



The Need for the Management of Youth Power for Global Development

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1. Introduction

"The youth are recognized not only as future leaders but also as actors and foundation of our society, with a direct stake in the development process of our great nation."

-Aishat Ismail, (New Nigerian, 2001)

Youth are one of the greatest assets any nation can be proud of. Not only are they legitimately regarded as the future leaders, young women and men are potentially and actually the vital resources worth of investment by a country as well as the valued possession for national development. As critical stakeholders, they are the center of reconstruction and sustainable development of any nation.

The emerging global and regional consensus on youth development clearly underscores the need to ensure the inclusion of youth perspectives in the development process along with the effective participation of youth in national development practice. Over the years, there has been a gradual increase in global awareness about the vital role of young people in sustainable development. The United Nations, in 1985 drew the attention of the world to the important role of young people, by declaring that year, The International Youth Year for Development and Peace. (Giwa, 2008)

2. What is Youth Power?

World leaders have signed up to Global Goals which promise to end poverty, inequality and climate change. These promises can only be kept with the unique power of young people taking action to influence their leaders, working together to use their collective power, and by having the opportunities to influence the leaders making these decisions that affect young people's lives. The "Youth Power" is a global campaign- led by Restless development in partnership with youth-led and youth focused organizations around the world - to support young people making sure the promises of the global Goals become a reality.

3. Why does Youth Power We need?

World Leaders have made ambitious promises to us all in the Global Goals which promise to end poverty, inequality and climate change by 2030. Today's young people are optimistic that these Global Goals can be achieved. They have to be. They are the 'Peak Youth' generation who make up the majority of the world's population. They are the generation that stands the best chance of making these Global Goals happen. They are the generation most affected if the Global Goals fail.

But the Global Goals will stay promises unless young people are making sure those promises are kept. Youth have a right to ask how, when, and by who these ambitious Global Goals will be delivered. Young people being able to ask those questions and being able to turn the answers into action is how promises on paper become real changes for all of us. Governments, businesses, NGOs, and the rest of us all must get behind them because young people are our best chance of keeping these promises to ourselves.

As the youth-led international development agency, Restless Development has seen that when young people can use their power to make sure promises are kept, everyone benefits. We know what youth power looks like when it is done well, and how necessary it is for positive change in the world, and so our new global campaign is to support young people around the world to make it happen.

We're going to do it by making sure young people have the knowledge, skill and confidence to take action which influences leaders on the Global Goals. We're going to make sure young people are connected to a global network with the solidarity, support and power of collective action to influence leaders. And we're going to make sure young people have the opportunities to influence the way that leaders make the decisions that affect their lives.

The promises that have just been made by leaders in the Global Goals mean a world without poverty, inequality and climate change is within our reach. Youth Power is our campaign to support young people to turn those promises into reality.

Worldwide, while young people face a wide array of development challenges, their concerns - common across development contexts - are too often overlooked: they are often victims of multiple and interlocked forms of discrimination, frequently involving negative assumptions about age, capability and respect; they face significant barriers to their participation in public life, which leads them to be greatly underrepresented in decision-making and development processes; in most places, they represent a disproportionate number of the unemployed; and at a critical time for their individual development, they are severely impacted by a lack of access to quality and affordable public services, such as health and education. These forms of marginalization often lead to an imbalance of power that excludes young people from an otherwise 'adult society', with the result that their needs and aspirations are not adequately addressed, and their potential contributions to development lost.

The majority of the world's population has yet to reach the age 30 And as the numbers of young people continue to grow, proportionally and in absolute terms, they will represent the largest new cohort of adults the world has seen. The response to this coming demographic change - the investments made now in young people and the way they are currently engaged - will dramatically shape the future of societies. It is increasingly evident, then, that tackling the challenges faced by young people by supporting their empowerment and providing them with an enabling environment for their human development makes today a potentially historic and transformational opportunity to lay the foundation for a peaceful and sustainable future.

The current economic situation for young women and young men has been especially difficult. Young people still lack decent jobs.⁶ They make up 37 percent of the global working-age population but 60 percent of the total unemployed. As many as two thirds of youth in developing economies are either without work, out of school or are engaged in irregular / informal employment. Looking ahead, the global economy will need to create 600 million more productive jobs over the next decade in order to absorb the current unemployment levels and provide employment opportunities for the 40 million annual labour market entrants - many of whom are young people. ⁷ Young women make up nearly half of the world's population working under vulnerable employment conditions which prevent them from accessing basic necessities, services and decent work. Youth unemployment, underemployment and poor wages can have an adverse long-term impact on human, economic and social capital, and can weaken their sense of social belonging. They can trigger a vicious cycle of intergenerational poverty, vulnerability, unrest and conflict.⁸ Young entrepreneurs' efforts to grow enterprises are often thwarted by the unavailability of credit, weak business networks, corruption and inadequate entrepreneurship environments. Know-how and sustained support are essential - not only for the initial success of their initiatives, but also for their long-term sustainability.

In a nutshell, the intended message to get across to youth and adults in this paper as a way out of the existing sorry state is epitomized in the following words of a philanthropist, Taveras (2006) cited by, ShimelisTsegaye, (2006:3)

“Don’t believe all of the negative perceptions that are out there about youth. You, along with your families and communities can change things. You need to be part of a network of peers and adults who can work together to achieve a vision you may have... Young people are not in a ‘waiting period’...waiting to be leaders; waiting to make a difference...young people matter now!”

Therefore, I am advocating that, we need to break away from damaging stereotypes of youth and patronizing sentiments towards them. We must utilize youth as a force behind the renewal of human society in order to benefit from their energy, idealism, unique perspectives and innovative ideas to achieve sustainable development.

4. Conclusion

The value of youth participation in nation building needs to be fully recognized at all levels ranging from the local community to the international arena. However, recognition is not the same as action, and progress in the area of practical implementation has been slow. Even in those countries that have achieved the most, participation remains piecemeal and insufficiently integrated into all areas of young people’s lives. Many Initiatives may be limited to seeking the views of young people on particular issues; their involvement in decision-making is rarely sought. Young people therefore remain marginal to most democratic processes. Token participation is meaningless, as it does not empower young people to influence outcomes and achieve real change.

The demographic picture of youth makes it patently evident that engaging youth fully in development is not a matter of choice, but rather an imperative for national development. Young people constitute a significant share of our population and will continue to do so. It should be recognized that despite the challenges associated with youth development like inadequate access to education, the young people of today are, on average, better educated than their parents. They are better connected to the rest of the world than any of the earlier generations of youth, and they are, as a result, more determined to find options to close the gap between their limited opportunities and what they perceive to be possible in the global economy. Failure to provide opportunities for youth to build their capacity to participate in development would be a missed opportunity to harness the huge potential in human capital, and this could have enormous economic, cultural, political and social consequences.

Efforts must therefore be made to listen to youth and engage them in the process of strengthening participatory democracy. Their involvement can lead to better decisions and outcomes. Participation promotes the well-being and development of young people, strengthens their commitment to and understanding of human rights and democracy, and provides them a form of protection; it also allows them to take part in decision-making processes. Youth participation is an essential strategy for ensuring young people’s optimal development and for achieving wider development goals for society.

References

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