

CHAPTER

1



INTRODUCTION

THE *World Youth Report on Youth Civic Engagement* has been prepared in response to growing interest in and an increased policy focus on youth civic engagement in recent years among Governments, young people and researchers. It is intended to provide a fresh perspective and innovative ideas on civic engagement and to serve as an impetus for dialogue and action. The objective of the *Report* is to provide a basis for policy discussions around youth civic engagement in order to ensure that young people are able to participate fully and effectively in all aspects of the societies in which they live.

SITUATION OF YOUTH

The transition from youth to adulthood marks a key period characterized by greater economic independence, political involvement, and participation in community life. However, the socioeconomic and political environment in which young people live can have a serious impact on their ability to engage.

Unemployment is a concern almost everywhere, affecting more than 73 million young people around the world in 2014.¹ Although the global economy has shown fairly consistent growth over the past two decades, young people entering the labour market today are less likely to secure a decent job than labour market entrants in 1995. Economic growth has in many places not translated into sufficient levels of jobs creation, especially for youth. In addition, in some parts of the world, young people's ability to engage and become economically independent has been affected by the 2008/09 economic crisis and, more recently, by a slowdown in global economic growth.

In some developed countries, the youth unemployment rate has climbed above 50 per cent.² In

low- and middle-income countries, underemployment in the informal sector is the primary employment challenge faced by young people. Statistics for 2013 indicate that an estimated 169 million employed youth were living on less than US\$ 2 per day, and 286 million lived on less than US\$ 4 per day. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), an estimated 600 million jobs would need to be created over the next decade to absorb the current number of unemployed young people and provide job opportunities for the approximately 40 million new labour market entrants each year.

A staggering number of young people are not in education, employment or training, and many of those who do find work are employed in precarious and/or informal situations, delaying their full socioeconomic integration. The lack of effective economic and employment policies and insufficient job creation has left many young people with no option but to accept part-time, temporary or informal work.

At the same time, outdated education systems are ill-equipped to meet the changing and diverse needs of today's labour market. Inadequate training and skill obsolescence translate into limited job prospects for youth—even when the economy improves.

Further exacerbating the situation, many Governments have responded to the economic slowdown by cutting

¹ International Labour Organization, *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2015: Scaling Up Investments in Decent Jobs for Youth* (Geneva, International Labour Office, 2015). Available from http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_412015.pdf.

² Ibid. Examples include Spain (53.2 per cent) and Greece (52.4 per cent).

spending on social services and provisions, often with little transparency or accountability. Such actions have led many youth to question the legitimacy of those in power. The resulting trust crisis has revealed itself online and in the streets via protests and demonstrations—often youth-led—that demand more open and effective governance.

ADDRESSING THE POLICY CHALLENGES

Addressing youth unemployment and underemployment has become a priority for Governments worldwide. A number of Member States have developed targeted youth employment policies and strategies aimed at promoting job creation and strengthening youth skill development and training. In many cases, actions aimed at combating the youth unemployment and underemployment challenge constitute a central element of Member States' national youth policies, strategies and plans.³

³ President of the General Assembly, "Summary of the key messages, initiatives and proposals from the High-Level Event of the United Nations General Assembly to mark the 20th Anniversary of the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) and to highlight Youth Priorities in the Post-2015 Development Agenda, held in New York on 29 May 2015" (New York, United Nations, 24 June 2015). Available from http://www.un.org/pga/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2015/08/240615_Summary-of-key-messages-for-High-Level-Event-to-mark-the-20th-Anniversary-of-the-World-Programme-of-Action-for-Youth.pdf.

In spite of such efforts, young people remain three times more likely than adults to be without work.

Policymakers have responded by focusing attention on alternative approaches that place greater emphasis on young people's role in creating their own employment opportunities. Increasingly, Governments are moving towards the promotion of youth entrepreneurship and the creation of internship programmes for young people to acquire marketable skills.

National policies and programmes are also being developed to promote youth involvement in volunteering and sporting activities. Such activities are seen as a means of integrating young people into their communities while also allowing them to develop skills and attributes that prepare them for life. They also create an environment in which young people may be less likely to engage in negative and risky behaviours. However, while such programmes have value, they have so far fallen short of meeting the real challenge of creating decent jobs for young people and ensuring their meaningful involvement and representation in governing structures and decision-making bodies.

YOUNG PEOPLE TAKING ACTION

The failure of Governments to effectively address many of the challenges facing young people has led to widespread discontent among youth. Young people often feel disenfranchised and have become disillusioned with governing structures incapable of providing them with the opportunities and support they need to progress from youth to adulthood. Stuck in a period of “waithood” (a time of stagnation in the transition from youth to adulthood), growing numbers of young people are initiating protests and demonstrations, demanding change. Such protests have largely been driven by young people demanding a greater say in governance and policy development, better economic and employment opportunities, and equal participation in society. Youth are calling for increased transparency, greater inclusion, and enhanced engagement. Their efforts are being bolstered by the use of new information and communications technology (ICT) and social media, which have been used to drive and effectively reshape activism both within and across borders.

Well-intentioned policies are often inadequately funded or face delays in implementation, leaving young people disappointed, disillusioned and frustrated. Youth demanding change have responded to this reality by becoming proactive in addressing the challenges themselves. Engaging at the grass-roots

and community level, young people are addressing structural and systemic problems through volunteering and peacebuilding activities. Similarly, through various entrepreneurial endeavours, youth are actively creating their own employment opportunities where Governments have failed. At the same time, the changing nature of employment contracts and conditions has changed the playing field for youth when it comes to internships and engagement in trade unions.

Within this context, the World Youth Report examines the positive and negative aspects of both traditional and emerging forms of civic engagement in the economic, political and community life of youth. It is intended to contribute to the dialogue on how youth civic engagement can serve as an enabling force for young women and men in the development and formulation of youth-related policies.

HEIGHTENED INTEREST IN YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Over the past two decades, youth civic engagement has acquired some prominence in research, policy and practice in many parts of the world. At the international level, the World Bank has identified the exercise of active citizenship as one of the most important activities for a healthy transition to adulthood for both the youth of today and the next generation.⁴

Interest in civic engagement has been spurred by a range of factors, including concerns about the perceived decline in the levels of civic and political engagement among young people worldwide and about the potential negative impact of this decline on the governance of society. The focus on youth civic engagement is driven in part by the assumption that young people who are more involved in and connected to society are less likely to engage in risky behaviour and violence—and are likely to stay engaged as they grow older.

Youth engagement may be considered an end in itself, but it is also a means to achieve other objectives and benefits in society. Its potential to contribute to the personal development of young people, to improve their welfare, and to address injustice in society also provides an impetus for promoting civic engagement as a component of youth work and youth action.

Interest in youth civic engagement is also linked to increased public awareness of the right of children and young people to have their voices heard. Growing numbers of adults are coming to recognize the need to support and encourage youth participation and social action. There has essentially been a paradigm shift in how adult society views the role of young people—one that challenges age-old stereotypes of youth efficacy and commitment. It calls on societies that have traditionally viewed youth as “adults in waiting” to be open to the engagement of young people as active contributors to social change.

FOCUS AND STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

The *World Youth Report* comprises five chapters; an introduction and overview is followed by three sections respectively focusing on the economic, political and community-based engagement of youth, and a final chapter offers key conclusions and recommendations.

Each chapter provides a thematic overview followed by expert opinion pieces on the highlighted topic⁴. The contributing authors, who include esteemed youth researchers, activists and academics, address specific aspects of youth-driven forms of civic engagement (see below). Each section is intended to stand alone and concludes with recommendations and suggestions for further reading. It is intended that these thought pieces be used to promote and inform policy dialogue and discussion between young people and Governments.

⁴ World Bank, *World Development Report 2007: Development and the Next Generation* (Washington, D.C., 2006). Available from http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/IW3P/IB/2006/09/13/000112742_20060913111024/Rendered/PDF/359990WDR0complete.pdf.

⁵ Disclaimer: The views expressed in the contributions to this publication are those of the individual authors and do not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of the United Nations or of the organizations with which the authors are affiliated.

Introduction (chapter one)

The current introductory chapter provides a broad overview of the topic of youth civic engagement. Pat Dolan and Mark Brennan explore various discourses to civic engagement such as engaged citizenship, positive youth development, belonging, care and social justice. They set out key recommendations for successful youth civic engagement programming.

Economic engagement (chapter two)

Chapter two of the Report examines changing trends in economic participation among youth and the relevant policy context, focusing primarily on the period since the global economic crisis. The chapter addresses the impact of the crisis on the economic life of young people and explores the normative shift from stable and permanent employment to flexible and part-time work. The authors describe how young people are responding to this changing context through engagement in internships (Gianni Rosas), entrepreneurship (Claudia Pompa), and trade unions (Amy F. Huziak).

Political engagement (chapter three)

Chapter three focuses on changing trends, policies and patterns relating to young people's political participation. It addresses the reasons for declining levels of youth involvement in institutional politics (including voting, running for office, and participating in

party politics) and examines alternative approaches to political participation that have emerged among youth—exploring how traditional forms of political expression such as protests and demonstrations have merged with ICT and social media to create a new form of political engagement. The authors analyse how emerging forms of youth political engagement are shaping the political landscape, focusing on topics ranging from their involvement in legitimate governance structures to their participation in extremist activities. The opinion pieces in this chapter highlight youth electoral participation (James Sloam), transitions in power (Nur Laiq), negative engagement (Akil N. Awan), and digital activism (Erhardt Graeff).

Community engagement (chapter four)

Chapter four explores the various ways young people participate in and engage with their communities, specifically through voluntary activities (Sarah Huxley), peacebuilding initiatives (Lakshitha Saji Prelis), and participation in sports for development (Selina Khoo and Andre Matthias Müller). The chapter explores the evolution of community engagement among youth, highlighting both the increased recognition of the value and skills young people contribute to community development and the benefits accruing to youth themselves from strengthened community connections.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: AN OVERVIEW

Pat Dolan and Mark Brennan

Civic engagement is not a neutral concept, but rather encompasses a variety of forms and perspectives surrounding relationships between the individual, the community and broader society. Various discourses and viewpoints carry particular messages and reflect differences in understanding with regard to the purpose and nature of youth as citizens. To fully understand the significance of civic engagement to youth and society, it is necessary to examine how particular forms of civic engagement relate to the experiences and social positioning of young people and what the objectives are.

Throughout the research and literature on youth civic engagement, five key discourses present youth civic engagement/action as desirable activity in their analyses and underlying assumptions about youth and the purpose of their engagement. While these discourses are not mutually exclusive, they each contain dominant strands demonstrating their distinctiveness. An overview of the five discourses is provided in table 1.1.

TABLE 1.1.
DISCOURSES INFORMING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

DISCOURSE	KEY AIM	CONCERN	DESIRED OUTCOME
Engaged citizenship	Participation	Recognition; voice; human rights	Engaged in decisions and influence
Positive youth development	Idealized adulthood	Adaptation; behavioural/cognitive/moral adaptivity; acquisition of life skills	Becoming more socially adapted individuals for future adulthood; social conformity; less risky behaviours
Belonging	Cultivation of affective social inclusion	Increasing attachments to place and others; building social capital (trust, networks, norms); finding spaces for a sense of inclusion	Stronger connectedness; better interactions; stronger youth-adult interdependencies
Care	Strong social support and resilience	Building strengths in adversity; preventing escalation of problems; increasing protective factors	Supportive/more effective networks; relevant programmes
Justice	Understanding and addressing injustice	Acknowledging root causes of structural inequality	Social justice

ENGAGED CITIZENSHIP

The discourse on engaged, democratic citizenship views citizenship primarily in terms of how political and civic identities are activated through engagement and influence in the public sphere. The literature on engaged citizenship therefore revolves largely around opportunities for youth to demonstrate their capacities to participate as political and social actors in society. It suggests that civic engagement begun in adolescence is more likely to continue throughout the life course. Because of this, it is argued that civic attitudes, beliefs and skills should be nurtured among young people.⁶

With engaged citizenship, civic education and civic skills development, focused both on the exercise of rights and responsibilities, are seen as the basis for active engagement among youth in policy processes. Schools play an important role in this approach as the primary venue for developing the skills, values and behaviours needed to participate in public life. This is achieved both through formal civic education and through extracurricular and community-related after-school activities. It is also argued that schools may serve as a learning ground for understanding and practising participation and social responsibility and for exercising rights. While this traditional framework offers the fundamentals, it is generally acknowledged that the potential of civic education and civic skills development has not been fully tapped in either the formal or the informal education and learning system as a means of engaging youth in developing more responsive policies and services.

A more direct mechanism for linking young people to community needs and developing the sensitivities required for greater political participation can be found in programmes that involve participants

in projects incorporating elements of deliberation, decision-making, and political advocacy or activism.

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

In the early 1990s, several Western countries began moving away from a problem-prevention approach to youth issues—fixing problems such as substance abuse was no longer seen as enough—towards a positive youth development framework that emphasized skills development and competency-building. There is a wide body of literature supporting the theory that civic engagement activities constitute an effective means of strengthening the development and capacity of individual youth at the emotional, cognitive, academic, civic, social and cultural levels.⁷

The positive youth development approach focuses on making young individuals stronger and more resourceful, as reflected in their behaviour and mindset. Positive youth development is linked to five key characteristics:

1. Competence
2. Confidence
3. Character
4. Connection
5. Caring

⁶ Ruth Lister, "Why citizenship: where, when and how children?" *Theoretical Inquiries in Law*, vol. 8, No. 2 (2007), pp. 693-718. Available from www7.tau.ac.il/ojs/index.php/til/article/viewFile/650/611.

⁷ Karen J. Pittman and Marlene Wright, "Bridging the gap: a rationale for enhancing the role of community organizations in promoting youth development", Commissioned Paper #1 (Washington, D.C., Center for Youth Development and Policy Research, February 1991). Available from https://archive.org/details/ERIC_ED364804.

Proponents of the model assert that increased strength and resourcefulness among youth lead to enhanced community engagement, which further contributes to positive youth development—and the cycle continues.

Positive youth development frameworks are designed to benefit young people and society simultaneously; young men and women with sufficient skills, a sense of belonging and attachment, and clearly defined roles in the community are better prepared for adulthood and find themselves empowered to act on behalf of their societies.

BELONGING AND COMMUNITY CONNECTEDNESS

Against the backdrop of what is viewed as an increasingly individualized society, civic engagement is sometimes seen as a way for youth to strengthen connections with others in the places they live and in the spaces in which they interact, including online spaces such as social media, increasing their sense of social attachment and belonging.

There are two key theoretical positions supporting this discourse: social capital and interaction theory.

Social capital is the collective value of the benefits accruing from social connections and trust between people.⁸ Empirical research has shown that the factors contributing to social capital, such as social support networks, civic engagement in local institutions, trust and safety, and the quality of schools and neighbourhoods, are associated with positive outcomes for children and young people.⁹ One

conclusion that may be drawn from social capital research is that community connections are important to adolescent well-being because they broaden networks and provide opportunities for interaction with others, often through local groups and activities. Intergenerational relations are one important component of this dynamic. Children and youth need positive adult attention to feel a sense of safety and security—to feel that they are cared about and cared for. Relevant studies suggest that the incidence of child neglect is higher in neighbourhoods with a poor social capital base.¹⁰

Social capital comprises not only the value of an individual's social relationships but also the quality of the groups, networks, institutions, communities, and societies in which these relations are developed. Civic engagement is viewed, then, as that which builds and strengthens trust, a sense of safety and security, support networks, and information sharing—as constitutive elements of social capital—effectively providing young people with a feeling of belonging in a society in which they have a stake. Engagement and interaction and corresponding youth development can take place in a variety of formal and informal settings, including those in which governance, education, and cultural and recreational activities occur.

8 John Field, *Social Capital*, 2nd ed. (Oxon, United Kingdom, Routledge, 2008); Alejandro Portes, "Social capital: its origins and applications in modern sociology", *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 24, No. 1 (August 1998), pp. 1-24; and Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 2001).

9 Kristin M. Ferguson, "Social capital and children's wellbeing: a critical synthesis of the international social capital literature", *International Journal of Social Welfare*, vol. 15, No. 1 (January 2006), pp. 2-18.

10 Gordon Jack and Bill Jordan, "Social capital and child welfare", *Children and Society*, vol. 13, No. 4 (September 1999), pp. 242-256.

Interaction theory posits that the behaviour of young individuals is largely influenced by social relations and the strength or weakness of the social bonds within their respective communities.¹¹ The emergence of community is viewed as a dynamic process of bringing people together by focusing on the general and common needs of all residents. The key component of this process is diverting action that would otherwise be invested in more individual interests towards the creation and maintenance of channels of interaction and the development of informal positive relationships among groups. Through these relationships, individuals interact with one another and develop a mutual understanding of their common needs. Where this can be established and sustained, local adaptive capacities increase, resiliency becomes possible, and community can emerge.¹²

As community residents and groups interact over issues of importance to all of them, they develop what has come to be known as community agency, or ways for local action and resiliency to emerge.¹³ Community agency reflects the building of local relationships that increase the human capacity of local people. Agency can therefore be seen as the capacity of people to manage, utilize, and enhance those resources available to them in addressing issues in the local community. The application of agency can be seen in civic engagement at all levels. Of particular importance is the fact that such engagement and interaction can define a clear place for youth in local society, strengthening their sense of self and identity. Enabling youth to be visible and empowering them to be active constitute a key component in community development efforts.

CARE AND RESILIENCE

A fourth discourse—which has received less attention but is currently gaining momentum—sees civic engagement as a means of creating a more caring, empathic and supportive environment in the lives of young people, especially those who are vulnerable. Whereas the positive youth development discourse applies to all young people, the care factor is particularly relevant to those experiencing challenges such as poverty, health issues, disability and exploitation. Traditional youth services typically emphasize the need to address young people's problems (such as poor academic performance or social isolation) before they deem them ready to take on leadership roles or engage collectively with others to bring about social change. Proponents of the care approach argue that the assumption that young people need to be "fixed" before they can be developed runs counter to what is known about human motivation and adolescent development. They believe that all youth need to be challenged as well as cared for, and that there is a need to weave together opportunities to develop and engage. In particular, they assert that civic engagement offers

11 Wilkinson, K. *The Community in Rural America*. (New York, Greenwood Press, 1991).

12 M.A. Brennan, Rosemary V. Barnett and Eboni Baugh, "Youth involvement in community development: implications and possibilities for extension", *Journal of Extension*, vol. 45, No. 4 (August 2007). Available from <http://www.joe.org/joe/2007august/a3.php>.

13 Wilkinson, 1991; A.E. Luloff and Jeffrey C. Bridger, "Community agency and local development", in *Challenges for Rural America in the Twenty-First Century*, David L. Brown and Louis E. Swanson, eds. (University Park, Pennsylvania, Penn State University Press, 2003), pp. 203-213; and M.A. Brennan and A.E. Luloff, "Exploring rural community agency differences in Ireland and Pennsylvania", *Journal of Rural Studies*, vol. 23, No. 1 (January 2007), pp. 52-61.

14 Pat Dolan, "Youth civic engagement and support: promoting well-being with the assistance of a UNESCO agenda", in *Child Well-Being: Understanding Children's Lives*, Colette McAuley and Wendy Rose, eds. (London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2010), pp. 111-126.

a means through which the needs and rights of vulnerable young people can be addressed.¹⁴

The study of resilience focuses on how some individuals exposed to a series of adverse experiences manage to escape serious harm.¹⁵ Longitudinal studies of risk and resilience have shown that many young people cope well and demonstrate positive outcomes in adulthood despite having been exposed to serious risks during childhood. These studies have attributed such resilience to the presence of protective factors that help mitigate against the effects of early disadvantage. Significant protective factors include problem-solving skills, external interests or attachments, support from non-familial adults, and a defined purpose in life and sense of self-efficacy.¹⁶ Social or political activity among youth—or, more specifically, their engagement in civic action about which they feel passionate—can act as a protective factor that supports young people becoming resilient to the challenges they face in life.¹⁷

SOCIAL JUSTICE

The social justice approach is distinct from other forms of youth development in that it calls for explicit acknowledgement of the seriousness of the socio-economic challenges facing young people. It includes elements of youth development frameworks such as emotional and social support as well as positive adult relationships, yet it also encompasses a socio-political element linked to a critical understanding of the root causes of social and community problems. The social justice approach derives from the proposition that youth can be active agents of social and political change in their own environment once they are equipped with the sociopolitical competencies

necessary to articulate social and community problems and propose solutions.

Social justice youth development includes practices and programmes that foster a positive sense of self through exploration of one's racial, ethnic and sexual identity; increase social awareness through the acquisition of knowledge about social issues; and strengthen skills that promote inquiry, analysis and problem solving. More succinctly, this approach can be used not only to identify problems, but also to activate mechanisms through which adversities can be addressed in real and tangible ways.

ADULT VIEWS AS A CHALLENGE TO YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Adults tend to have low and often negative expectations of young people, focusing on their risky behaviour, destructive peer influences and resistance to adult authority; few see youth as individuals with the positive motivation and skills to contribute to their communities. A body of research highlights how young people sense that their participation is not valued in society, which makes them less likely to engage in collective activity in the first place. The extent to which young people feel they can influence their local school and community experiences reveals much about their level of recognition as

¹⁵ John C. Coleman and Leo B. Hendry, *The Nature of Adolescence*, 3rd ed., Adolescence and Society Series (London, Routledge, 1999).

¹⁶ Michael Ungar, "Resilience across cultures", *British Journal of Social Work*, vol. 38, No. 2 (2008), pp. 218-235.

¹⁷ UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, *Citizenship: The Foróige Youth Citizenship Programme—Evaluation Report* (Galway, Ireland, May 2012). Available from https://foroige.ie/sites/default/files/citizenship_evaluation_report.pdf.

social actors. It has been argued that young people, especially those from low-income backgrounds, are conditioned to believe that nothing they do will make a positive difference in society.

Another obstacle to the civic engagement of young people is “adultism”, or the tendency of adults to control the nature and content of youth civic engagement. Typically, civic engagement among young people replicates the structure of adult democratic institutions and tends to be based on adult notions of what constitutes appropriate forms of participation for youth. As a result, marginalized youth and other young people lacking the “necessary” qualifications and resources are less likely to volunteer. Studies have found that some young people see “volunteering” as something imposed upon them by adults rather than as something they really want to do.

There is ample evidence from research indicating that while young people are capable of developing projects that can bring significant positive change to society, they are not encouraged to do so because these projects may challenge existing institutions. Hence, prevailing forms of civic engagement often focus on the maintenance of these institutions rather than promoting action for change. This may contribute to the apparent reluctance, or even unwillingness, of youth to engage in the existing civic and political framework.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMMES: FIVE KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

It is worth noting that it is widely acknowledged that organised efforts are required to promote youth civic engagement. Research suggests that young people are

more likely to become civically engaged when they are in setting such as schools, workplaces and community organizations where they are asked to take part because their friends are, or because they learn about issues that concern them (Flanagan and Levine, 2010).

The following recommendations are set out for the development of both policy and youth civic engagement programmes, practices and interventions. They can be adapted to the community, national and international levels. These recommendations should be included in any, and all, youth programmes where a legitimate desire for youth involvement exists. Regardless of whether these are designed at the local, regional, or national level, and are deemed as promising or proven in terms of evaluation and renown, a youth voice and representation is essential. However to maximize effectiveness programmes should be implemented locally. These local efforts can utilize consistent curriculum/methods designed at extra-local levels (Universities, Governments, NGOs), but it is essential that youth in the context of their environments help decide how these are delivered and implemented based on their unique needs.

This approach benefits Member States and localities that embrace youth in such a manner. Examples where this approach has effectively worked include *Youth as Researchers*¹⁸ (where groups of youth raise issues, answer these through rigorous research, and communicate the results to a wider audience, and add to body of knowledge), *Leadership for Life*¹⁹ (where local youth defining problems and how to develop plans to address these), and the *Communities that*

¹⁸ Youth as Researchers: <http://www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/youth-researchers>

Care²⁰ (this UK program focuses on developing local civic engagement to address unique local needs).

Be explicit regarding the degree of youth participation.

Some studies have emphasized the importance of involving youth in all aspects of programme design planning, development and execution, which can provide them with opportunities to practise their leadership skills, determine the responsiveness of the programme to the needs of all its beneficiaries, pursue social justice, and understand methods for effective implementation. All allow for increased youth ownership of the process and the long term commitment of young people to such efforts. It is argued that a youth-driven or youth-led model will yield the most tangible results in terms of youth development and youth empowerment.²¹ A youth-driven model may not necessarily be run by youth, but the adults administering the programme can ensure that many aspects are shaped by youth and that there is a significant level of youth ownership. It is important that civic engagement initiatives explicitly define the degree of youth ownership and the decision-making authority young people have with regard to programme activities. Successful civic engagement programmes, as widely recognised

best practice, include youth involvement in monitoring and evaluation. This should be included as a norm in all youth engagement efforts.

Be relevant to young people's own interests and lived experience.

Young people are more likely to be engaged by and passionate about issues that are relevant to their own culture and lived experience. This does not suggest that youth should be driven to action by carefully selected information given to them by adults. It is about youth being more likely to be committed to something that directly impacts their well-being and individual passions. The knowledge youth possess must be valued, and young people need an enabling environment that allows them to develop a certain level of expertise on the issues that influence their lives. This approach is consistent with Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which affirms the right of children to express their views freely and to have those views taken into account in all matters that affect them.²²

Be action-oriented.

Research has shown that young people are committed to social justice but often do not consider themselves responsible for the injustices they see, nor do they believe they are in a position to do anything about them. Therefore, it is important that the ideals of civic engagement programmes are grounded in action and in the establishment of processes for ensuring action. Organizations and agencies working with youth on civic engagement initiatives should clearly specify the civic goals they wish to achieve and provide real opportunities for young people to engage in action directed towards meeting those objectives. They must also ensure that youth engagement is

¹⁹ Leadership for Life: <https://foroige.ie/our-work/youth-leadership/foroiges-leadership-life-programme-overview>

²⁰ Communities that Care: <http://www.communitiesthatcare.net>

²¹ Andrea Edelman and others, *Youth Development and Youth Leadership: A Background Paper* (Washington, D.C., Institute for Educational Leadership, National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth, June 2004); and Lauren Kahn, Sarah Hewes and Rushanara Ali, *Taking the Lead: Youth Leadership in Theory and Practice*, *The Young Foundation* (London, Crown, 2009), available from youngfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Taking-the-Lead-October-2009.pdf.

²² United Nations, Convention on the Rights of the Child. Available from <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>.

real, substantial, and significant. If engagement is “tokenistic” it will not propel further involvement. Similarly when assessing the success of engagement efforts it is important to understand that the success of establishing a process for engaging youth in long-term activities matters. Establishing the process, framework, and methods is the measure success. This allows for long-term capacity building and sustained engagement, not just one off activities that are abandoned after a single success or failure.

Value and foster analysis and reflection. While action is essential in developing civic skills and experience, the importance of reflecting on civic activity is also emphasized in the literature. For example, young people may be trained and engaged in designing, implementing and evaluating research, conducting surveys and interviews of their peers, and presenting findings and solutions in public forums.

Provide opportunities for youth-adult partnership. While youth ownership of civic action is important, this does not mean adults should not play a role. Youth leadership emerges out of a complex set of skills, behaviours, actions and attitudes that are best developed through apprenticeships and other experiential processes requiring close partnerships between youth and adults.²³ Adults often play a key role as mentors and motivators in youth leadership programmes.²⁴

²³ Linda Camino and Shepherd Zeldin, “From periphery to center: pathways for youth civic engagement in the day-to-day life of communities”, *Applied Developmental Science*, vol. 6, No. 4 (2002), pp. 213-220.

²⁴ R.B. Woyach, “Five principles for effective youth leadership development programs”, *Leadership Link* (Columbus, The Ohio State University Extension Leadership Centre, 1996).

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Banaji, Shakuntala. The trouble with civic: a snapshot of young people’s civic and political engagements in twenty-first century democracies. *Journal of Youth Studies*, vol. 11, No. 5 (2008), pp. 543-560.

Brennan, Mark A. Conceptualizing resiliency: an inter-actonal perspective for community and youth development. *Child Care in Practice* (Special Issue: Building Resilience in Children, Families, and Communities), vol. 14, No. 1 (January 2008), pp. 55-64.

Flanagan, Constance, and Peter Levine. Civic engagement and the transition to adulthood. *Future of Children*, vol. 20, No. 1 (Spring 2010), pp. 159-179. Available from https://www.princeton.edu/futureofchildren/publications/docs/20_01_08.pdf

Dolan, Pat. Youth civic engagement and support: promoting well-being with the assistance of a UNESCO agenda. In *Child Well-Being: Understanding Children’s Lives*, Colette McAuley and Wendy Rose, eds. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2010. Pp. 111-126.

Innovations in Civic Participation. *Youth Civic Participation in Action 2010: Meeting Community and Youth Development Needs Worldwide*. Washington, D.C., October 2010. Available from www.icicp.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Youth-Civic-Participation-Worldwide-.pdf

Shaw, A., Brady, B., McGrath, B. Brennan, M. Dolan, P. ‘Understanding youth civic engagement: debates, discourses and lessons from practice’. *Community Development* (2014) 45 (4)



Youth conducting research in a rural area of Ghana on the prevalence of some diseases.

© Delanyo Amuzu