POST 2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

"Dialogue with Civil Society and Other Actors: Youth"

The Second Round of
NATIONAL CONSULTATIONS IN AZERBAIJAN

FINAL REPORT

Baku - July 2014
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The Ministry of Youth and Sports of Azerbaijan Republic is a governmental agency within the Cabinet of Azerbaijan in charge of regulating activities related to sports and youth development in the Republic of Azerbaijan. The ministry is responsible for the education and training of youth in accordance with national strategy of youth development and with universal and national values; ensuring social, moral and healthy physical development of the youth. www.mys.gov.az

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This report is the result of the “Dialogue with Civil Society and other actors: Youth” held in the framework of the Second Round of National Consultations in Azerbaijan to shape the Post-2015 Development Agenda, which was carried out by UNDP, NAYORA, the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Azerbaijan and UNFPA.

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Post-2015 Development Agenda

“Dialogue with Civil Society and Other Actors: YOUTH”

The second round of National Consultations in Azerbaijan

FINAL REPORT

The Report was prepared by Mr. Ruslan Ismayil-zada, UN and UNDP Communications Officer, in consultation with the National Assembly of Youth Organizations of Republic of Azerbaijan.
Dear reader,

We are very pleased to present the findings of our dialogues with civil society and other actors, which specifically focused on youth issues according to the framework of the second round of the Post-2015 National Consultations. The consultations were co-organized by UNDP and UNFPA offices in Azerbaijan, the Ministry of Youth and Sport of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and the National Assembly of Youth Organizations of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

The recent Post-2015 National Consultations in Azerbaijan are – one could argue – somewhat unique among the other consultations being conducted throughout the world this year in that in Azerbaijan they are concentrated on youth. Youth around the world, while often full of ambitions and high expectations, face many challenges. Poverty and limited access to resources, education, healthcare and employment, along with social discrimination, lack of participation in decision-making, violence, conflicts, environmental degradation, and climate change hinder the full realization of youth rights, opportunities, and potential in many parts of the world. This increasingly can lead to worrying implications for both young people themselves and society as a whole.

We have held national consultations to hear the voices of Azerbaijani youth and to let them make a contribution to global awareness on youth issues. We did not want youth to be merely a recipient of the next agenda for their own future – as they too often are even today – but also a close partner to shape the future they will live in; we want youth themselves to share the responsibility of making a sustainable and bright future a reality for their own country, their region, and, moreover, the world.

On behalf of the United Nations, I would like to thank all participants in the national consultations for their active participation and passion in voicing their dreams about the future of the world. I also would like thank to all of our stakeholders, partners, and volunteers who worked hard to organize these national consultations.

The findings of both the first and second rounds the Post-2015 National Consultations have already been submitted to shape the future development agenda. I am more than sure that all of this year’s global consultations will revitalize future development goals to be more sustainable and inclusive, and reflect the future the people want.

Antonius Broek
UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Azerbaijan
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## Acronyms

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<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>BGHG</td>
<td>Converting Black Gold into Human Gold (UNDP Azerbaijan's report)</td>
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<td>CoE</td>
<td>Council of Europe</td>
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<td>CWD</td>
<td>Children with disabilities</td>
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<td>DaO</td>
<td>Delivering as One</td>
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<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<td>HDR</td>
<td>Human Development Report</td>
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<td>IDPs</td>
<td>Internally Displaced Persons</td>
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<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organization</td>
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<td>IT</td>
<td>Information Technologies</td>
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<td>M&amp;E</td>
<td>Monitoring and Evaluation</td>
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<td>MDGs</td>
<td>Millenium Development Goals</td>
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<td>MUN</td>
<td>Model United Nations</td>
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<td>NAYORA</td>
<td>National Assembly of Youth Organizations of Republic Azerbaijan</td>
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<td>NGOs</td>
<td>Non-governmental Organizations</td>
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<td>OSGEY</td>
<td>United Nations Office of Secretary General's Envoy on Youth</td>
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<td>PWD</td>
<td>Persons with disabilities</td>
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<td>SDGs</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goals</td>
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<td>SMEs</td>
<td>Small and medium enterprises</td>
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<td>SRH</td>
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<td>UNESCO</td>
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<td>United Nations Resident Coordinator</td>
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<td>UNYAC</td>
<td>United Nations Youth Advisory Committee</td>
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<td>WPA</td>
<td>United Nations World Programme of Action</td>
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In 2014, Azerbaijan applied to lead a second round of Post-2015 National Consultations in the country to identify goals and strategies for the implementation of a new future development agenda, when Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) expires after its target year 2015. The country was included in a subcategory to host dialogues with civil society and other actors. Taking into consideration the emerging demographic of youth, who are a majority of the national population, and whose many various challenges need to be addressed countrywide, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Azerbaijan focused specifically on the voices of youth during the recent national consultations.

Held between June and July 2014, and led by UNDP, in cooperation with leading youth organization the National Assembly of Youth Organizations of Republic of Azerbaijan, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the second round of Post-2015 National Consultations in Azerbaijan engaged a total of 800 young persons through deliberations in Ganja, the 2016 European Capital, and Guba, the 2014 National Youth Capital; a Model United Nations event in Baku; a validation workshop with United Nations Youth Advisory Committee (UNYAC) members; a jointly organized Global Week of Action; and an essay competition organized by UNFPA throughout Azerbaijan.

The key participants in the consultations were youth, young activists aged 15-29, young persons with disabilities, young Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), young academics, youth from ethnic minorities and the poorest rural communities, young entrepreneurs, representatives of youth organizations and civil society, international development partners working with youth, international organizations and UN agencies, think tanks, private sector agents, student trade unions, journalists, and NGOs. The participants discussed many development issues concerning youth, youth organizations, and civil society.

As a result of this second round of Post-2015 National Consultations in Azerbaijan, seven priority areas focused on youth and young people emerged. The priority areas include:

1. Development of a quality and inclusive education system, and the prioritization of vocational education;
2. Diversification of the economy, and creation of employment opportunities; global cooperation for youth development;
3. Empowerment of youth in decision-making;
4. Provisions for gender equality;
5. Establishment of a better healthcare for all;
6. Development of rural areas and agriculture;
7. Environmental sustainability in the face of climate change, and access to safe, drinkable water.
Dialogue with Civil Society and other actors: Youth in Azerbaijan

The second round of Post-2015 National Consultations was the first opportunity for young people, especially those living in remote regions of Azerbaijan, to discuss development challenges and to suggest their national, regional, and global solutions in an informal setting. Although the inclusive dialogues held in 2013 – the first round of the consultations – featured the voices of people representing a variety of backgrounds from all levels of society, the 2014 dialogues were the first time that the UN in Azerbaijan engaged in consultations with one specific target group comprehensively.
Background to the Dialogues with Youth

The Report of the Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda suggests “Youth” as one of the key themes for UN senior leadership. “Today’s adolescents and youth are one-quarter of the world’s population. They are shaping social and economic development, challenging social norms and values, and building the foundation of the world’s future. Young people must be subjects, not objects, of the post-2015 development agenda. They need access to the right kind of health and education to improve their job prospects and life skills, but they must also be active participants in decision-making, and be treated as a vital asset for society.”

In the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) framework, young people are seen as the beneficiaries of programs rather than their leaders, initiators, or innovators. The UN, starting with the Secretary-General, who recently made youth a top priority and appointed a UN Envoy on Youth, believes that young people are not just the recipients of development, but vital partners who will ultimately be responsible for implementing agendas.

In 2000, when MDGs were being developed, young people were probably unaware that decisions being made in a room on the other side of the world were changing their lives. The world we live in now is very different to the one that policy-makers were faced with in 2000. The young people that we consulted about a new development framework this year will be in their thirties and forties when we once again evaluate the success of new global goals. The current debate on the Post-2015 Development Agenda is therefore central for young people. The UN wants to make sure youth organizations participate in this process in a manner that upholds their valuable role as development actors contributing to the design of a future global development agenda that is able to address the root causes of poverty and other global challenges, and to improve the situation of young people around the world and acknowledge their rights.

MY World survey results show that youth have consistently rated “a good education,” “better healthcare,” “better job opportunities,” and “an honest and responsive government” as their top priorities. In fact, these issues are rated as the top priorities across the globe, from Africa to the Middle East to Azerbaijan. Unemployment, which is the main concern of youth, is one of the issues that almost everyone lists near the top of their agenda, and it will shape the global political future. Young people are demanding not only jobs, but also a voice and legitimate political participation.

During the consultations, participants were keen not just to express their views on the content of the agenda, but they were also interested in how it would be implemented, including the roles

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1 The “MY World” Survey (http://www.myworld2015.org) is a UN global survey in which citizens from all over the world are voting on issues they think are important in their lives. The MY World survey offers individuals a list of 16 issues to choose from. The voters are then required to prioritize six of those issues that they consider most important to their lives. The survey results will be used for future UN development agendas after MDGs end in 2015.
Dialog with Civil Society and other actors: Youth in Azerbaijan

and responsibilities of different stakeholders. Dialogue participants raised implementation issues not yet fully explored in inter-governmental negotiations, including issues related to ownership, localization, participation, capacities, partnerships, and monitoring and accountability systems.

About the Post-2015 National Consultations in Azerbaijan

First Round of Post-2015 National Consultations in Azerbaijan: ‘The Future We Want’

The Post-2015 National Consultations in Azerbaijan were launched for the first time in early 2013 under the chairmanship of the UN Resident Coordinator (RC), the UN Task Force on the Post-2015 Consultations, and in partnership with the UN Country Team (UNCT). The consultations, held from March to June 2013, and during which 2700 people shared their voices, aimed to engage people from every walk of life, with specific focus on vulnerable groups whose voices are not always heard.

Participating stakeholders included youth, women, children persons with disabilities, internally displaces persons (IDPs), academics, international development partners, think tanks, private sector agents, entrepreneurs, business associations, journalists, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The consultations took place not only in the capital, Baku, but also in the regions of Azerbaijan outside the capital. The results were presented and validated at a conference co-chaired by Mr. Ramiz Mehdiyev, Head of the Administration of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and Mr. Antonius Broek, UNRC and UNDP RR, in Baku on June 21 2013.

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2 Particularly, in rural areas.
Dialogue with Civil Society and other actors: Youth in Azerbaijan

People participating in these national consultations held last year specified ten priority areas for the Post-2015 Development Agenda in Azerbaijan. The priority areas included:

1. Economic diversification and inclusive growth;
2. Rural development and quality infrastructure;
3. Enhanced quality of and access to healthcare;
4. Improving opportunities for youth;
5. Gender equality and women’s empowerment;
6. Promoting internally displaced persons’ self-reliance;
7. Good governance and effective institutions;
8. Ensuring food and nutritional security;
9. Environmental sustainability;
10. Effective migration management.

Second Round of Post-2015 National Consultations in Azerbaijan:
‘Dialogue with Youth’

The United Nations in Azerbaijan places a high importance on goals proposed by Azerbaijani youth for their country’s Post-2015 sustainable development. Similar to the original national consultation process launched in the country in 2013 as part of the UN-led global conversations, the new concept of a second, youth-based forum was designed to provide additional space and opportunities to young people, as members of civil society, to contribute to a collective vision of a Post-2015 Sustainable Development Framework.

In 2014, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Azerbaijan, with administrative support from the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and in partnership with the National Assembly of Youth Organizations of the Republic of Azerbaijan (NAYORA), and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Azerbaijan, implemented a second round of national consultations to shape the global Post-2015 Development Agenda.

Azerbaijan was among 51 states that conducted such consultations this year. These national dialogues on the implementation of the Post-2015 Development Agenda focused on building and utilizing partnerships with civil society members and other actors, especially youth in Azerbaijan, in order to achieve the agenda’s goals.

3 In no particular order.
Consultations with youth complemented the new UNCT initiative to establish the UN Youth Advisory Council (UNYAC) in recognition of the value of dialogues between young people and the UNCT. Furthermore, this year the Government of Azerbaijan will host the First Global Forum on Youth Policies convened by the United Nations Office of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, together with UNDP, UNESCO, and the Council of Europe (CoE). Thereby, this new round of in-depth consultations with youth provided some useful insights into the discussions around youth-related policies and programmes at both local (UNYAC) and global levels (the Global Forum).

**Development Settings in the Field of Youth in Azerbaijan**

**Azerbaijan’s Recognition of and Commitment to Youth Issues**

Today, youth policy has become an integral part of state policy. Azerbaijani young people distinguish themselves by activity in all sectors of public life, and they play an important role in the implementation of political, economic, humanitarian, and social policies. As a result of the extensive opportunities offered to youth by Azerbaijani society, they have become a vanguard force of the society.

Youth and adolescents aged 14-29 represent nearly one-third of the population (31 percent) of Azerbaijan. Although they have the vision, energy and motivation to contribute to the country as well as to their own development, they require both more opportunities and more support to strengthen their skills and capacities. The Government, recognizing the strategic importance of young people for the development of the country, is thus prioritizing solutions to meet the needs of youth. In turn, it has sought to enhance health, education, development, and participation of adolescents and young people in governance and decision-making.

As part of its ongoing investment in youth, Azerbaijan has planned to host in October 2014 the first Global Forum on Youth Policies, an international gathering of more than 700 ministers, experts, and youth organizations. The Forum represents a timely initiative to advance youth participation and development in the Post-2015 Global Development Agenda, in addition to demonstrating a renewed commitment to the 1995 United Nations World Programme of Action for Youth. It also aims to help ensure that more countries strengthen their commitments to the development of national youth policies, for which Azerbaijan can provide an effective model.

The Government of Azerbaijan has formulated the State Programme for Youth Development and the state programme for Azerbaijani Youth to Study Abroad, while the Ministry of Youth and

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Sports, itself the lead agency to address youth-related issues, is providing support to the operations of the Office of the United Nations Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth (OSGEY). Likewise, the Government has established the Youth Fund, a new public-funding mechanism that aims to stimulate activities in the fields of science, education, culture, and other social fields connected with youth policy.

Azerbaijani youth today are represented in state bodies, parliaments, municipalities, businesses, and other groups, and contribute to the development of society. In fact, more than 60 percent of those employed in state bodies is young people. Twenty-eight percent of the members of municipalities – 4303 people – are young people. Of these, 326 of them are the chairs of their municipality. At present, about 200 youth organizations, including more than 20 high school student youth organizations, are operating in the country. Appropriate steps have been taken for the construction of the "Youth House" in Baku and other youth houses in the regions, of which 12 have already been completed. Within the framework of the socioeconomic development of the Baku metropolitan area, projects have been approved for the construction of five youth houses in districts of the capital. Construction will begin this year, and during the next 2-3 years 15 youth houses will be built.

### Looming Challenges for Azerbaijan’s Youth Development

Apart from the abovementioned success, Azerbaijan faces many challenges that demand solutions in the near future. According to the UN 2014 Country Analysis Report, about 33 percent of youth eligible for work are unemployed, social services are not readily accessible for 70 percent of youth, more than 50 percent of adolescents and youth are not able to access information they need because they did not know where to look for it or could not understand its content, and available sports facilities are not female-friendly or largely accessible to low-income youth.

Although youth participation in public life is developing, this trend largely excludes youth living in remote areas or in lower socioeconomic quintiles; very few youth organizations exist in the regions of the country outside of the capital, and financial constraints in these areas are significant. Girls and young women, particularly in rural and conservative areas, face particular problems with participation in events outside their hometowns because of cultural traditions preventing them from staying away from home without chaperones.

A growing issue is that of long-term unemployment and underemployment among youth, especially among young women. Among the 1,197,933 youth found to be economically active in 2011, 612,845 were young men and 585,088 were young women; in the same group, 55,133 young men were unemployed, compared to 75,119 young women. The highest unemployment rate, about 16 to 17 percent, was observed among youth aged 15-19 and 20-24; in urban areas, this percentage increased to 24.4 to 27.7 percent. Moreover, 16 percent of youth in 2010 were classified as neither in education nor employment (18.7 percent of men, 14.3 percent of women).

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5 VI Youth Forum of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The Speech of the Minister of Youth and Sports, Mr. Azad Rahimov, Baku, 2011.
Even if youth are employed, many do not earn enough to meet their basic needs, especially if they have a young family. Half of married youths do not have a house and thus live with their parents. Volunteering also is limited among young people, who are often unwilling to work without compensation.

The second round of the Post-2015 national dialogues with civil society and youth reflected the thoughts and priorities of Azerbaijani youth regarding the achievements and current challenges they face, and their suggestions about the implementation of related sustainable development goals after 2015, a target year for MDGs.

Impact of the First and Second Rounds of the Post-2015 National Consultations in Azerbaijan

The second round of Post-2015 National Consultations was the first opportunity to discuss development challenges and to suggest their national, regional, and global solutions in an informal setting for young people, especially those living in remote regions of Azerbaijan. Although the inclusive dialogues held in 2013 featured the voices of people representing a variety of backgrounds from all levels of society, the 2014 dialogues were the first time that UN in Azerbaijan engaged in consultations with one specific target group.

The consultations also helped the UN System in Azerbaijan support the Government’s strategy on youth and civil society and assist in implementation of related policies in the country. The Republic of Azerbaijan adopted a strategic development plan, called “Azerbaijan 2020: Vision to the Future,” which prioritizes youth development and youth participation in governance, and which set goals to achieve by target year 2020. The cooperation framework of the UN System with country, the “UN-Azerbaijan Partnership Framework,” must be aligned with the national priorities articulated in the Vision 2020. The complementary recommendations generated by national consultations on the Post-2015 Global Development Agenda will help the government to hear and respond to the voices of targeted groups precisely. It is also a good chance for Azerbaijan to consider its national experience within a global context.

The process of hosting Post-2015 consultations regarding development strategies helped both the Government and the UN System to gain third-party perspectives – those of civil society and watchdog organizations – on the country’s development. Moreover, the findings of the consultations offer useful guidance for UN programming and priority-setting by development partners, stakeholders, and donor agencies.

9 Vision 2020, op.cit.
The dialogue with civil society and youth organizations has helped the current discussions and efforts of existing UN agencies in Azerbaijan to develop an effective M&E system and to work together under the context of the “Delivery as One” initiative.

Moreover, the consultations have helped to ensure that the Post-2015 Development Agenda reflects the wishes of the people and provides a reliable strategy to achieve and sustain development goals until 2030. In Azerbaijan, the 2013 and 2014 consultations together attracted more than 3500 people, who participated either through the national consultations, MUN workshop, Global Week of Action campaign, essay contest dedicated to the national consultations, or through the MY World survey online or offline. The discussions show that people are now more aware about the ongoing process of the country’s development agenda than they were 15 years ago when MDGs were adopted. The consultation findings from both years help us in constructing future programming activities and encourage us to find better ways to cooperate with the Government on specific issues that boost a culture of the national ownership of the Government on nationally implemented projects.

The current consultations help the Government to form systematic ways, based on existing plans and processes, to pursue their MDG priorities – a process which in turn catalyzes the processes of the MDGs Acceleration Framework. One of the main features of the current dialogues is their reproducibility and versatility to support project implementation strategies on national, regional, and global levels. They also have provided unique venues for thousands of young people to articulate their views, share their aspirations for the world and for the future they want for themselves, and suggest how these goals might be achieved and their own roles in this process.

The national consultations on the Post-2015 Development Agenda fostered an environment to strengthen the cooperation between the UN System in Azerbaijan and the Government’s agencies. The Ministry of Youth and Sports, which has a big interest in working together with the UN System in the area of youth, provided administrative support to implement the Post-2015 National Consultations jointly. A leading youth organization, NAYORA, jointly led the consultations. ADA University, the most prestigious university in Azerbaijan under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, assisted stakeholders to host a Model United Nations (MUN) workshop on its campus. Both Ganja and Guba Executive Committees closely participated during the dialogues by providing administrative assistance, participating at the opening ceremonies of the consultations, and helping to promote the MY World survey in their respective cities.
Dialogue with Civil Society and other actors: Youth in Azerbaijan

Methodology of the Dialogue

National consultations: Dialogue with Youth

Held between June and July 2014, and led by UNDP in cooperation with the Ministry of Youth and Sports, NAYORA, and UNFPA, the second round of Post-2015 National Consultations in Azerbaijan engaged a total of 800 persons through deliberations in Ganja and Guba cities, a Model United Nations event in the capital, a validation workshop with UNYAC members, the jointly organized Global Week of Action, and an essay competition organized by UNFPA throughout Azerbaijan.

As the concept of the dialogues focused on youth, cities to host the dialogues were selected accordingly. The first destination was the second largest city of the country, Ganja, which is the 2016 European Youth Capital. The city was elected by the participants of the 2013 European Youth Forum held in Greece. It is a title granted to a European city for a period of one year, during which the city is given the chance to showcase its youth-related cultural, social, political and economic life and development. Ganja has already identified five areas, including youth participation, education, social cohesion, youth employment, and volunteering, to tackle during 2016.

The second city selected to host dialogues was Guba, the 2014 Youth Capital of Azerbaijan. According to the State Programme on “Azerbaijani Youth 2011-2015,” one city is selected every year to mark the importance of national youth development and promote youth active participation in the society. Having half of its population as youth, the Guba was elected to be the 2014 National Youth Capital.

As part of the consultations, participants were asked about their problems, their challenges, their opinions about specific development issues, related questions about the means of implementations, and their recommendations on mechanisms for future development agenda. The consultations specifically addressed the following:
1. How young people can be engaged in defining localized Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and how youth-specific concerns can be incorporated into local SDGs;

2. How young people can participate in the implementation of local SDGs;

3. How young people can participate in the monitoring and evaluation of SDGs implementation, and provide feedback;

4. What can trigger new partnerships and voluntary commitments, and what can make them successful in advancing economic, social, and environmental progress.

The key participants in the consultations were youth, young activists aged 15-29, young persons with disabilities, young IDPs, young academics, youth from ethnic minorities and the poorest rural communities, young entrepreneurs, representatives of youth organizations and civil society, international development partners working with youth, international organizations and UN agencies, think tanks, private sector, students trade unions, journalists, and NGOs.

The participants discussed many development issues concerning youth, youth organizations, and civil society, such as: economic diversification and shared growth; social cohesion; gender equality and rural women’s empowerment; youth empowerment in the public and private sector; employment and jobs creation; food security, nutrition, and rural development; population dynamics; migration and human trafficking; healthcare and health issues; education; engagement opportunities; etc.

Model United Nations workshop

As the object of the consultations was to define regional and global mechanisms for implementing future development agendas, it was decided to lead the final consultation in a MUN format. Participants discussed the Post-2015 Development Goals in the guise of UN diplomats, and they were the first “politicians” to witness how the future sustainable goals might
Dialogue with Civil Society and other actors: Youth in Azerbaijan

look if put to vote in the General Assembly. Note that UNDP in Azerbaijan has a great experience in working with youth, especially in the field of empowering them in decision-making. The UNDP project “Empowering Youth in Decision-Making and Policy Implementation,” which has already been accomplished, wrestled specifically with this issue and included the first-ever International Conference of Model UN Security Council in October 2013.

The consultation in MUN format was designed to develop and propose a concept for the Post-2015 consultations using MUN methodology. Such a process led actual UN member states to define SDGs for the 2015-2030 period based on the findings of the Post-2015 national consultations held worldwide. Participants took part in a pre-session, were provided with insights on the MUN simulation, and received previously prepared initial reading materials developed based on the results of the national consultations of 40 selected countries of five different regions.

Listening to the presentations of each of the 40 young people representing five regions of the world brought to the agenda 28 sustainable development topics, from which, after voting, ten priority areas were selected as Post-2015 SDGs. In order to identify ten priority areas, participants were divided into five working groups representing different regions of the world. Each region was assigned two selected priority areas. The mock priorities for 2015-2030 were identified, along with clear goals for achieving tangible results. The results of this simulation were then incorporated into the national consultation findings, making for a more inclusive, global, and multidimensional set of data.

A Closing Ceremony of the Dialogue with Civil Society and other actors: YOUTH. Baku, 15 July 2014

MY World survey

A global survey titled MY World was promoted in all events related to the Post-2015 National Consultations in Azerbaijan. Participants of the national consultations were encouraged to select through the MY World survey six out of 16 important global priorities and submit their votes online or, optionally, through offline ballots, particularly in rural areas where Internet access is uneven. Additionally, an online poll was created on Facebook and promoted through UNDP and NAYORA’s social media, and was sent to all stakeholders in order to offer another opportunity
for youth to voice thoughts and concerns. Overall, 250 Facebook accounts expressed their opinion in this way.

Four hundred survey participants submitted their ballots offline. In the offline survey, women participants (60 percent) outnumbered men (40 percent). Over 50 percent of respondents had a higher education. The results of the votes that were collected through the MY World offline survey reveal that voters’ top four priorities were “better job opportunities,” “a good education,” “better healthcare,” and “an honest and responsive government.”

Graph 1. Offline voters by gender.

Graph 2. Male and female offline voters by education.
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**Top 5 priorities of participants**

- A good education
- Better job opportunities
- Better healthcare
- An honest and responsive government
- Equality between men and women

Graph 3. The result of offline voting during the 2014 national consultations in Azerbaijan.

**Top 5 priorities among females**

- A good education
- Equality between men and women
- Better job opportunities
- Better healthcare
- Access to clean water and sanitation

**Top 5 priorities among males**

- Better job opportunities
- A good education
- An honest and responsive government
- Better healthcare
- Affordable and nutritious food

Graph 4. Female and male offline voters’ priorities during the 2014 national consultations in Azerbaijan.
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To compare the offline results, below are the current standings in the online MY World survey at www.myworld2015.org.

Graph 5. Current online standings of MY World survey from Azerbaijan.

As part of the national consultations, UNDP and the UN Information Center in Azerbaijan organized a series of events within the framework of the Global Week of Action\(^\text{10}\) to increase the number of MY World survey participants. Target groups mostly included students of the local universities who participated promoted the event through their social media accounts, donated their social media profiles, or voted offline to give their voice for shaping the global development agenda beyond 2015.

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\(^{10}\)The Global Week of Action was a UN Millennium campaign May 5-11 2014, using online and offline methods to help the numbers of MY World survey votes reach two million.
UNFPA essay contest

Additionally, in the same spirit as the Post-2015 National Consultations to raise awareness about important population and development issues, the UNFPA Office in Baku declared an essay contest on “Investing in Young People,” to be written by youth about their rights to information and services. This contest also aimed to sensitize the general population in Azerbaijan to key population issues on the eve of World Population Day. The key messages of the contest included bringing adolescents and youth into the central focus of future development agendas and raising awareness of the frequent exclusion of young people from the decision-making processes that directly affect their lives. The winners of the essay contest were selected, and ideas mentioned in their essays have been included into the results of the dialogues.

Validating the findings with UNYAC representatives

In 2014, The UN Youth Advisory Council (UNYAC), as part of the framework of the “Azerbaijan 2020: Vision to the Future” national development concept, was established to construct a more youth-responsive and inclusive UN through the meaningful participation of youth, to increase knowledge sharing between young people and the UNCT, and to gradually assume responsibilities of the Youth Advisory Council. Specific Objectives include advising the UNCT about strategic opportunities and necessary actions for addressing adolescent and youth issues; increasing the level and quality of youth participation in the planning, implementing, and monitoring of UN programmes in Azerbaijan; and advocating for increased focus on youth development agendas and youth-responsive approaches in the UN-Azerbaijan Partnership Framework (UNAPF) and other UN-
led processes. As part of the Post-2015 consultation plan, the findings from the current national consultations were validated with the representatives of UNYAC.

### Promotion video

In order capture the national consultation dialogues – including the development problems and challenges voiced by participants, their recommendations and expectations from the new development agenda, and their suggestions regarding the implementation of global future sustainability goals – a promotional video clip were created. The video clip portrays in chronological order the consultations held in Ganja, Guba, and Baku, and participants discussing specified priorities; showing the aspiration of the participants for better future.

A hashtag\(^{11}\) strategy expressing what participants want has been widely used in all communication-related activities, and is reflected in photos and videos. Participants were given a sheet of paper with a hashtag printed on it, and they were asked to write one of their priority wishes for the new global development agenda. They then took a picture holding their hashtag sign and spoke in front of a camera about their advocacy for their chosen topic. The hashtag signs were then collected and attached to a big banner used in the closing ceremony of the national consultations.

\(^{11}\) A hashtag is a word or an unspaced phrase prefixed with the number sign (“#”).
Consultation Results: 7 Priority Areas

As a result of the second round of Post-2015 National Consultations in Azerbaijan, produced in partnership with civil society and other actors, seven priority areas focused on youth and young people emerged. The priority areas include:

1. Development of a quality and inclusive education system;
2. Diversification of the economy and creation of employment opportunities;
3. Empowerment of youth in decision-making;
4. Provisions for gender equality;
5. Establishment of a better healthcare for all;
6. Development of rural areas and agriculture;
7. Ensure environmental sustainability and access to safe water.

In the following sub-chapters, results related to each priority theme are explained in four steps. First, Background and Challenges presents the current situation and achievements in a particular area in more detail, paying particular attention to the social context that can explain people’s opinions. It introduces current problems that are priorities in Azerbaijan. Second, Recommendations are the proposals for changes or solutions from the people that were identified during consultations to address those challenges. Third, the Role of the Target Group that was consulted during the second round of the Post-2015 National Consultations is mentioned. Finally, Testimonials highlights the personal reflections of those who participated in the consultations.

**PRIORITY 1.**

**Development of a quality and inclusive education system**

**Background and Challenges**

The issue of education has been prioritized in all consultations held with youth. Most consultation participants voted for “a good education” in the offline MY World survey. Discussions showed that there were some areas in this field that need to be reformed nationally, regionally, and globally during the implementation of the Post-2015 Development Agenda.
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The low quality of education, especially in rural public schools, has been discussed extensively. The lack of infrastructure in educational buildings, including both public schools and most public universities, was mentioned as a significant factor in this problem. Lack of quality in schools’ and universities’ libraries was also an indicator for necessary further reform in this field. The overriding problem in public school textbooks is that they are often incomprehensible for school children. Most literature at university libraries is already outmoded and written in Russian, and therefore requires updates.

A lack of infrastructure delays the process of making the education system more inclusive. The public education system in the country was organized with the Soviet science of “defectology” in mind, and therefore it prescribes for children with disabilities (CWDs) education in special schools and home schools, separated from other children. Such a system isolates and segregates CWDs from their peers and society at large. Consultations with youth with disabilities showed that they were marginalized after they left the public school, as the overall educational system infrastructure did not permit their reintegration.

Other issues aired during the consultations included problems in the fields of pre-schooling and vocational training, and relevant specialization in graduate-level education for preparing employees to meet market demands. A large proportion of children younger than age five have not received early childhood care or preschool education. There is a significant need for reform in the field of technical training, vocational training, and skills-based learning in Azerbaijan, as graduates from such courses are not adequately prepared for competitive markets. Furthermore, schools often do not support their Research and Development (R&D) departments to evaluate current markets, establish new specializations, and close this gap of student ability and employer demands.

A lack of human resources and the low salary of teachers in all areas of education, and especially in rural areas, were mentioned during the consultations. Because of low teacher salary, the education field is not an exciting area for skilled persons to join. Teacher salary is at minimum wage levels in Azerbaijan’s society – which discourages working teachers to dedicate themselves to their work.

Although Azerbaijan is one of the flagship countries in primary education enrollment in the world, a steep enrollment drop-off is observed among the country’s students, especially those in rural southern regions, after completing their general secondary education. Consultation participants emphasized that the government needs to pay attention to this issue.

The participants also voiced their wishes to enlarge national and global support for science courses, create new exchange programmes with other nations, and boost international volunteerism – all areas in which the UN, as an international organization, can specifically play an important role.

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Consultation participants recommend prioritizing state education policies throughout this new development plan era. They suggest: further adopting education development strategies as proposed by strategic plan “Azerbaijan 2020: Vision to the Future” starting in 2015; providing state subsidies for education institutions; and promoting an inclusive education system to meet the needs of different demographic groups, especially students in rural areas.

Moreover, improved education curricula, teaching methods, and skills-based training programmes will help bolster the crucial fields of vocational and technical education in Azerbaijan. Such policies could also lead to a wider diversification of vocational specialization courses that prepare graduates to compete effectively in a shifting market. Consultation participants stressed the need to link the country’s education system to the demands of its labour market. The promotion of more active labour market policies may also help alleviate other challenges in the field of education.

The recent consultations aimed not only to satisfy the wishes of participants but also to attract them to the national work of government and the global work of the UN, so that their reform-oriented ideas might be institutionalized into the new development period. The consultations with civil society youth show that this target group can be harnessed to act in both informal watchdog capacities regarding education development trends, and in data collection capacities regarding evidence-based policy-making on national, regional, and global levels. Creating such a platform for active youth engagement would boost synergies among the new generation of civil society.

One of the main roles of youth in education is to act as a mobilizing force to confront and solve existing challenges in the field. Their activities in advocating policy, raising awareness, and fighting stereotypes, especially in rural regions, must be appreciated and considered in a new development framework. Youth represent a crucially important group for mutual understanding between nations and exchanging experience on a global level, and their participation in exchange programmes and volunteerism must be fostered beyond 2015. Their contributions after such exchange and volunteer experiences will amplify Azerbaijan’s capacity of results-based decision-making for the Post-2015 Development Agenda.
Testimonials

- “Because of my disability, I was away from other children and I was made go to the special schools for persons with disabilities. Such childhood affected my further life, and I never considered myself an integral part of this society. I would love to see all children with disabilities going to the same schools with other children in a new development framework. A post-2015 agenda must bring inclusive education to the table.”

  Murad Mammadov (male, 24 years), a trainer at the Center of Development & Aid National consultation in Baku

- “Education cannot mean just going to school and entering to the university. We skip the most important part here. Without vocational education, it is impossible to enrich the human capital of the country. There are many fields in Azerbaijan requiring professionals who have vocational training. Currently, most of them cannot find the relevant applicant to fill the vacancy. Such education also can help us to open new sectors in our economy.”

  Gullu Atakishiyeva (female, 22 years), student, PR manager of “Zaka” Youth Intellectual Center National consultation in Ganja

- “Investment in education is an investment in a bright future. If we have a good education, we will have a sustainable economy, a strong healthcare service, and an improved social system. A person with an education will have more chances to find a job, and by working he is paying his taxes, which, eventually, the government gains. Imagine that most of the population is educated and doesn’t have any capability to work and sustain their state. Governments must take this into serious consideration in defining future development goals, and they must vote for education to be among the global priorities.”

  Rasul Mirzayev (male, 28 years), a math teacher at school number 6 National consultation in Guba

- “Education is not just studying. It is also advocating values and promoting dignity and equality in the society. It is a very good tool to fight against stereotypes existing around us, especially in villages and rural areas. Early marriage is just one example. As citizens and representatives of civil society, we also must help the government in fighting against such taboos. Girls’ education must be prioritized in developing nations and somehow must be motivated by new development goals.”

  Kamala Hasanova (female, 16 years), student in rural Imishli National consultation in Baku
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**PRIORITY 2.**

Diversification of the economy and creation of employment opportunities.

**Background and Challenges**

Many discussions held during the current consultations included warnings about the existing challenges stemming from the resource-focused economy of Azerbaijan. It is not accidental that one of the main priorities of the Post-2015 National Consultations in Azerbaijan held in 2013 was economic diversification and economic growth. Despite economic achievements in Azerbaijan, the country’s continued dependence on oil for economic growth creates a precarious situation, making growth closely tied to production and global prices. It follows that diversifying the economy from a reliance on oil exports, and increasing competitiveness are priorities for the government. The problems of an undiversified economy are reflected in the high rates of employment scarcity in the national market.

The oil and gas sectors in Azerbaijan employ only a small percentage of the public, and sectors like agriculture are highly unproductive and inefficient. Additionally, agriculture tends to serve as a fallback sector for workers who cannot find more formal employment. Very few people have access to higher-income jobs in the oil and gas sectors, which generate only 1.1 percent of jobs. Azerbaijan thus needs a more efficient economy and sources of quality jobs in non-oil sectors. The overwhelming influence of the oil sector has distorted non-oil sectors, and the economy is divided into the export-oriented, capital-intensive oil and gas sectors, and the rest of the economy, which is dominated by informal employment, principally composed of subsistence agriculture and services.

One of the main concerns of consultation participants was that the development process of human capital in the country may continue at its usual limited pace despite a new development

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14 In an indication of disparities in income, while employment rates in 2008 were about 9 percent higher in rural than in urban areas, median earnings per employed person in 2008 were only 51 manat per capita per month for agricultural workers, compared to 75 manat in rural areas more broadly and 120 manat in towns and cities. Harun Onder. Azerbaijan: Inclusive Growth in a Resource-Rich Economy. World Bank, 2013, at https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/12228/NonAsciiFileName0.pdf?sequence=1.


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Framework. Participants stressed the limited knowledge of marketable skills among youth entering the workforce, and the poor infrastructure of the employment centers that deal with unemployed youth. The homogenous and exclusive nature of the job market in Azerbaijan is also an impediment for professionals who are not skilled in the oil industry but are trying to find decent jobs.

In addition to these challenges in the employment sector, youth participants also expressed their concerns about the workplace environments. Violations of working hours rules in workplaces have become customary in working culture in the country. A lack of employee benefits and a poor social corporate culture in workplaces, especially in the urban capital, were cited. These consultations also showed that some reforms are needed in the protection of labour rights and the promotion of health and safety in workplaces.

Participants indicated that those who wish to establish small and or medium enterprises (SMEs) face many challenges – a situation that, again, is even worse in the rural areas. One of the challenges in this area is finding advantageous microcredit opportunities with low interest rates. Participants also noted a lack of legislative incentives to motivate the success of SMEs in the country.

Youth are more likely than other demographics to relocate for the purpose of finding better jobs and life opportunities. The existence of big gaps between global standards and Azerbaijani common practices regarding workplace sustainability and responsibility, thus demand attention if Azerbaijan hopes to keep its youth in the regions and cities of Azerbaijan. Subsequently, e-recruitment and other IT tools should be used for such purposes.

Recommendations

UNDP’s Black Gold to Human Gold (BGHG) initiative, which also promotes the issue of economic diversification, prioritizes those skill types that will help the country’s economy succeed in the short term and in the long term.

Acknowledging global dimensions of development and the impact of the BGHG initiative on national policy, Azerbaijan must follow a new paradigm in further developing its entire approach to skills diversification. A focus on IT within a broad HRD strategy may engage not only the public and private sectors but also all relevant ministries in establishing a diversified economy in Azerbaijan. Specifically, reviewing best practices in skills identification, along with a new practical approach for occupational training and cross-sector policy coordination for better e-services, will establish Azerbaijan as a regional leader in implementing the BGHG approach.
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Increasing shares in non-oil sectors in the GDP, establishing better business environments, and developing SMEs is vital for the diversification of the economy in Azerbaijan. Access to finance for relevant entrepreneurship must be simplified in order to foster prosperous conditions for small and middle business opportunities. Moreover, state policies for the transformation of vulnerable groups into economically active populations must be implemented by empowering such targeted group with opportunities. Acknowledging worldwide policy trends toward environmental protection and the “green movement,” green economy, the development and implementation of relevant state policies are also recommended.

Consultation participants also advised for the promotion of responsible and competitive workplace practices, the advancement of decent labour and social justice in the development strategy of the country, and the implementation of ILO-recommended policies into national policies to guarantee decent work situations for all.

Consultation participants recommended active labour market policies for youth development and youth entrepreneurship be tackled in an upcoming development agenda beyond 2015. Wage subsidies, minimum wage policies for youth employment, and social security coverage for youth for risks other than unemployment were the most-discussed issues. Other recommendations included building specialized employment centers for boosting youth employment through professional career guidance, and simplifying the processes for youth migrant workers in order to ensure a supportive and globalized employment culture.

Role of Target Group

The youth who participated in these consultations talked about what they will need to succeed in today’s global economy. They pointed to market-relevant skills, access to financial services and technology, and opportunities to contribute to their country and communities. Most of the participants of the consultations were already economically active. The education, entrepreneurship, and employment of youth will spur economic growth and diversify the economy, which may enlarge the capacity of the middle class in the country. Investment in these areas should be addressed by the Post-2015 Development Agenda in the plans for global economic recovery and poverty reduction.

Azerbaijan’s economic success ultimately will be measured over time not by annual percentage changes in oil revenue but instead by how it propagates previous economic success stories such
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as its oil industry into new, sustaining, multi-dimensional job markets into which motivated young people can enter and within which they can succeed. Youth groups such as those who participated in the 2014 consultations – and regularly every generation of youth after them – will therefore soon confront their nation’s marketplace with a litmus test for economic success: Now is there room here for us to work?

**Testimonials**

- “Youth need financial support, especially during their first attempt to join the market. Governments must stimulate young entrepreneurs in such ways as introducing special taxation systems, offering easy loans, etc. The private sector, which includes most employment opportunities, should be motivated to employ youth as well. Governments should stimulate and further offer special incentives for those companies that support NGO’s and young people. Such symbiosis must be reflected in Post-2015 Development Agenda.”

  Araz Pashayev (male, 31 years), Executive Director of Zaka Youth Intellectual Center
  National consultation in Ganja

- “What will happen when one day natural resources are depleted? What will people do when the sphere of economy that encompasses most of our GDP stops bringing income? These are the questions that our government must seriously answer and take relevant measures toward answering. Azerbaijan has rich potential to develop its non-oil sector, and we have smart and educated youth capable to work there.”

  Ilaha Abasli (female, 22 years), student of Azerbaijan State University of Languages
  National consultation in Baku

- “Finding a job is one thing, working is another problem. The insurance package is not satisfactory. I am spending my time at a workplace and dedicating my health to my job. But when I get sick, the insurance the work provides cannot even pay for my pills. And it isn’t just my problem; many people are not satisfied with the insurance they are covered by through their workplaces. I hope to see any global instrument for improving this situation.”

  Fariz Ahmadov (male, 27 years), a social worker in rural Khachmaz
  National Consultation in Guba

**Priority 3.**

**Empowerment of youth in decision-making.**

**Background and Challenges**

The emergence of youth demanding for more and better civil, social, and political opportunities is a globally observed trend, and Azerbaijan is not an exception. Such demands often include calls for transparency, accountability, inclusivity, fiscal responsibility, good leadership, respect for human rights and rule of law, democracy, and fair competition for public offices. Eventually,
these demands spur some youth to participate in governance and other processes of decision-making.

Young participants in the recent national consultations were particularly concerned with perceived economic, social, and political obstacles for their participation in decision-making processes and their empowerment to become ready to lead governing bodies. Economic and social empowerment was seen as a solution for their initial step toward future broad participation in governance. Gender stereotypes, especially in rural areas, also pose challenges to many who wish to participate in regional or national decision-making processes. Women are often discouraged from participating in social life while men are often encouraged to do so. Early marriages also block many women’s paths toward active participation and leadership in their communities.

Housing problems, including an entangling combination of expensive apartment costs and bureaucratic, loan and mortgage systems, create other challenges for youth – especially those youth who move to cities for university and jump to market after the graduation. Although scholarships are given to some students to study abroad, and only the students with highest scores get such opportunity, the consultations showed that at the same time there are many students of minority or disadvantaged groups who need loans to continue their education in Azerbaijan itself.

The consultations noted poor access for youth to quality information, especially in rural areas. The existing national media is not youth friendly, and most quality sources are either in Russian or English, which creates a linguistic barrier particularly for youth living in remote areas of Azerbaijan.

Although consultation participants see solutions in extending the capacities of existing youth centers, which were claimed to be available in every city in Azerbaijan, the existing infrastructure of these centers does not permit for youth to get advanced benefits. This creates many problems for young people, who often have leisure time but no stimulating, educational, or otherwise worthwhile activities to do during this time.

Stressed at the 2013 consultations, and again mentioned this year, was the country’s lack of psychosocial services available for youth, and especially youth with disabilities.

**Recommendations**

The implementation of the strategic plan “Azerbaijan 2020: Vision to the Future” will boost the process of youth participation in decision-making processes, as the strategy promotes youth and young people as pivotal actors in the life of the country’s development. Consultation participants demanded the ongoing implementation of this strategy, to be fulfilled by 2020, as it will continually attract more youth to decision-making habits and positions.
During the consultations, one of the unique approaches suggested for prioritizing youth participation was to set up a quota system that fills a certain amount of seats in certain decision-making positions with youth. Setting up such a quota scheme for empowering marginalized groups may result in a more inclusive youth participation in society.

Giving loans and microcredit with low interest rates to youth for establishing their own small or medium-sized businesses may create a beneficial collaboration between the public governance and civil society. Simplifying the mortgage policy for providing housing opportunities to youth was also suggested in consultation remarks, though this process must be accompanied with considerations for the economic situation of the country.

Consultation suggestions also included: making state scholarships for education simpler; setting standards for banks to give education-related loans; and improving the infrastructure and quality of youth centers – especially in the regions – for youth to spend their leisure time productively.

Role of Target Group

More active involvement of youth in governance can play an indispensable role in achieving sustainable human development. Taking into account that youth constitute more than 31 percent of the population, the future development of Azerbaijan will depend very much on the kind of investment that is put into young people today.

The consultations focused on supporting the ongoing progress toward democratization in the country, including a refining of the roles of the central government and civil society, and increased involvement of civil society in the design and implementation of policies and programmes in order to achieve a greater accountability for the government. The youth who participated in the consultations represent the newest wave of this civil society, and the quality of their involvement with policy implementation will continue to define the nature of access to information, transparency, accountability, participation, rule of law, and other hallmarks of democratic governance in their country. They themselves may empower even more people to take an active part in
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political decision-making processes, including the free and open debates essential to sustain pluralistic governments.

Testimonials

- “I entered university with high scores and studying with a high GPA. But entering the job market is so hard, because I am competing with others who already have related work experience. Governance for me is not just the assembly of mature people; you cannot make important decisions without having a representative from a younger generation. I think that setting a quota for hiring youth in workplaces, government jobs, and companies will attract so many bright and young minds to governance.”

  Kamran Dashdamirov (male, 19 years), student at Azerbaijan Tourism Institute  
  National consultation in Baku

- “Housing problems are occupying my time so much that they prevent me from working on myself. After getting married, it got even worse. The mortgage requirement is very high for middle class Azerbaijanis to get. I must get more than a monthly 600 AZN wage to be eligible to apply, and this is double my current salary.”

  Kamal Heydarov (male, 29 years), a PhD student at Ganja State University  
  National consultation in Ganja

- “As a young rural woman, I also want to participate in the social life of my country. But there are only problems around me: I got accepted to university but, because of my low score, couldn’t get a scholarship. I wanted to get educational loans from banks, but they said it was impossible. And I am stuck here at my home. Now, I want to participate in the social life of our village and attend youth centers to improve my capabilities. Although they are new buildings, infrastructure is so bad in youth centers that it is better to stay at home.”

  Aliya Pashayeva, (female, 18 years), a youth activist from Gabala  
  National consultation in Guba

- “Before demanding things from the government, we have to do them on our own! I have never seen a young person be unemployed if she/he always is active in searching for new activities. So, for participating actively policy-making, we first must assemble in youth organizations, and participate in trainings and workshops to enrich our capabilities. Later, the experiences we have gained will help us to be in the hub of decision-making.”

  Raida Huseynova (female, 21 years), student, Azerbaijan State Academy of Fine Arts  
  National consultation in Baku

- “For participation in governance, I first need empowering myself. For empowering myself I need money and open business. So, it would be great to see micro-loans given to youth for their new business ideas. Such policies, will not only give us a place for employment, but also help us to explore and be innovative. Innovation! That is the sign of youth”

  Huseynkhan Hajizada (male, 24 years), member, youth organization, “Bridge to the Future”  
  National Consultation in Ganja
PRIORITY 4.
Provisions for gender equality.

Background and Challenges

Azerbaijan recognizes gender equality as an important element of human rights and a crucial condition for the nation’s sustainable development. Central to all Post-2015 national consultations was the provision of gender equality. In Azerbaijan, women still face major risks of individual, institutional, and structural discrimination, both in public and private sectors. Only 16 percent of the National Parliament is women. Women are also extremely underrepresented at the senior management positions of the Executive Power.

One of the main concerns raised by female participants of the consultations was the comparative powerlessness of women in family, social, and professional environments. Women are still often considered recipients of decisions and not agents of decisions. This compels a focus on activities that empower women in their social and economic spheres of living. Also raised was the need to empower women in political life and foster an environment for their participation in governance.

Consultation participants discussed early marriages broadly and considered them a main threat for girls and women to maintain their lives independently. Early marriages not only create education problems for young girls, but they are also hazardous from a health point of view, and thus reinforce their unequal status within the marriage. Domestic violence also is a reality in the country, and many women do not disclose issues of violence, due to social pressure and fear of consequences. Deeply rooted stereotypes about women’s positions in society are the main obstacles for girls’ and women’s lives to be empowered. Accordingly, the early marriages and domestic violence that stem from gender inequalities are an impediment for the nation to achieve sustainable development in many different areas.

Some discussions focused specifically on the topic of the wives of migrant workers. These discussions showed that husbands often have more agency than their wives in the decision to move to and work in a different region or country, and their wives are obliged to remain in place in order to raise and educate their children while also accumulating additional responsibilities. The lack of communication with migrant husbands over long periods represents a specific challenge for Azerbaijani families, and it significantly affects girls’ and women’s lives.
Consultation participants saw the solution of gender inequality in the education of society. As many girls drop out of school after their general education, financial packages and other privileges were recommended as incentives for girls to continue their education. Consultation participants recommended raising awareness of and promoting gender balance issues in society, and educating students about women’s rights as part of standard curricula. Consultation discussions also considered enabling institutional mechanisms and policies for gender equality not only in legislation, but also in corporate cultures. Specifically, the topic of girls’ and women’s access to entrepreneurship education was broached in the consultations; it is a topic that must be considered nationally and globally in order to further empower women in socioeconomic life. Establishing career centers to guide women and girls for employment and education, as well as to narrow the education gap between boys and girls, has also been advised.

If there is a desire to achieve gender equality in Azerbaijani society, both sexes must feel equally empowered; to achieve this women and young girls must be more empowered in economic life and elsewhere than they are currently. Providing loans and microcredit for marginalized groups of women to launch businesses, especially in rural areas of the country, was discussed during the Post-2015 National Consultations.

Setting a female employee quota system for all workplaces, including main decision-making hubs such as parliament and judicial systems, was voiced in the consultations to support the political participations of girls and women. Consultation participants also recommended increasing research, methodologies, tools, and applied technical work addressing gender issues. Decent and well-paid employment status must be provided to women for them to be empowered in the society. Consultation discussions also proposed state programs or similar instruments to support the families of absent, migrant-working fathers, and specifically to address the transition of youth from orphanages to the labour market.

Youth are especially vital to this priority of gender development. Achieving gender equality is only possible through public work, and the target group of youth is a great source for assisting governments in raising awareness and promoting gender equality in society. Gender inequality is a topic that benefits from the flexibility and innovation of young minds and young generations who can discuss the subject in compelling but nonviolent ways.

Since part of the battle for women’s rights in Azerbaijan is a fight against entrenched traditions, who is better than the youth of today to act as civil rights pioneers and free thinkers on behalf of their country? Working together, young people can make a bridgehead toward gender equality that their children and children’s children will help to advance and solidify well into the future.
Testimonials

- “From an economic point of view, one can state that educated girls are invaluable assets of the country while non-educated ones are burdens to bear. The reason is that government is obliged to increase its expenses to cover the living costs of orphans and disabled children left in orphanages as results of divorces or unhealthy early births, and to take care of single-parent families and deliver to them social benefits.”

  Essay of Nigar Akhundova (female, 22 years), student, Azerbaijan State University of Economics
  UNFPA essay competition

- “If I don’t have any social benefits, any property, or a source of income, how can I demand equality? There must be a state program to empower women in the social and economic life of the country. We must be prioritized for achieving balance and equality in the life of the country.”

  Sona Alizada, (female, 21 years), a student of Baku State University, UNYAC member
  National consultation in Baku

- “Fighting for equality and gender balance must not be considered a women’s activity. Everyone in the society, men and women, has to cooperate to have fruitful results in this field. Working with families on avoiding further gender-related issues, and setting rules for creation gender balance must be the actions taken during our future development goals.”

  Sahib Namazov (male, 30 years), deputy director of school in Khachmaz
  National consultation in Guba

- “Gender balance issues must be tackled through broad and long-term awareness-raising activities, in particular in rural areas. Involvement of the government is the least active component, I think. Awareness-raising through media and activities done by NGOs is more welcomed. This issue must still be engaged in schools together with teachers and parents, and it must be somehow regulated and controlled by a mechanism within the education system.”

  Nigar Alasgarova (female, 25 years), a chairman of “Odlar Yurdu” Youth Public Association
  National consultation in Ganja

- “The education of women has a great impact on demography. Educated girls generally tend to marry later, and have small and healthy families. It is worthwhile to note that the youth population is the most aggressive portion of the population. Thus, the higher the fraction of youth population, the higher the crime and violence rate in the country will be. Unemployed youth are also a potential threat for development stability.”

  Essay of Aytan Suleymanova (female, 23 years), a graduate student of ADA University
  UNFPA essay competition
PRIORITY 5.
Establishment of a better healthcare for all.

Background and Challenges

Youth participants in the 2014 consultations frequently discussed healthcare issues including: an ongoing need to strengthen health services; poor water and sanitation conditions, and inadequate electricity services; insufficient understanding of the health needs of women, children from poor families, children with disabilities, and youth; a lack of awareness of good health practices; and rising rates of non-communicable diseases.

The many challenges to overcome in this field are not concerns only for youth, but for all people. Maternal health and child mortality still remain a problem in the country, and the poor quality of healthcare services is the top reason influencing many people in the country to go abroad for health issues. Lack of infrastructure in state hospitals, especially in rural regions, was a main health-related concern during the consultations. Though there are some newly built healthcare facilities throughout the country, most of them are not publicly accessible in the regions. Poor quality of infrastructure prevails in rehabilitation centers, too. Consultations with young people with disabilities offered anecdotal proof that facilities often provided to them are not good quality, and state-provided wheelchairs break early.

As Azerbaijan is focused on growing its economy, another challenge discussed during the consultations was quality health insurance problems in workplaces. Discussion participants mentioned that common insurance packages granted to many employees are often useless and doesn’t have any benefits, while some intervening policies could change this. Obesity problems among youth and young people were discussed, and participants expressed their concern regarding growing numbers in this field and advocated further relevant policies to be implemented in future development strategies. Although there are many Olympic centers both in the capital and in the regions of Azerbaijan, quality sports facilities and regional sports infrastructures are sometimes publicly inaccessible, and interest in public sports is low.

Consultations also focused on national problems in reproductive healthcare policy and the growing number of non-communicable diseases in the country. Participants pointed to a lack of awareness and a lack of policy advocacy, especially in the regions of Azerbaijan, as the source of these problems. Abortion remains one of the primary methods of birth control in the country, and local women are often pressured by husbands and other family members to receive abortions. Contraceptive methods are used very rarely, especially in the regions outside Baku – a situation that calls for more government intervention in this field. Rising rates of non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, cancer, and diseases of the digestive system are already
the leading cause of death in the country. Consultation participants recommended expanding the current six focus areas of MDGs to include issues regarding non-communicable diseases, and making relevant policies to be implemented by governmental and global organizations in order to combat them.

Recommendations

Most participants in the consultations demanded more investment in human resources in the field of healthcare. Without professional doctors and a knowledge-based medicine culture, the future of the health system of the country is unclear. For a better healthcare foundation, participants talked about improving the infrastructures of medical education, and focusing on funding medical students to participate in exchange programs.

Participants discussed the continuation of policies reducing maternal and child mortality and improving maternal and child health. Pregnancy treatment for mothers, especially among vulnerable groups, is a concern in the rural regions of the country. Also discussed were the continued fight against HIV/AIDS and other diseases, and increased focus on research and preventative treatments for non-communicable diseases.

Participants requested greater focus on building better quality infrastructure and health services in the health field, especially in state hospitals, and maintaining services that are free and accessible to the public. Participants advocated for easy access to quality and affordable healthcare and welfare facilities for all, particularly for women, vulnerable groups, and those in rural areas. Moreover, organizations throughout the country must prioritize the reproductive health of girls and women, since this is a key, universal issue crucial for the preservation of women’s rights.

To enhance existing health insurance systems, participants suggested that the government to improve state insurance services in order to thereby instigate the private insurance market to compete at a higher level and offer more benefits to the public. Participants also recommended that the UN and other international organizations help in finding sustainable solutions for better health insurance.

Participants, especially those living in urban areas, recommended setting up higher quality infrastructure for attracting people into public sports and for enhancing overall attention to this field. Building such facilities in schools and universities and making them free to students may boost public interest in sports. Moreover, implementing corporate social responsibility programs that encourage fitness for employees may also be a step toward better public health in Azerbaijan.

Role of Target Group

One of the unique features of youth is their capability to assemble around and advocate regarding the most challenging and outstanding issues in society. Governments must use the activities of youth and youth organizations in addressing health-related problems such as reproductive health,
non-communicable diseases, and other issues discussed above. The country must invest in its future by investing in youth who wish to study medicine and health. In summary, providing opportunities and building infrastructure for youth in this field can help the Government achieve a better healthcare system in the years after 2015.

Testimonials

“I am living in a mountainous area and it is sometimes difficult for me to access hospitals and health services. New hospitals have been built in my village center, but the profession levels of the doctors are so low that I am afraid of stopping by their offices. You have to go either to Baku or to Iran for good quality health services.”

Rashad Baghirov (male, 26 years), a literature teacher in rural Khachmaz National consultation in Guba

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“The salary of doctors is so low that they have to bribe or accept money from patients in public hospitals. Such things make corruption a problem in healthcare services, and, I think, government must be engaged in fighting against it. Raise their salary and demand quality health services. That is the solution, and without health there is no development – not only in Azerbaijan, but all over the world.”

Nijat Tanriverdiyev (male, 24 years), a student at Technical School in Ganja National consultation in Ganja

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“In our current development, the fight against HIV, malaria, and other diseases is mentioned. In a more sustainable future, I think, the objective of this goal must be enlarged and cover non-communicable diseases. The level of non-communicable diseases is quite connected with the level of development. The more you are developed, the less chance you have to be a victim of such diseases.”

Babek Aghalar (male, 23 years), a graduate student of Baku State University National consultation in Baku

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“We overlook obesity as a health issue. In old times, when someone was fat, it was a symbol of richness and happiness. Currently, being obese is a sign of inappropriate eating and poor life conditions. And it is an emerging problem in Azerbaijan.”

Nazila Ismayilova (female, 29 years), a doctor in Guba State Hospital National consultation in Guba

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“There is a big problem in the sexual reproductive health area in the country. And it is not just an infrastructure or capacity-building problem, but it is a problem of awareness among the members of society. People must not be ashamed to talk about it. And such conversations must be organized even with schoolchildren. Civil society and youth must be very active in assisting the government to raise awareness.”

Anar Alizamanli (male, 21 years), a student of National Aviation Academy National Consultation in Baku

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Participants in the two national consultations that were held in Azerbaijani cities other than the capital, Baku, highlighted the importance of the development of rural regions, the establishment of rural infrastructures to meet world standards, and the prioritization of agriculture in a new development agenda. Discussions particularly focused on the concept of sustainability as it relates to these fields.

As Azerbaijan’s economy is mostly based on profits from oil and gas, development trends of agriculture are often at odds with other economic develop trends, and this puts agricultural industries at great risk in the future. The strategic plan “Azerbaijan 2020: Vision to the Future” stresses the importance of building modern agro-infrastructure and attracting many interested investors to this sphere. The Government has already established state privileges, given zero-interest state loans, and supported agro-business entrepreneurs. However, there is still lack of interest among the country’s young farmers to continue their agro-activities, and rural youth often do not see a positive future for themselves in engaging with agro-business.

Recommendations

Participants acknowledged the development of rural areas as a rational step toward the diversification of Azerbaijan’s economy. Providing more credit and microcredit for farmers and financially motivating young farmers to engage with agro-activities will support a balanced development between agriculture and other industries. Participants also advised for the development of entrepreneurship skill trainings to encourage self-employment and to foster small business activities in the field. Investing in agro-education, vocational education, and relevant exchange programs for rural farmers may further develop the agricultural industry.

Participants noted a need for better national transportation infrastructure, especially public roads, in order to ensure better transportation of goods and services and further enable businesses to develop in rural environments. Access to drinkable water and basic sanitation in rural areas is an urgent issue that must be solved in future development agendas. Consultations in the cities of Ganja and Guba also advocated for better
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access to quality education for rural youth.

Consultation participants want the new global development agenda to also reflect state policies for agricultural development covering tax reduction, access to subsidies, and access to simplified bank loans. Also highlighted was the need to transition informal economies to formal economies, and the need for the country to adopt global standards of “green,” environmentally-minded economic principles.

Role of Target Group

To diversify its economy, Azerbaijan needs the dynamic human capital that youth provide. By attracting youth to agro-activities in the country, Azerbaijan guarantees the future diversification and success of these activities, as well as a corresponding development of the regions. Advantageous microcredit opportunities and other state-backed incentives can encourage youth to think positively about and participate actively in agro-entrepreneurship.

Testimonials

“As a man living in a rural village of Azerbaijan, why would I need to migrate to the capital, if I have jobs here? At the end, it is the place I was born and I have been living here since my childhood. Improving life conditions in the region must be one of the priorities of Azerbaijan in a new development era.”

Nariman Hasanov (male, 27 years), a farmer in rural Gabala
National consultation in Guba

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“In the current time, youth are not interested in choosing to work in the field of agriculture. I see the problem in less attention of the government to this field. If a job’s salary brings you more income, day by day youth will be attracted. We always talk about the diversification of economy, but this must be mentioned – that without the improvement and investment in agriculture, the economy will not be diversified.”

Sabina Sadigova (female, 24 years), Vice Chairman of Bridge to the Future
National consultation in Ganja

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“The development of agriculture must begin from giving efficient loans to farmers and entrepreneurs interested in small and middle businesses in this field. Motivate them and create a good condition financially, and the government will get more benefits here than it gets from oil and gas.”

Nigar Alimardanli (female, 24 years), a worker of State Oil Company
National consultation in Baku

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The implementation of all abovementioned six priorities would be inefficient if the government and global community did not also tackle environmental sustainability issues. This sentiment was backed by the national consultations. Although many suggestions to confront this problem have been proposed to the government, the solution of this priority will require global cooperation and partnership. Goals suggested for the implementation of environmental policies in a new global development agenda are several. First of all, of direct importance to this development issue, the country should renew the poor infrastructure of old industries. Old plants left behind from Soviet times create environmental and health problems in the country.

Expanding the usage of alternative fuels and resources would not only help the government to maintain its environment balance, but it would also boost the process of economic diversification. The development of a green economy will reduce environmental risks, protect ecological scarcities, and sustain development without degrading the environment. Environmental disasters caused by greenhouse gas emissions may be more easily avoided and energy more efficiently used. The development of climate-resilient ecological agriculture and the management of sustainable water resources, with emphasis on safe water and sanitation, are good initiatives for Azerbaijan to maintain its sustainable environment policies in its development strategy.

Consultation participants recommended the development and adoption of strategies to promote green economic practices and specific governmental activities to grapple with environmental problems. Consultations also proposed including climate change impacts into broader Disaster Risk Reduction policies; adopting international strategies on the national level; increasing public-private collaborative partnerships to boost technology development; and knowledge-channeling and capacity-building in the fields of climate change and environmental sustainability.

In order to ensure sustainable access to safe water resources, consultation participants suggested the development of a monitoring system for surface and ground water quality, and the implementation of water safety actions to
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protect the quality of drinking water. Also considered good policy to address these areas was establishing waste management institutions and conducting advocacy campaigns for general public awareness of related issues.

Role of Target Group

Youth have special responsibilities in relation to the protection of the environment. They have to live with it longer than everyone else. If it deteriorates, they will be the ones to witness it. Young people are therefore compelled to prioritize and engage in effective forms of action and activism that will generate effective responses to ecological challenges. Future, unborn generations have no voice in present policy-making conversations, and thus youth must act as a representative of all future Azerbaijani citizens. Environmental education is also one way to equip young people with the necessary cognitive skills to recognize and withstand the pressures of the advertising world.

The youth of today have lived all their lives in an era in which environmental issues have loomed large. They can introduce fresh ideas, innovative approaches, and creative outlooks regarding environment-related issues. The youth of today often simply know more and think more about the environment than anyone else, and they therefore should take the lead in protecting and sustaining the environment.

Testimonials

“A newly established recycling plant is opened in Baku and I heard that its opening affected surrounding areas positively. First, new employment opportunities are created, and at the same time, we can reuse waste in a smart manner. I wish such centers will be opened in other regions very soon.”

Orkhan Mammadli (male, 24 years), representative of “Zaka” youth center
National consultation in Ganja

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“We recently began to have a drinkable water problem and heard that it is the consequence of environmental pollution in our region. Environment is what surrounds us. If our surroundings are polluted, how can we talk about sustainability in the future. Keeping the world green must be the priority, and a new development agenda must embrace it.”

Sahib Valikhanov (male, 30 years), representative of “Yurd” youth center
National consultation in Guba

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Conclusion

Having now been held for two sequential years in Azerbaijan, the Post-2015 National Consultations have helped the UN System and the Government of Azerbaijan to identify the pressing issues and corresponding actions necessary to orient and implement the newly established strategic plan “Azerbaijan 2020: Vision to the Future.” The dialogues have pinpointed specific objectives of the national development plan to be succeeded by 2020.

The consultations also showed that corruption is the most concerning problem the Government must address. The Government of Azerbaijan is seriously fighting against corruption: newly established ASAN Service Centers that use a “one-window system” to provide state services are just one of many examples of new anti-corruption measures. However, consultation discussions reflected that there are still many corruption concerns in the development fields of education, health, and entrepreneurship.

Dialogues also showed that the state must consider and seek out the cooperation and involvement of private institutions, civil society groups, and international organizations in order to enact broad development plans. This necessitates public-private partnerships that reflect a mutual collaboration between the government and private sector. These partnerships are especially relevant in public marketplace activities, in which the Government may subsidize certain goods to attract private investors. Such governance will enable the public sector to harness the expertise and efficiencies of the private sector. This governance practice will enhance the capacities of municipalities that are currently very weak in Azerbaijan.

The consultations, conducted with young members of civil society, also helped to suggest that the Government find new ways of cooperation with the UN System. Expanding opportunities for economic diversification countrywide and promoting an enabling environment for decent employment growth are large areas in which the Government of Azerbaijan and the UN System together can create synergies. The UN System in Azerbaijan has a professional capacity to assist the national government in strengthening institutional capacities and human capital, while taking the roles of young people into very close consideration.

In the post-2015 development period, the Government will address development challenges including reducing socioeconomic disparities, fulfilling international commitments to the protection of fundamental human rights, and enhancing environment management and climate change resilience. Achieving sustainable development in the country requires the full engagement not only of the UN, but also of the Government and other international partners. Such joint collaboration will help to ensure the participation of all stakeholders in the process of development and provide inclusive opportunities for those seeking to make a positive difference in the future of Azerbaijan, so that the wishes expressed during the Post-2015 National Consultations this year might become realities.