Utilizing the My World 2015 global survey as a Crowdsourced Platform for developing Global Policy on Youth

Ravi Karkara, UN-Habitat’s Global Expert Advisor on Children and Youth and advisor to the UN Millennium Campaign, makes a well-argued case for young people to be closely involved in the post-2015 development agenda.

Figure 1. Visualising a million voices.

Young people currently number 1.8 billion, accounting for approximately 18 per cent of the global population, according to the UN Population Fund. With the target date for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) arriving rapidly, the post-2015 development agenda must include youth voices and actions. Young people’s participation and inclusion in efforts to achieve all the goals in the new agenda are crucial to ensure a successful and sustainable outcome.

Today’s adolescents and youth are shaping social and economic development, challenging social norms and values, and building the foundation of the world’s future. They have high expectations for themselves and their societies, and are imagining how the world can be better. Connected to each other as never before through new media, young people are driving social progress and directly influencing the sustainability and the resilience of their communities and of their countries.
The world’s young people do not constitute a homogeneous group. Notwithstanding the wide differences between youth’s status across the world, regional-level analysis provides a general understanding of their development profile. The vast majority of the world’s youth – some 87 per cent – live in

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**The My World 2015 global survey**

My World is a United Nations global survey for citizens (www.myworld2015.org/). Working with partners, the aim is to capture people’s voices, priorities and views, so world leaders can be informed as they begin the process of defining the next set of global goals to end poverty. Specifically, the data so far have shown that the most important priority for global youth is a good education, with just under 70 per cent of respondents classifying the priority as one of their choices. It can also be noted that factors like better transport and roads are more important for youth in lower Human Development Index (HDI) countries compared with higher HDI countries.

About

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70 per cent of respondents to the survey, both offline and online, are young people below the age of 30 years old. Sri Lanka, India and Nigeria are the top three countries in total number of votes.

Topics and regions can be explored on the United Nations companion website, The World We Want – a platform created by the United Nations and civil society to amplify people’s voices in the process of building a global agenda for sustainable development (www.worldwewant2015.org).

**OVERVIEW**

**Moving forward**

Over the past few years, youth forums have taken place across the globe to identify barriers and suggest solutions for empowering young people. There was a clear consensus from the youth forums that voices and partnerships are strengthened when united. Providing the platform for youth to interact and develop such recommendations will not only empower the youth, but allow them to incorporate entrepreneurship into the development programme.

Through active participation, young people are empowered to play a vital role in their own development as well as in that of their communities, helping them to learn vital life skills, develop knowledge on human rights and citizenship and to promote positive civic action. To participate effectively, young people must be
given the proper tools, such as information, education about and access to their civil rights. It is clear is that this participation is central in realising the fate of the present MDGs and in both the development and the implementation of a youth-led post-2015. The importance of youth participation cuts across all the development discussion sectors, as illustrated in the following paragraphs.

Figure 2. My World 2015 respondent sectors at 23 May 2014.

SEGMENTS & PRIORITIES

Figure 3. Priorities for 16-30 age group as at 23 May 2014.

Youth should be given a chance to take an active part in decision-making at local, national and global levels.— UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

**Education.** As shown in Figure 3, access to a good education is clearly vitally important. Despite this, a substantial number of young people in developing countries continue to face challenges relating to educational access and quality. Although the global youth literacy rate increased from 84 per cent during the period 1985-1994 to 89 per cent during the period 2000-2006, progress has been uneven, with youth literacy rates below 80 per cent recorded in sub-Saharan Africa and in southern and western Asia, according to UNESCO (2008). A universal commitment to young people’s education will continue to stimulate their innovative and creative thinking.

**Employment and entrepreneurship.** Youth are concentrated in areas with limited access to basic social services. Employment is an integral part of the transition to adulthood and plays a central role in the social integration of young people. It provides economic security and facilitates participation in society at multiple levels. Youth access to employment essentially translates into income and resource access, both of which are pivotal to shaping adaptive capacity.

However, young people continue to be overrepresented among the world’s unemployed; in 2007, they comprised only 25 per cent of the working-age population but accounted for more than 40 per cent of those who were jobless. The global youth unemployment rate for 2007 stood at 12 per cent—three times the adult rate. In south-east Asia and the Pacific, youth unemployment rates as high as six times those of adults have been recorded (United Nations, 2007; International Labour Organisation, 2008).

For the vast majority of young people living in developing countries, unemployment rates tell only part of the story. For this segment of the population in these areas, informal, non-secure and low-wage employment is the norm, with labour activity among youth concentrated in agriculture and related industries and in the informal sector. Young people find it hard to find a first job, so
we believe a jobs target with a specific indicator for youth employment should be included in the next goal framework. Continued encouragement of the youth to develop their entrepreneurial and innovation skills will directly help sustainable development.

Urbanisation is an important aspect of the future prospects for young people. Inclusive growth emanates from vibrant and sustainable cities, making them the only locale where it is possible to generate the number of good jobs that young people are seeking.

**Governance.** The data from www.myworld2015.org suggest that young people are characterising honest and responsive governments as one of the most important priorities in the post-2015 development agenda. States should encourage active civic participation as a means of holding government and national institutions accountable, and allow meaningful and inclusive participation of youth in the decision-making processes.

**Healthcare.** Healthcare is viewed as a fundamental human right; governments and organisations must make a concerted effort to produce and deliver a basic package of healthcare services that are youth-friendly and include high-quality, integrated, equitable, comprehensive, affordable, acceptable, confidential and free-of-stigma care. These facilities must accept young men and women of all sexual preferences, drug users, refugees, rural populations, migrant workers, persons with disabilities, mental health sufferers and those living with HIV and AIDS. Only a healthy young population will allow for continued progress towards sustainable development across the globe.

**Gender equality.** In the post-2015 development agenda, there must be a special focus that endorses a greater representation of young women in politics; these individuals have equal say in pertinent policy and structural changes that directly impact the future. Additionally, the post-2015 agenda must address harmful traditional practices against girls and young women, including forced marriage, gender-based violence and violence against girls/women. Education and healthcare must be delivered in a gender-sensitive manner. This calls for a stronger focus on young women worldwide – harnessing their potential and leadership in development and implementation of the global agenda. The need to focus on the most marginalised young women has never been stronger.

**Addressing inequalities.** While the MDGs highlighted that freedom, equality, tolerance, and solidarity are fundamental values that must be addressed, there are still issues regarding inequality that are pertinent for youth throughout the globe today. The *Global Thematic Consultation on Addressing Inequalities* (www.worldwewant2015.org/node/299198) demonstrates that without understanding the various indicators, additional efforts to achieve better equality will not be effective. Inequalities have consequences for everyone in society.
Climate change and the environment. It is clear that climate change's effects on the environment are uncertain. The My World survey data suggest that, while not necessarily the most important priority, climate change and protecting the environment is an issue that needs to be discussed for sustainable development. This is especially vital in regions of the world where climate plays a large part in the daily lives of the youth, resulting in issues of access to clean water, sanitation services and food security.

Peace and security. While the data suggest that peace and security are not among the top priorities, it is still an important issue that must be discussed. Particularly in unstable regions, young people demand a post-2015 world where there is strengthened international cooperation between governments, NGOs, INGOs and the private sector. Utilising mass media may help in promoting this cooperation among the public.

Crime and violence. The largest shares of homicides occur in countries with low levels of human development, and countries with high levels of income inequality are afflicted by homicide rates almost four times higher than more equal societies. Some 80 per cent of homicide victims globally are male, mostly young men in the 15-29 year age group, as are their perpetrators.

Experience has shown that carefully targeted projects can build resilience to crime, violence and victimisation by providing the conditions and possibilities for alternative lifestyles to drug and gang involvement. Evidence presented in the Global Burden of Armed Violence 2011 (see www.genevadeclaration.org) indicates that deconcentration of income inequality, proactive social inclusion and targeted youth employment and education schemes can have a positive effect on the onset, duration and dynamics of violence.

Recommendations for Data Collection for Monitoring of post-2015 Development Agenda

The High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (HLP) identified a range of issues in its report to the Secretary-General. These mirror closely the survey results shown in Figure 3.

In addition to the main concerns, young people said they want to be able to make informed decisions about their health and bodies; they want access to information and technology so they can participate in their nation's public life; and they want to be able to hold those in charge to account, to have the right to freedom of speech and association and to monitor where their government's money is going.
Young people must be subjects, not objects, of the post-2015 development agenda. They need access to the right kind of healthcare and education to improve their job prospects and life skills, but they must also be active participants in decision-making, and be treated as the vital asset for society that they are.

Specific recommendations are:

1. The continued and expanded collection of data on the top issues identified by youth in the Myworld survey
2. The disaggregation and monitoring of data in relation to youth.
3. The gathering of data on international, national and sub-national (local government level) on youth
4. Increased partnerships between multi-lateral and UN agencies on data gathering on youth issues
5. The continued use and expansion of the Myworld survey and other crowdsourced platforms
6. The popularization of data across all social media platforms, assuring data is accessible and usable by youth and other populations

Author Credits

Ravi Karkara is the Global Expert Advisor on Children and Youth with UN-Habitat, and advises the UN Millennium Campaign on child and youth engagement. He is the lead author of the ground-breaking report Youth 21: Building the Architecture of Youth Engagement in the UN System. He has proven expertise on inclusion and participation of youth, young women, youth with disabilities, indigenous youth, migrant youth and youth in conflict and post-conflict settings. He has been appointed by the Government of Sri Lanka as the Honorary Global Advisor to the proposed World Conference on Youth in 2014 on youth partnerships in developing and implementing post-2015 development agenda.

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