure that the resolutions that this Forum (passes) are going to be actually implemented on the ground and by youth? (collected from a youth delegate from Tunisia – unidentified- by a youth blogger, Hend Sallam of Egypt)

Answer:

The 7th UNESCO Youth Forum marks a real change in the way we approach such meetings. Rather than an event held every two years, the Forum is now a platform

for debate and action over the entire two-year cycle, connecting one Forum to the following one.

UNESCO will work to support youth delegates in their follow-up efforts, and we will seek to incorporate their recommendations into our daily work within our programs.

In addition to helping to establish Youth Desks in UNESCO National Commissions in their countries, young people can also take an active role in local communities and get involved with NGOs to make sure that grassroots work is undertaken by youth.

Also, through the *Youth Voice Tour*, UNESCO will track the views and initiatives of youth around the world. We will be working closely with the youth bloggers who covered the 7th UNESCO Youth Forum and who will also be informing and raising awareness of the Forum's recommendations and follow-up.

5. How does UNESCO act in order to reduce the extremely big delay between its beautiful ideas and values for a better society, and the slow reactions of governments, policy or curricula makers and private sector? (from George Kudor, youth delegate of Romania)

Answer:

There is gap, and this is unfortunate but also normal. As an international organization with an ambitious mandate and – believe it or not – limited resources, we strive every day to meet our ideals and the ambitions we have set for the world.

UNESCO tackles this challenge daily - with our partners in civil society, with the private sector, with young people across the world and many others.

We work with all of these actors for peaceful change inside societies. Change is possible through better and more inclusive education, realizing the benefits of science for all, support to freedom of expression, including on the internet, protecting cultural heritage and the diversity of cultural expressions.

UNESCO set up the Youth Forum as a key platform to reach out to young people. We want to involve young people as fully-fledged partners to help make our ideas and values a reality in their communities.

Questions developed by youth bloggers

1. (a) In regards to the Arab Spring, do you see these revolutions as a real change or as a superficial change? And would it be your belief that revolution is needed in order to realize true change in society? (b) During this period of political transition in our region, does UNESCO have any special educational or social plans for the Arab world? (asked on behalf of youth blogger Ali Fakhry of Lebanon, by youth blogger Andrew Burton of the USA)

Answer:

All of us watch the events unfolding in the Arab world with the sense that we are witnessing unprecedented social and political change.

UNESCO sees young people as actively shaping the future of their countries, particularly those in political and social transition. Real change can be undertaken throughout and following these periods.

From 2011-2013, we are proposing a 3-point plan to support policymakers and changemakers following the Arab Spring, including:

- (1) Analyzing the situation of youth after the uprisings and supporting the consolidation of the youth movement(s) in a representative and inclusive structure;
- (2) Providing advice at the policy level to ensure that youth are fully and meaningfully engaged in the transition on all levels;
- (3) Getting youth involved at community level by helping to develop skills and opportunities for community action.

2. What do you identify as the most significant barriers to entry into the job markets for the youth of the developing and the advanced countries? How can the youth collaborate with policy-makers to introduce reform into

the system of governance in our countries? What do you see as they way out from the related frustration and depression? (asked by youth blogger Rajneesh Bhandari of Nepal)

Answer:

These days, unemployment is on everyone's minds, especially for young people. We have heard that you often feel frustrated when trying to enter the job market. The challenges young people in developed and developing countries face are often similar, but have different features. Certain contexts are supportive of youth entrepreneurship and youth businesses, while others are more reluctant. Too many young people still leave education without acquiring strong basic skills, which affects their performance and learning in the job market.

To bridge these gaps, we need new forms of education and training. We need new partnerships, networks and alliances at local and national levels, between public, private and civil society stakeholders.

We need innovative forms of youth participation to hold policy makers accountable. This can be achieved through youth participation in education councils and similar mechanisms, and newer informal means such as voluntary youth movements, youth organizations, and social media. We must bring youth's skills up to the level at which they are able to fully exploit these instruments for participation on local, national, and international levels.

The frustration youth are experiencing can be addressed by concrete measures to improve training and education, for work and for life, at policy level. Youth have a vital role to play in these changes.

As Director-General, I am encouraging new national and international alliances towards youth participation in decision-making, and on all levels of policy development. To achieve these changes, we must take youth seriously and not just offer them a token seat at the table.

3. In an era in which young people don't trust institutions anymore, how can UNESCO convince young people of the importance of the institutions?

**Does UNESCO have the power to show its importance to the youth of today?
(asked by youth blogger Andrew Burton of the USA)**

Answer:

I often hear the comment by young people that they do not trust institutions like UN agencies and UNESCO as much today as they once did.

I am aware of this perception, and UNESCO is trying actively to rebuild the trust of young people in institutions. We seek to do so by including youth in significant decision-making processes of the Organization – as seen in the UNESCO Youth Forum’s impact on the General Conference.

We want to go beyond making youth’s voices heard, and make sure they are acted upon.

Representing a considerable part of the world’s population and a huge potential, young people are critical players in all aspects of development. It is my hope that today’s young people will see UNESCO as an institution that gives them voice and the opportunity to participate as valued partners in decision-making and action at all levels.

4. In some parts of the world, people don't think highly of UN agencies such as UNESCO for not doing enough or for not being strong enough to protect Member States from resorting into violence with each other (such as the Thailand-Cambodian conflict over the listing of a Hindu temple by UNESCO in which conflict erupted, and UNESCO asked the parties involved to stop, but they kept fighting and many lives were lost). What (could) UNESCO do in order to change how it is viewed in these parts of the world or in other words in order not to fail solving these conflicts, again? (asked by youth blogger Kounila Keo of Cambodia)

Answer:

In situations of tension, such as that which occurred at the Preah Vihear Temple World Heritage Site in 2011, the role of UNESCO is to promote dialogue and peace.

We do this by working to bring parties together to discuss and negotiate collectively. One concrete effort to promote peace whilst protecting and safeguarding cultural and natural properties is seen in the ratification of the World Heritage Convention. This is a binding international legal instrument whose purpose is to improve international cooperation and dialogue so as to prevent future tensions.

5. Many programs today focus on giving women more opportunities to express themselves and build their capacities. But in this bid to create gender equality and empower more women in the society, do you think young men are being disenfranchised? (asked by youth blogger Jennifer Ehidiamen of Nigeria)

Answer:

Gender equality is the priority of the Organization, and it is my personal priority.

Gender equality is about historical justice and human rights. It is also important for social and economic development and to create equal opportunities and equal capacities for all in society.

Many programmes working on gender equality have focused on the rights of women and girls, because women and girls face greater discrimination. None of this, however, comes at the expense of men. Human rights are for all. Gender equality can only be achieved by involving both women and men as equal partners in society. This is the goal of our actions.

6. We understand that a reform will be voted on in the General Conference that aims to open space to civil society, meaning companies and NGOs. Since these agents may not necessarily have spaces for youth on their agendas, how will UNESCO ensure space for youth issues among these new entities? (asked by youth blogger Miguel Soffia of Chile)

Answer:

This is an issue of interest to many partners – including our NGO and private sector partners, youth, and the general public. UNESCO advocates on behalf of youth and raises awareness with its partners on youth-oriented issues in order to foster

greater investment and commitments on issues important to young people worldwide.

I am pleased to say that UNESCO actively pursues youth-focused partnerships with NGOs and the private sector. We also foresee targeted awareness-raising initiatives on youth issues to make sure that that concerns are addressed.

7. Change starts from the local community. I don't know if (the audience) know(s) this but this Youth Forum was organized by a great staff and (dozens) of volunteers and (dozens) of interns and they are not at all paid, (the same as) all interns inside the United Nations. So my question to Madame Bokova is, (sic) is UNESCO ready to try to give an example to all the community of the world (by) starting to pay people (for) internships? (asked by youth blogger Martina Castigliani of Italy)

Answer:

I am glad you asked such a pertinent and frequently asked question.

Youth employment and unpaid internships are hot-button topics around the world today, and UNESCO is no exception. I am glad to take this chance to underline the importance of interns and offer some clarification on the parameters of internships at our Organization.

UNESCO forms part of the wider UN family, and all agencies within that family have common practices. The internship programme is one of those. As a means of harmonizing the Internship programme within the UN system, it has been decided that the programme will be administered under the same rule, same condition of service, under the same type of contract and with the same sort of insurance. This programme is closely monitored within the UN System agencies to ensure a better balance of interns from developed and developing countries. Currently, more than 80% of the interns come from developed countries.

The aim of the internship programme is to give young people professional experience in an international organization that relates to and complements their studies. An internship is also a unique chance to work in a multicultural,

intergovernmental organization. It is safe to say that such experience and exposure is considered a great asset on a young person's CV.

When it comes down to the essence of the question, there are practical constraints to the system -- a key one being financial. Since UNESCO accepts roughly 500 interns per year, remunerating interns would imply an overwhelming financial cost to the Organization, and thus, sadly, we would have to reduce the intake of interns. Unfortunately, in these austere economic circumstances, this is the reality of the matter. UNESCO greatly appreciates the dedication and commitment of our interns, and we work to develop their growth and continue our relationship with them for years to come.

This policy is in place throughout the United Nations agencies and I believe it represents a great opportunity for young people to pursue their education with on-the-job training for up to 4 months. We learn from them, and they have an opportunity to further build their skills and to familiarize themselves with the work and processes of the UN System. We nurture courtesy, innovation and creativity. Of course, I would be happy to consider any proposal that could further improve this system.

Sources:

<http://www.un.org/depts/OHRM/sds/internsh/index.htm>

http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=11716&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html