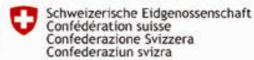# SWISS-UNDP (S-UN) FUND FOR YOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND YOUTH POLICIES

DECEMBER 2010

UNDP

Youth Services
Department

Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
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SWISS-UNDP (S-UN) FUND FOR YOUTH

The S-UN Fund for Youth Project started operation with the funds entrusted to UNDP by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. Youth Services Department of the General Directorate of Youth and Sports undertook national implementation of the Project.

Started its implementation in 2008, the Project provided grant and consultancy support for youth initiatives, which were developed by young women and men in cooperation with local institutions in the pilot provinces of Adana, Balıkesir, Kocaeli, Konya and Muğla.

Aiming to support social adaptation of young people from migrant families and disadvantaged youth groups, youth employment in culture and tourism sectors and utilization of information and communication technologies, 33 grant projects were implemented by young project teams within the scope of S-UN Fund. While 98 young women and 100 took part in grant projects' implementation, approximately 2.000 young people participated in the projects' activities.

In line with the provided grant support, capacity building activities, research on youth perceptions and attitudes and focus group meetings on youth policy were organized with the participation of young women and men.

With the knowledge and experience gathered throughout its implementation, the S-UN Fund aims to provide inputs for ongoing efforts of supporting young women and men's social adaptation and participation.

SWISS-UNDP (S-UN) FUND FOR YOUTH

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND YOUTH POLICIES

December 2010

The findings and recommendations prepared within the scope of the S-UN Fund for Youth Project, a project developed as a follow-up to the 2008 UNDP National Human Development Report titled "Youth in Turkey", are developed in light of one-to-one interviews with young men and women as well as representatives of government organizations, site observations, focus group meetings and perception surveys from 183 young women and 192 young men. The findings and recommendations aim to present a supplementary source of information for policy makers in the area of youth.

INTRODUCTION

YOUTH AND THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

To the question 'Why is being young good?' some of the young participants who attended the S-UN Fund focus group meetings responded; "*A healthy body and mind, willingness to learn, energy, dynamism, hope and time to realize dreams, the ability to adapt…*" Similarly, with the dynamism and potential it embodies, the term 'youth' is being often associated with concepts of development and progress all over the world. Young women and men are considered important actors in carrying their communities to the future.

Despite their important societal roles however, the problems and needs facing young people are serious and diverse. Young people are deeply affected by issues related to development and deprivations in human development. These deprivations, which are experienced during childhood and youth, limit the opportunities young people will have later on as adults.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which have shaped the global development agenda since 2000, are directly related to the opportunities and hence well-being of young people. Young women and men form a large part of the total population, especially in the developing countries. Be a young worker, a young migrant, a young mother and young father, perhaps without education and unemployed; young individuals shoulder heavy burdens and experience serious deprivations, in a period of their life when accessing basic services such as health and education is of vital importance.

Consequently, from eliminating poverty to ensuring gender equality and a sustainable environment; from providing universal primary education to basic mother and child care, reaching the MDGs is essential for millions of young individual's empowerment and their ability to reach the

> *"The sooner young people start expressing their opinions, the sooner they start progressing and enhancing their visions. Progress becomes faster this way."*
>
> *Kenan – Focus group meeting participant*

opportunities to shape their lives (European Youth Forum, 2010) .

However, young women and men are not only beneficiaries of development efforts but indispensable agents of change as is witnessed in the case of global movements such as on combating climate change. Young women and men are critical advocates of the global development agenda and form an important element of global partnerships and their participation is essential for sustainability of efforts in reaching the MDGs.

YOUTH IN TURKISH DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Similar to this global perception, young people in Turkey should also be considered integral and indispensable factors for development and growth. Turkey's ability to use its window of demographic opportunity is a prerequisite for the country to reach its development targets (UNDP, 2008).

The Turkish Government's 9th Development Plan, which covers the period from 2007 to 2013, perceives Turkey's young population as a source of synergy and vitality. While discussing the issue of youth - mostly in the context of youth employment - the Plan briefly mentions the social integration of young women and men.

Within this context, the Plan considers the negative effects of accelerating the transformation process in cultural and social relations. On the other hand, the increase in communication opportunities and development of civil society organizations are listed as positive factors that enable young people to clearly express their personal demands. Although the Plan does not specifically address problems facing migrant youth; it discusses the negative effects of migration from rural to urban areas within the context of poverty, urban infrastructure and participation in cultural life. Consequently, the Plan commits to support social adaptation of migrant populations and betterment of social infrastructure in cities under intense migration pressure.

Meanwhile, it is also stated that measures would be taken to support better communication of young people with their families and the society, develop young women and men's self-confidence, increase their sense of belonging to and sensitivity towards the society they live in, and ensure their participation in the decision making processes (State Planning Organization, 2006) .

FEEDBACK FROM THE S-UN FUND FOR YOUTH

YOUTH PARTICIPATION

However, Turkey lacks a national youth policy that can lead to the realization of the commitments mentioned in the Development Plan. As the National Human Development Report titled "Youth in Turkey" points out, there is an urgent need for developing a comprehensive and participatory youth policy on the basis of human rights, developing the necessary legal framework, as well as building local and national mechanisms that will ensure youth involvement (UNDP, 2008). The lack of a national

"If young people participate in decision making processes, first those who keep complaining about existing policies will keep quite. If we are given the opportunity to make our voices heard; if our opinions (whether they are right or wrong) are to be discussed at the policy making level, then we will get rid of our questions and doubts, we will develop self-confidence."

Gökay – Focus group meeting participant

youth policy forms a major obstacle for young women and men's involvement in decision making processes which directly have an impact on their lives.

A. The Importance of Youth Participation

Continuous and equal participation of youth in decision making processes is the basic principle underlying any national youth policy. Acknowledging that young people are important stakeholders of the development process, participation also appears to be an essential part of development, for development means 'empowerment of individuals and communities, for them to live fuller and more productive lives and elimination of their vulnerabilities' (UNICEF, 2003).

Participation is also a preliminary condition for young people to develop their identities and sense of belonging, determine their own needs, assert their rights related to those needs and expand the scope of their rights as independent individuals within the society (Kurtaran, Nemutlu and Yentürk, 2006, Youth and the United Nations, 2007).

Intergenerational communication, which can be developed through youth participation, will benefit the entire society. Meanwhile, youth participation is essential for decision making processes to become more democratic and rights based (European Youth Forum, 2004).

B. Barriers to Participation

In the S-UN Project, we defined youth participation as a two way process. Initially, it requires institutions and decision making processes to have the necessary tools for involving youth and for considering and responding to young people's demands. Subsequently, it requires young women and men to be informed about the existing channels of participation, as well as having the capacity and self-confidence required for participation.

- How open are the institutions to youth participation? Lack of a common definition and strategy

Our consultations with various institutions in the five pilot provinces showed that local institutions lack a shared definition of 'youth'. The definition of youth for any local institution remains limited to their target beneficiaries. As such, 'youth' is limited to 'students' for Provincial Directorates of National Education, 'under 18 years of age individuals under state protection' for Provincial Directorates of Social Services for the Protection of Children (SHCEK) and 'bursaries or any other groups of service receivers' for Municipalities.

The Project believes that the main drawback of limited institutional definitions of youth is that the young women and men outside these specified youth groups (such as young people out of school and employment) remain invisible to institutions. Moreover, the lack of a common understanding of youth limits local agencies in developing and implementing a shared strategy on youth issues at the local level. The lack of a national youth policy and national mechanisms for youth participation further restricts mobilization of local level institutions within the area of youth participation.

"Young people can achieve things up to a point. But when it comes to affecting policies and participating in decisions, we get blocked. Well, young people don't do research, they don't show the willingness to participate as well, but when we try to participate, we face barriers on our way."

Yusuf Cem – Focus group meeting participant

During Project activities, we observed that local institutions tend to cooperate with young women and men often based on perceptions of individuals within these institutions, rather than institutional strategies. We met with authorities at the local level, who were already willing to cooperate with young women and men. We also experienced cases where national and international partnerships initiated by the projects were perceived as 'prestigious' and enabled institutional partnership with youth groups. Moreover, the recent increase in European Union funds in Turkey encourages local institutions to gain project management experience, which consequently encouraged partnerships with youth groups in the case of S-UN Fund for Youth.

However, youth participation initiated by personal perceptions rather than institutional strategies has important drawbacks. During the implementation of S-UN Fund grant projects, we often encountered problems; delays and even cancelation of institutional partnerships, when the authorities who intermediate the partnerships with youth groups were replaced.

- Are young people prepared for participation? Deficiencies in information, capacity and self-confidence

When we approach youth participation from the perspective of young women and men, the lack of information appears to be an initial problem. The young people with whom we met often stated that they do not have sufficient information about services and facilities provided for youth at the national and local levels. It must be highlighted that young people reach even less information about existing facilities and available channels of participation, because they remain out of above mentioned limited institutional definitions of youth. That is to say, as young people stay 'invisible' to institutions, the existing facilities and services provided by the institutions concurrently remain 'invisible' to youth.

Young women and men's lack of information is not limited to services and opportunities. Young people who participated in the Project's focus group meetings also stated that they do not know their rights as citizens and they are unaware of the channels and processes required to exercise these basic rights.

The Project team also observed that there is a need for continuous capacity development and support in order to ensure participation of young women and men, especially those who do not easily participate in organized youth activities, lack project development and management experience, have lower household incomes and consequently, lower education levels. This will only be possible if the capacity of the local institutions is strengthened.

Along with capacity and information deficiencies, the Project found that the lack of self-confidence appears to be another factor that prevents young people's participation. What the Project also found however is that 'being involved in the project process' offers an important transformation for young women and men, regardless of the amount of funds allocated to a project or the content of activities that are being carried out. We believe this self-empowerment, which provides young women and men with the power to change their societies, to be one of the major outcomes of the S-UN Fund for Youth.

> *"I don't know my rights. And there is nothing I can do without knowing my rights. Without gaining awareness about our rights, there is no way of participating in decisions."*
>
> *Sedat – Focus group meeting participant*

During focus group meetings held in different cities, young

participants defined another barrier of participation with the same words as 'adopted helplessness'. Young women and men face a social perception at many levels in their lives; from families to the education system, asserting that participation is impossible and politics is an area that should be avoided. Even when they feel ready to participate, young people are taught by older generation that expressing their opinions and claiming their rights is useless. This shows that youth participation is not merely determined by communication between young people and policy makers or related institutional regulations, but also shaped by social perceptions and practices.

During the first phase of S-UN Fund's perception and attitude change survey, 100 young women and 95 young men responded to a standard survey questionnaire (S-UN Fund for Youth, 2009). An important ratio of survey participants confirmed their belief on the propositions '*Young people do not sufficiently know about their history and culture*'; '*Apathy and lack of goals and ideals are widespread among youth*' and '*Youth in Turkey experiences a moral decline*'.[1]

Meanwhile, a considerable number of survey participants agreed with the statements 'T*he society does not value young people*'; '*Young people are not included in any of the decision making process in society*' and '*The existent education system is preventing students from developing an independent personality*'.[2]

We believe that the survey results confirm the problems about above-mentioned preconditions of youth participation - regarding young people's preparedness and institutions' (and the society's) openness for youth participation - from the perspective of youth.

On the other hand, 75.9% and 74.4% of participants stated their belief in respective statements that '*young people in genera*l' or '*the interviewee, as a young individual holds the power to change and lead their societies'*. Despite the participants' negative perception about barriers of participation, young women and men's awareness of their own power for leading and transforming their society can be interpreted as a signal of young people's willingness and self-confidence to participate.

YOUTH WORK

As an essential component of youth policy, youth work is also a determining factor of youth participation. Youth organizations can enable young people to integrate themselves into their societies as active citizens, empower them to gain knowledge and skills, while providing representation and visibility for youth.

Our observations throughout the Project showed us that involvement in youth activities; civil society organizations and access to higher education (especially university

> *"If young people are given the opportunity, they can express their opinions and can affect policies. There are young people who can use their rights, as well as those who cannot enjoy their youth and cannot reach opportunities. Even reaching out for young people who remain out of youth activities is a step towards affecting policies."*
>
> *Ebru – Focus group meeting participant*

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[1] The ratios of participants who 'agree' with the three statements are respectively 80.5%, 79.3% and 48.7%. 7.7%, 18.5% and 29.2% of the participants stated that they 'do not agree' with the statements.

[2] The young people "agreed" with the three statements with the consecutive ratios of 41.5%; 50.8% and 69.7%. Consecutively 3.3%; 30.8% and 14.4% of the participants "disagreed" with the statements.

education) help young people greatly in overcoming information and self-confidence barriers. Building upon this, along with the empowerment of young individuals, holistic support for extending the scope youth work, education and civil society activities is important for encouraging local and national youth participation.

Cooperation among young individuals and institutions throughout youth work is vital for developing individual self-confidence, as well as changing social prejudices. The fact that young women and men's projects are being supported by important national and international stakeholders and it involves various institutional partnerships at the local level enables young people to find acceptance from their surroundings. Young women and men who had the first step into youth work during the S-UN Fund for Youth expressed to a great extent a positive change in their families' attitude towards them and how they were provided greater freedoms as a result.

Consequently, the Project believes in the importance of increasing the visibility of youth work, along with conducting extensive awareness raising activities to encourage youth participation, in order to eliminate societal prejudices against young people's involvement in decision making processes.

The relatively limited scope and resources of the S-UN Fund and similar youth funds contribute to positive results but are not sufficient. Providing sustainable resources for youth activities, particularly those that can be directly accessed by young people, is important both for increasing youth participation and changing the wide-spread social perception that youth work is merely a past-time activity.

Considering limitations of funds allocated to youth in Turkey, developing youth-centered policies in areas such as employment, transportation, accommodation and social protection, which directly affect young people's lives, appear to be another important factor for young individuals to become autonomous and participate in their societies as active citizens.

- Cooperation in youth work

Along with the limitations of financial resources, Turkey's large youth population with its diverse needs signifies the importance of coordination among different organizations involved in youth work.

During the course of the S-UN Fund, the grants which are implemented in cooperation with youth centers and civil society organizations created good practices, enabling different organizations to join forces. Youth centers used their advantage as public institutions for reaching out to disadvantaged young people and initiating partnerships with other public agencies, while civil society organizations enriched the content of grant projects, with their capacity and expertise particularly in non-formal education methods and needs-focused flexible structures.

Cooperation among different youth organizations such as youth centers, civil society organizations, youth councils and youth clubs is important for extending the scope and effectiveness of youth work at local and national levels, as well as enabling

"It is important to take part in youth organizations, both for socializing and gaining experience of working with organizations. When you are young, you are open to learn new things. With the experience gained, you understand how to cooperate with organizations and the way to communicate with them."

Süleyman – Focus group meeting participant

young individuals to participate in youth work through an organization to which they feel they belong. The Project could conclude that building youth organizations' capacity to cooperate, coordinate and represent young people in a non-hierarchic structure is vital for youth participation, as youth participation is directly linked to democratization and bringing together diversities.

Considering that youth work in Turkey is mostly delivered on the basis of volunteer participation, another way of increasing effectiveness of youth work appears to be creating academic fields for youth workers to gain expertise and skills. Meanwhile, support to youth studies and research is also important for determining the specific needs that youth work aims to address.

- Local strategies for participation of diverse groups of disadvantaged youth

Throughout the S-UN Fund for Youth's implementation, we tried to reach out to young women and men affected by migration. In addition to information collected from municipalities and social services offices at the provincial level, we also benefited from our meetings with district level offices and mukhtars while communicating with our target beneficiaries.

Although the S-UN Fund for Youth's main target group is specified as 'young women and men who migrated from rural to urban areas and undergo social adaptation problems as a result of human deprivations', during field visits we realized that there is diversity among target group's profile.

In fact, a young person who migrated to Konya to work in agriculture may have different social, economical and cultural characteristics than a young person who moves to Muğla during summer in order to work in the tourism sector. Similarly, young people migrating to Kocaeli for their university education may have very different characteristics than young people who move to the city from eastern parts of the country in order to work in industrial production. Consequently, all those young people go through different experiences of social integration in the cities they arrive.

While equal participation of young women and men in the Project was realized easily for young people from better socio-economic groups, we observed that young women were increasingly excluded from the process, as the participants' educational and economic status decreased.

Building upon this, we acknowledge the importance of locally developed strategies for ensuring participation of young people with different disadvantages, with an emphasis on young women's participation. The diversities in young women and men's experiences of social adaptation signify the need for locally implemented needs assessment to support national strategies.

> *"Policies should consider specific conditions of our youth. If a potential can be developed in every young person, then the policies can be successful. Turkey is a country with immense gaps. Problems of young people in Hakkari and İzmir are not the same. This should be taken into account while organizing youth work."*
>
> *Emre – Focus group meeting participant*

- Supporting youth mobility and creating shared youth spaces for social cohesion

During our meetings in pilot provinces, we observed a limited perception of youth among young women and men, similar to the perceptions of the local authorities. The young people, with whom we met, portrayed 'youth' as constrained by the

socioeconomic and cultural groups in which they belong.

However, the perceptions of young people and local authorities differed on the issue of conflict among youth groups. While the local authorities stated that dissociation and conflicts do not exist among different youth groups in their cities, young people told that they experience dissociation and conflicts.

Acknowledging these observations, we believe that creating shared spaces and platforms for socialization of different youth groups, as well as encouraging youth mobility at the local level are essential for replacing dissociation and conflicts among different youth groups with tolerance and dialogue, as well as breaking the limited perception of youth.

CONCLUSION

Despite its limited duration and area of implementation, the S-UN Fund for Youth project offered firsthand experience and insights on youth participation.

The grants supported by the S-UN Fund for Youth generated useful and instructive practices for building cooperation among young people and institutions, bringing together different youth groups, generating youth employment, enhancing young participants' communication with their communities and extending the scope of youth activities at the local level.

We also had the chance to observe at the local level, the same challenges and problems concerning youth participation, which have previously been highlighted in various studies and activities supported by UNDP, the Youth Services Department, other institutions and academics working in the area of youth. Young women and men, with whom we had to chance to work with and communicate, provided significant input to policy recommendations included in this report.

In light of these experiences, we can summarize the needs and recommendations discussed within the scope of this report as follows:

- Development of a comprehensive and participatory youth policy, along with the establishment of necessary youth participation mechanisms continue to be the most urgent need at the national level.

- Youth participation mechanisms are also a prerequisite for enabling local level institutional partnerships in youth work and developing institutional strategies which need to replace local authorities' personal willingness as the key to youth inclusion. Local level participation mechanisms must include all young women and men taking their differences into account, while ensuring special measures for involving disadvantaged groups.

- There is a need for informing young people on their rights, working structures of national and local decision making mechanisms and available services and opportunities provided to youth, as well as supporting their capacities of participation and leadership.

> *The hierarchy between youth and the society needs to be eliminated. There shouldn't be discrimination among those who are experienced and those who are not. Other people's opinions should not be neglected.*
>
> *Serkan – Focus group meeting participant*

- Awareness raising activities for encouraging youth participation and eliminating prejudices against this participation must not only target young people and decision makers, but the entire society.

- There is a need for extending the scope of youth activities and the resources allocated for youth. Support for youth organizations needs to build their institutional capacities to coordinate and cooperate, as well as to enable these organizations' democratic representation.

- Youth research needs to be supported, while academic fields need to be developed for youth workers to gain expertise and develop their skills.

- Along with supporting youth work and studies, holistic support needs to be provided on policy development in areas such as education, employment, transportation, accommodation, social protection and conflict prevention.

- In order to ensure equal participation of young people, special needs of disadvantaged groups, especially young women, have to be identified and addressed. However, it must be acknowledged that 'disadvantaged' youth groups are not necessarily homogenous, but include individuals with diverse needs and profiles. Considering this diversity at the local level, any national youth policy needs to make room for local level strategies.

- Building capacities and creating shared spaces for different youth groups and supporting local level youth mobility appear as another point of action for supporting dialogue, tolerance and cooperation among young women and men, preventing dissociation and conflicts among youth groups. These measures are also important for young individuals and communities affected by migration to develop a sense of belonging in their cities of arrival.

- The measures addressing the issues mentioned above can be developed and implemented by understanding the challenges faced by different groups of young men and women, providing leadership, political will and building the necessary human and institutional resources at national and local level. This can only be achieved by establishing dialogue between representatives of national and local institutions and a diverse group of young men and women.

"If young people can participate, for instance to education policy, then they will develop themselves, they will become more active citizens. When they participate in these processes continuously, they will also spread their energy to the whole society."

Zeren – Focus group meeting participant

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