

CHAPTER

# 4



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

**OVER** the past few decades, greater attention has been given to youth engagement at all levels within the development agenda. There has been increased recognition of the value of young people's participation as it pertains to both youth and wider development, as well as formal acknowledgement of the need to actively address the many challenges facing a growing youth population, including unemployment and underemployment, poverty, inequality, political unrest, and social exclusion.

Involving youth—as collaborators, team members, leaders and decision makers—in addressing the day-to-day issues that affect them offers a broad range of benefits to both young people and the community, from greater community connectedness and social awareness of the individual to enhanced participatory decision-making and democratic governance in community institutions (see boxes 4.1 and 4.2 for more detailed benefits). Such involvement also sends youth the message that their participation has intrinsic value.

Although the extent of their participation has varied, young people have always been actively engaged at the community level through volunteerism, peace-building efforts and sporting activities. Young people engage for a number of reasons ranging from self-actualization and peer recognition to the desire

to solve problems, make changes or fight injustice through social or political activism.<sup>202</sup> Young people are often more motivated by the immediate and short-term outcomes of engagement, while for adults community involvement tends to be more focused on the long-term impact.<sup>203</sup>

Engagement at the community level often provides young people with their first experience of active participation in a cause or activity, serving as a gateway to further and broader engagement throughout life as well as opportunities for leadership building. Young people are increasingly motivated to engage with issues, causes or movements that are meaningful to them and the communities in which they live.<sup>204</sup> Over the past few decades, young people have been gradually moving away from engagement in institutionalized structures (such as electoral activities and political parties) towards greater involvement in cause-oriented political activism. At the same time, the rise of social media and advance of new ICTs and mobile technology has provided young people with greater opportunity to engage within in their communities in new and innovative ways.

Youth-focused and youth-led organizations often provide the first experience of intentional engagement for young people at the community level. Organizations such as the Scouts can draw together children and youth at an early age, teaching them

---

**202** Daniel Adugna Muluneh, “Creating an enabling environment for youth entrepreneurship”, a paper presented at the Expert Group Meeting on Youth, Development and Rights, held in New York on 13 and 14 November 2013. Presentation summary available from <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/egms/docs/2013/YouthDevelopmentRights/EGMReportYouthandRights.pdf>.

**203** United Nations Development Programme, *Enhancing Youth Political Participation throughout the Electoral Cycle: A Good Practice Guide* (New York, 2013), p. 11. Available from [http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/electoral\\_systemsandprocesses/enhancing-youth-political-participation-throughout-the-electoral.html](http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/electoral_systemsandprocesses/enhancing-youth-political-participation-throughout-the-electoral.html).

**204** See James Sloam’s contribution on political engagement in the present publication.

valuable life skills through focused voluntary activity. Integrating intentional learning and education in youth engagement at the community level can contribute significantly to youth development. Activities such as volunteering, peacebuilding and sport not only engage youth in the activity itself, but also offer the possibility for young people to develop specialized skills and knowledge in the areas of leadership, teamwork, communication, peer-to-peer mentorship, problem solving, decision-making, negotiation and mediation, and intercultural understanding. Furthermore, evidence suggests that involving youth at the community level in grass-roots causes, groups and activities increases the likelihood that they will engage in political processes.<sup>205</sup>

In this chapter, the changing trends and concepts surrounding engagement at the community level are explored in the contexts of volunteerism (Sarah Huxley), peacebuilding (Lakshitha Saji Prelis) and sport for development (Selina Khoo and Andre Matthias Müller).

## VOLUNTEERISM

The nature and practice of voluntary activity are wide ranging and have been subject to change. Volunteering has traditionally been viewed as an altruistic endeavour carried out by an individual for the purpose of providing charity, support or assistance to a specific community and/or project in

order to promote the well-being of a specific group or society as a whole.

The notion of volunteering can be quite fluid and broadly encompasses many forms of civic engagement. For example, according to the most recent *State of the World's Volunteerism Report*, the terms “volunteering” and “social activism” are not mutually exclusive. “Volunteering and social action converge and overlap around creating opportunities for participation: social activism starts at exactly the same premise as volunteering—people giving time who want to make a change in their community”.<sup>206</sup>

At its most basic, volunteerism often works to fill gaps in service provision for those living in poverty,<sup>207</sup> and while volunteering is often perceived as those “with”

---

**205** Expanding the participation of young people in local groups inspires greater electoral and political participation. Volunteer activities in the community can give youth greater confidence in their ability to influence broader issues and take action in the political realm. See Mercy Corps, *Civic Engagement of Youth in the Middle East and North Africa: An Analysis of Key Drivers and Outcomes* (March 2012). Available from [https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/mena\\_youth\\_civic\\_engagement\\_study\\_-\\_final.pdf](https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/mena_youth_civic_engagement_study_-_final.pdf).

**206** United Nations Volunteers, *State of the World's Volunteerism Report 2015: Transforming Governance* (Bonn, 2015), p. 4. Available from <http://www.volunteercorps.org/SWVR2015-frame/21337%20-%20SWVR%20report%20-%20ENGLISH%20-%20web%201.pdf>.

**207** *Ibid.*, p. 7.

helping those “without”, volunteers are themselves diverse in nature. Indeed, in Africa, “much volunteering is done by the poor for the poor”.<sup>208</sup>

In recent decades, the practice of volunteering and voluntary service has increasingly been viewed as a give-and-get proposition, whereby individuals offer their time and effort to a cause but expect, in return, to develop skills and gain experience. In some cases, voluntary activity is used as a means of obtaining experience in a specific area to bolster a young person’s curriculum vitae (CV) or résumé as he or she searches for employment. Volunteerism is seen to have added value among recent graduates who are potentially facing long periods of unemployment or underemployment as a result of the global economic crisis.

The period of “waithood”—a time of stagnation in the transition from youth to adulthood—is becoming longer for many young people worldwide. Facing delays in the progression from school to work, marriage and family formation, youth often see voluntary activity as a way to fill the gap. However, the potential exists for young people to become long-term volunteers rather than transitioning to the labour market, which can have a significant impact on youth development. Added to this is the fact that the skills and experience gained throughout voluntary activity are still not

recognized in many sectors, leading some employers to ignore the value and benefits of voluntary activity among prospective employees.

The upsurge in “voluntourism”—where a person travels abroad to volunteer on a community project for a specified short-term period—has also had implications for volunteerism and brings into question the sustainability of such endeavours for the receiving communities.

With the development of relevant ICT platforms, online voluntary service has become increasingly popular among young people, providing them with a means to work with a community and/or project anywhere in the world from their own home. Young people are able to quickly mobilize others via social media sites and campaigns; this less formal but enormously effective form of mass volunteerism is challenging historic notions and definitions of volunteerism.

---

208 Ibid.



# BENEFITS OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

—Pat Dolan and Mark Brennan

Young people who are involved in their communities feel that they are valued and taken seriously by other community members.<sup>a</sup> They often receive recognition for their contributions and tend to have relatively high self-esteem.<sup>b</sup> Helping others can bring great satisfaction, contribute to happiness, and make young people feel part of something bigger than themselves.<sup>c</sup> Assuming some form of responsibility or leadership can engender feelings of efficacy and being able to make a difference. Young volunteers often have a sense of contributing to shared norms or values so that they feel “at home rather than out of place” in their communities.<sup>d</sup> Flanagan and Levine point out that engaging with peers singularly and in groups helps young people form social networks, build social capital and connect to opportunities.<sup>e</sup> Young people may enjoy increased independence

and altruistic capacity, enabling them to shift their focus from their own problems to the needs of others. Youth also benefit from more and better social support from others, which has a proven connection to better mental health and well-being.<sup>f</sup>

## YOUTH CIVIC ACTION: BENEFITS FOR INDIVIDUALS

- Enjoyment, fun and friendship;
- Enhanced skills in areas such as group work, research, needs assessment, planning, programme evaluation, and media campaign development and execution;
- Strengthened capacity to participate effectively in the community and contribute to its betterment;
- Greater community connectedness;
- Greater social awareness;
- A positive sense of self and identity;
- Enhanced social support, resilience and well-being;
- Opportunities to provide organizational leadership;
- Academic and career development;
- Development of personal networks and social capital.

---

**SOURCES:** (a) Rosemary V. Barnett and Mark A. Brennan, “Integrating youth into community development: implications for policy planning and program evaluation”, *Journal of Youth Development*, vol. 1, No. 2 (September 2006), pp. 2-16. Available from [http://www.leadingnow.org/sites/default/files/pdf/Integrating\\_Youth\\_Community\\_Development.pdf](http://www.leadingnow.org/sites/default/files/pdf/Integrating_Youth_Community_Development.pdf); (b) Peter C. Scales and Nancy Leffert, *Developmental Assets: A Synthesis of the Scientific Research on Adolescent Development* (Minneapolis, Minnesota, Search Institute, 1999); (c) Lonnie R. Sherrod, Constance Flanagan and James Youniss, “Dimensions of citizenship and opportunities for youth development: the what, why, when, where, and who of citizenship development”, *Applied Developmental Science*, vol. 6, No. 4 (2002), pp. 264-272; (d) *Ibid.*, p. 267; (e) Constance Flanagan 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](https://www.princeton.edu/futureofchildren/publications/docs/20_01_08.pdf); and (f) 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.

# BENEFITS OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT FOR THE COMMUNITY

—Pat Dolan and Mark Brennan

Youth civic engagement benefits not only the individuals involved but also their communities and wider society. Supportive groups, organizations and communities can provide opportunities for young people to connect with others, participate in meaningful activities, develop skills, and feel safe, secure and valued. Crucially, by engaging in civic activities, young people can help create the types of communities that are needed for positive youth development. According to Brennan,<sup>a</sup> the contributions of young people to community development have often been overlooked or underestimated, even though it is known that community and resiliency (the capacity to cope under stress) contribute significantly to the well-being of youth. More simply, strong communities are needed to promote youth resiliency and vice versa. Communities can benefit from youth participation in the identification of problems and solutions relevant to young people and the community as a whole. Collaborative civic action creates connectedness between community members and highlights the importance of young people as civic actors. Research has shown that youth civic engagement can help young people develop the capacity to serve in organizations and eventually transition into community leaders who contribute to the long-term success and sustainability of community development efforts.<sup>b</sup> Furthermore, youth civic engagement can enhance the democratic process by bringing new energy, ideas and perspectives into the community.

## YOUTH CIVIC ACTION: BENEFITS FOR COMMUNITIES

- The negotiation of joint solutions to social and civic problems and inequalities;
- Stronger community networks, identity, attachment and capacity;
- Better recognition of young people as contributors to the development of their communities and society;
- Enhanced participatory decision-making and democratic governance in community institutions;
- Renewal and sustainability of community development efforts through the injection of new lifeblood.

**SOURCES:** (a) Mark A. Brennan, "Conceptualizing resiliency: an interactional 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; and (b) Joel Nitzburg, "The meshing of youth development and community building", *New Directions for Youth Development*, Special Issue: Putting Youth at the Center of Community Building, No. 106 (Summer 2005), pp. 7-16; and Mark A. Brennan, "The development of community in the west of Ireland: a return to Killala twenty years on", *Community Development Journal*, vol. 42, No. 3 (2007), pp. 330-374.

## YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN PEACEBUILDING

With close to 600 million young people living in conflict-affected or fragile contexts,<sup>209</sup> youth have a significant role to play in peacebuilding efforts. Although young people have always been involved in peacebuilding, activities and programmes focused on the specific role of youth in peacebuilding are relatively new.

Just as youth are not homogeneous, the roles of young people in conflict and post-conflict settings are diverse, ranging from activist to dissident and from peacemaker to conflict aggravator.<sup>210</sup>

Much attention is being focused, particularly by the mainstream media, on the role of youth—especially young men—in instigating or perpetuating conflict and violence, either via recruitment as armed soldiers or as instigators of armed conflict themselves. Indeed, throughout 2014 and 2015, Western media focused disproportionately on the numbers of young men and young women joining the group Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. Far less attention has been directed towards the role of young people in peacebuilding. The perpetuation of the view of young people as instigators of violence rather than as peacebuilders

is unfair, as the majority of young people worldwide espouse the ideals of peace and security.

Indeed, large numbers of youth are engaged in community-based activities at the grass-roots level and are most often on the front lines of peacebuilding efforts.<sup>211</sup> With the right opportunities and targeted activities that build on their special skills and capacities, young people can be effective agents of change within the community.

However, whether or not this happens can depend greatly on the approach applied to peacebuilding in its specific context. As Professor Alan Smith, Ulster University, explains (Box 4.3.) young people can be viewed as either positive stakeholders who are sought out to be actively involved in the peacebuilding process or they can be perceived as threats and excluded from the process altogether.

---

**209** United Nations Development Programme, *UNDP Youth Strategy 2014-2017: Empowered Youth, Sustainable Future* (New York, 2014). Available from [http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/Youth/UNDP\\_Youth-Strategy-2014-17\\_Web.pdf](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/Youth/UNDP_Youth-Strategy-2014-17_Web.pdf)

**210** Siobhan McEvoy-Levy, “Youth as social and political agents: issues in post-settlement peace building”, Kroc Institute Occasional Papers No. 21:OP:2 (Notre Dame, December 2001).

**211** *Ibid.*



# APPROACHES TO PEACEBUILDING AND THE ROLE OF YOUTH

—Alan Smith

A young person's role in peacebuilding can depend on the nature of the peacebuilding efforts in place. Alan Smith, Professor of Education at Ulster University, notes two broad approaches to peacebuilding.

The first is a neoliberal approach, which focuses on establishing dialogue between political actors and securing a cessation of violence. Youth are often perceived mainly as a threat to security, and their potential as peacebuilders is neglected. One of the main criticisms of the neoliberal approach is that it tends to focus on reversion to the status quo once hostilities have ceased; often, this involves bringing together political actors in a coalition to govern and revive the economy. This approach is frequently criticized for not addressing systemic issues and inequalities and for failing to serve the interests of those who often are the most marginalized and disadvantaged.

An alternative approach places much more emphasis on social justice, building on Galtung's concepts of "negative peace" (stopping violence) and "positive peace" (addressing the fundamental causes of violence). This approach also has strong links to critical theory by feminist thinkers such as Nancy Fraser, in which transformation and change are key elements and social justice is achieved through, for example, the redistribution of social, economic and political power and resources and the recognition and representation of groups and populations previously marginalized and discriminated against, including youth in many cases.

When involving youth in peacebuilding efforts, it is important to establish whether specific youth engagement programmes are focused primarily on keeping the peace or are committed to addressing structural causes of violence, inequalities in society, and historical grievances between groups in order to bring about real transformative change in society.

**SOURCES:** (a) Nancy Fraser, "From redistribution to recognition? Dilemmas of justice in a 'post-socialist' age", *New Left Review*, vol. 1/212 (July-August 1995), pp. 68-93; (b) Nancy Fraser, "Reframing justice in a globalizing world", *New Left Review*, vol. 36 (November-December 2005), pp. 79-88; (c) Johan Galtung, "Three approaches to peace: peacekeeping, peacemaking and peacebuilding", in *Peace, War and Defence—Essays in Peace Research*, vol. 2, Johan Galtung, ed. (Copenhagen, Christian Ejlertsen, 1976), pp. 282-304; (d) Johan Galtung, "Cultural violence", *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 27, No. 3 (August 1990), pp. 291-305; (e) Alan Smith, "The influence of education on conflict and peace building", a background paper prepared for the *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2011—The Hidden Crisis: Armed Conflict and Education* (Paris, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2010); (f) Alan Smith and others, *The Role of Education in Peacebuilding: Literature Review* (New York, United Nations Children's Fund, 2011).

In recognising the positive role that young people play in peacebuilding, the United Nations Inter-agency Network on Youth Development convened a Working Group on Youth Participation in Peacebuilding<sup>212</sup>. The Working Group developed a set of “Guiding Principles for Young People’s Participation in Peacebuilding”<sup>213</sup> to offer overarching guidance on meaningful youth engagement and participation, especially in conflict or transition settings. The Principles offer guidance to key stakeholders, including Governments, UN entities, donors, national and international non-governmental organizations and civil society actors.

**212** The United Nations Inter-agency Network on Youth Development’s Working Group on Youth Participation in Peacebuilding is co-chaired by the UN Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), Search for Common Ground (SFCG) and the United Network of Young Peace Builders (UNOY). The Working Group brings together UN entities, youth organizations and civil society stakeholders working in the field of youth and peacebuilding.

**213** United Nations Inter-agency Network on Youth Development, Working Group on Youth Participation in Peacebuilding, “Guiding principles for young people’s participation in peacebuilding”. Available from <https://www.sfcg.org/guidingprinciples> and <http://www.youth4peace.info/>

**214** United Nations Inter-agency Network on Youth Development, Working Group on Youth Participation in Peacebuilding, “Young People’s Participation in Peacebuilding: A practice note”, Available from <http://www.un.org/en/peacebuilding/pbso/pdf/Practice%20Note%20Youth%20&%20Peacebuilding%20-%20January%202016.pdf>

**215** United Nations, *Sport for Development and Peace: Towards Achieving the Millennium Development Goals—Report from the United Nations Inter-Agency Taskforce on Sport for Development and Peace* (2003). Available from [http://www.un.org/wcm/webdav/site/sport/shared/sport/pdfs/Reports/2003\\_interagency\\_report\\_ENGLISH.pdf](http://www.un.org/wcm/webdav/site/sport/shared/sport/pdfs/Reports/2003_interagency_report_ENGLISH.pdf)

In addition, the Working Group has released a “Practice Note on Young People’s Participation in Peacebuilding”<sup>214</sup> which aims to inform policymakers and donors of key strategic and programming considerations for supporting young people’s participation to peacebuilding.

## YOUTH ENGAGEMENT THROUGH SPORT

Sport is a popular pursuit in which young people regularly engage and can include myriad types of physical activity contributing to fitness, well-being and social engagement.<sup>215</sup> Many young people of all ages participate in sport—ranging from play and recreation to organized competitive and non-competitive activity—at the community level. Schools, sporting clubs and recreation centres provide a meeting place for youth to engage with each other in a safe environment where they can develop skills such as teamwork and collaboration.

Sport is being increasingly recognized as a tool for education, capacity-building and community engagement, and in recent decades, sport-based development initiatives targeting youth have been on the rise. The benefits sport provides to individuals and communities are manifold. For the young person, sport not only offers opportunities for play and self-expression; it can also foster physical and

emotional development and can constitute an alternative to harmful activities such as drug use and criminal pursuits. At the community level, sport can provide a platform for members of the community to come together, bridging ethnic, racial, religious and other divides, and can be a useful component of peacebuilding and social integration efforts.<sup>216</sup>

In particular, sport can be used as a tool to engage disadvantaged youth and youth at risk, many of whom may otherwise be hard to reach. Youth who are no longer in the formal education system, young people susceptible and vulnerable to joining gangs, and youth who are isolated from other forms of youth engagement can often find a medium for engagement through sports.

There is increasing recognition of the role that sport plays in bringing young people together and in promoting civic engagement and youth development. However, in and of itself, sport is not a panacea for youth development and social integration. Sport can be an exclusory activity, particularly for young people with disabilities, young migrants, and young women; ensuring the full and meaningful inclusion of these and other such groups in sport-based activity is necessary for successful sport-for-development programming.

Sporting activities and programmes must be strongly linked to existing initiatives and work within the community focused on youth development. For example,

an organization working with vulnerable youth in an after-school programme may include sporting activities to reinforce specific skills and attributes such as collaboration, teamwork and negotiation, which has a positive impact on other work being carried out.

---

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.





WE WANT RIGHTS. WE WANT CHOICE.

WEARYOUTH.NET

# RECONCEPTUALIZING YOUTH VOLUNTARISM: WHO DECIDES?

*Sarah Huxley*

## INTRODUCTION

This is a time of great transition. The world is facing many interconnected challenges and upheavals, including growing inequality, climate change, complex conflicts, and increasing resource scarcity. At the same time, there is a world full of young women and young men who are drivers of social change.<sup>217</sup> Youth<sup>218</sup> from all backgrounds are passionate about improving their lives, their families' lives, their communities and the world around them. Volunteerism is at the heart of how diverse groups of young men and women seek social transformation, but much more needs to be done in terms of conceptualizing what youth volunteerism could be from the perspective of young people themselves, and when it becomes disempowering or co-opted and should give way to other forms of civic engagement.

This thought piece explores the historical roots of youth volunteerism and some of the emerging trends in the past three decades before touching

upon the benefits for young people and society as a whole. It then moves to a discussion of alternative perspectives (especially for those living in poverty) before proposing five guiding principles aimed at encouraging a deeper level of analysis that is cognizant of diverse motivations, acknowledges different types of youth volunteerism (activism), and ensures flexibility within an ever-changing external environment. The piece concludes with a summary of key challenges, opportunities and recommendations.

## NORMATIVE DEFINITIONS AND HISTORICAL ROOTS'

Normative (Western) definitions of youth volunteerism focus on a young individual's offer of free work on a project or series of activities for an organization or institution. Yet this is by no means the only definition, and there are many variants that focus on the giving of time and talents for charitable, educational, military or other purposes. At the core of volunteerism is a moral imperative to engage in worthwhile activities primarily for the good of others—but also for the benefit of the individual concerned in terms of their skills development, sense of identity and self-worth, and socialization within a community.

It is interesting to note some of the differences between youth and adult/senior volunteerism.

---

**217** Akil N. Awan explores the impact of demographic youth bulges in his thought piece on negative youth engagement: involvement in radicalism and extremism (see chapter three of the present publication).

**218** Some entities (including the United Nations World Programme of Action for Youth) define "youth" as those between 15 and 24 years of age. The author of the present thought piece uses a more fluid definition that extends to young women and men in their early thirties, recognizing that, nowadays, social markers of adulthood such as securing employment, getting married and starting a family often occur later in the life cycle.



According to a 2010 study published by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS),<sup>219</sup> around 59 per cent of 12- to 18-year olds<sup>220</sup> in the United States were engaged in youth volunteer work in 2009. Brief 1 in the CNCS *Youth Helping America* series indicates that in 2004, more than 15 million teenagers participated in formal volunteer activities, “contributing more than 1.3 billion hours of service”; the youth volunteer rate of 55 per cent was almost double the adult rate of 29 per cent for that year.<sup>221</sup> The Brief notes that “teens tend to serve fewer hours and with less regularity than their adult counterparts. ... The typical youth volunteer contributes 29 hours of service each year, compared to 52 hours for the adult volunteer population”.<sup>222</sup> In the mainstream culture of the United States, youth volunteerism is a popular form of civic engagement. Such activity is more likely to continue into adulthood if undertaken when young—especially if a parent volunteers as well.

Although the United Nations Declaration of Universal Human Rights provides a relevant framework for signatories, the questions of what makes a good citizen and how this can be demonstrated through civic engagement are the focus of heated debate. Therefore, it is crucial to explore the historical roots of youth volunteerism, which is arguably key to understanding citizenship and the package of rights and responsibilities associated with it.

Volunteering was originally associated with military service in the seventeenth century, when the French noun *voluntaire* first appeared.<sup>223</sup> Volunteerism in a Western context thus has its origins in a cultural psyche based on the collective defence of one’s own country, principles and values. What is fascinating is

the inherent tension embedded in what it means to be a volunteer; the claim is that this is based on “free will”, but State/societal pulls can make it something else entirely, and forced conscription or “volunteer” conscription is at the epicentre of this tension.<sup>224</sup> The fundamental exertion of free will can be understood from a collective or societal perspective, as well as from an individual’s point of view.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there was a shift from the military draft to voluntary civic engagement and community service, which focused on collective organizing to address the systemic social injustices of those times; examples include the anti-slavery and women’s suffrage movements. By the twentieth century, volunteering was associated with charitable organizations and large international aid programmes such as the Red Cross and

---

**219** Joanne Fritz, “Top 6 facts about youth volunteers” (World Volunteer Web, 2 May 2006). Available from <http://www.worldvolunteerweb.org/browse/volunteering-issues/volunteer-management/doc/top-6-facts-about.html> (accessed 2 October 2015). For more information on youth volunteering, see Corporation for National and Community Service, *Youth Engaged in Service* (Washington, D.C., 2010). Also see <http://www.nationalservice.gov/youth> and <http://youth.gov/youth-topics/civic-engagement-and-volunteering>.

**220** Unfortunately, data are not readily available for older age cohorts, so this includes younger adolescents as well as older youth from the age of 15 upward.

**221** Corporation for National and Community Service, *Youth Helping America—Building Active Citizens: The Role of Social Institutions in Teen Volunteering*, Brief 1 in the Youth Helping America series (Washington, D.C., November 2005). Available from [http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/05\\_1130\\_LSA\\_YHA\\_study.pdf](http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/05_1130_LSA_YHA_study.pdf).

**222** *Ibid.*, p. 2.

**223** From the Latin *voluntarius*, meaning “of one’s free will”.

**224** In the United States, for example, discussion surrounding the notions of citizenship, rights and the State’s role intensified during the Viet Nam War in the 1960s, and the fairness of national service emerged as a major issue, resulting in the United States moving towards “all-volunteer armed forces”. It has been interesting to see the debate on forced conscription re-emerge in current times; see <http://www.usnews.com/opinion/articles/2010/10/19/compulsory-national-service-would-strengthen-american-citizenship>.

Girl Guides. Youth volunteering programmes were seeded with the emergence of Voluntary Service Overseas (1958) and the Peace Corps (1961) against the backdrop of independence movements in Africa and Asia.

## YOUTH VOLUNTEERING IN RECENT DECADES AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY

As the youth unemployment crisis has intensified over the past few decades,<sup>225</sup> growing numbers of young people from diverse backgrounds have turned to volunteering as a means of developing their skills and building their CVs. This trend derives in part from the fact that many State and non-governmental agencies now regard youth volunteering as a prerequisite for paid employment, especially for entry-level jobs. Similarly, young people often see volunteering not as “lost” time but as an investment in their career of choice. In Myanmar, for example, several volunteer Youth Fellows<sup>226</sup> have gone on to paid employment in social work or development or are seeking to create their own social enterprises with a human-rights-based approach.

Although youth volunteerism can be a springboard for sustained youth-led civic engagement,<sup>227</sup> it requires reconceptualization in the present global context. In today’s political economy, volunteerism can be used by States as a mechanism for obtaining free labour from citizens; by non-governmental organizations as a means of providing opportunities for the better off to “help” the less well off (at its worst a form of neocolonialism); and by businesses and youth development programmes as a way to provide young people with work experience (a societal

narrative around moulding youth). All of these scenarios present a dynamic of those with power providing something for those without.

The point is that, depending on one’s perspective, youth volunteering can be very empowering or very disempowering, and just because there is a narrative of morality and entitlement does not mean that it should not be challenged and brought into the twenty-first century. The time should be taken to answer these questions: Who is volunteering for whom? Why are they volunteering? What does everyone get out of it (in terms of the cost/benefit to the individual and the social consequences)?

## SKIMMING THE SURFACE: WHAT IS THE VALUE OF YOUTH VOLUNTEERISM?

Much has been written by sociologists, international organizations and government entities on the value of youth engagement. Some observations that have emerged from the discourse include the following:

- Young Westerners participating in volunteer tourism, or “voluntourism”, are often provided

---

**225** International Labour Organization, *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2015* (Geneva, International Labour Office, 2015), available from [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms\\_337069.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_337069.pdf). Also see <http://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/weso/2015/lang--en/index.htm>.

**226** Participation in the Youth Fellowship Programme in Myanmar is normally long term (1-2 year placements), with young volunteers from a local community serving as the main catalyzers and later identifying other volunteers; ActionAid funds training in participatory processes to create the Village Book.

**227** This should be shaped by young men’s and women’s own conceptions of civic engagement.

with opportunities for global engagement, networking, career development, intercultural competence building, problem solving and psychological support (life skills).<sup>228</sup> One study on international volunteering and service (IVS) in Australia notes that “for these projects to avoid public critiques and negative outcomes, they need to harmonize personal and institutional expectations with real volunteer capacities. Thus, until IVS programs in the university context distance themselves from a development aid discourse, they will potentially fall under the umbrella of ‘neo-colonialism’.”<sup>229</sup>

- A study carried out by CNCS in 2004 concludes that volunteering helps young people succeed—and benefits society as a whole—in the sense that “youth who volunteer are less likely to engage in risky behaviour, are more likely to feel connected to their communities, and tend to do better in school”.<sup>230</sup> Further exploring the link to education, the study asserts that “the success that teens find in their academic life is related to their likelihood of volunteering. [The researchers] found that the higher their grade point average, the more likely it was that teens volunteered and volunteered regularly. ... However, it is likely that the relationship of grades to volunteering is also part of a larger set of positive expectations and social networks for this group. Those students with high academic achievement may be more engaged in other activities, may have more opportunities to be asked to volunteer, and may feel more empowered to effect change in their community”.<sup>231</sup> It is thus implied that youth who volunteer can achieve more and contribute effectively to the labour force in adulthood.

- Among youth living in poverty, volunteering is often viewed as a way to improve prospects for securing employment, as it allows them to network and potentially strengthen their skills. As noted by one young focus group participant in a 2006 study on volunteering in Malawi, “Somebody ... [volunteers] because he has nothing else to do ... but once he gets a better job or something permanent, then he will get out.”<sup>232</sup>
- Direct political participation may occur in multiple contexts. Young members of parliament—many of whom started their careers as volunteers—can bring the concerns of young constituents into the heart of traditional political institutions. Just as important as mainstream political participation are the informal, grass-roots modes of civic engagement, which also tend to develop off the back of youth volunteering experiences. Volunteerism plays an important part in laying the foundations for lifestyle and career pathways to sustained civic engagement.

These observations offer insight into some of the motivations and reasons for volunteering among

---

**228** A personal perspective: these were skills the author of the present thought piece acquired from her experience with Restless Development in 1998.

**229** Carlos M. Palacios, “Volunteer tourism, development and education in a postcolonial world: conceiving global connections beyond aid”, *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, vol. 18, No. 7 (2010).

**230** Joanne Fritz, “Top 6 facts about youth volunteers” (World Volunteer Web, 2 May 2006). Available from <http://www.worldvolunteerweb.org/browse/volunteering-issues/volunteer-management/doc/top-6-facts-about.html> (accessed 2 October 2015).

**231** *Ibid.*, p. 12.

**232** Catherine M. Moloni and Brenda M. Gallagher, “Youth, service and development in Malawi” (2007), p. 47. Available from <http://community.eldis.org/59ee4585/Youth%20Service%20and%20development-MW.pdf>.

young women and men.<sup>233</sup> Below is an exploration of alternative perspectives on youth volunteerism, with attention given to the importance of reflecting on power dynamics and to the problematic nature of extended periods of volunteering.

## ALTERNATIVES: IS THE LABEL “VOLUNTEER” ACTUALLY DISEMPOWERING FOR THOSE LIVING IN POVERTY?

Youth volunteerism can be a negative, prolonged or forced experience. At the ActionAid Design-a-Thon workshops held in Uganda and Bangladesh in the summer of 2015,<sup>234</sup> which encouraged the use of social design to think through challenges and solutions linked to youth unemployment, it became apparent that for some of the fiercely intelligent but largely unemployed participants, the prolonged state of unemployment (despite their academic credentials and experience) was making them long-term volunteers—in the sense that they could often pick

up small, insecure pieces of work for little or no pay. Young people in such circumstances are stuck in a period of “waithood”.<sup>235</sup> The questions arise: For how long can a young person continue to volunteer? When does it become an act of civic engagement that no longer benefits the young men or women involved? While youth volunteerism can be commended for finding value in an exchange system that goes beyond financial gain, it can also become corrupted and exploitative, especially in a world of increasing inequality.

Within this context of prolonged/forced/unpaid work, the position of disadvantaged groups—including the disabled, those in poverty, and young women—deserves special attention. A number of organizations involved in youth volunteering efforts focus on the challenges faced by one or more of these groups; ActionAid’s Young Urban Women Project, for example, highlights young women’s contributions to family and society that often go unnoticed.<sup>236</sup>

There is also something of a myth regarding experience and what youth have to offer. Who decides what experience is within the framework of an activity or project? If peer-to-peer facilitation is needed, then a young person may well have much more to offer than an adult facilitator in terms of skills and experience—particularly within the realm of modern technologies and processes. However, traditional assumptions within an adult-centred power structure may mean that the resources youth can bring to volunteering are never tapped—which effectively serves to devalue their role and contributions.

There has to be an element of choice and free will at both the individual and collective levels. It may be

---

**233** Some studies have shown that youth volunteering is not all about resume building; in fact, one study indicates that “students motivated by résumé building motivations have a lower intensity of volunteering” (Femida Handy and others, “A cross-cultural examination of student volunteering: Is it all about résumé building?” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, vol. 39, No. 3 [June 2010], pp. 498-523). This is a controversial issue.

**234** See Emer Beamer, “Designing ways out of complex social challenges...”, in *Putting Ideas to Work: Youth Design Their Own Futures* (ActionAid, 2015), p. 5. Available from [http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/putting\\_ideas\\_to\\_work\\_lr\\_2.pdf](http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/putting_ideas_to_work_lr_2.pdf).

**235** Alcinda Honwana, *The Time of Youth: Work, Social Change, and Politics in Africa* (Sterling, Virginia, Kumarian Press, 2012).

**236** ActionAid, “Young urban women”. Available from <http://www.actionaid.org/young-urban-women>.

argued that much of the youth volunteering occurring today is prolonged, and that the term itself has become overly neutral, reflecting a soft, glass-is-half-empty view of youth. Rather than identifying them as young volunteers, it might be better to think and speak of them as young activists, as the latter term is empowering<sup>237</sup> and acknowledges a diverse collective of capable changemakers.<sup>238</sup>

Volunteerism is not intrinsically good or positive just because its traditional premise is “doing good”. There needs to be far more consideration given to the question of who benefits over time. It is no longer acceptable, in an interconnected world focused on genuine development and respect for human rights, to assert prejudice and say that youth volunteerism is inherently good because it keeps otherwise idle young people occupied and offers them the chance to obtain experience.<sup>240</sup>

---

**237** See ActionAid, “Exploring youth activism in today’s world: searching for common ground”. Available from <http://www.actionaid.org/2015/04/exploring-youth-activism-todays-world-searching-common-ground>.

**238** Activista El Salvador, for example, is a national youth campaign volunteer group (connected to other national Activista groups). It has evolved over the past few years; new members join, and different youth rights issues emerge as priorities depending on local and/or national concerns. These youth receive a small amount of direct (technical/financial) organizational support.

**239** This adult-centric view is shared across the world.

**240** See, for example, Corporation for National and Community Service, “Youth helping America: the role of social institutions in teen volunteering”, issue brief (2005), available from [http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/05\\_1130\\_LSA\\_YHA\\_SI\\_factsheet.pdf](http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/05_1130_LSA_YHA_SI_factsheet.pdf). It would have been interesting to also hear of some of the challenges from the perspectives of the young people involved.

#### BOX 4.4.

## KEY PRINCIPLES OF YOUTH VOLUNTEERISM

Youth volunteerism can be hugely beneficial, but it is often presented in a narrow or biased way.<sup>239</sup> It is essential to consider the diverse motivations driving young volunteers, to recognize and support different types of youth volunteerism (activism), and to ensure flexibility within an ever-changing external environment. The present thought piece is intended to encourage a deeper level of analysis based on the following five principles:

1. Altruism is not always the starting point, especially for those living in poverty; volunteerism may be driven by the desire to survive or may be an expression of resilience.
2. Youth volunteerism is a fluid and shifting series of activities that can take place within a variety of formal and informal spaces for civic engagement.
3. Young women and young men are co-creators of the ways they want to engage in acts of social good.
4. Prolonged experiences and the lack of monetary compensation can devalue volunteer contributions and can ultimately become disempowering.
5. At its best, youth volunteerism is a collective endeavour that seeks to address social injustices and reduce structural inequalities such as patriarchy and ageism.



## KEY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Some of the main challenges for youth volunteering may be summarized as follows:

- Youth are in danger of being co-opted. Are young people actually provided with enabling, supportive and mutually beneficial environments, or are they doing community work for which the State should assume responsibility (with support from aid agencies and civil society)?
- Institutional forms of youth volunteerism do not always support the human rights agenda. Built into youth volunteering should be mechanisms to guarantee freedom of speech and assembly, as these rights are being increasingly threatened across the globe.
- Volunteerism is often prolonged to the point that it becomes a negative experience in many young people's lives. There should be open discussion about whether opportunities for payment exist, especially given the lack of employment opportunities for youth (and the implications this may have for their dependents).

The following is a summary of opportunities linked to youth volunteerism:

- Volunteerism constitutes part of an alternative socioeconomic model. The challenge mentioned above may also be interpreted as an opportunity whereby unpaid volunteerism could potentially be part of an alternative approach to community development that bypasses the market economy. Anand Aditya expands upon this concept, referring to volunteerism in Nepal as "a theory that subsumes the ultimate

fulfilment of the human individuality in broader social callings and defines it as the best flowering of the individuals' innate capacity for self-actualization. ... [It] is an emerging movement ... a shift from material consumption toward voluntary simplicity, from technological growth toward post-materialism, and from growth fetish toward evolution".<sup>241</sup> While much needs to be qualified in this ideology, it has resonance.

- Online volunteer platforms and other relevant ICT applications are expanding rapidly and present unlimited possibilities. ICT resources are dramatically reshaping youth volunteerism in a number of areas, including emergency response. During the recent earthquakes in Nepal, huge numbers of young people contributed time and effort through social media such as Facebook, Google and Twitter to deliver services<sup>242</sup> outside formal aid mechanisms. The impact of online youth volunteering has yet to be fully understood, in part because it is growing so rapidly and expanding in multiple directions. Crowdfunding, project management and data gathering sites are all facilitating the emergence of new forms of volunteerism—most notably the fusion of traditional and cyber-volunteering. One community of practice helping to redefine youth volunteerism by operating both online and offline is Edgeryders, which works to invest "time and

---

**241** Anand Aditya, "Voluntarism in Nepal: renurturing the movement and revitalizing the mission", in *Voluntarism in Nepal*, Vinod K. Shrestha and Anand Aditya, eds. (Kathmandu, National Planning Commission, 2002), p. 72. Available from [http://www.worldvolunteerweb.org/fileadmin/docs/old/pdf/2002/02\\_12\\_05NEP\\_book\\_on\\_volunteerism.PDF](http://www.worldvolunteerweb.org/fileadmin/docs/old/pdf/2002/02_12_05NEP_book_on_volunteerism.PDF).

**242** See tweets about #50HomesforNepal on Twitter as an example.

effort into solving the global societal, economic, environmental, security and energy problems threatening Europe and humanity in general. [They] care about things like open access to knowledge; openness and transparency of government; food security; smart communities; decentralised economic architecture; free/open source software; and art".<sup>243</sup> For Edgeryders, both the material and virtual worlds are invaluable spaces that mutually reinforce one another. This dual model is likely to inform much of the youth volunteering activity occurring in the future.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Youth volunteerism (activism) is evolving as the world changes. Opportunities for digital engagement are emerging alongside volunteer activities on the ground. However, there are aspects of volunteerism that effectively hold young people back and reinforce inequality—particularly among young women.

The present thought piece has sought to explore the power dynamics behind youth volunteerism and to encourage those seeking to volunteer and those who work with young volunteers to consider the five principles outlined above in future research and in programme planning, development and execution. Youth volunteerism (activism) needs to be able to breathe, evolve and expand; some risks may have to be taken to find alternatives to practices that perpetuate injustice and inequality—including seeking partnerships in unexpected places.

Agencies, institutions, and other formal platforms for civic engagement are no longer the only

mechanisms for deciding and shaping who youth volunteers (activists) are and what they do. In this digital and potentially more open age, policymakers and institutional decision makers need to change their approaches in order to motivate and meet the needs of young volunteers; otherwise, they will cease to be relevant. To what extent are agencies, organizations, and government entities enabling diverse groups of youth to shape the agendas on what youth volunteering should be?

There has been a dramatic increase in the use of different artistic forms<sup>244</sup> to challenge social norms, as evidenced by the work of Afripedia, political cartoonists, photojournalists and grass-roots groups such as Activista El Salvador.

Overall, much more can be done, especially with regard to mobilizing adult-led (and often male-dominated) spaces to support and advocate for youth agendas. What are young people's plans, and what kind of action can be taken to ensure that young women play a key role?

Youth volunteerism is a social contract, and for too long young people have had little say in defining the terms of engagement. This needs to change. Societal norms and life circumstances influence an individual's ability to exercise free will and demonstrate citizenship. History has shown that people who volunteer in their youth can shape not only

---

<sup>243</sup> For more information on Edgeryders, see <https://edgeryders.eu/en/page/get-involved>.

<sup>244</sup> For example, the spoken word/music with a political message is a common form of expression for young volunteers; see Facebook, "Nothing about us without us", available from <https://www.facebook.com/restlessdev/videos/1018508301534722/>.

themselves, their families and communities, but also society as a whole. Nelson Mandela demonstrated this as National Volunteer-in-Chief for the Defiance Campaign of 1952, tackling apartheid at the age of 34. There are thousands of young men and women in the world at this very moment fighting social injustices. They need to be provided with appropriate support.

## REFERENCES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

**Liu, Elaine Suk Ching, Michael J. Holosko and T. Wing Lo**, eds. *Youth Empowerment and Volunteerism: Principles, Policies and Practices*. City University of Hong Kong Press, 2009.

**Meckler, Jessica**. The value of volunteering at home. WhyDev!, 5 May 2015. Available from <http://www.whydev.org/the-value-of-volunteering-at-home/> (accessed 2 October 2015).

**United Nations Volunteers**. Youth and volunteerism. Fact sheet. Available from <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-volunteerism.pdf>.

**Wijeyesekera, Dilhani**. *The State of Youth Volunteering in Africa: Stepping Back So That Young People Can Step Forward*. Discussion paper for the 2011 IVCO Conference. International Forum on Development Service, 2011. Available from <http://restlessdevelopment.org/file/forum-youth-volunteering-africa-pdf>.

**Youth.gov**. Civic engagement. Available from <http://youth.gov/youth-topics/civic-engagement-and-volunteering> (accessed 2 October 2015).

# YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN PEACEBUILDING

Lakshitha Saji Prelis

## INTRODUCTION

The youth of today constitute the largest generation the world has ever seen,<sup>245</sup> yet nearly 600 million of these young people live in conflict-affected or fragile States.<sup>246</sup> Because they comprise such a large share of the population in many troubled countries, youth inevitably play a major role at every stage of conflicts and social movements. From the uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa to the rise of technologically savvy violent extremist groups, young leaders play pivotal roles in the growing demand for major change. Policymakers and practitioners can build on this momentum by encouraging youth participation that is constructive, and can mobilize the potential of this generation of eager peacebuilders by partnering with them to reduce violence, build resilience, and contribute to development.

This shift has already begun, catalysing new ways policymakers and practitioners engage and support young people in conflict and fragile contexts. Though the “victims and villains” paradigm is still prevalent in global discourse, there is growing appreciation of the multiple and complex positive roles that young people do play and can build on in their societies. This includes their critical efforts in managing, mitigating and preventing violent conflict and building peace.

## WHAT IS PEACEBUILDING?

Peacebuilding is a process that encompasses a wide range of activities ranging from formal mediation and reconciliation efforts to security sector reform and intergenerational dialogue. It involves many different actors including Governments and civil society, the media, artists, athletes and everyday citizens. Peacebuilding activities can take place at the community, regional, national and/or international levels, with all involved working towards a common goal. The Alliance for Peacebuilding notes that “peacebuilding ultimately supports human security—where people have freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom from humiliation”.<sup>247</sup> Peacebuilding is generally recognized as a process that involves many entities addressing the root causes of conflict, but it is important to understand that young people are affected by different forms of violence that may not relate directly to armed conflict itself. Johan Galtung (1969)<sup>248</sup> identified three distinct forms of

---

**245** U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation. *The Millennial Generation Research Review* (Washington, D.C., 2012). Available from <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/millennial-generation-research-review>.

**246** United Nations Development Programme, *UNDP Youth Strategy 2014-2017: Empowered Youth, Sustainable Future* (New York, 2014), p. 10. Available from [http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/Youth/UNDP\\_Youth-Strategy-2014-17\\_Web.pdf](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/Youth/UNDP_Youth-Strategy-2014-17_Web.pdf).

**247** See Alliance for Peacebuilding, “What is peacebuilding?” Available from <http://www.allianceforpeacebuilding.org/our-work/what-is-peacebuilding/>.

**248** Johan Galtung, “Violence, peace, and peace research”, *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 6, No. 3 (1969), pp. 167-191.

violence—structural,<sup>249</sup> cultural,<sup>250</sup> and direct.<sup>251</sup> In expanding peacebuilding work, it is important to understand and transform these types of violence. An effective conflict transformation model,<sup>252</sup> proposed here, builds on this premise towards a practical application to programming in conflict and fragile situations. Essentially, change can be viewed at three levels:

### 1. *Changing the perception of self.*

Conflicts inevitably mould the self-identity of young people. A successful transformation can only take place when people's identities are consistent with the desired result. The types of change desired might include a fearful refugee becoming a reintegrated member of society or a perpetrator of violence evolving into a peacebuilder and bridge builder.

### 2. *Changing the perception of "the other".*

A characteristic of conflict or violence is that communication between conflicting parties breaks down, the parties become isolated, and their perceptions of one another diverge. Transformation requires that all parties work to understand each other and acknowledge the essential humanity of everyone involved.

### 3. *Changing the perception of the issues.*

Conflicts emerge from disagreements over specific issues, and the situation often deteriorates very quickly, with opposing parties focusing more on blaming or accusing each other than on solving the problems at hand. One of the requirements of peacebuilding should therefore be to help parties focus on reconciling the issues that constitute the source of the conflict

collegially and without blame. If steps are taken to increase people's knowledge and understanding of the issues, to articulate the many different perspectives that exist and, when necessary, to identify and explore any "unspoken" issues, it may be possible to better assist people in making decisions in a safe space, based on their interests rather than on fear.

## YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN PEACEBUILDING

Young women and young men play a multitude of roles in pre-conflict, conflict, and post-conflict settings, serving as activists, dissidents and vigilantes but also as negotiators, mediators and peacemakers.<sup>253</sup> The notion that youth "are at the frontlines

---

**249** Structural violence is defined as injustice and exploitation built into a social system that prevents people from accessing services. For example, institutionalized racism and ageism would fall into this category.

**250** Cultural forms of violence derive from aspects of a culture that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence, and may be exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science. Johan Galtung, "Cultural violence", *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 27, No. 3 (August 1990), pp. 291-305.

**251** Direct violence includes acts such as verbal attacks, rape and war. Although physical in nature, direct violence stems from conditions created by structural and cultural violence.

**252** Search for Common Ground, Children, Youth & Conflict: *An Introductory Toolkit for Engaging Children & Youth in Conflict Transformation* (Washington, D.C.). Available from <https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/cyc-toolkit1.pdf>.

**253** Siobhan McEvoy-Levy, "Youth as social and political agents: issues in post-settlement peace building", Kroc Institute Occasional Papers No. 21:OP:2 (Notre Dame, December 2001).



of peace building” is one that has been affirmed by many practitioners and scholars<sup>254</sup> and by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.<sup>255</sup> On 9 December 2015, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2250, which encourages increased representation of young women and young men in preventing and resolving conflicts and their participation in peace processes and dispute resolution mechanisms.<sup>256</sup>

A multi-country study on child and youth participation in peacebuilding—the first of its kind, in Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Nepal—was recently undertaken by a global steering team comprising Peace Action Training and Research Institute of Romania (PATRIR), Save the Children Norway (Redd Barna), Search for Common Ground (SFCG), United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY Peacebuilders), and World

Vision International, and was supported by 117 local young evaluators (children and youth) and two global evaluators. The study’s main findings included the following:<sup>257</sup>

- Young peacebuilders often became more aware and active citizens for peace.
- Young peacebuilders increased peaceful cohabitation and reduced discrimination.
- Young peacebuilders reduced violence.
- Young peacebuilders increased support to vulnerable groups.

The study also identified 11 factors influencing the impact of child and youth participation in peacebuilding, as follows:<sup>258</sup>

- Attitudes, motivation, and commitment of children and youth and their organizations;
- Capacity, knowledge, skills, and experience of children and youth;
- Family attitudes and support;
- Cultural attitudes, beliefs, and practices;
- Key stakeholders’ motivation, commitment, and support;
- Awareness raising, sensitization, and campaigns among key stakeholders [including access to information];
- Culture, theatre, arts, and sports as a means of engaging children and youth;
- Existence and implementation of government laws, policies, strategies, and provisions;

---

**254** For example, Del Felice and Wisler provide examples of youth-led efforts that illustrate the power and potential of youth as peacebuilders using non-violence as a tool for engaging with their communities. Celina Del Felice and Andria Wisler, “The unexplored power and potential of youth as peace-builders”, *Journal of Peace, Conflict and Development*, issue 11 (November 2007). Available from [http://www.creducation.org/resources/Power\\_and\\_Potential\\_of\\_Youth\\_as\\_Peace-Builders.pdf](http://www.creducation.org/resources/Power_and_Potential_of_Youth_as_Peace-Builders.pdf).

**255** See Office of the Secretary-General’s Special Envoy on Youth, “Secretary-General’s remarks at open debate of the Security Council on the role of youth in countering violent extremism and promoting peace” (New York, 23 April 2015). Available from <http://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2015/04/secretary-generals-remarks-open-debate-security-council-role-youth-countering-violent-extremism-promoting-peace/>.

**256** United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) on maintenance of international peace and security, S/RES/2250 (2015) of 9 December 2015. Available from [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2250\(2015\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2250(2015)).

**257** Michael McGill, Claire O’Kane and others, *Evaluation of Child and Youth Participation in Peacebuilding: Nepal, Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, Colombia* (Global Partnership for Children and Youth in Peacebuilding, July 2015). Available from <https://www.sfcg.org/3m/>

**258** *Ibid.*, p. 77.

- Financial and material support given to child and youth participation in peacebuilding efforts;
- Income generation support for marginalized groups;
- Conflict, political instability, and insecurity.

From this and related studies, a salient finding was that young people's participation in peacebuilding at an early age had a lasting, positive impact on their involvement in school, family life and the community, helping them develop as individuals and become responsible young adults.

### Changing Social Norms: New narratives and youth alternative models to violence

Information and communications media provide youth with powerful platforms for expression, allowing their message to reach an extensive audience. These mechanisms of interaction provide young people with outlets to engage with society and their broader community in productive ways. One related theory of change holds that at the community level, the presence of media programming and social media will create a peacebuilding constituency that extends beyond the confines of a viewer-listener relationship. As the user base increases, conversation and dialogue can also grow at the societal level.

Young people are already using a creative mix of traditional and emerging communications media for peacebuilding. SFCG has used interactive media and role models to enable youth to learn how to resolve conflicts non-violently. The *Génération Grands Lacs* radio programme, for example, simulcast in Rwanda,

Burundi and Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, is co-hosted by two young journalists from two different countries on a rotating basis. Through call-ins and text messaging, each radio show incorporates live question-and-answer sessions and interactive discussions that engage a broader audience<sup>259</sup>. In Democratic Republic of the Congo, SFCG used Participatory Theatre for Conflict Transformation<sup>260</sup> to enable local youth communities to observe and acquire conflict-management and peacebuilding skills. This methodology was used to change the way young people dealt with conflict by offering them a venue to test new ways of addressing conflict and have those efforts immediately validated by their peers and community members.

Throughout the Middle East, most notably in Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen, youth in recent years have learned how to make their voices heard to influence change and challenge the political elite.

Increasingly, the peacebuilding field is learning to embrace an integrated, informed model for policy and programming that engages young people as partners for peace.

---

<sup>259</sup> Lena Slachmuis, "Youth in the Great Lakes region: the making of a new generation", *New Routes: A Journal of Peace Research and Action*, issue on peace without borders—regional peacebuilding in focus, vol. 17, No. 4 (November 2012), p. 34. Available from <https://www.sfcg.org/articles/GGL%20for%20LPI%20NR%204p.pdf>.

<sup>260</sup> Search for Common Ground, "Participatory theater in DR Congo", posted 25 March 2014. Available from <https://www.sfcg.org/participatory-theater-in-dr-congo/>.

## EXAMPLES OF PROMISING PRACTICE

***Young people's participation as an essential condition for successful peacebuilding.*** The Process Approach Model for Community Peace, Recovery, and Reconciliation (CPRR)<sup>261</sup> is a mechanism for community-based conflict resolution and reconciliation that allows for meaningful youth participation and partnership. Designed for use in divided communities, the Model encourages all members of a community, including youth, to uncover the root causes of conflict and the potential paths forward through dialogue. In Burundi, Kenya, the Central African Republic, Guinea, South Sudan, Uganda, and Ethiopia, the Model recognizes the role of young people within a community system. Rather than singling out youth as the only important actors, this practice respects youth as partners to their adult counterparts and encourages everyone to play a role in community conflict resolution.

***Young people's ownership, leadership and accountability in peacebuilding.*** Other mechanisms that specifically promote the participation of young people, including youth leadership models, have also yielded promising results. In Timor-Leste, the Government supported the creation of the National Youth Council and the Youth Parliament in order to build the capacity of young people to be civically engaged. One important outcome of this positive relationship and engagement was the creation of a National Youth Policy based on evidence and input from young persons. Since they contributed to its creation, young individuals and their associations largely supported

the National Youth Policy and have felt a strong sense of ownership for it.<sup>262</sup>

Similar programmes and policies designed to enhance the leadership capacity of young people have been implemented in South Africa, Tunisia, Lebanon, Nepal and other areas and have led to better relationships between youth and their communities and Governments. In Tunisia, for example, where half of the population is below the age of 30, a large number of young women and young men mobilized to help build a more democratic and politically inclusive system of government. SFCG, an international conflict transformation and peacebuilding organization, launched Empowering Young Change Makers in Tunisia, a programme that worked with young Tunisians to create Youth Leadership Councils (YLCs) in each of the 24 governorates.<sup>263</sup> The youth in these Councils built strong networks and engaged with their elected leaders and peers from diverse political, geographic, and socioeconomic backgrounds to address grievances and differences constructively. In doing so, they facilitated open communication between youth and elected officials, encouraged cooperative action on local issues, and inspired

---

**261** United Nations Development Programme, Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development; and Kenya, National Steering Committee on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management/ Ministry of Provincial Administration and Internal Security, *Community Peace Recovery & Reconciliation: A Handbook for Generating Leadership for Sustainable Peace and Recovery among Divided Communities* (2011). Available from <http://www.acordinternational.org/silo/files/community-peace-recovery-and-reconciliation-handbook.pdf>.

**262** Asia-Pacific Interagency Group on Youth, *Investing in Youth Policy: Sharing Good Practices to Advance Policy Development for Young People in the Asia-Pacific Region* (2011). Available from [http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Investing\\_In\\_Youth\\_Policy.pdf](http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Investing_In_Youth_Policy.pdf).

**263** For more information, see Search for Common Ground, "Empowering young change makers in Tunisia". Available from <https://www.sfcg.org/empowering-young-changemakers-tunisia/>.

other youth to engage civically through dialogue, social media, and community advocacy.

A Mercy Corps publication on best practices and lessons learned in dealing with youth and conflict emphasizes the following:

“Engaging young people in the project cycle will help nurture and encourage emerging youth leaders to learn, to lead, and to identify areas that may be of interest for future careers. Furthermore, inclusion of youth in project design and implementation provides youth with the self-esteem, connection to peers and communities and a positive self-identity, all of which reduce vulnerability to joining violent movements.”<sup>264</sup>

As part of Mercy Corps’ Nepal programme, young people designed community projects (for which they raised money) and subsequently built and helped maintain them. By including young women and young men in all phases of the projects, Mercy Corps enabled young people to see themselves as responsible for their future.<sup>265</sup>

***Invest in intergenerational partnerships.*** In young people’s communities, many effective programmes have capitalized on youth involvement as a means to undermine the appeal of armed groups. A number of community-building initiatives employ a two-pronged approach aimed at both increasing “protective factors” against violence and providing productive outlets for youth to voice grievances. Policymakers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in Pakistan have employed this strategy by using dialogue and mediation to reduce incidents

of violence.<sup>266</sup> Strengthening community resilience requires the collaboration of diverse groups across multiple sectors including youth, security forces, political figures and religious leaders.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are recommendations policymakers and practitioners might consider to strengthen youth participation in peacebuilding:<sup>267</sup>

- Prioritize young people’s participation and promote the reality that the majority of young people worldwide do not participate in violence.
- Respect the experiences of all young people and develop targeted strategies to include youth from different backgrounds.
- Avoid stereotypical assumptions about gender norms and focus on the roles that girls, boys, young men, young women, and young transgender individuals can play in peacebuilding.

---

<sup>264</sup> Mercy Corps, “Youth and conflict: best practices and lessons learned”, p. 2. Available from <https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/youth-and-conflict-best-practices>.

<sup>265</sup> Also see United States Agency for International Development, Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation, *Youth and Conflict: A Toolkit for Intervention* (Washington, D.C., 2005). Available from [http://toolkit.ineesite.org/toolkit/INEEcms/uploads/1037/Youth\\_and\\_Conflict\\_A\\_Toolkit\\_for\\_Intervention.pdf](http://toolkit.ineesite.org/toolkit/INEEcms/uploads/1037/Youth_and_Conflict_A_Toolkit_for_Intervention.pdf).

<sup>266</sup> Search for Common Ground, “Promoting mediation and dialogue in KPK and FATA”, fact sheet (Summer 2014). Available from <http://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Promoting-Mediation-and-Dialogue-in-KPK-FATA-Summer-2014.pdf>.

<sup>267</sup> United Nations Inter-agency Network on Youth Development, Working Group on Youth Participation in Peacebuilding, “Guiding principles for young people’s participation in peacebuilding”. Available from <https://www.sfcg.org/guidingprinciples> and <http://www.youth4peace.info/>

- Enable young people’s ownership, leadership, and accountability in peacebuilding processes and projects. (This would include access to public information)
- Create a safe<sup>268</sup> environment for participation and be sensitive to inequalities.
- Involve young people in all phases of programming and policy development.
- Enhance the knowledge, skills, competencies, and attitudes of youth.
- Create or expand opportunities for intergenerational and intergroup dialogue so young people may help bridge divides in their communities.
- Support policies that address the full needs of young people.
- Use an interdisciplinary approach when engaging young people in peacebuilding. The ground-breaking new Guiding Principles on Young People’s Participation in Peacebuilding recommend that policymakers and practitioners integrate economic, sociocultural, socio-political, and human rights approaches in promoting peacebuilding among youth.
- Identify youth participation as a critical component in achieving sustainable peace. This includes rejecting the assumption that a majority of youth engage in violence and accepting the reality that most young people strive for and are actively involved in the pursuit of peace and stability.
- A comprehensive and nuanced understanding of youth and their contribution to peacebuilding needs to be developed.
- It is important to acknowledge the diversity of youth experiences rather than simply focusing on youth as victims, troublemakers or peacemakers in conflict settings. Young people participate in informal governance and peace structures in a wide range of contexts outside of those affected by armed conflict. More youth-led research and analysis is needed to create a better understanding of such diversity so that positive youth voices and identities are given the attention they deserve.

The multi-country, multi-agency evaluation highlights the following recommendations:

- Children should be engaged as peacebuilders from a young age to ensure continuity and strengthen the impact of their participation. Children and youth should be integrated into informal governance and peace structures in a wide range of contexts, not only in situations of armed conflict.
- Child and youth participation in peacebuilding must be supported by multiple stakeholders in a multitude of ways in order to strengthen the impact of their contributions.

In a recently published comprehensive literature review,<sup>269</sup> the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) identifies the following key gaps and opportunities relevant to youth peacebuilding programming:

---

**268** A safe environment or space implies both a supportive environment built on trust and a physical space that young women and young men feel valued in.

**269** M.T.A. Lopes Cardozo and others, *Literature Review: Youth Agency, Peacebuilding and Education* (Amsterdam, Research Consortium on Education and Peacebuilding, 2015). Available from <http://learningforpeace.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Youth-Literature-Review-May15.pdf>.



## Policymakers:

- Policymakers should develop a more comprehensive understanding of young people's needs and priorities. This will require further analysis of holistic and cross-sectoral theories of change.
- Governments should ensure that national youth policies are evidence-based, cut across sectors, and support active participation among youth.
- Create platforms and mechanisms to engage young people in decision-making.

## Practitioners:

- Programmes should integrate mechanisms that provide youth with the ability to monitor and evaluate their own work to support their development and growth.
- Practitioners should explore the possibility of engaging youth-led organizations as advocates of youth inclusion and involvement in policy decisions. Providing advocacy training would offer young people the opportunity to enhance their leadership, mediation, negotiation, conflict-resolution, communication, and life skills, and would allow them to contribute to rebuilding positive social norms.<sup>270</sup>
- Work with youth-led organizations to establish participatory governance, monitoring and evaluation processes.
- In addition to facilitating communication between decision makers and youth, young people should engage in dialogue with the surrounding community as a means of both

establishing accountability and securing local and regional support.

- Donors must allocate long-term, sustainable funding and material support to youth-led organizations and networks, formal and informal youth groups, and individual youth initiatives.<sup>271</sup>

## REFERENCES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

### International instruments and resources to improve support for youth and peacebuilding

Youth, civil society organizations, Governments, and international organizations and institutions have all created tools and resources focused on engaging and enabling young people as leaders in peacebuilding. These have been developed primarily across agencies with the intention of facilitating collaboration to influence the entire youth and peacebuilding sector. They include the following:

#### United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250:

The Security Council unanimously adopted on 9 December 2015, Resolution 2250 (S/RES/2250) on Youth, Peace and Security. The adoption of

---

<sup>270</sup> United Nations Inter-agency Network on Youth Development, Working Group on Youth Participation in Peacebuilding, "Guiding principles for young people's participation in peacebuilding".

<sup>271</sup> Amman Youth Declaration on Youth, Peace and Security. Adopted in Amman, Jordan, on 22 August 2015. Available from <https://www.unteamworks.org/youth4peace> This point is further illustrated in the UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (S/RES/2250) Adopted by the Security Council at its 7573rd meeting, on 9 December 2015. Available from [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2250\(2015\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2250(2015))

this Resolution marks an historical achievement: for the first time in its history, the Security Council recognises that young people play an important and positive role in the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security. The adoption of Resolution 2250 marks the culmination of years of advocacy by civil society for the recognition by the Security Council that young women and young men have a critical, positive role to play for building sustainable peace.

([http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2250\(2015\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2250(2015)) )

**The Guiding Principles on Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding**<sup>272</sup> provide guidance on how young people should be engaged in conflict-affected and fragile environments. The Guiding Principles were developed by the United Nations Inter-agency Network on Youth Development's Working Group on Youth Participation in Peacebuilding,<sup>273</sup> which is a growing community of practice among United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations, academics, and youth-led organizations and individuals focusing on youth, peace and security to better coordinate efforts and influence smarter policies and evidence-based programming for and with young people in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. (<https://www.sfcg.org/guidingprinciples/> and <http://www.youth4peace.info/> )

**The Amman Youth Declaration on Youth, Peace and Security**<sup>274</sup> articulates a youth-led common vision and roadmap towards a strengthened policy framework to support young people in transforming conflict, preventing and counter-ing violence, and building sustainable peace.

Inspired by the women, peace, and security agenda and Security Council frameworks, the Amman Declaration calls for a United Nations Security Council resolution on youth, peace and security. ([www.youth4peace.info](http://www.youth4peace.info))

**The Youth Action Agenda to Prevent Violent Extremism and Promote Peace**<sup>275</sup> outlines young people's understanding of violent extremism, what youth are doing to address and prevent it, and the opportunities presented for key stakeholders such as Governments, civil society, businesses, media, international organizations, and other youth groups to engage young people as partners in preventing violent extremism and promoting peace. (<https://www.sfcg.org/the-youth-action-agenda-to-counter-violent-extremism/>)

These instruments illustrate the growing demand for smarter tools and resources that support partnership with youth in peacebuilding. They also point to a trend towards inter-agency cooperation helping to influence the entire sector more effectively.

---

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

<sup>273</sup> This Working Group is co-chaired by UNOY Peacebuilders, Search for Common Ground and the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office and comprises more than 40 United Nations agencies, international non-governmental organizations, donors, scholars and youth-led organizations.

<sup>274</sup> The Declaration was written entirely by young people and launched at the Global Forum on Youth, Peace and Security, held in Amman on 21 and 21 August 2015.

<sup>275</sup> The Youth Action Agenda was produced at the Global Youth Summit against Violent Extremism, held in New York City on 28 September 2015.

# YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN SPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT

*Selina Khoo and Andre Matthias Müller*

## INTRODUCTION

Sport in the modern sense is a hotly debated concept, as there are widely varying opinions on the extent to which it is understood to incorporate the many different forms of bodily movement, play, and games existing worldwide. Sport—specifically athletics—was historically a religious activity performed to please the gods in ancient Greece. Another important purpose of athletic training was preparation for wars and violent conflicts. In comparison, modern sport is rather secular in nature and is performed to accommodate various (arguably more peaceful) motives such as promoting health or getting together with others. This also means that it is more inclusive of a wider audience that can be mobilized for humanitarian purposes. Pierre de Coubertin was among the first who had the vision of sport being a universal movement of education towards peace, tolerance and development when he initiated the first modern Olympic Games in Athens in 1896. He likely thought that it was the younger generation that would benefit most from the lessons sport could teach because competitors were mostly younger people who would eventually be responsible for future development.

One reason sport rose to become one of the pillars of development efforts (and especially peacebuilding) relates to its inherently non-violent approach to nationalism, which stands in clear contrast to how

nationalism was expressed a few centuries ago (through warfare and killing). Sport “conflicts” (competitive races, matches or games between nations or clubs) are resolved based on rules that constrain violence and encourage respect. Arguably, people who engage in sport learn those values and also experience extreme emotions, which are particularly vital for youth. The rise of sport-based development and peacebuilding projects in conflict-affected regions exemplifies how sport has proven capable of easing conflicts that might otherwise have escalated. For example, various programmes in the Middle East bring Israeli and Palestinian youth together via sport.

Sport has evolved from its cultic (ancient Greek) and elitist (industrializing British) origins into a secular, highly inclusive force that can contribute to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. The working group initiated by the United Nations to drive the agenda on sport for development and peace is dedicated to seeing those Goals realized.

## THE POTENTIAL OF SPORT FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

What makes sport so valuable for young people? It is generally acknowledged that there are three broad areas in which sport can positively affect youth development. First, sport participation leads to personal (physical, psychological, educational and

social) development that is important for realizing youth potential. Hundreds of studies have reported the impact of physical training on various health parameters that in turn affect well-being. Further, acquiring a physical skill enhances self-confidence and provides mastery opportunities and experiences, which are important precursors to coping with challenging situations beyond sport. There are also numerous studies that have reported on the educational benefits of effectively implemented sport programmes. Apart from reduced school dropout rates among youth involved in sport, physical activity has been shown to increase levels of concentration and academic performance. Language learning through team sports exemplifies a direct link between sport and education. Extending the sport-learning connection even further, Right to Play is collaborating with Governments to successfully combine sport, education and peacebuilding activities for youth in low-income countries and in post-conflict settings such as refugee camps.

Second, sport has the capacity to support youth at risk (including unemployed and migrant youth) because it is structured around norms, behaviours and rules that are also desirable in the larger community. Participation in sport cultivates a sense of responsibility that can be applied to other areas of life.

Finally, sport offers young people the opportunity to acquire social capital through the development of contacts and networks. Strengthening social connections can help youth achieve a sense of belonging, gain access to resources outside sport, and in some cases improve employment prospects.

#### BOX 4.5.

## YOUNG WOMEN AND SPORT

In spite of the clear benefits of sport, girls and young women customarily face more barriers to participation than do boys and young men and therefore tend to be less involved. Sport has traditionally been perceived as a primarily masculine activity centred around attributes such as strength, power and victory. In many societies, young girls are raised in a manner that they do not identify with such attributes and therefore have lower motivation to participate, have less confidence in their physical and sporting capabilities, and receive less support from others. Hence, especially during adolescence and in conservative cultures, the increased pressure to be feminine conflicts with what sport traditionally stands for. Moreover, girls can often feel that they are judged physically when engaged in sport. The perceptions of others critically observing their body can embarrass girls and effectively limit sport participation.

To make sport more appealing to girls and young women, sport programmes can incorporate activities that are in line with their preferences and strengths—cooperation rather than competition, agility rather than strength, positive reinforcement for skill mastery and effort rather than victory—or build on activities that are not “gendered” (including action sports such as Ultimate Frisbee). With this approach, it is possible to appreciate the body for what it can do rather than how it is perceived to look. If that can be achieved and more girls and young women are empowered to become involved in sporting activities, they can unlock physical, psychological and social assets that are transferable to other spheres (as shown by study results). Girls in the Game, based in Chicago, is an example of a programme that has embraced such a framework and effectively combines sport, health education and leadership training for girls.

## BOX 4.6

# SPORT AND THE ENGAGEMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The potential of sport to foster the inclusion and engagement of young persons with disabilities is immense; though their involvement in sport is not new, there is growing emphasis on utilizing sport geared towards youth with disabilities for community development and integration. Involving young persons with disabilities in sporting activities challenges what communities think about disability while also challenging the perceptions those with disabilities may have about themselves. In doing so, stigma and discrimination are reduced, and the skills, confidence and potential of youth with disabilities are realized.

In addition, sporting activities can provide a meeting ground for young people with and without disabilities to come together in a positive environment, learn from each other, and help eradicate preconceived notions of disability by focusing attention on the varying abilities of all youth.

However, for such efforts to be successful, sporting activities must be inclusive and adapted to

accommodate the varying needs of all youth involved. If not, sport neglects its potential to provide a forum for inclusion and integration and instead remains an activity that excludes young people with disabilities.

Few realize that there are more than 17 international competitions for persons with disabilities, including three world-level competitions targeting athletes with disabilities—the Deaflympics (for athletes with hearing impairment), the Paralympics (for athletes with other forms of disability such as physical disability and visual impairment), and the Special Olympics (for athletes with intellectual disabilities).

**SOURCE:** Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group, *Harnessing the Power of Sport for Development and Peace: Recommendations to Governments* (Toronto, Right to Play, 2008), p. 171. Available from <http://www.un.org/wcm/webdav/site/sport/shared/sport/pdfs/SDP%20IWG/Final%20SDP%20IWG%20Report.pdf>.

What makes sport such a powerful tool for engaging youth? For one thing, sport typically brings a sense of joy and adventure not found in other daily activities. It offers youth the excitement they crave in a safe environment. For the most part, sport is a voluntary activity in which youth are intrinsically motivated to join. Sport is full of challenges that have to be tackled with acquired skills and through coordinated

interaction with others (including teammates, competitors and coaching staff). This combination is optimal for engagement and positive development.

Sport is valuable for all youth but is particularly beneficial for young people who are marginalized. For example, participation in sport can facilitate the integration of migrant youth into their host societies.



Sport is always linked to the values, norms and culture of the society in which it is played. Young migrants generally have problems finding their way in their new environment, and participation in sport provides them with the opportunity to assimilate. Furthermore, when “different” people work together in a team, obeying the same rules to achieve a common goal, a sense of camaraderie emerges similar to that found in traditional communities where mutual support was necessary for survival. Recent research from Norway confirms that team sports such as basketball and soccer offer opportunities for migrant youth to develop a sense of belonging, whereas individual or expressive activities such as aerobics are more ego-centred and therefore less effective in promoting integration.

## SPORT NOT FOR SPORT’S SAKE

It is worth pointing out that sport in itself is not enough to effect broader development, except at the individual level. This is because participation in an inherently competitive activity has limited potential to engage youth. As it is commonly assumed by Governments and non-governmental organizations that sport is, in itself, a solution for many youth-related problems, little thought is given to how the potential of sport might be interpreted and utilized more meaningfully. Research from around the globe has emphasized that sport must be regarded as a “hook” for engaging young people. The idea is to use sport to attract youth and to then add other activities beyond sport to bring about individual and community development and induce social change. For example, organizations can offer activities in neighbourhoods with disadvantaged youth, providing them with access to sport that they would not normally have (such as street

leagues). Through cooperation with specific organizations, activity modules relating to education, health, peacebuilding or other areas of interest can be added. Collaboration with non-sport-related organizations is essential because such organizations have the resources and expertise to implement comprehensive programmes with sport as a necessary building block. The focus is hence not on sport for pure sporting success, but on sport as a means to reach out to youth and engage them beyond sport.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below are intended to guide policy and programme planning focused on sport for youth development.

### Recommendations for youth

***Contribute Knowledge.*** Provide “insider” knowledge to inform the content and delivery of sport for youth development programmes.

***Contribute to Programme Development.*** Contribute actively to the creation and adaptation of sport for youth development initiatives and to relevant outreach (via social networks, for example).

### Recommendations for Governments/policymakers

***Design and Adapt Policies.*** Design and adapt policies and educational curricula to ensure that the potential of sport can be actualized to benefit youth on various levels.

### ***Provide Funding and Infrastructure.***

Provide funding and a safe and easily accessible sport infrastructure to engage as many youth as possible.

***Engage Stakeholders.*** Cooperate with a wide range of stakeholders from various fields and sectors (including sport and academia), utilizing existing expertise in the development of sport for youth development.

## **Recommendations for all stakeholders**

***Engage youth.*** Actively involve youth as both leaders and informants in the design of sport for youth development programmes to learn what is wanted and needed from young people themselves.

***Target marginalized youth.*** Implement programmes for marginalized youth, including migrant youth and youth with disabilities, in the areas where they feel safest and most at home (including neighbourhoods and common meeting places).

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING**

**Allen, James T.,** and others. Sport as a vehicle for socialization and maintenance of cultural identity: international students attending American universities. *Sport Management Review*, vol. 13, No. 4 (November 2010), pp. 421-434.

**Coakley, Jay.** Youth sports: What counts as “positive development?” *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, vol. 35, No. 3 (2011), pp. 306-324.

**Dudfield, Oliver, ed.** *Strengthening Sport for Development and Peace: National Policies and Strategies*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 2014. See pp. 63-75. Available from <http://www.sportsthinktank.com/uploads/strengthening-sport-for-development-and-peace-national-policies-and-strategies-january-2014.pdf>.

**Gould, Daniel, and Sarah Carson.** Life skills development through sport: current status and future directions. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, vol. 1, No. 1 (2008), pp. 58-78.

**Kelly, Laura.** “Social inclusion” through sports-based interventions? *Critical Social Policy*, vol. 31, No. 1 (February 2011), pp. 126-150.

**Krüger, Michael.** Global perspectives on sports and movement cultures: from past to present—modern sports between nationalism, internationalism, and cultural imperialism. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 32, No. 4 (2015), pp. 518-534.

**Rauscher, Lauren, and Cheryl Cooky.** Ready for anything the world gives her?: A critical look at sports-based positive youth development for girls. *Sex Roles*, vol. 71 (February 2015).

**Slater, Amy, and Marika Tiggemann.** Gender differences in adolescent sport participation, teasing, self-objectification and body image concerns. *Journal of Adolescence*, vol. 34, No. 3 (June 2011), pp. 455-463.

**Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group.** *Harnessing the Power of Sport for Development and Peace: Recommendations to Governments*. Toronto: Right to Play, 2008. Available from <http://www.un.org/wcm/webdav/site/sport/shared/sport/pdfs/SDP%20IWG/Final%20SDP%20IWG%20Report.pdf> (accessed 17 May 2013).

**Walseth, Kristen.** Sport and belonging. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, vol. 41, No. 3-4 (December 2006), pp. 447-464.