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TOOLKIT "GET YOUTH ON BOARD!"

Establishment of Structures for Youth Participation & Youth Promotion

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Relevance of structures for youth participation and youth promotion

Ensuring effective youth promotion and empowerment needs institutionalised youth policy structures, youth-promoting services and youth participation strategies. Only through the development of structures and policies that take a long-term approach can youth of both sexes and of different social classes be empowered for active citizenship in a sustainable way.

Background information

Youth-related issues are cross-cutting rather than sector-specific issues. They therefore need to be articulated and integrated into a wide array of sector policies and structures at different administrative levels. Relevant youth policy structures must be established to mainstream youth issues and advocate for their rights, needs and interests. However, besides these policy structures, institutionalised services are also needed to implement integrated youth promotion at local, national and international levels.

The development of youth policies, their anchorage in the political, legal and administrative system, and the establishment of the relevant structures must take youth into consideration as active stakeholders. Article 104 in the United Nations World Programme of Action for Youth assumes that the “capacity for progress of our societies is based, among other elements, on their capacity to incorporate the contribution and responsibility of youth in the building and designing of the future...”¹ not least due to their unique potential and perspective.

It is necessary to institutionalise the participation of youth in discussions and decision-making processes on matters that concern them and to develop participatory processes in all institutional settings. Faced with the challenges of the 21st century, young people are acknowledging that their local, national and international systems of decision-making lack adequate avenues for their participation. Traditional social and political systems do not offer appropriate representation mechanisms or meaningful opportunities for the youth to contribute to the development of their societies. Although youth volunteerism is at record level, with many young people organising themselves locally, through the internet and informally, in many places they are still perceived as apathetic or disengaged. Reforms of political structures are necessary to open new ways for civic engagement.

To consolidate democracy and empower youth for active citizenship they have to experience the implications of democratic decision-making and to learn what their rights and duties are. This also means experiencing how their freedom is limited by the rights and freedoms of others and how their actions can affect the rights of others.

The establishment of youth promotion and youth participation structures must be linked to each other. Only through integrated youth promotion and the strengthening of young people’s capabilities and self-esteem do they become able to use participation structures. On the other hand it is only those young people who participate in the development of youth promotion services who accept and use them.

Local and regional youth policy structures tend to be better established in industrialised countries than in developing countries, although in recent years some of the latter have made efforts to increase the opportunities for the involvement of the youth.

¹ United Nations (1996): *World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly - New York.*

Relevance for development cooperation

Strengthening the partner countries' institutional capacities is considered a main requirement for the promotion of good governance, political stability, democracy and thus poverty reduction. As the youth play a decisive role in the development of a society it is essential to support the institutional capacities for youth promotion and participation at all levels.

It is a requirement of many international, regional and national documents and programmes that a process be put in place to promote dialogue between the youth and government at all levels. (For further elaboration see Fact Sheet International Commitments.) Mechanisms should be established that enable them to access information and which provide opportunities for them to present their views on government decisions, and to influence these decisions. The recommendations of international, regional and local youth conferences and other forums should be considered for incorporation into relevant policies.

Especially at the local, municipal level, socioeconomic conflicts or tensions arise between the generations and the interests of the youth are strongly affected. This is also the level at which youth are most willing to participate in democratic processes.

German Development Cooperation

As part of its promotion of good governance, German Development Cooperation strengthens the capacities of public institutions and civil society organisations in its partner countries to foster political, social and economic progress, and achieve poverty reduction. An important concern is to connect democratisation and good governance with the realisation of human rights. Young people are an essential target group of German Development Cooperation's human rights concept. Thus the promotion and protection of young people are also important for institutional development in the partner countries. German Development Cooperation has long experience in the establishment of structures for youth promotion and empowerment in several regions and countries.

As participation is vital to good governance, German Development Cooperation supports its partner countries in the creation of structures that allow the active participation of all groups of society, including the youth.

Forms of institutionalisation

The institutionalisation of youth promotion and participation structures can happen at local, national, regional and international levels. While national youth policies, laws and action plans are necessary instruments for framing and legitimising youth promotion and participation in society, policy structures at the local level tend to be more effective when it comes to influencing the immediate realities of youth.

Some effective structures and institutions for youth promotion and youth participation in developing countries are presented below.

Youth policy structures

Youth ministries

As youth promotion is a cross-cutting issue, youth ministries at national or local level are responsible for strategy development and mainstreaming youth promotion and participation. On the one hand they provide advice to different sector ministries about integrating youth promotion and participation into their policies. On the other hand the national and local youth ministries are responsible for the development of youth policies and action plans. Youth policies define the visions, goals and indicators of integrated and intersectoral youth promotion and empowerment. Youth action plans form an implementation strategy for youth policies with a concrete description of the services and activities to be implemented in different sectors (e.g. education, employment, health etc.). Special attention should be paid to the approval of a budget that includes the planned strategies and services.

The establishment of youth policies and action plans should occur in a participatory way involving all relevant stakeholders, especially the youth.

The employees of youth ministries should be trained to an international standard in the enactment of youth policies, modern concepts of youth work, project management, and networking, communication and leadership skills.

Youth commissions

A youth commission should be composed of different stakeholders (representatives of relevant ministries, NGOs, institutions and youth organisations) and should meet regularly. In different countries, the mandates of youth commissions vary. In most cases their aim is to develop, implement and evaluate a national or local youth promotion strategy. In countries or regions with varied ethnic or religious population groups, representatives of each group should participate in the commission. An independent moderator should mediate between the interests of the different stakeholders.

Youth offices

Youth offices are an organisational unit within the local administration. They are responsible for the planning and implementation of youth promotion services within the community. Employees of youth offices should be experts, both theoretically and practically, in youth promotion. If there are no adequate experts available, a training programme similar to that given to the employees of youth ministries should be offered. This training should also include practical aspects and tasks.

Youth advisors or officers

The local youth officer or advisor works as an advocate for youth-related issues. He or she is appointed as part of the national government or the communal administration, or is elected by government and youth representatives. Youth officers or advisors function as mediators between the administration and the youth, and create synergies between the strategies and activities of different units and institutions. They may also be responsible for strategy development in the field of youth promotion if there is no youth ministry, commission or office. They are easily accessible to the youth and regularly communicate with youth organisations. They transmit their concerns to the responsible authorities or provide the youth with information. Special training should be provided to support the officers or advisors in the fulfilment of their tasks (see example 4).

Youth participation structures

Youth parliaments

Elected representatives of youth organisations, schools, youth groups and suchlike, discuss their concerns and interests in a (local) youth parliament. The youth parliament is integrated in national or local decision-making structures and its characteristics are similar to those of the adult, national parliament. The youth parliament represents the interests of young people in the design and implementation of sector strategies and to ensure better development policies. Attendance should be paid on the representativeness of the youth parliament.

Youth parliamentarians

In some countries, youth representatives are elected to represent the interests of young people in the national parliament. They can organise and address meetings in their constituencies and make recommendations to the parliament.

Youth councils

Representatives of national, regional or local youth organisations meet regularly to develop common goals, to coordinate their work and to lobby for their interests. Thus they constitute a strong pressure group within society that can not easily be ignored by political decision makers. Youth councils mediate between the youth, youth organisations and government; they assist youth-related governmental and non-governmental agencies, and they facilitate the implementation of approaches to youth promotion and participation. In contrast to youth parliaments they are not part of a formalised political structure. They mobilise and guide young people's access to the wide range of governmental and non-governmental services and sometimes ensure substantive and representative youth participation in policy-making processes. However, many of the national youth councils that have been established in over 100 countries need to be strengthened. Their existence alone is not always a guarantee of adequate and effective youth representation, as they are often linked to political parties or dependent on the government. Another problem might be the fluctuations and volatility inherent to all youth organisations.

Youth forums

Youth forums are events that take place at regular intervals. They can be organised by political or civil society actors, companies, development projects or youth organisations. They provide young people with a platform to exchange ideas with political, social or economical decision makers. The young people can formulate their concerns and interests in relation to specific topics. Youth forums can also be organised as internet forums. The young participants may be elected by local youth organisations or determined through a national or local competition. The forums should offer a real opportunity for participation and their results should be taken seriously in strategy or programme development. Unfortunately, in many cases they only serve as an instrument to sanitise the public image of institutions, organisations or companies.

Institutionalised youth promotion services

The services presented below can be included and budgeted for in the national or local youth policy and action plan.

Non-formal basic education services

These services comprise all organised and systematically implemented learning activities that are not a part of the formal educational system. They are directed at young people who have no access to the formal education system, or at school dropouts. Important target groups are working children and youth, street children, AIDS orphans or former child soldiers. Non-school education cannot replace a functioning formal education system, but it can play a key bridging role. For example, it can help prepare children and young people who have no formal schooling or who have broken off their schooling early, to gain or regain access to formal education.

Common approaches in non-formal basic education are literacy courses or learning circles. Non-formal basic education is generally run by NGOs or church organisations; few public institutions ever get involved. In many cases special learning groups are organised for girls as they are especially disadvantaged within the formal education system. Non-formal basic education

services link literacy with topics such as health education, family planning, employment or conflict management.

Youth (social) work

Youth work comprises a wide variety of different services intended to integrate young people politically, socially and economically, and to enhance their personal development. Amongst other things, this includes organising leisure activities, setting up youth centres, supporting youth organisations, and providing non-formal education in the fields of health, conflict management, environmental protection and employment.

Youth social work is directed at disadvantaged and vulnerable young people. Employment promotion is a central aspect of it, for instance through the provision of information and careers orientation, or by enhancing the employability of vulnerable youth. Other services include school social work and mobile youth work. Trained youth social workers are needed to implement these services.

Juvenile welfare and youth protection services:

The boundary between youth social work and youth protection services is blurred. Juvenile welfare and protection services include programmes for families and children that involve, for example, educational and psychological counselling, socio-pedagogical care, assisted accommodation for vulnerable youth, protection from neglect or mistreatment by family members or assistance in personal or economic crisis situations. Trained psychologists or psychotherapists are needed for the rehabilitation of mistreated, abused or traumatised young people, such as child labourers, former child soldiers or street children.

If a local youth (welfare) office exists, it will be responsible for planning, coordinating and evaluating youth work and youth protection services, and must ensure the skilled staff are properly trained. In many developing countries public structures do not exist and these services are carried out by NGOs or local initiatives. Action is therefore needed to institutionalise and structure these activities, to create synergies and to establish training opportunities for NGO staff.

Youth health services

Youth health services can be affiliated to community health centres, hospitals or youth centres. They address the special concerns and problems of youth without putting moral pressure on them. The staff should be medically trained and sensitised to the special needs of young people. Youth health services may also be charged with the development of youth-friendly information material and the training of youth promoters.

International level

Examples of youth participation in the international arena are the Youth Delegates at the United Nations, Youth for Habitat, the European Youth Forum, the European Youth Parliament, the Euro-Med Youth Parliament and the J8 Summit (J for junior). The topic of youth participation was discussed at the 2007 EU Youth Event on "Equal Opportunities and Social Participation for all Children and Youth". It has also been integrated into several international programmes and commitments (the World Bank Youth and Good Governance programme, World Programme of Action, Agenda 21). International organisations also promote youth participation through research activities and the use of platforms or publications where they can express their opinion on issues that affect them (State of the World Population Youth Report by the UNFPA, UNICEF's Voices of Youth).

International organisations hold meetings to sensitise policy makers and development practitioners about the need for youth promotion strategies, and to discuss their experiences with them. However, the participation of youth in international bodies or meetings does not always guarantee that their interests are taken seriously or that they are considered in policy and programme development. Often the young people only serve as decoration.

Examples

Youth councils in Bogotá – Colombia

The establishment of district and local youth councils according to Article 19 of the National Youth Law of 1997 constitutes an important step in involving the youth. The councils function as a mouthpiece for youth organisations and initiatives. They promote youth participation in the design, monitoring and review of institutional youth programmes and projects; and they act as advisory authorities to public institutions with regard to policies, action plans and other issues of concern to the youth. The councils offer an opportunity for young leaders to meet and exchange experiences and knowledge. Through them, they can build a common identity, become better qualified and can join forces to represent more successfully the political, social and economic rights and duties of young people.

The district and local youth councils were established by the municipality of Bogotá in 2001. They were elected for the first time in 2002 for a period of three years. The youth councils have the character of associated and autonomous bodies. 60% of their members are elected through the direct and popular vote of the young local population, and 40% are representatives of youth organisations. In line with the political administrative divisions of Bogotá, there are 20 local youth councils and one district youth council in Bogotá.

An institutional support team at district and local levels-headed by the mayor(s) and consisting of representatives of all youth related institutions-offers management and professional support to the youth councils.

The activities of the youth councils include:

- Organisation and coordination of training programmes for the members of the councils
- Mediation and negotiation with local and district institutions involved in the promotion of youth
- Consultation of local and district youth organisations
- Establishment of mechanisms and channels for participation of young people in the design of local and district development plans
- Proposal of initiatives and projects to improve the situation of the youth
- Recording and systematisation of information about the situation of the youth
- Controlling and evaluation of youth programmes and projects realised by public and private institutions.

Establishment of youth-promoting structures – Uganda

In most countries of Eastern Africa, children and youth policies are at an early stage of development. Uganda, however, is in some respects an exception. With the assistance of GTZ, the country has introduced a variety of youth promotion measures. One is the strengthening of the National Youth Council to enable it to participate in the development and implementation of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), and thereby integrate the views of local youth organisations.

Furthermore, government officials at all administrative levels have been trained as “youth advisors”. The principal task of these advisors – bestowed with a district-level budget – is to help young people to develop by expanding juvenile welfare and progressive services for employment promotion.

At the village level, GTZ has trained “youth promoters” to develop and implement projects suitable to the local context. Dropping out of school and unemployment are major problems for the impoverished youth, while self-employment is the most realistic option they have for improvement. For this reason, the trained youth promoters support the development of small-scale businesses. Another important area of work for the youth promoters is the organisation of leisure time activities.

Training and establishment of youth officers – Bosnia/Herzegovina

The GTZ project “Development and Support of the Youth Sector in BiH” started in 2004 with in-service training as youth officers for employees of the municipal administration. A plan has also been developed for the training of youth advisors in Bosnia, which imparts the basic principles and strategies of modern youth social work while appropriate strategies are being implemented. The presence of youth officers at the local level is an indicator for a youth-friendly community (see the indicators of the Council of Europe and of the International Council on National Youth Policy). The course of training is spread over two years and is divided into six modules of five days each. Between the modules the participants have to put the theory into practice in their local administrations.

The goals of the training include implanting expertise for youth promotion in the local administration; introducing and accompanying a process of support and participation for the youth of communities and municipalities; devising a plan for youth promotion; introducing a new career opportunity; establishing professional identification with the idea of youth promotion. Training the youth officers is also useful for the communities in a concrete sense: experts in the situation of young people are trained; contact people for youth issues, and people committed to the needs of the youth become available. Youth promotion is better integrated in the community and in the local development plans. Furthermore someone takes responsibility for devising and implementing youth assistance and promotion plans; there is support for the implementation of national and regional laws and programmes for youth; the process of youth participation is facilitated and there is systematic, regular exchange between politicians and the younger citizens.

Relevant literature and websites

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European Youth Forum: www.youthforum.org

European Youth Parliament: www.eypej.org

International Council on National Youth Policy (ICNYP): www.icnyp.net

International Labour Organisation, Youth Employment Network: www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/yett/index.htm

International Youth Foundation: www.iyfnet.org

Right to education: www.right-to-education.org

TakingITGlobal: www.takingitglobal.org

The information toolkit for young people: www.youthinformation.com

The Socially Integrative City: www.sozialestadt.de/en/programm

UNESCO: www.unesco.org

UN-Habitat: www.unhabitat.org

UN-Habitat Agenda 21: <http://habitat.igc.org/agenda21>

UNICEF: www.unicef.org

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

Worldbank: www.worldbank.org

World Health Organisation: www.who.int

Youth Coalition: www.youthcoalition.org

Youth for Habitat: www.youthforhab.org.tr/network/index.htm

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