

Chapter 5

Policy Processes and Youth

This chapter:

- examines how youth mainstreaming is not just about integrating a youth lens in a specific sector, but how it is also about understanding the interconnectedness between different policy domains, and broadly acknowledging the importance of considering sociodemographic factors in planning
- illustrates how these interlinkages have implications for the way we plan in a co-ordinated manner for youth.

5.1 Policy connectedness

The aspirations and frameworks discussed above ultimately translate into policies that inform our delivery for young people. Youth mainstreaming is not just about factoring youth capacities and interests into planning *within* a sector, but understanding how policies *across* sectors have an influence on each other, and can either strengthen or weaken other areas of policy/young people's realities.

Policies have differential impacts for young people, just as for other marginalised groups. YM policy and practice is also influenced by power, influence, interests, sensitivity in general to issues of social/demographic groups, and decision-maker/administrator relationships. This understanding becomes critical when planning across sectors and creating cross-sectoral dialogue.

5.2 Policies can affect young people differently

Policies can affect different social groups, including youth, in different ways. If these social groups are not specifically factored into the analysis, design and implementation of the policy, this differential impact will be a negative one; for example, young people form a disproportionate section of those globally unemployed. This is because the design of employment policies

Box 5.1 Housing policy and young people

The undersupply [of housing in the UK] is affecting the way young people experience the housing market in a series of real and significant ways, with knock-on consequences for their everyday lives and future aspirations ... [A]s homeownership and social housing move further out of reach for all but the richest and poorest respectively, young people are becoming more and more reliant on the private rented sector ... [T]hese experiences also impact on young people's sense of control and independence, their safety and security, their ability to build relationships and start a family, and their chance to put down roots and become part of a community.

– Institute for Public Policy Research 2012

has not adequately considered the voices and concerns of young people. See Box 5.1 for an example for housing policy.

5.3 Mainstreaming processes succeeds where all marginalised groups are considered

Youth mainstreaming is unlikely to be a standalone 'youth' lens where other social, political and economic marginalities are not considered. The success of YM will depend on capacities of policy-makers and planners to recognise the needs of different social/demographic groups. Where, for example, gender equity and other forms of equity for demographic and social groups/issues are not built into planning, it is unlikely that equity for youth will be built in.

5.4 Each policy outcome requires a range of players

Engaging in cross-sectoral work means looking at not only youth mainstreaming within a sector, but how your policy initiative will benefit from formal partnerships with other sectors.

For example, a range of policies will affect young people's access to affordable reproductive healthcare: ministries/departments with planning and finance portfolios would play a role in ensuring greater financing for the health sector's youth services; the education sector would educate young people on access to healthcare; community health groups would ensure outreach around preventative healthcare; and health services

would provide the actual health support, minimised by the preventative actions of other sectors. This implies a co-ordinated approach to policy development, where policy initiatives related to the above are discussed, designed and implemented concurrently across sectors.

Youth mainstreaming, then, will mean adopting a youth lens in cross-sectoral policy co-ordination. In this way, the boundaries of policy areas often become blurred and cross-sectoral collaboration becomes inevitable.¹

5.5 Each policy decision has impacts across policy domains

One policy decision in Sector A can create intended or unintended, negative or positive, outcomes in Sector B. For example, school expulsion policies can negatively affect youth crime,² as, being out of school, young people may be vulnerable to delinquency in contexts of poverty and other forms of structural deprivation. This, in turn, could influence expenditure and responses to youth crime in the criminal justice sector. It also raises the question of the basis of school expulsions, the devising of youth-friendly positive disciplining as opposed to 'punishment' in education contexts, and the need for young people's participation in decision-making within education settings; this would, in turn, positively affect both the education and justice sectors in reducing burdens on systems.

We will take another example from Country Y of a policy that was seemingly meant to benefit children in early childhood, but would have, if implemented, affected the autonomy of young mothers. This was the case of proposals in some countries with high female labour migration to restrict (mostly young) women's employment abroad if their children were below a certain age. It was indeed well-intentioned and meant to benefit very young children. However, women's rights groups pointed out how this also meant constraining women's economic choice and creating cyclical poverty in poor families, affecting children even more and affecting young mothers differentially. It then raises the question of how childcare is socially perceived, which gender norms inform policies and how these affect mostly young mothers; it also highlights the need for more gender- *and* youth-sensitive approaches to aspects of childcare provision.

5.6 Young people's interests may conflict with the interests of the status quo

In orthodox development environments, the interests of youth may be at odds with the interests of the status quo. Young people's movements, which should be at the centre of a youth-mainstreamed approach, have often disagreed with received development paradigms on education, health, social safety nets etc. and their concerns often go unconsidered in policy – as demonstrated in examples in this publication.

5.7 No policy is neutral to young people

Every public policy can have an impact on young people, including defence, social, fiscal and economic policies. For example, policies that prioritise high defence spending may result in funds being displaced from education and health, affecting social development outcomes for youth. A comprehensive youth mainstreaming approach requires that nodal youth agencies and all sectors can scrutinise and review each global, regional, national and sub-national to local policy proposal, as relevant, for its potential impact on young people, and ensure that evaluations assess the actual impact.

5.8 The policy process is not linear

We cannot assume undisrupted links from policy design to implementation. Often, those who design policies are removed several steps from those who implement them. In any mainstreaming process, it is critical to link policy-making processes to mid-level and field personnel, including young professionals, to ensure their ownership and during implementation. This applies both ways, as local government officers have much experience and knowledge to contribute to the design process. If we are to motivate middle-level managers and young professionals to carry out policy visions, then they must be involved in the entire process, not just the implementation stage.

Similarly, contexts in which policies were first designed may change during the implementation phase, and people and institutions that were at one point the champions of a policy

may fade into the background with changing political regimes and power structures. The challenge is then establishing sustained links between the less transmutable elements in a process, i.e. civil society processes or relationships with longer-term administrative personnel, to ensure continuity.

5.9 Political economy defines policy decisions

The links between policy design, implementation and achieving outcomes are fraught with complexity and layers of explicit and hidden motivations. What incentives, restrictions and rules³ do legislators, policy-makers and administrators have as they embark on their respective policy work? What motivates them? How do they balance job security, power dynamics and relationships as they work towards policy goals? These political economy considerations are integral to succeeding in youth mainstreaming.

5.10 Conclusions and reflections

Policy processes are complex and interrelated. An important step in youth mainstreaming is one that looks outward at the connectedness of one policy to others and to young people. We can no longer see ourselves as a single sector that only connects to other sectors for specific programmes, but as a sector that connects and collaborates meaningfully across all sectors, holistically and strategically, and in the long term.



Box 5.2 Reflections on Chapter 5: Policy Processes and Youth

- Does policy planning and implementation in your context consider interactions across sectors in planning in relation to outcomes for youth?
- What kind of dialogue does policy planning/implementation facilitate across sectors?
- Is this inter-sectoral interaction formalised through planning guidelines?
- What challenges and benefits exist in taking on this approach?

Notes

- 1 Cairney 2012, 97.
- 2 Ibid, 30.
- 3 See, for example, Hudson and Leftwich 2014 and UNDP 2012.

References

- Cairney, P (2012), *Understanding Public Policy*, Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire.
- Hudson, D and A, Leftwich (2014), *From Political Economy to Political Analysis*, Development Leadership Programme, Birmingham.
- Institute for Public Policy Research (2012), *No Place to Call Home*, IPPR, United Kingdom.
- UNDP (2012), *Institutional and Context Analysis Guidance Note*, Oslo Governance Centre.