

Chapter 1

Framing Youth Participation in the Twenty-first Century or 'Missing the Wood for the Trees'

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My friends, no-one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth. A society that cuts itself off from its youth severs its lifeline; it is condemned to bleed to death.

Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General
(UN World Conference of Ministers for Youth, Lisbon, August, 1998)

With adult prevalence rates of around 20 per cent and 35 per cent respectively, South Africa and Botswana are already feeling the impact of the epidemic. Worse is yet to come in both countries, today's 15 year olds have a greater than 50per cent chance of dying of HIV-related causes if the current infection rates are not cut dramatically.

(UNAIDS AIDS epidemic update: December 2000)

There always have been and always will be exceptional young people in the world. Are there really no modern day equivalents to Goliath-slaying Davids or Joan of Arc? At age 12, Canadian Craig Keiggleburger started a campaign against child labour in the sportswear industry that contributed to starting a global movement. Now governments across the world are signing the UN Convention on the Abolition of Child Labour. During the 1980s, Rigoberta Menchu fled her homeland, Guatemala, after the murder of her immediate family. From the age of 22 she worked at home and abroad to secure and protect the rights of indigenous peoples and promote intercultural peace. She was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize for her work in 1992 when she was only 33.

Stark contrasts are facing young people today: on the one hand global commitment to democracy and an increasing demand for active citizenry. On the other, death for more than 50 per cent of today's 15-year-olds in two countries because not enough was done to combat HIV/AIDS by the previous generation. This is an extreme case. But other developments also bode ill for youth participation in conventional politics: the demise of youth sections of political parties, the ageing

nature of the Bush administration, the demonising of South African youth who went from being the young lions to the lost generation in five short years.

Young people are not treated as a high priority. They can be, and are being marginalised. In recent national elections in the USA (2000) and UK (2001) there was a low turnout amongst many different ages and sectors of the electorate – but young people were among those least likely to vote.

But as we ask ‘who’ young people are today – what they are doing or not doing – the first point to note is that they are far from homogeneous. Take the most fundamental level of analysis – demographics. In the developed world the young are dwindling in numbers as the population ages; there is good reason why politicians are increasingly courting the ‘grey’ vote. But in the South the situation is very different. In some countries up to 70 per cent of the population is less than 30 years of age. There is a huge cohort of young people leaving education in various states of unpreparedness, without access to further training in skills, or even finance for micro-enterprise.

International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates show the following figures for youth population and entry into the labour force over the next decade:

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| Global population | 6 billion |
| Aged 15–24 | 1 billion |
| Aged under 20 | 2.4 billion |
| Entry to labour force, 2000–2010 | 700 million |

These figures should prompt politicians and policy-makers at national, regional and international levels to ask the following kinds of questions:

- Is there a clear relationship between development planning and demography in policy and practice?
- Are positive interventions planned to reflect these demographic trends in education, training, employment and economic activities?
- What would be the positive measurable outcomes of successfully engaging even a fraction of these young people in economic activity?
- What is the worst possible scenario if the labour market entrants – 700 million young people – remain marginalised, excluded and powerless?

New Forms of Participation

In important respects, this is a picture of under-participation. But deeper inspection reveals a more complex set of needs that require new methods to make participation attractive and meaningful. And before we conclude that the young do not participate, we should be careful not to restrict our attention to the most familiar indicators.

Recent research from North America describes the positive environment that nurtures participation, the 'triggers' for civic engagement and the importance of mentors and peer support. A One World (USA) report describes how young activists' 'careers' follow a similar trajectory:

youth activists [take] lead roles in environmental or justice-based campaigns. They report not only supportive parents and high academic accomplishment, but a precocious development of social consciousness and the early onset of an intense and dogged curiosity about how the world works.

These findings are reinforced by a Canadian study, *Social Vision – Young Adult Perspectives on Social and Civic Responsibility* by D-Code Inc. and the Canadian Centre for Social Entrepreneurship (April 2001).

A student active in environmental issues recalls having 'deep feelings of needing to make a change' from the time she was a child but [having been] uncertain how to do it. She was encouraged by a high school teacher who connected her with other youth who felt the same way on issues about the impact of globalisation ... she found mentors and fellow young activists who encouraged and inspired her with their commitment and passion, providing her with an outlet for action and expression.

During the period of 'youth' (defined by the UN/Commonwealth as life between the ages of 15 and 30) people experience much change and transition on the way to 'adulthood'. This is an exhilarating challenge. Increasingly it is being observed that precisely because they are in times of *personal* transition, young people are better equipped than other generational cohorts to embrace changes associated with globalisation.

In a paper on Youth Development and Population (UN ECLAC 2000), youth is described as being at a paradoxical crossroads.

Modern times are clearly marked by the institutionalisation of change and the centrality of knowledge as the motor of progress. Both factors place young people in a privileged position for contributing to development. But while the realisation of current development styles requires optimal utilisation of the types of assets that are concentrated among young youth, it paradoxically increases social exclusion among young people.

Technology provides a good example of the strengths of the young. In 1986 I was managing youth work in Sheffield in the UK. At a young mothers drop-in centre there were some very basic computers (remember Commodores?). A little girl of three or four drew a flower with a simple draw tool and was filling the petals in with different colours. She was showing no fear of technology, just acceptance of it – as I had accepted crayons 30 years earlier. This spurred me into buying my first PC. I

still wonder if that girl (now a young woman) uses IT with the same ease she did at four.

Young people are embracing new forms of activism in both the North and South. They are using their cell phones to text messages to each other to overthrow corrupt politicians (Philippines, January 2001). They are using websites and free e-mail services to create and develop global networks with each other on issues they care passionately about, such as the anti-globalisation protests in 1999–2001. They are communicating and acting in C21st mode. A generational and digital divide is giving young people an edge in organising. In 2000, all members of CYP's youth network in the Caribbean region had personal (often free) e-mail addresses – unlike the national Ministries responsible for Youth Affairs.

Defined, Excluded and Under-Invested

Western notions of childhood, adolescence and transition to adulthood today determine the conceptualisation of young people in the world. Entire industries of physiological and psychological development have grown up around them. (Just look at some headlines from websites/newspapers on youth today.) This conceptualisation of children and young people is all-pervasive, having been exported to the developing world. 'School dropouts' is a common expression – but in the South it is more likely they didn't get into the education system at all, or were pushed out by the lack of places in secondary education. In the Caribbean I have heard street children disparaged by adults in the education profession – in a country where compulsory secondary education is not available. Where else do young people go after they have failed (or been failed) in the formal education system, where there is little post-primary vocational training?

Whilst training youth development workers in Aotearoa, New Zealand I found a common complaint was 'feeling like the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff'. They were waiting for young people to present as problems, as victims or deviants. The role youth development workers were ascribed was rescue, patching up or 'fixing' young people. Convincing the 'caring professions' to work with and alongside young people to build fences at the top of the cliff was regarded as pretty radical. Youth suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, juvenile crime and teen pregnancy are associated with 'medical' models of intervention. Something is wrong or faulty – it needs to be fixed. Sadly, programme funding, resources for research, training and conferences for adult 'professionals' are often easier to secure than those for young people who can do it for themselves.

In Uganda there is a decentralised system of government. Within this system there are seats exclusively reserved for young people at village, regional and national levels. The elections for these seats are fiercely contested; young people take their participation in democracy and representation very seriously. But there was no written record of this bold engagement of young people by the Museveni govern-

ment until 2001 (see 'Addressing the Democratic Deficit' – due for publication by the Carnegie Young People's Initiative, late 2001). No-one thought it worth studying, documenting and publishing. There is little literature relating to young people that does not focus on their perceived vulnerability and shortcomings. The image of carefree, irresponsible youth with an appetite and aptitude for sex, drugs and rock and roll is a poor substitute.

There remain large numbers of young people who are under-invested in, particularly those who are out of school for the range of reasons cited earlier. Once these young people part company from child health care or rudimentary basic education, they have little contact with the resources or benefits of investment. Civil society, governmental agencies and international development organisations do not see young people, especially those in the second decade of life (11–20), as a priority.

Programmes targeted at this group of young people are often tackling symptoms that adult society sees as undesirable, with programmes and activities that adult society thinks appropriate for them. Such programmes are designed and implemented with little or no consultation with the target beneficiaries. Their impact is greatly diminished for two reasons. Firstly, because they do not engage young people as partners. Doing so would add to young people's insights into their own needs and interests. Secondly, programmes would have a much greater impact if they involved the energy and creativity of the young people themselves.

If we dig deeper behind these Western concepts we can find another reality, one in which young people can and do play important and active roles in family, community, economic life, and political and social change. This is largely undocumented and disregarded. The lack of the body of knowledge means young people lose the history of success and are unable to transmit these important lessons to the next cohort.

The fight against HIV/AIDS gives us an even starker example. From Uganda, Zambia, Thailand, Senegal and, most recently, South Africa, comes good news. Lower infection rates among young people aged 15–19 have been reported. 'Great', you might think, let's find out exactly what caused attitude and behaviour change amongst these young people. But if you scour the websites and literature that proliferate on HIV/AIDS you will find it difficult, if not impossible, to find explanations for this. The 2000 Durban AIDS conference had plenty of presentations and information about research on drug therapies. But what about identifying the successful interventions that actually result in fewer young people becoming infected? Where is the research? It simply does not exist; young people are not regarded as sufficiently high priority to warrant this investment.

This is despite the fact that health, along with education, is one of the few areas even thought of as demanding investment in young people. Great strides in the well-being of children in the first decade of life (1–10) took place during the early 1990s. However, in the developing world much of this has been, or is in grave danger of, being seriously eroded.

HIV/AIDS – Generations and Gender

That campaign must reach girls as well as boys. At present, in sub-Saharan Africa, adolescent girls are six times more likely to be infected than boys. That is something which should make all of us African men deeply ashamed and angry.

Kofi Annan, 26 April 2001, Africa Leaders Summit on HIV/AIDS

There is plenty of literature and research on the impact of HIV/AIDS. There are terrifying statistics about the loss of human capital, especially in Africa. Zambia cannot train enough teachers to replace those who are dying each year from AIDS. Health, education, transport, core industries like mining and agri-business, together with key public services, face decimation in the Southern African region. The response to date has been to recruit key workers from other regions where possible and/or affordable. Botswana has recruited teachers and other professionals from Guyana (the poorest country in the Caribbean which can ill afford to lose professionals), yet they may have similar infection rates to those they have been hired to replace.

What exactly have male teachers who are infected with HIV/AIDS done? Many of them have infected the girls and young women they teach. Reports from South Africa early in 2001 reported that schools are unsafe for adolescent women. Demands for sexual favours from teachers and male students, together with the real danger of sexual assault and rape, make pursuing education a daunting prospect.

The situation in schools is part of a broader pattern. Typically it is older men who have knowingly or unknowingly infected young women. They have used their traditional cultural authority over women – especially young women – to demand sex. The ‘sugar daddy’ to a young woman needing funds to pay her school or university costs, the senior civil servant who demands sexual favours in return for promotion, the HIV-positive man who believes that sex with a virgin will cure him. This fabric of sexual inequality is coyly referred to as “age mixing”, typically between older men and young women or girls’ (Global AIDS Epidemic Update – UNAIDS, December 2000).

Those responsible are the husbands, fathers, uncles, brothers, neighbours and community members that all of us know. Yet young women are blamed for their fate, labelled as precocious, promiscuous, having their values and morals eroded by globalisation and alien culture. Not identifying men’s behaviour as the key is the real scandal. It means that a generation of girls and young women are paying with their lives.

In 1990 Amartya Sen identified the absence of one hundred million women from the global population. This is caused by a combination of factors: selective abortion of female fetuses, infanticide, neglect of the girl-child, complications in early pregnancy and child-bearing. Disproportionate infection with HIV/AIDS is another factor that must now be added to the list.

HIV/AIDS – the ‘too hard box’

Children and young people are already bearing the brunt of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Over 13 million children have been orphaned as a result of AIDS. Child and sibling headed households are an increasingly common feature in sub-Saharan Africa. The growing presence of street children is testimony to this. A young African woman (herself part of a sibling headed household) told me that in the capital city the government rounded up the street children to return them to their families – but of course there were no families for most of them to go back to.

What will happen when the impact of HIV/AIDS begins to be acknowledged and understood? Who will teach in schools, who will care for the sick, who will work in essential industry and commerce, who will farm the land, build the homes, care for children and be role models? Children and young people are already doing it for themselves but without the support and services they need.

Agricultural extension workers need to help the young subsistence and cash crop farmers. Professions like teaching, nursing, the law and medicine need to rethink how people get the necessary training and education. The transfer of skills and knowledge across the generations becomes an urgent imperative. High school graduates as teacher and nurse aides, articled clerks for the legal profession, apprenticeships, private sector and industry required to make young counterpart learning on the job compulsory?

Decision-makers and leaders are paralysed with fear and lack of comprehension. Life will never be the same again in those countries whose human and social capital continues to be decimated. Brave, bold, lateral thinking ‘outside the box’ is needed now at policy and programme levels to address the emergency. Children and young people must be fully participating actors in the partnerships that need be created, fast, to maintain development.

Solutions – the Way Ahead

Participation is a right

Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Article 12:1

Young people are empowered when they make an informed decision freely, take action based on that decision and accept responsibility for the consequences of that action. Empowering young people means creating and supporting the enabling conditions

under which young people can act on their own behalf, and on their own terms, rather than at the direction of others.

Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment, endorsed by Commonwealth Heads of Government, 1999.

The Benefits

Throughout the 1990s a common global agenda emerged through world summits and conventions. A focus on human development reflects recognition that economic growth alone does not improve quality of life or sustain democracy. Agreed common objectives of equality, development and citizenship were embodied in the UN Global Agenda of the UN Millennium Special Assembly, 2000.

The benefits of youth participation are multiple and not solely for young people themselves. Social inclusion, resulting in cohesive communities, solid support and engagement in national development, is clearly desirable. Institution-building and social cohesion are at least as important for nationally owned development processes as electoral democracy. World Bank research covering 192 countries found that 64 per cent of economic growth could be attributed to human and social capital (World Bank, 1996).

The target year for development objectives agreed at various international fora in the 1990s, and at the Millennium Summit, is 2015. 15–40 year olds are the most active age group of trainers, technicians and wealth creators at the local level. *It is today's 0–25 year olds who will be driving the process by 2015.* Their capacity to do so depends on practical decision-making experience.

- Up to two-thirds of the population of developing countries is under 30 years old. There is no alternative to targeting young people in development strategies. There are no alternatives to young people as the principal actors on the ground.
- AIDS deaths are one reason why skills-transfers from the older generation – both within families and in schools – are declining and are insufficient for the task ahead. Another is the importance of new technologies, including IT. Here the skills transfers are if anything being reversed: the younger generation is teaching the older.
- Fighting HIV means educating the under-30s, who account for over 60 per cent of those infected. Young people have a central role as peer educators and as evaluators of strategy. They know whether behavioural change has been achieved, and why.

Traditionally, the dichotomy has been between sectoral participation (education, workplace), and periodic, formal political participation (for example, voting). What is lacking is ongoing participation in decision-making.

One of the weakest links [between economic and social development] ... is the lack of appropriate institutions for integrated policy frameworks. Such institutions 'should provide for the active participation of social actors ... to facilitate the 'visibility' of the social effects of economic policies.

UN ECLAC, 2001

- *Participatory situation analysis* puts all stakeholders in command of more information – government, civil society organisations and young people.
- *Inclusive institutions* facilitate links between macro- and meso-economic policies; for example, employment strategies engage with the environment faced by firms. This attains a better social and economic return on both private investment and development assistance (such as micro-credit and enterprise skills training).
- *Multi-sectoral youth policies* 1) co-ordinate efforts across the state and civil society; 2) rationalise personal and institutional trade-offs between income generation and skills development for young people; 3) pool the statistical capacities of all government departments, so that realistic goals can be set and progress can be monitored.

Overcoming the Democratic Deficit – Together

Across the globe, younger generations are deprived of a sense of fully belonging to society. This does not reflect the potential of young people in development. Rather, it is a symptom of under-engagement itself. Only systematic participation can gain momentum, and revitalise a whole society. This is why one-off consultations and token youth representation is inadequate – nowhere more so than in youth policy itself. When involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of public policy, young people know their participation has been substantive. We must aim at nothing less.

In preparation for the UN Special Assembly on Children in September 2001, community, national, regional and international consultations are taking place. Some are aimed at the general child and youth population; others, like the African Movement of Working Children and Youth, seek to gather the views and inputs of children and young people living and working on the streets of 16 African countries. The impetus of the UN General Assembly Special Session has seen an explosion of interest in participation. Unfortunately it is not the norm in relation to those under 18 or those aged 18–30 in many countries.

However, the impact of young people's positive experience in the consultations is not transitory. Workshops, community forums, on-line forums, the 'Say Yes to Children' campaign and many different interventions will highlight and demystify

the way in which policy is made and reveal to young participants how they can make their voices and opinions heard. The engagement of young people in formulating national youth policy in Commonwealth countries has done the same. These are foundation lessons in skills for a lifetime as an active citizen in a democracy.

The democratic deficit describes the gap in current development theory, the lack of participation by the poor in contributing to democratic policy dialogue on poverty and related issues. Participation skills are learned – they don't just happen. Development theorists and practitioners know that without participation and ownership by target groups the impact of interventions will be limited. Throughout the poverty reduction frameworks and strategies of donors runs the exhortation to involve the poor in designing solutions. Imagine if children and young people in poor and marginalised communities were part of youth and community action that practiced genuine participation. Would there be a democratic deficit? International development targets agreed by the UN and the international development community would have a head start. Between 2001 and 2015 (the time frame for achieving international development targets) they would engage increasingly mature young people and young adults who were able to take a full and active role in sustainable development regardless of their poverty. Young people's participation is win-win – there are no losers.

Chapter 2 of this book, contributed by Steve Mokwena, builds on a paper presented to Commonwealth Youth Ministers in 1998. The paper explored the theme 'Participation in decision-making: the empowerment of young people as the civil society of the twenty-first century'.

Mokwena brings to light the changing theory and practice of youth participation – the move from an approach in which young people's participation is defined within limits prescribed by adults towards a new paradigm of youth empowerment. He argues that it is necessary to build on post-liberation and independence democracy by engaging young people and that ensuring that young people are part of mainstream civil society is necessary to consolidate and deepen democracy.

He examines institutional, attitudinal and mythological barriers to participation. He points to the mythology of young people as apathetic and lacking motivation. The reality is that young people have their own civil society of sometimes formal and sometimes informal associations. However, this is either not recognised or not valued by adult society. Adults' perception is that young people are doing 'nothing' if they are not engaged in things defined as worthwhile by adults. Overcoming stereotyping (which of course is not a one way street) is a challenge for advocates to overcome.

Chapter 3, written by Indira Ravindran and Laila Duggan, presents a series of case studies from a wide range of organisations. Invitations were sent through the Partners for Youth Participation networks. Our intention was to feature examples

from different regions of the world, to be gender-balanced and reflect a range of organisations from youth-initiated NGOs to international agencies.

The chapter examines a diverse range of organisations that provide positive models of young people's participation. They range from Bluepeace, a youth initiated and led environment NGO in the Maldives, to government-supported programmes in Papua New Guinea where the outreach of youth workers enabled the Husena village youth to make safe water accessible to their community. The spin-offs from this youth action transformed traditional relationships between the generations and created dialogue, awareness and action. The International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) created an environment for genuine youth participation in its governance mechanisms with a Youth Advisory Council leading the process.

Successes in youth-based social movements are hard to find in well-documented form. The transitory nature of youth (albeit ranging from 15–30-years-old), and the practice and tradition of youth and development workers, means that 'doing' rather than recording, documenting and analysis is the norm. However, as can be seen in Chapter 3, there is diversity and richness of experiences and information. In analysing common themes from these successes key principles and lessons emerge: the importance of providing opportunity, not charity; the multiplier effect that even small initiatives can generate; and maintaining focus and passion as essential for sustaining participation.

Chapter 4, contributed by Charlotte Barran, features a collection of profiles of people from different generations. They share their personal experiences, and discuss pathways to participation and empowerment. PYP invited people to share their personal experiences of participation as a young person. The aim was to hear about who or what motivates individuals to participate, and the factors that make participation difficult or easy.

The chapter features nine personal profiles, together with an analysis, drawing conclusions, through personal testimony, of the enabling conditions that make participation possible and effective. A comparison of participation experience over 60 years examines the impact on people's subsequent life choices.

Charlotte Barran asserts there exists a 'set of circumstances which drives a person to become a young activist'. This is not dependent upon education or social status but is much more fundamental, 'a basic recognition of the need to participate in society and positive relationships with adults'. Thus the context and circumstances that individuals describe vary enormously but critical factors emerge that created a supportive and enabling environment for participation.

Finally, in Chapter 5 Kumi Naidoo presents a typology of young people's participation at macro-, meso- and micro-levels. It looks at both limited and substantial levels of participation and, importantly, how these fit into current concepts of active citizenship. The macro-level can be characterised as young people's

concerns about why the world is the way it is; if change needs to happen, then how and where do they articulate their views and ensure that they are heard? The meso-level is about doing the right thing and the smart thing, especially in terms of policy and ensuring that desired outcomes are achieved with young people's engagement. This engagement must happen not simply by involving young people in consultations on policy but by ensuring that they have a real role in formulation, implementation and monitoring. Lastly, at the micro-level, young people want to do real things for real people. They need opportunities to put their energy, creativity and passion into action with tangible results.

In his analysis Naidoo examines the range of challenges and opportunities facing young people and civil society to create genuine participation for mutual benefit. He points out that even amongst the most marginalised and socially excluded young people there is still diversity and differentiation. Gender is a critical factor in this analysis as young women often become invisible and assumptions are made that either the 'women's' or 'youth' agenda will capture their needs. The reality is often that neither do so and they fall through the gap.

Youth leadership and partnership with other generational cohorts, especially those with a different experience of values formation, are important. Young people are growing up in a period of globalisation – one in which technology and geopolitics continue to change rapidly. They will influence new thinking, and become both the engine and the implementers of new paradigms of development and democracy. Lastly, Naidoo gives us 'GRACES' (gender equity, racial and religious tolerance, age and ability, class, community and caste, ethnicity and socially exclusion). He identifies these as key areas for social action that equip us all to overcome the challenge of intersectorality.

This book comes to you from a community of practitioners – itself described by Friedman in *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* as the most appropriate forum for creating new concepts for social policy in globalisation. We hope the experiences of young people, their advocates, mentors and partners will provide insights which can be acted upon. The transformation of generational relationships is a formidable challenge. It is an imperative but also an enormous opportunity for benefits that no-one can afford to ignore.