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TOOLKIT "GET YOUTH ON BOARD!"

Youth Participation

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Concepts and relevance of youth participation

More than half of the world population is now aged below 25 years. The topic “youth” is attracting more and more attention – in the media, in community discussions, in politicians’ speeches, from religious leaders and on the agendas of development agencies. Nevertheless structures, methods or the political will to involve youth in decision making processes often lack. A common understanding of what is meant by youth participation in different circumstances and contexts does not exist. Mainstreaming youth participation leads to incorporating the voices of young people into decision making processes and implies major changes in attitudes both of youth and adults, in policies and social structures.

Background

Youth participation is understood as “a programme strategy or an attitude that encourages youth to express their opinions, to become involved, and to be part of the decision-making process at different levels”¹. Youth participation (we refer to adolescents and young adults between 12 and 24 years of age) can take place at all levels, from community life to the global level. It can become effective in various degrees of formalisation: from entirely informal settings e.g. in the family and among peers, to institutionalised participation in different spheres of society. (See also Factsheet “Establishment of Structures for Youth Participation and Youth Promotion”)

Youth participation also differs according to its entry point. The development of clear criteria in the choice of entry points can help maximise both impact and flexibility. Important entry points for adolescent participation are schools, health services, community development and environmental care, youth associations, the media, and political processes.

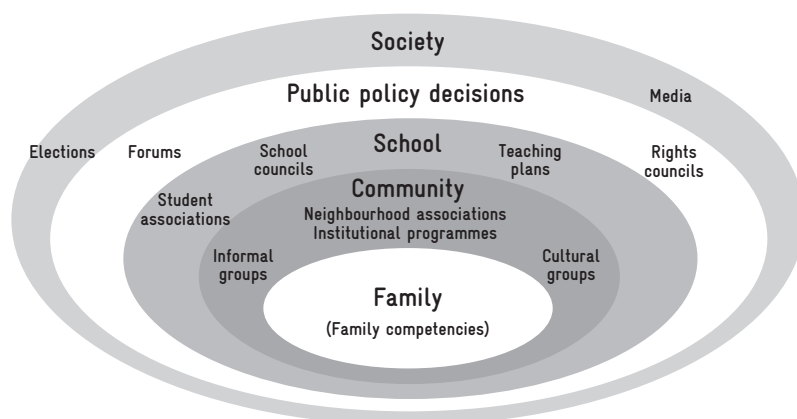
Why youth participation?

According to the World Development Report 2007 1.3 billion of the 1.5 billion people aged between 12 and 24 live in developing countries, and their numbers are increasing. Over 50% of youth (15 to 24 years) worldwide are affected by poverty.²

Thus young people should not only be an important target group of Poverty Reduction or Development Strategies but should also be actively involved in the elaboration, implementation, monitoring and re-direction of PRSPs and sector strategies affecting their concerns (e.g. education and employment strategies, youth policies). This applies not only for the relevant national planning processes but also for their implementation through local planning.

Spheres of participation

(Source: www.unicef.org)



¹ Golombek, S. (2002): *What Works in Youth Participation: Case Studies from Around the World*, p. 8

² *Studies from Around the World*, p. 8, UN: *Facts about young people and poverty*, www.un.org/esa/socdev/nyin/iyd2006.htm

Above all, children's participation is guaranteed by public international law. As set out in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (see Fact Sheet 2), children should have the right to "express their views freely" and "be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceeding" affecting them.³

Benefits for the entire society

Youth participation presents the opportunity of appreciating democracy, responsibility and ownership.

Political participation in adulthood is largely determined by participation in youth. Young people who learn early to deal with democratic values and human rights will later contribute - as active citizens - to build up stable democratic and peaceful structures in their countries. The promotion of youth participation is thus of utmost importance to enhance good governance and to avoid disenchantment with politics.

But youth participation does not only help young people to prepare for active citizenship in their adulthood. Especially in their adolescence they benefit society through their fresh ideas and enthusiasm as well as through their idealism, motivation and potential for innovation. Young people question conventional ways of thinking and create new perspectives on decision making.

Children and youth poverty and the high percentage of youth unemployment are amongst the biggest challenges for development countries. Latest ILO data indicate that of the world's estimated 191 million unemployed people in 2004, about half or nearly 86 million are aged between 15 and 24.⁴ To solve these problems and to overcome the circle of poverty it is vitally important to involve the youth in policy development and implementation. As they are experts on their life situation the special experiences of youth contribute significantly to achieve political, economical and social progress in their home countries. Youth participation also improves the effectiveness and sustainability of development programmes.

Young people who can actively bring in their concerns and ideas in decision making processes feel that they are taken seriously by society. In return they take over responsibility for the development of their community and country instead of turning away and inflicting damage on the society. Youth who feel involved and valued gain more self-esteem and are less likely to engage in risky behaviour such as drinking and driving, violence, early and unprotected sex, and drug use. Thus costs for society are being reduced and the potentials of young people can be used in a beneficial way.

Empowerment and capacity development of youth

Youth participation plays a key role in their empowerment and gives young people the opportunity to become aware of their rights and responsibilities. However, not all young people are in the position to participate in decision-making processes per se and need support and capacity development. Once involved in participatory processes it also contributes to the capacity development of youth by helping them to develop communication skills, to express their needs and to claim their rights as well as to get access to information and social networks and thus to attain social capital. Young people's feeling of identity, motivation, self-confidence, self organisation skills and their ability to conduct a political dialogue with relevant decision makers are strengthened. They learn to shape their lives on their own responsibility.

Involving young people in local development helps to preserve a local identity, creates pride, a sense of belonging and affection for the neighbourhood; all this opens up life perspectives in their community and in their country.

Challenges to youth participation

The concepts of youth participation have to be adapted to the political background as well as to the cultural and social context of the different societies. Youth participation is more difficult to achieve if cultural norms favour hierarchical or male dominated relationships, traditions prevent youth from participating in education and child labour is widely accepted. Especially girls are

³ UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12

⁴ www.ilo.org/global/Themes/Youth_Employments/lang--en/index.htm

excluded from participation and have no voice in many societies. Restricted access of youth to information, fixed mindsets on "ageism" and youth generally portrayed as a "problem" also hamper their participation. Youth participation always implies a hand-over of power from adults to young people, an issue which takes time and which has to be challenged again and again.

Sometimes it is difficult to mobilise young people because they are not convinced of the credibility of adults or politicians and do not want to be misused. There are limitations in reaching young people, especially girls and effectively incorporating them into the process of policy or programme development. To reach youth from rural areas or especially marginalised and disadvantaged young people (incl. ethnic or religious minorities) special approaches and additional resources and endurance are necessary. Activities to involve marginalised youth in decision making processes should take in consideration their specific life situation and their availability and should be carried out at the places where the young people are.

A well-known phenomenon when working with youth is their spontaneous enthusiasm coupled with their lack of perseverance. It is easy to raise their interest and get them to participate for one event, for a day or a month; but it is extremely difficult to maintain their interest in participation over a longer period of time. Youth participation goals should not be over-ambitious; realistic youth participation goals must be set short- or medium- term and the steps of the process must be followed systematically. To preserve their motivation it is important that young people don't have to wait too long to see the results of their engagement. The process should be organised in a way which allows new people to join and avoids a collapse should some people decide to leave.

Sometimes funding mechanisms discourage the participation of young people; the procedures do not envisage sufficient time or support for young people to come up with their own ideas and formulate them into project

proposals. In comparison to a non-participatory approach, the involvement of young people appears to require more time and more resources. It is through increased sustainability and social integration over a longer period of time that the value of investing time and resources to enhance youth participation becomes evident.

Levels of participation

R. Hart used a ladder to illustrate the different intensities or levels of participation of children. This ladder can also be used to illustrate the diverse levels of youth participation that range from instrumentalisation to real and equal involvement in decision making processes.

The first rung labelled "manipulation" illustrates how adults consciously use the voice of children to carry their own messages. "Decoration" stands for children wearing slogan T-shirts rallying for a cause without real involvement. In the case of "tokenism" participation is only symbolic: children are asked, but their answers do not influence decisions.

From rung four upwards, participation takes place in different degrees depending on the competencies and capabilities of the children involved. "Assigned but informed" means that children are at least informed about the project and can ask questions. "Consulted and informed" projects are still designed and run by adults, but children understand the process, are consulted and have their opinions taken seriously. In the case of "adult-initiated, shared decisions with children" adults still dominate decision making, but children take part in the planning and implementation of the projects. As regards "child-initiated and child-directed" and finally "child-initiated, shared decisions with adults" levels of participation are rarely reached.

At the level of "youth-initiated, shared decisions with adults" projects are prepared and run autonomously by young people, but they collaborate with adults in decision-making and implementation, benefiting from their experience.

Youth participation and development measures

In general, participation is one of the fundamental principles of German and international development cooperation as it helps to overcome arbitrary rule and corruption, fostering transparent governance and poverty reduction. Participation is a cross-cutting issue and an underlying element common to all principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. The promotion of active participation is also an important step on the road to achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Within the last decade international development cooperation has become increasingly aware of the importance of youth participation. It is by now an overwhelming consensus that the continuous involvement of young people is essential for the peaceful and democratic development of communities and societies. This becomes apparent in various strategies and declarations (e.g. UN World Youth Report 2007, World Development Report 2007) as well as in the upsurge of youth advisory boards and committees of international institutions and programmes. Empowerment and Participation are one broad category of the World Bank's conceptual framework on youth promotion.⁵

To clear the way for a permanent participation of young people in decision making processes development agencies should - beyond empowering young people – also support institutions and adults in creating an environment in which youth participation can be facilitated, especially in the context of post-conflict regions and countries with a non-democratic history and thus a lack of democratic experience.

German Development Cooperation

The conceptual approach of participation in German Development Cooperation promotes three aspects of participation: democratic participation (enabling citizens to participate in a living democracy), process participation (involving stakeholders in the identification, planning and evaluation of projects and programmes) and institutional participation (anchoring participation in rules, standards and legislation). This conceptual approach in general can also be applied to youth participation

involving youth in democracy, in projects, programmes and institutions. These three aspects are interrelated and mutually reinforcing.

In its youth projects in partner countries GTZ generated ample methods for increasing youth participation in national and local political processes. In particular in several partner countries capacity building at government and ministry level combined with empowering youth organizations enabled the participatory drafting of youth policies and action plans. In some countries GTZ played a major role in fostering the participation of youth in the PRSP process. At local level the establishment and training of youth officers and capacity building for youth NGOs is used as a strategy to help young people to make their concerns heard in local politics.

Strategies for effective youth participation

Both international and German Development Cooperation support strategies to mainstream youth promotion and youth participation in different sectors and sector policies. Important development sectors that have a strong relation to the lives of young people are: good governance, democratisation and decentralisation, health, education, employment promotion, conflict prevention and management of natural resources.

Strategies to promote youth participation in different sectors contain:

- Political Participation: Enhancing youth participation in policy and programme development on local, national, regional and global levels through the involvement of youth representatives in political structures;
- Capacity development: Empowerment and organisational development of youth organisations on local, national, regional and international level and training of peer educators;
- Youth participation in local development: Promoting the participation of youth at local level, e.g. in NGOs, local initiatives and institutions (schools, neighbourhood initiatives, social, political, cultural or environmental organisations, sport clubs);

- Awareness raising for the potential and rights of young people: Stimulating a public dialogue about children and young people's participation at community, national, and global levels using wide media coverage.
- Voting rights: In some developing countries citizens are enfranchised with the voting rights with 21. Lowering the voting age at least to 18 (some experts demand to lower it even to 16 years) and extending the voting rights give young people a reason to deal with political and social themes and allow them to participate in the "adult world". Another important aspect is that the minimum age for passive suffrage is not too old as well.
- Promoting girls' participation
Activities to promote girls' participation in decision making should take into consideration that they often have to take care for the household and for children or younger siblings. Approaches at community level, e.g. workshops, discussion groups, youth hearings or debating clubs, should take place at a time they are able to participate and should allow them to bring along their children. Apart from that the families often need to be convinced to allow the girls to participate. In many cases it is reasonable to offer special activities for girls. If they stay amongst themselves the girls feel fewer constraints and feel free to express their concerns. As the role of girls within society is connected to social, cultural or religious perceptions awareness raising for the rights of girls amongst families and in the community is of particular importance.

Youth participation at programme level

Young people should participate at all levels of programme or policy development from planning to implementation to evaluation and re-direction. They should bring in their experiences and competencies in governmental programmes, as well as in development programmes of NGOs, local institutions and initiatives and bi- or multilateral development agencies.

It needs to be taken into consideration that youth participation at the different project levels implies training in the relevant skills and backstopping.

Young people can become active in⁶:

Research:

Provided with training as researchers young people can undertake independent investigations focusing on issues of direct concern to them, e.g. situation assessments and analysis, surveys, focus group discussions, expert or target group interviews, hearings and public meetings. The findings can provide a basis for the design of concrete development programmes.

Policy analysis:

Young people should be involved in reviewing existing legislation and policies from the perspective of their own experience, e. g. through specific workshops with youth groups or youth leaders who then develop concrete policy proposals with their youth organisations.

Policy and programme design:

Based on the findings of their independent research young people and youth organisations can bring in their views and experiences as follows:

- through the constitution of youth councils and parliaments. The members of these councils should be elected by youth organisations on communal and national level according to predefined criteria and should represent the interests of youth in policy development and legislation.
- by sending youth representatives to decision making bodies, commissions and working groups, incl. boards of international and regional alliances (UN, NEPAD, global NGOs);
- by participating in youth hearings and workshops at community level;
- by acting as advisory bodies for NGOs or political institutions. In this case a regular exchange with youth organisations should be institutionalised.
- Budgeting and budget tracking:
Young people should also be involved in budgeting as the promotion of youth participation and the empowerment of young people needs resources. Budget tracking ensures that the resources allocated to youth promotion are not redirected to other areas. It gives young people the opportunity to contribute to increased accountability and transparency and develop a deeper understanding of public finance.

Programme implementation:

- As peer educators' young people can realise educational or awareness raising activities in their communities. Training can be provided by local NGOs and institutions on topics referring to various sectors (e.g. health education, conflict prevention, employment promotion, human rights education).
- Youth organisations can offer educational, cultural or sportive activities for young people in their community, independently or in cooperation with other community organisations and institutions (e.g. schools, health or employment centres, NGOs).
- Youth can engage in existing NGOs and initiatives at local, national, regional and international levels to bring in their views and to make development measures more "youth friendly".

Programme monitoring and evaluation:

Young people can become active by deciding indicators and organising how they are monitored, providing information about themselves, explaining likes and dislikes about project activities, gathering information and opinions from others, interpreting data and planning activities based upon monitoring and evaluation results.

Campaigning and lobbying:

Once young people are offered the chance to come together and articulate their experiences and concerns, many are able to develop campaigns for the realization of their rights, lobbying for the necessary changes from grass-roots to international levels.

Media skills:

By receiving training as youth journalists young people are being qualified to run their own radio programmes, develop video tools for the promotion of rights, and publish journals and newsletters. This allows reaching a wide mass of youth even those who are less interested in active participation. Especially in rural areas with poorly developed infrastructure radio programmes by youth and for youth show a great success.

Conference organisation and implementation:

Young people can participate in local, national, regional and international conferences as organizers, speakers, delegates and rapporteurs to make sure that the outcomes take into consideration the specific needs, experiences and concerns of youth.

Risks of youth participation

The promotion of youth participation, especially at national or global levels, has always to deal with the question of representativeness and legitimacy. To what extent do the selected youth leaders represent the interests of different groups of young people, especially of marginalised youth? How can disadvantaged young people with few education and communication skills be reached and included in development programmes? How can be made sure that youth councils or parliaments at national level don't lose the contact to their grassroots organisations on local level?

In many cases the promotion of youth participation at communal level is more effective and representative than at national and global levels. In policy development the implementation of youth hearings in communities is an appropriate way to get access to the views and concerns of various groups of young people.

How to reach the youth?

Do

- Reach youth where they are e.g. in certain areas of the community or in rural areas (mobile youth work)
- Integrate families, teachers, the police, government officials, street workers, community representatives, media people and employers in the sensitisation process and encourage them to support, promote and advocate participation
- Emphasise the respective benefit and relevance for the different stakeholders in the sensitisation process
- Create trust, establish a respectful relationship between young people and adults and treat the youth seriously as partners with equal rights
- Create an environment which enables youth to participate on a voluntary basis

Examples

- Strengthen the self-confidence of young people; appeal to their uniqueness and importance, encourage them to contribute and pardon their mistakes
- Be aware of power relationships and of the special barriers to the participation of girls and create an atmosphere to enhance everyone's participation
- Involve youth who seem less involved than might be expected, identify situations and offer opportunities that are likely to maximise their ability to demonstrate competence
- Provide a wide diversity of methods of participation and of different types of expression and develop authentic forms of participation according to the respective age group and idiosyncrasies
- Listen to their contributions open and carefully, share ideas and goals and discuss seriously
- Take into consideration that belonging to the age group of youth is a finite process and consistently new young people have to be motivated to participate.

Don't

- Applaud and agree with everything young people say
- Announce that everyone is in complete agreement
- Allow older people to interrupt younger people (and vice versa)
- Conduct a workshop where you never get beyond warm-ups, without any teaching/skills sessions or where adults act as teachers all the way through
- Establish hierarchical structures but enable one-to-one communication with decision-makers
- Implement one-shot initiatives; instead employ carefully considered strategic approaches to youth participation
- Give young people the feeling of being useless and unimportant
- Use them or exploit them as cheap labour.

Youth commission for youth policy development – Bosnia and Herzegovina

The youth commission in Bosnia-Herzegovina was founded in December 2004 with support of the German technical cooperation project “Building and Promoting Youth Structures in Bosnia and Herzegovina”. Its aim is to develop and implement a national youth strategy. The commission consists of 18 members of which 10 are youth representatives and eight are government representatives. Representatives of the Bosnian youth were appointed following a public advertising process (the country does not yet have a unified structure for youth representation). The most important criteria for the appointments were that candidates should work with a youth organisation, have experience of youth social work and be well educated. The selection committee was composed of commission members, the NGOs' association and representatives of the international community. All participants received simultaneous training in youth policy planning, which proved an advantage, and they were – or still are – important multipliers within their ministries and offices. Consensus was found between the ideas of the youth representatives and those of the government.

Participatory youth baseline study – El Salvador

To assess baseline information on living conditions of young people in 11 selected project municipalities of the GTZ supported PaisJoven project, young people were trained as interviewers, one per municipality. After preparation and under the guidance of adult experts, they organised focus groups with youth, municipal representatives and with members of NGOs, carried out the interviews and examined additional information. The experience was enriching for both sides: The information collected gave a real insight into life realities and perceptions of young people, both, for the youth themselves and for the experts, as well as for the public (see publication “Jóvenes en El Salvador, su vida y sus percepciones”, GTZ 2004); the young interviewers received the opportunity to acquire important communication and organisational skills. As a result, small seed youth organisations have been initiated.

Youth PRA in a settlements upgrading project – El Salvador

Within the KfW (German development bank)-financed upgrading of the informal settlement Los Manantiales in the capital city San Salvador, between 2003 and 2006 social enhancement activities with young people have been carried out. Among them, a participatory rapid assessment (PRA) on drug abuse and violence has been realised. Under the guidance of the social project team, roughly 20 young people between 14 and 25 years jointly elaborated a questionnaire, interviewed youth and selected community members and summarised the results in a small report. Only through them it has been possible to get access to socially excluded groups such as drug addicts and youth gang members for the first time ever.

Youth participation in PRSP evaluation

Between April 2004 and December 2005, the local Cameroonian NGO “Service Oecuménique pour la Paix - SeP” conducted debates with youth groups from rural and urban areas. The NGO was supported by the technical cooperation programme “Decentralisation and Local Development” and the GTZ-sector project “Children and Youth”. The young people used the debates to address Cameroon’s Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) and discuss proposals with decision makers from politics and society. In workshops the young people analysed - under guidance of local NGO and GTZ staff - the existing PRSP and formulated suggestions for improvement. Training was provided for the young participants in methods of communication, leading debates, lobbying and peaceful conflict resolution as well as in human rights and participation rights for youth.

Empowerment of local youth organisations – Paraguay

Between March 2005 and October 2006 the project “Youth as important actors of development” was carried out in selected communities of the three rural departments Concepción, Caazapá and Guairá. The project was a component of the German Technical Cooperation programme “Good Governance and poverty reduction at communal level”. Its aim was to involve the potential of youth into community development. Thus youth organisations have been empowered and trained to develop their projects and to bring them into local decision making bodies. The training included different contents, e.g. project management, budget planning and monitoring, financial accounting, communication skills, lobbying and public relations.

Several of the “youth projects” have been incorporated into the annual plans of local governmental departments and a budget for their implementation has been provided. The youth have developed different approaches to express their interests at political level, e.g. youth forums, participation in public hearings, negotiations with political decision makers and organisations of events.

Youth forums - annual meetings of the most important youth organisations - have been established to evaluate the work of the existing youth office and to develop annual youth action plans.

The technical cooperation youth component contributed to improve the organisational structures of youth organisations, to establish sustainable structures of youth participation and the communication between young people and decision makers.

Relevant literature and websites

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Youth Employment Network (2007): Joining Forces with Young People: A Practical Guide to Collaboration for Youth Employment.- Geneva

Websites

European Youth Forum: www.youthforum.org

Family Health International, youth participation guide: www.fhi.org/sp/Youth/YouthNet/RHTrainMat/ypguide.htm

Global Youth Connect: www.globalyouthconnect.org

Infostelle Kinderpolitik des Deutschen Kinderhilfswerks (including participation tools): www.kinderpolitik.de

International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance: www.idea.int

Pro Youth International: www.alli.fi/euro

Taking IT Global: www.takingitglobal.org

UNICEF: www.unicef.org

UNICEF, Voices of Youth: www.unicef.org/voyn

YouthActionNet: www.youthactionnet.org

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