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# Youth 21: Building an Architecture for Youth Engagement in the UN System

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Development

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<b>ABBREVIATIONS .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>ABOUT THE REPORT .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>PART 1: YOUNGER THAN EVER! .....</b>	<b>7</b>
CHALLENGES TO YOUTH LIVELIHOODS .....	8
<b>PART 2 – THE UN SYSTEM’S COMMITMENT TO YOUTH ENGAGEMENT .....</b>	<b>11</b>
THE EMERGENCE OF AN UNITED NATIONS YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AGENDA .....	11
THE UN SYSTEM’S WORK WITH YOUTH .....	13
INITIATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DAY .....	15
List of Previous Celebrations of International Youth Day include: .....	15
The UN World Youth Reports .....	15
<i>UN Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (IANYD)</i> .....	16
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, 2011 .....	17
<i>Other key UN Inter-Agency Collaborations on Youth</i> .....	18
UNAIDS Inter-Agency Task Team (IATT) on HIV and Young People .....	19
Youth Employment Network .....	19
Inter-agency cooperation on climate change and sustainable development .....	19
Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies.....	19
United Nations Adolescent Girls Task Force .....	20
BENEFITS OF INTER-AGENCY COLLABORATION .....	20
Secretary-General’s Recommendations on Improving Collaboration within the United Nations system on youth-related matters .....	22
SUMMARY.....	22
<b>PART3 – ARE WE MOVING AHEAD OR BACKWARDS ON YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN THE UN? .....</b>	<b>24</b>
1998 BRAGA YOUTH ACTION PLAN .....	25
<b>THE WAY FORWARD</b> .....	26
<i>Scenario 1: Scale up the UN Youth Program to an Institutional level</i> .....	27
An Example in the UN System: Establishment of the UNAIDS.....	27
<i>Scenario 2: Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Youth</i> .....	28
<i>Scenario 3: UN Permanent Forum on Youth, Youth Platform Assembly, and Special Representative on Youth</i> .....	29
Example in the UN system: Process for Setting up of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.....	31
<b>CONCLUDING REMARKS .....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>ANNEX .....</b>	<b>33</b>

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## Abbreviations

COP	Conference of the Parties
ECOSOC	Economic & Social Council
FAO	Food & Agricultural Organization
GA	United Nations General Assembly
GC	UN-HABITAT's Governing Council
IANYD	United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
IYY	International Year of Youth
MENA	Middle East North Africa
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SG	Secretary-General
SRS	Special Representative of Secretary-General
UNCED	UN Conference on Environmental Development
UNCSD	UN Commission on Sustainable Development
UNDESA	UN Dept. Of Economic & Social Affairs
UNFCCC	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNFPA	UN Population Fund's
UN-HABITAT	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UNPFII	UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
YEN	Youth Employment Network

## Executive Summary

There are currently 1.2 billion youth in the world, the largest number of youth ever to have existed. The majority of these youth live in developing countries where most face daunting challenges, living in poor economic, social and environmental conditions, with limited access to education, training and employment. Yet, even facing these challenges, youth are recognized and act as agents for positive change globally, whether it be as the drivers of economic advancement, or the instigators of democratic reform. This report is an attempt to take on this challenge of creating an environment for youth leaders of today, not just tomorrow.

It is within the context of youth being the pioneers of today, and leaders of tomorrow, that this report is being written. This report explores how youth can be more meaningfully engaged in governance at the global level, specifically within the UN system? The UN has recognized the unique role that youth play in development since its inception. This recognition has come through such global initiatives as the International Year of Youth (IYY), and through policy declarations such as the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY). Following the completion of the most recent IYY, there was a renewed commitment by the UN expressed in paragraph 26 (GA/RES/65/312) to evaluate the achievements and shortcomings of UN programmes and from this evaluation input forward recommendations on how to more effectively address youth issues and youth engagement.

UN-HABITAT, the lead agency authoring this report, was tasked by its Governing Council (HSP/GC/23/7) to work together with member states and other UN agencies to enhance youth engagement in the UN system. UN-HABITAT recognizes the global importance of youth. Since 2007, more than half of the world's population lives in an urban context, and the most marginalized of those are often young women and men. It is estimated that as many as 60% of all urban dwellers will be under the age of 18 by 2030. It is under the framework of the aforementioned resolution, the WPAY and in the spirit of advancing the issues of youth globally, that UN-HABITAT as a member of the Inter-Agency Network on Youth and Development (IANYD) has authored this report.

This report seizes on the opportunity provided by paragraph 26 from the outcome document from High-Level Meeting on Youth in July 2011, and has put forward four possible scenarios that may facilitate improved engagement of youth. These scenarios, found in detail in part 3, are as follows:

Scenario 1: Scale up the UN DESA Youth Program to an Institutional Level

Scenario 2: Establish a Special Representative of the Secretary General on Youth

Scenario 3: Establish a UN Permanent Forum on Youth, inclusive of a Youth Platform Assembly, and Special Representative on Youth

In conclusion, this report finds that the UN has historically worked to engage youth with a number of UN agencies working independently and across the agency to address key issues that impact the lives of youth globally. Yet, though there have been many policy statements made that reference the need to engage youth more meaningfully within the UN system, these have remained on paper. Scenarios 1-3 proposed here describe a range of options to better engage youth. This report finds Scenario 3 to be the most comprehensive and the best option.

## About the Report

Youth from 15-24<sup>1</sup> of age are unique in that they are one of the largest demographic groups that has no formal mechanisms of representation within the UN system, as do other demographic groups do via the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and UN Women. Nevertheless, young people globally are not only demanding to be heard but also taking positive action to advance their communities and societies. There is an urgent need, therefore, to put mechanisms in place that give youth a broader and more meaningful stake in shaping the policy and work of international agencies such as the UN.

The current percentage of youth in the world's population has never been seen before. Youth are demanding a seat at the table where their future is being decided. Recent developments in the MENA region clearly demonstrate one possible outcome of denying youth the opportunity of participation in decision-making and policy development. These factors give a clear signal to the UN that there is an opportunity to engage the youth globally in a positive way, and by through this make the UN relevant in their eyes.

UN-HABITAT has historically engaged young people at all levels, from mainstreaming in its operations through its Youth Advisory Board to supporting urban youth through capacity building, training and the Urban Youth Fund. With the adoption of the resolution HSP/GC/23/7,<sup>2</sup> UN-HABITAT was tasked by its Governing Council in April 2011 to explore, in co-operation with sister agencies and member states, the enhancement and engagement of youth in the UN system. This report is the first step in engaging national governments, international partners and youth themselves in this process. The goal of this initiative is to unleash the power of urban youth in particular and youth in general to effect positive and sustainable change in their communities globally, by developing mechanisms through which youth can directly engage in global governance and decision-making in the UN system.

In 1995, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) to guide national and international action to create an environment in which young people can flourish and develop their potential to the fullest. Since then, opportunities for young people to benefit from development have expanded within the UN system and globally. Nonetheless, WPAY and other policies and frameworks, still do

Looking back at the  
ambitions in BRAGA 1998

"Youth issues should be given higher priority in United Nations System. We recommend the strengthening of the United Nations Youth Unit and its counterparts in other funds, programmes and specialised agencies and the provision to them of greater resources and more staff – notably young people."

<http://www.un.org/events/youth98/yforum98/bragayap.htm>

<sup>1</sup> UN defines youth from 15-24 and UNICEF and WHO define adolescent from 11-19. The UN-HABITAT Urban Youth Fund defines youth as 15-32.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.unhabitat.org/downloads/docs/9775\\_1\\_593698.pdf](http://www.unhabitat.org/downloads/docs/9775_1_593698.pdf)

not have accompanying mechanisms that allow youth full and meaningful participation in decision-making; too often, they are viewed-upon as clients rather than partners and stakeholders.

Following the aforementioned UN-HABITAT Governing Council resolution and the recently concluded International Year of the Youth<sup>3</sup>, UN-HABITAT, a member of the UN Interagency Network on Youth Development<sup>4</sup>, partnered with other governments and UN agencies to attempt to find ways to better engage youth in the UN system. It is within this context, and in response to paragraph 26 in the recently adopted Outcome Document of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on *Youth: Dialogue and Mutual Understanding*<sup>5</sup>, that UN-HABITAT has prepared this report.

The report is structured as follows: a broad background to how the UN system historically has engaged young people; an elaboration of three possible models of engagement, and a tentative conclusion on the best way forward for the UN system and the member states.

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<sup>3</sup><http://social.un.org/youthyear/>

<sup>4</sup><http://social.un.org/youthyear/uniany.html>

<sup>5</sup><http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=A/RES/65/312>

## Part 1: Younger than Ever!

Currently 18 per cent of the global population or about 1.2 billion people are young citizens of the world.<sup>6</sup> Youth do not constitute a homogeneous group; their socio-economic, demographic, and geographical situations vary widely both within and among regions. Notwithstanding these differences, regional-level analysis shows that the vast majority of the world's youth—some 87 per cent—live in developing countries and the largest proportions here face challenges such as limited access to resources, education, training, employment, and broader economic development opportunities.

**Figure 1 Total population (both sexes) by five-year age group, major area, region and country, 1990 and 2010 (thousands)**

Major area, region, country or area	1990	2010
	15-24	15-24
	1990	2010
ASIA	646 878	754 015
AFRICA	122 399	205 336
EUROPE	104 941	93 820
LATIN AMERICA AND THE NORTHERN AMERICA	87 377	106 186
OCEANIA	41 470	47 936
	4 670	5 666
<b>Total Youth Population</b>	<b>1 007 735</b>	<b>1 212 960</b>
	1990	2010
Less developed regions, excluding least developed countries	739 578	886 307
More developed regions	168 444	158 132
Least developed countries	99 713	168 521
Less developed regions, excluding China	584 736	825 272
Less developed regions	839 292	1 054 828
World (total population not only youth)	5 362 591	7 001 141
<b>Total Youth population</b>	<b>1 007 735</b>	<b>1 212 960</b>

\*Total population (both sexes combined) by five-year age group, major area, region and country, 1990 and 2010 (thousands)

\*All numbers are based on estimates

\*<http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Excel-Data/population.htm>

At present, 62 per cent of the world's youth live in Asia and 17 per cent (the next largest proportion) live in Africa, equalling approximately 960 million young men and women in these two regions alone. This global demographic "youth-bulge" faces a range of issues that limit their full engagement within society; issues such as poverty, their lack of access to education and employment that negatively impact their livelihoods, the

<sup>6</sup>The United Nations uses the following definitions: "adolescents" is those between 10-19 years of age. Youth is those between 15-24 years of age. "Young people" are defined as including both adolescents and youth (For more in-depth details, see UN General Assembly Resolution 36/215 and 36/28 of 1981)



environmental and social conditions they live within, and their ability to have a say in the issues that directly affect them.

## Challenges to Youth Livelihoods

A substantial number of young people reside in areas in which poverty constitutes a major challenge. Approximately 64% of youth in Africa and 84% in Asia live in countries where at least one third of the population subsists on less than US\$ 2 per day. Another defining factor is that youth are very often concentrated in urban areas with limited access to basic social services. A growing majority of youth live in cities and towns; the cities of the developing world account for over 90% of the world's expected urban growth and youth account for a large percentage of those inhabitants. It is estimated that as many as 60% of all urban dwellers will be under the age of 18 by 2030.<sup>7</sup>

**Employment** is an integral part of the transition to adulthood and plays a central role in the social integration of young people. It provides youth with economic security and facilitates their participation in society at multiple levels in a positive way. Youth access to employment essentially translates into income and resource access, both of which are pivotal to shaping adaptive capacity. Youth's participation in the economic life of the society is also increasing its purchasing power and serves as potential taxpayers.

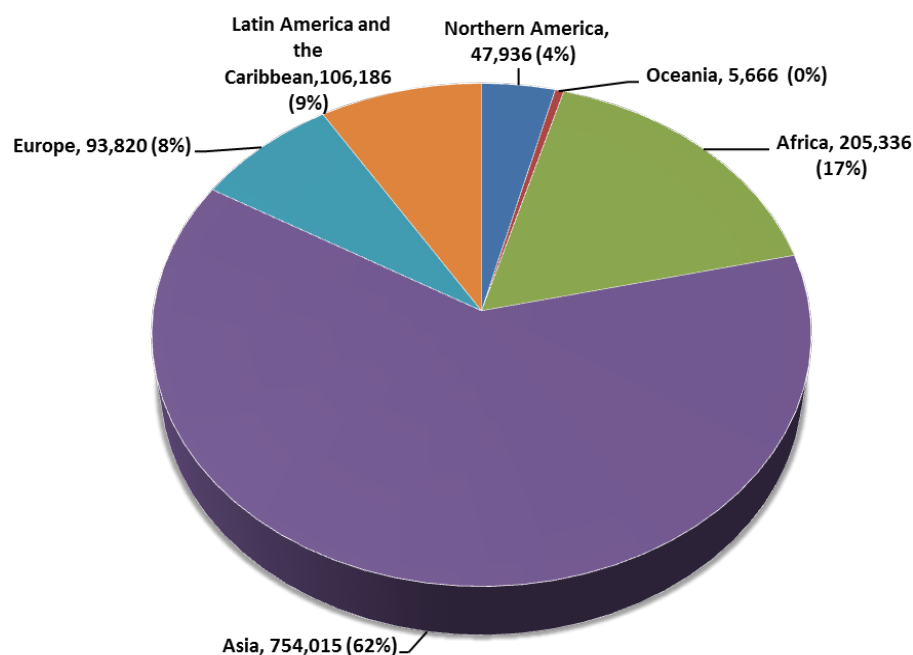
Youth continue to be overrepresented among the world's unemployed. In 2007, youth comprised only 25 per cent of the working-age population but accounted for more than 40 per cent of those who were jobless. The global youth unemployment rate for 2007 stood at 12 per cent, or three times the adult rate. In South-East Asia and the Pacific, youth unemployment rates are as high as six times those of adults! This is a massive waste of the society's resources. More importantly, young people with poor access to the necessary urban life resources are demonstrably less inclined to see civic authorities as working for and representing them. In effect, the low presence of youth in employment also effectively blocks the creation of positive commitment for efficient urban governance. One possible outcome of this kind of situation is lately seen in the MENA region.

Still, youth unemployment in developing countries tell only part of the story. For young people in these areas, informal, non-secure, and low-wage employment is the norm, with labour activity among youth concentrated in agriculture and related industries and in the burgeoning informal sector. More than 79 per cent of the world's youth live in Africa, Asia, and Oceania, where employment in agriculture comprises at least 35 per cent of total employment.

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<sup>7</sup>*Cities of Youth: Cities of Prosperity report, UN-Habitat*

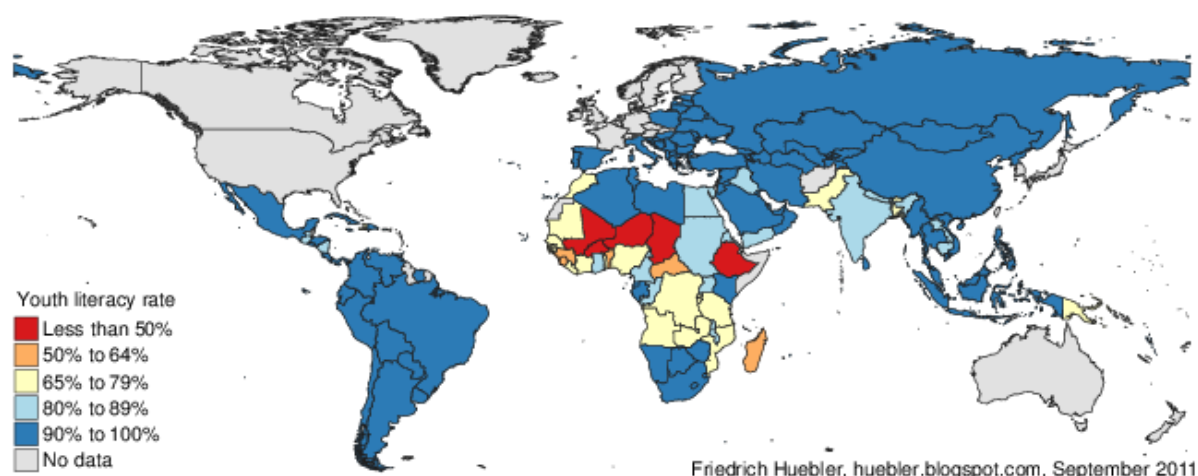
Figure 2 The World's Youth Population (15-24 years) in 2010, by region



**Education** is another essential element in the transition to adulthood. For a substantial number of young people in developing countries access to quality education is difficult. Although the global youth literacy rate increased from 84 per cent during the period 1985-1994 to 89 per cent during 2000-2006, progress has been uneven, with youth literacy rates below 80 per cent recorded in sub-Saharan Africa and in Southern and Western Asia. Secondary enrolment levels are as low as 25 per cent in some Pacific countries and 16 per cent in parts of Asia, but the lowest rates are found among youth in Africa. Large disparities in educational quality and access also exist within countries owing to factors such as income, location, gender, and ethnicity. Another aspect of the educational quality young people are faced with is the disparity between the educational sector's output and the requirements of the private and public sector employment. In several countries, this mismatch between education and skills needed is creating a large body of skilled yet unemployed people. Highly educated youth are without jobs and there is a large section of poorly educated youth leading to an enormous waste of the society's resources.

The proportion of youth in the world's population is often referred to as "the youth bulge". A key assumption in this report is that this "youth bulge" provides a unique window of opportunity in which youth globally can be engaged as positive resources in creating a more sustainable, just and equitable world. The immediate context of this report is the explosive growth of cities globally, where since 2007 more than half of humankind lives. Key to advancement of many developing countries will be the engagement of those most marginalized, who are often young people living in the slums and unplanned settlements of the increasingly urbanized world.

Figure 3 Youth Literacy rate (2011)



(Source UNESCO)

The State of the Urban Youth 2010-2011 report called for “Levelling the Playing Field” for youth in danger of being caught in this vicious cycle of poverty. This report, the first of its kind, focused on youth exclusion from opportunities in urban areas in order to raise international attention and action towards this critical issue. The key findings of the report strongly suggest that outcomes of inequality (earning and assets) that define youth exclusion from urban life are related to the unequal opportunities that occur in successive life stages. Education is a key determinant of equal opportunity but there are various factors that prevent youth’s access to schools and good quality education. The key findings of the report strongly suggest outcomes of inequality (earning and assets) that define youth exclusion from urban life are related to the unequal opportunities that occur in successive life stages. Gender also continues to be a challenge to equal opportunities. It is important to acknowledge the gender disparities in education that leads to unequal opportunities in later life. Girls have a very high dropout rate with very few completing secondary education, due to several socio-economic factors such as young pregnancies and social pressure.

## Part 2 – The UN System’s commitment to Youth Engagement

### The Emergence of an United Nations Youth Development Agenda<sup>8</sup>

The Member States of the United Nations first acknowledged the importance of youth in 1965 when they endorsed the *Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples*. Two decades later, the United Nations General Assembly observed 1985 as International Year of Youth, with the theme “*Participation, Development and Peace*”. The first International Youth Year drew international attention to the important role that young people play in the world, and in particular, to their potential contribution to development and to the goals of the United Nations Charter. Looking back, the first International Year of Youth was instrumental in putting youth on the international agenda; but in practice governments were still reluctant to let young people into the center stage of UN politics as stakeholder *with* a voice.

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, also known as the Rio Conference, was a major breakthrough for youth participation. At this conference *Agenda 21* was adopted, in which chapter 25 calls for the involvement of youth in decision-making. The governments present in Brazil in 1992 agreed that “each country and the United Nations should support the promotion and creation of mechanisms to involve youth representation in all United Nations processes in order to influence those processes” (*Agenda 21*, 25/7).

In the processes of enhancing youth participation and involvement a significant step was taken at the Habitat II conference in Istanbul, Turkey in 1996, where the Habitat Agenda was adopted. In this watershed conference women and youth were recognized as two of the major groups in international development, and seen as equal partners in decision-making processes that affect human settlements. Since then, the UN has recognized these groups as an important stakeholder in sustainable urban development locally and nationally.

International debate and discussions reached a high point in 1995 when, on the tenth anniversary of International Year of Youth, the United Nations adopted the *World*

“...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**

<sup>8</sup>Part of this section is based on the publication *Growing Together: Youth and the Work of the United Nations* <http://social.un.org/index/Youth/YouthintheUN.aspx>

*Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond*. The adoption of the Programme of Action, which provides a framework to guide public, private and international action on youth development, was evidence of the commitment of the international community to young people and of a resolve to address the challenges to youth development in a comprehensive and collaborative manner. Yet few real changes in the UN system in terms of real youth engagement in policy development and discussion surfaced after the adoption. To some degree, one can say that the focus after the adoption of the WPAY was more on the national and local level than internally in the UN.

In May 2003, the UN-HABITAT Governing Council adopted a resolution on youth engagement in the work UN-HABITAT (HSP/GC/RES/19/13). This resolution was followed up by the Governing Council in 2005 with the adoption of a *Strategy for enhanced engagement* (HSP/GC/20/2/Add.5). In the strategy, UN-HABITAT and the member states stated that the objective of the strategy was to provide an integrated approach to urban youth development and mainstream a focus on the youth in all normative and operational work of UN-HABITAT.

In December 2009, the General Assembly adopted its resolution 64/134<sup>9</sup> proclaiming the *International Year of Youth: Dialogue and Mutual Understanding*<sup>10</sup>, to commence on 12 August 2010. At the end of the High Level Meeting marking the end of the IYY, Member States adopted the Outcome Document submitted by the President of the General Assembly, A/RES/65/312.<sup>11</sup>

The International Year of Youth was celebrated widely among different agencies and organizations but young people are yet to see real change in how the UN system engages youth. Youth continue to be looked upon as clients the system and governments are to serve, and not as key stakeholders. Such a changed perception would necessitate a place for youth at the decision-making table. UN agencies and governments alike seem hesitant to give young people a real voice when it comes to shaping politics and projects concerning their future.

In sum, the youth agenda has been long in the making (Figure 4). There have been both high and low points of youth focus within the UN system, a repeated pattern spread over eight decades. Significantly, the UN system has not had a pivotal global meeting on youth in the same scale as the breakthrough meetings that so advanced relevant concerns relating to women, elderly and indigenous peoples in the past.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=A/RES/64/134>

<sup>10</sup> <http://social.un.org/youthyear/high-level-meeting.html>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=A/RES/65/312>

Figure 4 - Evolution and the growth of the World Youth Forum Idea: 1936-2011 and its linkages with the League of Nation and the United nation System



## The UN System's Work with Youth

The United Nations has long recognized the importance of investing in youth in different policy documents and conference outcome documents. The following section takes stock of different initiatives where the inter-agency collaboration and youth engagement have materialized.

With activities ranging from data collection and analysis to direct country support to Governments, civil society and other stakeholders, the United Nations system is well positioned to provide comprehensive, specialized assistance in support of global youth development. Particular attention is being given by many UN system offices<sup>12</sup> to areas such as health, education and employment, and the special circumstances of girls and young women—areas which present persistent challenges to youth development in many parts of the world.<sup>13</sup>

Parallel to the youth-related work the different UN agencies and programs 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 Development that are the main intergovernmental bodies which monitor the progress, constraints, and emerging topics related to youth issues within the UN.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.un.org/en/aboutun/structure/>

<sup>13</sup> Please see annex for details on key UN agencies selected work to advance youth issues.

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>14</sup>

The resolutions adopted by the General Assembly and the Commission for Social Development can always ask for a *Report of the Secretary-General* on specific issue of interest, which then will be prepared by the Programme on Youth of the Division for Social Policy and Development at the UN Secretariat (UNDESA). These reports provide comprehensive information on the topic of interest, along with recommendations, which can be included in the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly or by the Commission for Social Development.<sup>15</sup>

The adoption of the World Programme of Action for Youth in 2000 was one of the major achievements in youth empowerment within the UN system and created a momentum in youth-focused development work. The WPAY identified the following 10 priority areas to guide policy and action in the area of youth development:

1. Education
2. Employment
3. Hunger and poverty
4. Health
5. Environment
6. Drug abuse
7. Juvenile delinquency
8. Leisure-time activities
9. Girls and young women
10. Youth participation in society and in decision-making

In 2005, in order to recognize the major changes that were occurring in national and international development environments at the end of the twentieth century and to align the Programme of Action better to new challenges

in the twenty-first century, the General Assembly added five additional priority areas. These five areas – Globalization, Information and Communication Technology, HIV/AIDS, Armed Conflict and Intergenerational issues) – were elaborated in a supplement to

“...The international community must continue to work together to expand the horizons of opportunity for these young women and men and answer their legitimate demands for dignity, development and decent work. Failing to invest in our youth is a false economy. Investments in young people will pay great dividends in a better future for all.

This Day marks the end of the International Year of Youth, a milestone in global advocacy by and for the world’s young people. My hope is that this experience will now provide a foundation to go even further in harnessing the talents and energies of young people. To them I say: you have the opportunity to change our world. Seize it.

**Ban Ki-moon,**  
**UN Secretary General,**  
**International Youth Day 2011**

<sup>14</sup>List of resolutions: <http://social.un.org/index/Youth/Resourcesandtools/Youthresolutions.aspx>

<sup>15</sup>List of Secretary-General’s Reports: <http://social.un.org/index/Youth/Resourcesandtools/SGreports.aspx>



the WPAY, which was adopted at the sixty-second session of the General Assembly in 2007.

The following section is a short analysis of the newly created Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (IANYD) and its role in facilitating the process leading up to and during the second International Year of Youth, as an example of how UN agencies currently are working on youth engagement. This section concludes with an analysis of other institutionalized multi-stakeholder or inter-agencies mechanisms at the UN level to advance youth issues.

### Initiation of the International Youth Day<sup>16</sup>

In 1999, in its resolution 54/120, the General Assembly endorsed the recommendation made by the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth (Lisbon, 8-12 August 1998) that 12 August be declared International Youth Day. The Assembly recommended that public information activities be organized to support the Day as a way to promote better awareness of the World Programme of Action for Youth, adopted by the General Assembly in 1995 (resolution 50/81).

#### *List of Previous Celebrations of International Youth Day include:*

- IYD 2011 - Change Your World
- IYD 2010 - Dialogue and Mutual Understanding
- IYD 2009 - Sustainability: Our Challenge. Our Future.
- IYD 2008 - Youth and Climate Change: Time for Action
- IYD 2007 - Be seen, Be heard: Youth participation for development
- IYD 2006 - Tackling Poverty Together
- IYD 2005 - WPAY+10: Making Commitments Matter
- IYD 2004 - Youth in an Intergenerational Society
- IYD 2003 - Finding decent and productive work for young people everywhere
- IYD 2002 - Now and for the Future: Youth Action for Sustainable Development
- IYD 2001 - Addressing Health and Unemployment
- First Observance of International Youth Day 2000

#### *The UN World Youth Reports*

In addition to the International Youth Day, the UN World Youth Reports have been very important tools in highlighting the youth agenda. Up to now it has been four key World Youth Reports. These reports have created much attention and been instrumental in pushing important youth issues inside and outside the UN system.

**The World Youth Report 2003** provides an overview of the global situation of young people. The first 10 chapters focus on the priority areas identified by the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY), adopted by the General Assembly in 1995. The remaining five chapters address some of the newer issues that were later identified as

<sup>16</sup> <http://social.un.org/index/Youth/InternationalYouthDay.aspx>



additional priorities for youth and were adopted by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 2003. <http://social.un.org/index/WorldYouthReport/2003>

**In the World Youth Report 2005**, it is argued that too often, youth policy is driven by negative stereotypes of young people, including delinquency, drug abuse and violence. What seems to be forgotten is that young people are a positive force for development, peace, and democracy. <http://social.un.org/index/WorldYouthReport/2005>

**The World Youth Report 2007** examines the challenges and opportunities existing for the roughly 1.2 billion young people between the ages of 15 and 24 in the world. Distinct from the 2003 and 2005 editions, it provides a regional overview summarizing the major youth development trends in the fifteen priority areas of the World Programme of Action for Youth. The report explores major issues of concern to youth development, including employment, education, health, poverty and violence. At the same time, it highlights youth as a positive force for development and provides recommendations for supporting their essential contributions. <http://social.un.org/index/WorldYouthReport/2007>

**The World Youth Report 2010** focus on youth and climate change, and is intended to highlight the important role young people play in addressing climate change, and to offer suggestions on how young people might be more effectively integrated as individuals and collective agents of change within the realm of climate change adaptation and mitigation. The Report is designated to assist youth and youth organizations in educating themselves and to become more actively involved in combating the threat of climate change. It is also meant to affirm the status of young people as key stakeholders in the fight against climate change. The publication comes at a time when efforts to address climate change are receiving unparalleled attention on the international arena, offering youth a unique opportunity for their voice to be heard in the debate. <http://social.un.org/index/WorldYouthReport>

### **UN Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (IANYD)**

The United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (IANYD)<sup>17</sup>, established in 2010, is a network consisting of UN entities, represented at the headquarters level, whose work is relevant to youth. The Network is co-chaired by the United Nations Programme on Youth and a rotating member selected on an annual basis; currently ILO is the co-chair together with UNDESA.

The overall aim of the IANYD is to increase the effectiveness of UN work in youth development by strengthening collaboration and exchange among UN entities. The Network contributes to increase the understanding and visibility of the UN System's work on youth development. The IANYD also serves as a platform for entities to provide updates on youth-related work and to initiate dialogue on prospects for collaboration.

<sup>17</sup><http://social.un.org/youthyear/unianyd.html>

One of the main focuses of the IANYD up to now has been the coordination of the International Year of the Youth.<sup>18</sup> In 2009 the General Assembly (A/RES/64/130) called upon the United Nations Program on the Youth and the IAYND to continue to act as the focal point within the United Nations system and as well as recommended that the Program receive continued support in its role in facilitating the participation of youth in the UN system. Following up on this, in the spring of 2010, the Network developed the *UN Framework Approach for the International Year of Youth* in order to provide a concrete framework for collective efforts during the IYY. There were three key objectives decided upon: creating awareness through increasing the commitment and investment in youth; mobilizing and engaging youth through increase participation and partnerships; and connecting and building bridges through increased intercultural understanding amongst youth.

In addition to its facilitation role, the IANYD as well play an advocacy role in engaging youth through issuing joint statements, pledging to increase the effectiveness of the UN in advocating for and supporting national efforts in supporting youth. Still, one often cited criticism and the main challenge for UNDESA and the IANYD rests with the limited mandate they can operate within as part of the secretariat. In the end, these entities cannot move beyond the will of the member states.

The IANYD played a clear and positive role in the engagement of youth in the IYY. Yet, this role did not stray from the continued norm of youth being treated as clients, with no meaningful engagement within the governance of the IANYD. Youth engagement was highlighted throughout the preparatory process of the High Level Meeting on youth including a special briefing session for member state on meaningful youth participation was held in April 2011.

At the conclusion of the IYY, a joint statement was endorsed by the Heads of UN entities of the inter-agency network on Youth Development (see below).

***Joint Statement by Heads of UN Entities<sup>19</sup> of the Inter-agency Network on Youth Development on the occasion of the UN High-Level Meeting on Youth, 2011<sup>20</sup>***

*On the occasion of the United Nations High-Level Meeting on Youth, we pledge to increase the effectiveness of the United Nations in advocating for and supporting national efforts to accelerate the implementation of international agreements and development goals as they relate to adolescents and youth.*

*We join Member States and youth-led organizations in building on synergies to promote the ideals of peace, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, gender equality, solidarity, progress and development as guided by the proclamation of the International Year of Youth by the General Assembly.*

<sup>18</sup> <http://social.un.org/index/Youth/YouthintheUN/InterAgencyNetworkonYouthDevelopment.aspx>

<sup>19</sup> 24 UN Entities signed this joint statement

<sup>20</sup> <http://social.un.org/youthyear/docs/JointStatementInteragency.pdf>

*The Year has provided an opportunity to work together to enhance dialogue and mutual understanding among young people worldwide, to promote the participation of young women and men at all levels and to increase commitments and investments to promote adolescent and youth development. With strengthened resolve, we stand ready to work as one within the United Nations to support young people in achieving their aspirations. In the coming years, we will intensify efforts within our respective mandates at the global, regional and national levels, including through strengthening mechanisms such as the Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development, in order to promote and support:*

- 1. COMPREHENSIVE POLICIES that include young people's issues and voices, and enhance the use of data on young people to promote development and poverty reduction;*
- 2. MULTISECTORAL PROGRAMMES that promote the human rights and fulfil the development needs of adolescents and youth, including marginalized adolescent girls;*
- 3. STRENGTHENED CAPACITIES of national institutions and youth-led organizations to implement coordinated youth policies and programmes;*
- 4. 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.*

*We reaffirm our pledge to make young people a priority in our work and commit to incorporate their perspectives within our organizations and in the United Nations system. We call on governments, civil society, the private sector, donors, media, communities, youth-led organizations, voluntary associations and other stakeholders to join us in making this a world fit for young people.*

### **Other key UN Inter-Agency Collaborations on Youth**

The IANYD is only one example on inter-agency collaboration on youth issues. Whereas the IANYD is a joint initiative by all agencies involved in youth development in the UN system, other cooperation involves only some. A key difference between the IANYD presented above and the other examples presented below is the nature of cooperation. The IANYD brings together all the entities on a general level: youth issues in the UN while other collaborative efforts in general have a specific focus; HIV and Young People, Youth and Employment etc. Therefore, one can say that these specialized task teams and other set-ups have an advantage focusing in only one theme while the IANYD has the advantage of being able to address all issues relevant to youth.

### *UNAIDS Inter-Agency Task Team (IATT) on HIV and Young People*

The inter-agency task team on HIV and young people<sup>21</sup> was created in 2001 to support an accelerated, harmonized and expanded global, regional and country-level response to the need to increase young people's utilization of HIV services. Membership includes the UNAIDS Secretariat and co-sponsors, along with youth networks/associations, donors, civil society, and research institutions. It is convened by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) as a lead agency on HIV and young people, as agreed in the UNAIDS technical division of labor.

In order to achieve its goal of reducing the number of young people infected by HIV/AIDS, UNAIDS aims to increase young people's comprehensive knowledge of HIV and counseling services. Within the overall collaborative framework of UNAIDS, a number of inter-agency task teams, such as the task team on HIV and young people and the task team on education, promote further inter-agency collaboration related to youth.

### *Youth Employment Network*

The Youth Employment Network (YEN)<sup>22</sup> is a partnership between the United Nations, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Bank, set up in the wake of the Millennium Summit of the United Nations to find new and durable solutions to the youth employment challenge. The Network is a global platform whose goal is to prioritize youth employment on the development agenda and to exchange knowledge on effective policies and programs to improve employment opportunities for youth.

YEN focuses on policy advice, innovative pilot projects, knowledge-sharing and brokering partnerships. YEN is managed by a permanent secretariat hosted by ILO offices in Geneva, Dakar and Dar es Salaam.

### *Inter-agency cooperation on climate change and sustainable development*

The United Nations Joint Framework Initiative on Children, Youth, and Climate Change<sup>23</sup> was created in October 2008 under the auspices of the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The aim of the Initiative is to share information among interested United Nations agencies on their activities engaging children and youth on climate change issues at the national, regional and global levels. The Initiative also allows participating agencies to share plans for events on child and youth issues that are to be organized at meetings of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Convention and to facilitate a coordinated United Nations effort to that effect. In this context, the Joint Framework Initiative implemented a series of activities at recent sessions of the Conference of the Parties (COP).

### *Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies*

The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies<sup>24</sup> aims to improve inter-agency communication and collaboration in the provisions of education opportunities and

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.unfpa.org/public/iattyp>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/yen/>

<sup>23</sup> [http://unfccc.int/cc\\_inet/files/cc\\_inet/information\\_pool/application/pdf/growingtogether.pdf](http://unfccc.int/cc_inet/files/cc_inet/information_pool/application/pdf/growingtogether.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> [www.ineesite.org](http://www.ineesite.org)

services in emergency and post-crisis contexts. This network brings together stakeholders from both within and outside the UN system. The current steering group is composed of UNESCO, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNICEF and the World Bank in equal partnership with the civil society organizations CARE International, ChildFund International, the International Rescue Committee, International Save the Children Alliance, Open Society Institute and Refugee Education Trust. This set-up makes the UN system more responsive to the outside stakeholders, and gives, to a limited degree, also youth the possibility to participate in the discussions.

### *United Nations Adolescent Girls Task Force*<sup>25</sup>

In November 2007, the United Nations Adolescent Girls Task Force was convened in response to the need for a clear inter-agency programming framework specifically addressing the most marginalized and disadvantaged adolescent girls. The objective of the Task Force is to support the United Nations system in ensuring that programmes of cooperation with Governments and civil society raise awareness of the situation of the most marginalized and disadvantaged adolescent girls and prescribe practical action to fulfill their rights. Co-chaired by UNFPA and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Task Force includes UNESCO, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UNWOMEN), the World Health Organization (WHO) and ILO and supports collaboration at the country level with Government ministries, civil society organizations and women's and girls' networks.

In 2010, at the fifty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the Adolescent Girls Task Force launched the United Nations Joint Statement on Adolescent Girls<sup>26</sup>, in which the heads of all six participating agencies pledged to intensify their efforts to fulfill the human rights of adolescent girls with a particular emphasis on those hardest to reach. The Joint Statement identifies five strategic areas: education, health, prevention of violence, leadership development and data. A joint programming framework to roll out the work in these five areas at country level is currently under development.

### Benefits of Inter-Agency Collaboration

The experience of inter-agency collaboration such as the IANYD on youth at the global, regional and country levels has demonstrated a number of important benefits.<sup>27</sup> The coordinating mechanisms and working groups that have been established at various levels provide a forum to share information and knowledge, avoid duplication of initiatives and identify complementary expertise and potentials for synergies in delivering relevant outcomes.

<sup>25</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/adolescence/index\\_girls.html](http://www.unicef.org/adolescence/index_girls.html)

<sup>26</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/adolescence/index\\_girls.html](http://www.unicef.org/adolescence/index_girls.html)

<sup>27</sup> GA A/66/61-E/2011/3 - Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the World Programme of Action on Youth: United Nations system coordination and collaboration related to youth; <http://www.un.org/en/ga/third/66/documentslist.shtml>

The sharing of contacts and pooling of networks and expertise has proven to be especially helpful. In particular, organizations with only a global or regional headquarters have been able to benefit from the country networks of partner agencies. At the same time, the agencies themselves have benefited from improved access to intergovernmental processes that take place at the global or regional level. Since the challenges facing young people are multifaceted, sectorial approaches are insufficient to improve the well-being of young people in a holistic manner. By combining efforts, United Nations entities are able to draw on their specific expertise, mandates and resources to ensure that youth issues are addressed in a comprehensive manner.

Even with these positive outcomes, one of the key challenges for the IANYD and other inter-agency collaborations is how to meaningfully engage young people in the governance structures and the policy planning. In the case of the IANYD, they are mandated to only involve representatives from the different UN agencies working with youth. In regards to the engagement of youth, they only encourage and support their engagement at the local, national and international, external to their own work. The IANYD is primarily concerned with promoting collaboration amongst members of the United Nations system that have different mandates and missions on youth which do not always complement each other, a significant challenge in itself. The other agencies mentioned as well do excellent work in bringing youth issues into the UN, but in and of themselves have not created mechanisms to engage youth in the decision-making. The UN recognizes the importance of youth, and though both GA and UN agencies resolutions clearly call for and recognize the value of youth participation in decision-making, the UN system as a whole has not created any structures that institutionalize youth engagement. Though strong advocacy for youth by UN agencies and adult experts is laudable and should continue to be supported, there is no strong example of any mechanism within the UN system that meaningfully engages youth in its decision-making. As this report clearly shows, the way in which the UN system is dealing with youth issues is for the most part ad hoc. Youth are still seen as clients rather than meaningful stakeholders to engage in the process.

Research suggests that youth engagement in governance improves outcomes not only for the youth engaged, but for the adults and community as a whole. Most studies are qualitative, but suggest that real youth engagement in governance brings about increased concern for issues external to the youth, followed by increased commitment, and subsequent impact on the projects themselves. This report is based on the well-grounded understanding that the engagement of youth in governance leads to increased involvement of society and better outcomes for youth and for society.

The mechanisms proposed here are not meant to replace ones such as the WPAY, IANYD and other types of inter-agencies collaborations and policy frameworks, but to complement them, keeping in focus the goal of the better representation of youth within the UN system's decision making processes, and the greater support and recognition of youth issues and activities outside the system.



A cornerstone of a real democracy is *voice*: the right to say ‘no’ and be heard. The key question this report addresses is how to provide youth a voice in the structures of planning and governance in the UN system. We need to recall that other groups like women and indigenous people did not have a voice either for a long time before specialized entities were set up to address their cause. It is time now to act and invite the leaders of tomorrow and the pioneers of today, young people, to the table where their future is being planned.

*Secretary-General's Recommendations on Improving Collaboration within the United Nations system on youth-related matters*<sup>28</sup>

*Collaboration within the United Nations system on youth-related matters has expanded significantly in recent years. This increased collaboration has resulted in the adoption of more strategic approaches to promoting youth development and, increasingly, joint programme delivery by the United Nations system. Yet, to fully reap the benefits of inter-agency coordination, more remains to be done.*

*In view of the foregoing, the General Assembly may wish to consider the following recommendations:*

- *To call upon the relevant organizations of the United Nations system to further increase coordination and collaboration in their work related to youth;*
- *To call upon the regional coordination mechanisms of the United Nations to adopt and/or implement regional inter-agency action plans in support of Member States' efforts to develop holistic and integrated youth policies based on the World Programme of Action;*
- *To call upon relevant organizations of the United Nations system to further develop inclusive and accessible mechanisms for youth participation in inter-agency initiatives on youth development.*

## Summary

There is a progression on the issues of inter-agency collaboration over the last decade on youth-related issues. These range from age-focused collaboration like the adolescent girls cohort to an issue-based collaboration such as prevention of HIV/AIDS.

It is not clear though how many of these collaborations that include young people in decision-making processes relate to youth themselves. Most of them have a component on youth participation as a strategy to reach the goals set under the collaboration; but they do not clearly outline a structure or a mechanism that engages youth meaningfully within the UN collaborative structure.

There have been a number of repeated calls for inter-agency collaboration from both within and from outside the UN system which have surfaced the last years. It has been hard to determine what has been the impact of these collaborations in advancing the youth issues worldwide; both internally in the policy development process and on the

<sup>28</sup> GA A/66/61-E/2011/3 Implementation of the World Food Programme of Action for Youth

ground. What is clear is there is currently no mechanism that provides for the highest levels (heads of agencies) of the UN to meet regularly to work on structures and mechanisms to improve the meaningful participation of youth in the UN system together with youth. Further, there are no mechanisms with the UN system that allow youth to meet and work on policy questions and other key decisions that affect their future. How can youth, in the same manner as other specific groups, be given a seat at the table and be listened to?

Clearly, in this new millennium where youth have taken the lead in toppling dictators and fighting for democracy, justice and equity often under the harshest economic and social conditions, the UN system must create mechanisms that truly respect youth's capacities and commitment, also in order to not become obsolete.

The research for this report raises more questions than answers regarding youth engagement and underlines the importance of the statement of the Secretary General: "Still, I do not think we have gone nearly far enough".



## Part3 – Are We Moving Ahead or Backwards on Youth engagement in the UN?

From the *Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples* to the *Braga declaration* in 1998 to the *World Programme of Action for Youth* in 2000, the UN has clearly stated its intention to meaningfully engage youth and address their issues. Numerous youth meetings and conference spread over years have demanded greater accountability of the UN system to deliver on youth issues worldwide without producing any real results.

**“Failing to  
Invest in our  
Youth is a False  
Economy,”**

**UN Secretary-  
General  
Ban Ki-Moon**

Even though state representatives have repeatedly been calling for more investment in youth and job opportunities, the High-Level Meeting in July 2011 did not manage to address the various challenges that young people face in the different regions of the world, even with—or despite—its main focus on developing countries. Some critics are asking whether it is really too much to expect a somewhat nuanced approach to regional youth issues at a global event.

What is certain is that there is much room for improvement. The success and sustainability of youth involvement in the UN will probably, and as in the past, depend as much on concerted youth and NGO lobbying as it does on the member states’ political commitments and actions.

To be meaningfully engaged, youth need inclusive, accessible mechanisms. Youth certainly require a change of attitude towards themselves combined with genuine partnerships between youth and stakeholders on all levels. As one speaker aptly put it at the High Level Meeting in July 2011: “A nation that does not take care of its youth, does not have a future – and does not deserve one”.

Many youth organization have been lobbying the UN system for a key role in decision making processes that affect them. Some UN entities such as the UNFPA, UNESCO and UN-HABITAT have set up youth advisory bodies; but these are exceptions not the rule. It is not clear what impact these advisory boards have had on the daily program activities of the agencies and their long term strategic planning.

It would benefit the UN and its member states to reflect on some of the recommendation made a decade ago. The concern for youth rights has been taken up by regional bodies such as the African Union<sup>29</sup> and the Ibero-American<sup>30</sup> Conferences of

<sup>29</sup> See [http://www.africa-union.org/root/au/Documents/Treaties/Text/African\\_Youth\\_Charter.pdf](http://www.africa-union.org/root/au/Documents/Treaties/Text/African_Youth_Charter.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.crin.org/resources/infodetail.asp?ID=16822>

Heads of State and Government Member States. The need for a Special Rapporteur on Youth was proposed in 1998, and was discussed by the General Assembly, yet there has been no movement on such an initiative. The lack of sustained momentum on behalf of the United Nations in meaningfully engaging youth in its governance structures and policy discussions is very evident.

It has been pointed out in the preceding parts that the world attention on youth issues since 1936 has been ad hoc; often spur of momentum that only results in a diminishing curve. There has been a tendency to seek new initiatives rather than build on older, proposed but untried, initiatives. These scattered dots need to be connected and a comprehensive response sought and acted upon.

"A nation that does not take care of its youth, does not have a future – and does not deserve one"

### **1998 BRAGA YOUTH ACTION PLAN<sup>31</sup>**

#### **YOUTH RIGHTS CHARTER AND A SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON YOUTH RIGHTS:**

*Instead of a so called "Youth Rights Charter", the United Nations Youth Unit produce and assist youth NGOs disseminate at international, regional, national and local levels a compendium on existing youth rights which consists of the compilation of the existing rights regarding young people already included in reports adopted by the General Assembly and United Nations Human Rights instruments, including United Nations international conferences such as the conferences in Cairo, Copenhagen, Vienna and Beijing. The compendium should be made into a youth friendly publication available and accessible to all youth around the world, was not adopted.*

*The UN Special Rapporteur on Youth rights should be appointed by United Nations Secretary General before the end of 1999 basing on nominations through regional consultations of NGOs to be made by August 1999. He or she should be mandated for three years (renewal possible only for two terms). He or she should be a young independent expert (no older than 35 years of age at the time of appointment and renewal), experienced with human rights issues, recently and directly involved with youth organisations. Effort must ensure the elimination of discrimination with every appointment to ensure fair and equal opportunity in the position over time. He or she must submit an annual report to the UN General Assembly and other relevant bodies, including recommendations for better implementation of youth rights. He or she should be actively supported by all UN structures.*

*We urge the Secretary General of the United Nations to take the initiative, with the help of specialised agencies, relevant regional organizations and youth NGOs, for the organisation of an ad hoc event on Youth Rights, in order to bring together representatives of states and all interested national, regional and international youth*

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.un.org/events/youth98/yforum98/bragayap.htm>

NGOs. This World event (either a special session of UN General Assembly or a UN World Conference on Youth Rights) should be prepared at the national and regional levels through campaigning to promote the largest possible involvement of young people. The ad hoc event on Youth Rights should address the questions of how to improve the Human Rights situation of youth under sanctions, embargoes and occupation.

### The Way Forward

Paragraph 26 in the *Outcome Document of the High Level Meeting (General Assembly, A/RES/65/312 - 2011)*, and parallel UN agency resolutions such as UN-HABITAT's Governing Council resolution 23/7, 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 their meaningfully engaged and their human rights respected, fulfilled and protected.

#### Outcome Document of the High Level Meeting (General Assembly, A/RES/65/312 - 2011)

##### Recommendation 26

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 following scenarios have been developed based on the historical demand for a stronger UN and Member State's respond to the growing youth agenda. The scenarios are reaffirmation of the decade's discussions and recommendations to firm the global youth agenda and give it its due attention at the UN.

The scenarios are evaluated on their strengths and weaknesses in regards to the engagement level of the mechanism and the achievability of the process, with reference to the time it would take to implement, resources, and UN system and country support needed.

### Scenario 1: Scale up the UN Youth Program to an Institutional level

Scenario 1 proposes that the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs' Youth Unit's mandate be expanded beyond solely engaging representatives from different UN agencies working with youth. The mandate should be expanded to include youth engagement and youth agencies at all levels. The Youth Unit could be scaled up and better resourced to be able to respond to the increase in demand on them from all parts of the society: youth, youth organization, member state, the UN system, NGOs, media, academia and the private sector to name a few. This could mean establishing country and regional coordinating structures as well. A parallel can be drawn to the establishment on UNAIDS as described below.

**Strengths:** An enhanced Youth Unit in UNDESA will be able to successfully build on and effectively coordinate existing youth initiatives of various UN entities at the national, regional and global level while securing meaningful youth engagement in the UN system. This would be the easiest scenario to implement as it would be dealing with a current structure within the UN system, implemented through the Youth Unit which has, through its work in coordinating the IANYD and the IYY, shown its competence in regards to championing youth issues both within and outside the UN system.

**Challenges:** The main challenge is that youth would still be in a "client" role within the unit, only engaged in an advisory capacity. Youth involvement in decision-making and program planning would be at the ability and behest of the staff of the Youth Unit. The ability for youth to advocate on issues through the Youth Unit could be limited as it is an internal body. Herein lays also another challenge; as part of the Secretariat, the Youth Unit's ability to really engage with youth groups in policy planning could be challenged by Member states. The transformation from being a coordinator and facilitator to being an advocate for youth perspective could prove to be challenging.

#### *An Example in the UN System: Establishment of the UNAIDS*

*The need for a joint UN programme on AIDS was confirmed by a resolution of WHO's World Health Assembly in 1993 and later endorsed by the governing bodies of the other prospective cosponsors and by the Economic and Social Council of the UN. By early 1996, the six cosponsoring organizations had signed a Memorandum of Understanding to work together against AIDS and support UNAIDS. UNAIDS is thus United Nations reform in action. It takes a unique, collaborative approach to a fundamental health and development challenge. Through UNAIDS, countries can draw on the broad expertise of the cosponsors and other UN organizations in areas such as programme development and management, women and child health, education, legal networking, demand reduction for drug use, community care initiatives, rural development and resource mobilization. The goal is an expanded response to HIV/AIDS.*

*UNAIDS has taken over the baton from WHO's Global Programme on AIDS, which led the fight against AIDS starting in 1986. Alongside WHO, other UN agencies and bodies have been active against the epidemic, each in its own sphere of action.*

*There are two key reasons for the six agencies to join forces in UNAIDS:*

- The need for a **broader-based, expanded response to the epidemic** in sectors ranging from health to economic development.
- The need to **provide leadership and better-coordinated UN system** support to countries. Much has been learned and accomplished in responding to the epidemic, thanks to the inter-agency collaboration.

## Scenario 2: Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Youth

Scenario 2 in this report proposes the appointment of a Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Youth. The request for a Special Representative on Youth (SRSGY) was tabled back in 1998 in the Braga Youth Action Plan *“the UN Special Rapporteur on Youth rights should be appointed by United Nations Secretary General before the end of 1999 basing on nominations through regional consultations of NGOs to be made by August 1999...”*.<sup>32</sup>

Historically the role of the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General has evolved considerably, especially since the end of the Cold War, where the UN’s reactions to peace and security threats have become more complex.<sup>33</sup> Special Representatives are considered to be working for the Secretary-General (SG), though they are as well responsible to the Security Council, and the General Assembly.

The Special Representative on Youth could be mandated to work with the SG and provide guidance to the member states on global youth issues. Furthermore, the Special Representative will ensure that the member states are given guidance and support to handle a range of youth issues given the heterogeneity of youth issues. The Special Representative could work closely with existing youth programs in the various UN entities, regional mechanisms and further advocate other regions to develop similar mechanism. The Special Representative could also help collate a Compilation on Human Rights for Youth as recommended in Braga in 1998.

**Strengths:** The strength of Scenario 2 is that this has already been proposed in the GA resolution (Braga 1998) and hence it can be built upon from there. The appointment of a Special Representative on Youth would give youth representation at the highest level within the UN system. The Special Representative needs to be constituted by the SG’s on his discretion, in response to multiple past resolutions requesting the SG’s to have a Special Representative to youth issues worldwide. This will require a cohort of member states who would support a resolution to appoint a Special Representative on Youth and help in establishing a secretariat. The office will need to work closely with UNDESA Youth Unit, the IANYD and the various Youth programs in UN entities.

**Challenges:** One main challenge with this scenario would be that the Special Representative on Youth would be responsible directly to the Secretary-General, and

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.un.org/events/youth98/yforum98/bragayap.htm>

<sup>33</sup> <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/usa/04703.pdf>

not to a youth body. This would mean that youth would still be relegated to client status, and similar to the enhancing the Youth Unit, advocacy on controversial issues could be compromised. The Special Representative would further need to depend on cooperation of multiple UN entities to forward her/his mandate and may end up drowning in coordination than working to advance the youth mandate worldwide. Last, one may pose the question whether or not this scenario would truly mean a youth engagement in the UN system.

### **Scenario 3: UN Permanent Forum on Youth, Youth Platform Assembly, and Special Representative on Youth**

The third scenario in this report brings together three mechanisms that could work to engage youth democratically in the UN system, while as well allowing youth a body from which to advocate. A UN Permanent Forum on Youth can be established based on a model of the existing UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. This Forum would have to be a member-led process, in that it would require member states together with lead UN agencies and the SG to explore and support the establishment of the process.

The Forum would have as representatives youth drawn from a Youth Platform Assembly. The Youth Platform Assembly would be a self-selected body of representatives of youth agencies that would meet biennially to discuss and debate current youth issues, develop policy, and elect the representatives to sit in the UN Permanent Forum on Youth for the next two-year period. The Permanent Forum on Youth would be co-chaired by the Special Representative on Youth appointed by the Secretary-General and an elected co-chair from the Forum. Similar to the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, eight of the Members would be nominated by governments and eight nominated directly from the Youth Platform Assembly. The Special Representative would be a non-voting Chair of the Permanent Forum on Youth with the office of the Special Representative on Youth acting as the secretariat.

**Strengths:** Scenario 3 would best represent youth globally, giving them a forum in which youth can discuss youth issues and formulate policy, democratically elect members to the Permanent Forum, and have a Special Representative to advocate within the UN system and globally for decided upon priorities and policies. This scenario is the only scenario which truly allows for a comprehensive youth engagement in the UN.

Another strength with this scenario is this scenarios potential for an incremental and iterative process. This scenario is composed of reinforcing mechanisms which don't have to be implemented at the same time.

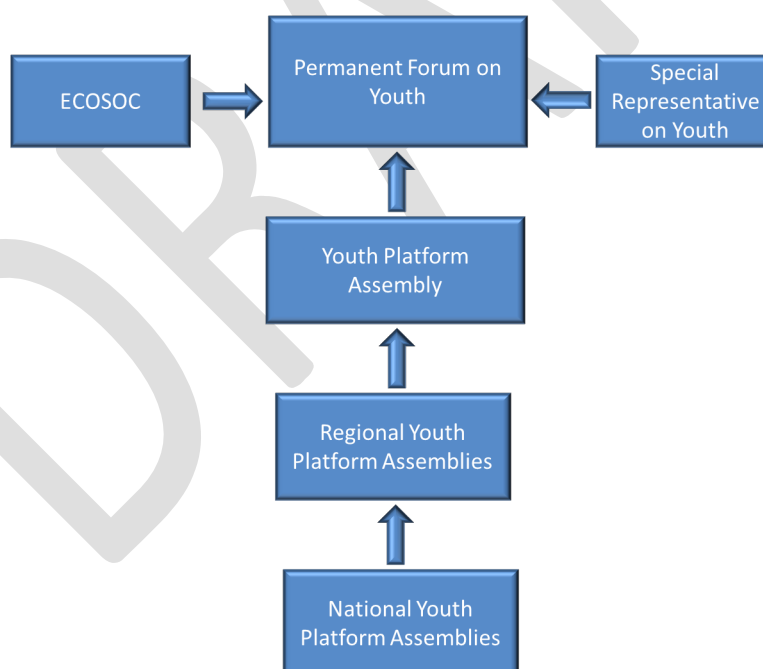
**Challenges:** Of the three Scenarios presented here this poses the most challenges. There would have to be a number of countries supporting the proposal and a resolution need to be passed within the General Assembly to establish the Permanent Forum on Youth. This may be a long process that will need a lot of lobbying and support from the member states, youth groups and youth focused NGOs.



One key aspect with this scenario however is as mentioned above the opportunity to establish an incremental process. Not all components of this scenario need to be established simultaneously. The Special Representative could be the first step (similar to scenario 2), while the process for the establishment of a Youth Platform Assembly could be the second step before the establishment of the Permanent Forum on Youth would see the light of day.

Also, the UN system already has similar assemblies that could work as test case for this Youth Platform Assembly. UN-HABITAT, UNESCO, ILO and UNFPA already have youth assemblies where these questions could be addressed and elaborated. One possible option is to re-brand the current biannual World Urban Youth Assembly into the Youth Platform Assembly. Further, as part of the preparation for the World Urban Youth Assemblies, regional and national Youth Assemblies could be held in order to engage both the regional differences in the topics discussed and to select people to go to the Youth Platform Assembly, as described in figure 5 below. The Regional Platform assemblies could be different assemblies already organized by different UN agencies and Youth Agencies such as, i.a. YMCA, the Scout and Guide movement, Peace Child International and International Coordination Meeting on Youth Organizations.

Figure 5 Proposed design of Scenario 3



### ***Example in the UN system: Process for Setting up of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues***

The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues<sup>34</sup> was established by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) resolution 2000/22<sup>35</sup> on 28 July 2000. In this resolution the UNPFII was given a mandate to "discuss indigenous issues within the mandate of the Council relating to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights. To substantiate this work, the Permanent Forum was called upon to provide expert advice and recommendations on indigenous issues to the UN system through the Council; raise awareness and promote the integration and coordination of relevant activities within the UN system; and prepare and disseminate information on indigenous issues. The Permanent Forum is comprised of sixteen independent experts, functioning in their personal capacity, who serve for a term of three years as Members and may be re-elected or re-appointed for one additional term.

Eight of the Members are nominated by governments and eight are nominated directly by indigenous organizations in their regions. The Members nominated by governments are elected by ECOSOC based on the five regional groupings of States normally used at the United Nations (Africa; Asia; Eastern Europe; Latin America and the Caribbean; and Western Europe and Other States). The Members nominated by indigenous organizations are appointed by the President of ECOSOC and represent the seven socio-cultural regions determined to give broad representation to the world's indigenous peoples.

The regions are Africa; Asia; Central and South America and the Caribbean; the Arctic; Central and Eastern Europe, Russian Federation, Central Asia and Transcaucasia; North America; and the Pacific—with one additional rotating seat among the three first listed above.

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/structure.html>

<sup>35</sup> [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/resolution\\_2000\\_22.html](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/resolution_2000_22.html)



## Concluding remarks

For over 75 years the international community has discussed how youth can be better engaged at the international level. Part 1 and 2 of this report clearly demonstrate how these efforts look promising on paper but that they have not been successful in bringing youth and youth perspectives more effectively into international policy discourse and decision making processes.

The adoption of the World Programme of Action for Youth in 2000 marked a milestone in youth development in the UN, yet youth are still looked upon as clients rather than equal stakeholders. Recent developments in the MENA region clearly demonstrate how negatively youth without access to decision-making processes or other key policy processes can react. The UN is in a situation where it can choose to be relevant for the future generation, but then some changes in its attitude towards youth have to be changed.

In Part 3, three different scenarios are presented, each demonstrating ways in which the UN can be more responsive to youth and youth engagement. Scenario 1 outlines the possibility to upscale and enhance UNDESA's Youth Unit. This scenario would have a positive impact on youth engagement, yet youth would still be in a client role. Scenario 2 gives youth visibility and potentially access to the Secretary-General and top level decision-making in UN, yet still youth will be in a client not partner role. Further, a potential challenge with this scenario is that the Special Representative would not have any clear mechanism for youth to access policy discussions and decision-making processes.

Scenario 3 outlines a menu of mechanisms to secure true and meaningfully youth engagement in the UN system. The combined and interdependent proposal of a Special Representative, a Permanent Youth Forum and Youth Platforms will give youth globally a seat at the table. A key strength with this scenario is its interdependence yet reinforcing mechanism. All the proposed mechanisms don't have to be established simultaneously, but one can foresee an incremental process. The appointment of a Special Representative can be the first step, and subsequently this person can work towards the establishment of a Permanent Forum.

It is the opinion of the authors of this report that Scenario 3 is the most comprehensive model that truly gives youth access to decision-making processes and policy discussions at the UN level. The report requests the Secretary-General to commission a report that outlines a process towards implementing Scenario 3.

ANNEX

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