



The Youth Employment Network



Joining Forces with Young People: A Practical Guide to Collaboration for Youth Employment

A product of the Youth Consultative Group of the Secretary-General's Youth Employment Network (YEN)

Preface

There are more than one billion young people aged 15-24 in the world today, and 85 per cent of them live in developing countries.¹ While for some, rapid globalisation and technological change will offer new opportunities for productive and decent employment opportunities, millions of other youth across the world will face bleak prospects. Many risk failing to gain entry into the workforce. Discrimination, unless addressed, will make it even harder for disadvantaged young women and men to fully contribute to the development and growth of their nations. The vast majority of jobs available to youth could continue to be low paid, insecure, and with few benefits or prospects for advancement. Effective policies and programmes that address these concerns must be put in place if these scenarios are to be averted.

Increasingly, governments around the world are trying to determine what constitutes effective practices that work to improve the job prospects for the next generation. These vary from one context to another but one universal factor is emerging: effective youth employment strategies must involve young people.

Policy interventions addressing youth are nothing new, but in recent years there has been increased emphasis placed on identifying the right mix of actors needed for successful policy-making. Although logic may suggest that in developing policies for young people, youth themselves, as the intended beneficiaries, should be key actors, unfortunately such an approach has not prevailed in most youth employment policy initiatives. Often policymakers have committed to engage youth groups but too frequently this has meant little more than 'consultation' leading to the formulation of strategies perceived as being 'what is best' for young people. Such policy-making, frequently based on a perception that youth lack the skills and capacity to effectively participate, has often led to initiatives that fail to address the underlying concerns of young people and the causes of youth un(der)employment.

In addition, the YEN, in partnership with youth, has been seeking to change the prevailing thinking. Rather than viewing youth as a target group for which employment must be found, young people should be engaged as partners in devising solutions to a common problem. Indeed youth, through organised youth structures, are increasingly exploring solutions to their own problems, often taking the initiative to set up youth employment related projects and forge partnerships focussed on improving their working lives.

The YEN sees youth participation as central to its mandate of supporting Lead Countries in the development of National Action Plans on youth employment (NAPs). Engaging youth in collective solutions for employment will add value to the policy-making process and the outcomes, as they have an essential understanding of their situation in relation to the labour market.

¹ Global Employment Trends for Youth, ILO 2006

Executive Summary

In 2004, a number of major international and regional youth organisations mobilised themselves into a Youth Consultative Group (YCG) to advise the High-Level Panel² of the YEN on how best to support active youth participation in youth employment policy development around the world, by drawing on their extensive networks.

Building on their global work, including a review of youth participation in the development of the 41 NAPs submitted to the United Nations in 2004-2005³ and experiences in the YEN Lead Countries, the YCG, in partnership with the YEN Secretariat, has produced this guide for youth to facilitate and motivate young peoples' participation in youth employment policy-making. This guide is part of ongoing efforts to systemise the substantive and meaningful engagement of young people in the development and implementation of youth employment strategies.

This publication also provides guidance for other stakeholders, primarily governments, on engaging with youth. Through highlighting good practices on youth participation, empowerment and capacity building in relation to youth employment policy-making, it demonstrates the added value of youth involvement.

The **first** section of this guide provides a brief overview on the broader issue of why youth should be engaged in the policymaking process. It highlights the main issues, debates and literature in this regard, including defining who youth are and how to ensure their effective representation. This section explores why a focus on employment is so critical for youth and the value of their involvement in policymaking.

The **second** section concisely explores the concepts of youth participation and empowerment related to employment policy issues. This section also explains the different levels of participation that can be achieved and identifies the relevant tools and methods used by youth groups to achieve sustainable participation as well as by youth-serving organisations⁴ to build the capacity of youth and to empower them to participate effectively.

² Twelve leaders and policy experts in the field of youth employment from throughout the world were appointed by the ILO, World Bank and United Nations in 2001 as members of the High-Level Panel on Youth Employment. The Panellists role has been to advise the YEN on youth employment policy as well as mobilize opinion and action in favour of youth employment worldwide. In December 2006, in parallel with the conclusion of tenure of Mr. Kofi Annan as UN Secretary-General, the High-Level Panel announced that it had completed its 5 year mandate set out in 2001.

³ See the UNDESA / YEN Publication, *Putting Commitments into Action: A Review of National Action Plans on youth employment* (2007). These submissions included both finalised NAPs and progress reports towards the development of NAPs.

⁴ A youth-serving organisation can be defined as any organisation set up to serve the needs of youth including schools, sports clubs and other community-based social groups. In the context of this guide the term predominantly refers to youth focused NGOs and any bilateral and multilateral programming specifically focussing on youth.

Furthermore, this section provides detailed guidance on what youth can do to get involved in youth employment policy activities at different levels and charts successes and challenges faced by youth involved in youth employment policy processes through a series of case studies.

The **third** section guides youth on how to set up youth employment related projects. As well as practical tips, this section highlights a number of successful examples of youth-led employment-related projects. Profiles of over 30 projects can be found in **Annex 1**. This section also highlights ways in which the YCG can support youth organisations in setting up or scaling up employment-related activities as well as helping them to better participate in policy-making processes.

The **fourth** section of the guide catalogues a range of useful tools, resources and potential partner organisations which can assist youth organisations to participate more effectively in decision-making processes.

Whilst focusing specifically on the employment question, the rationale behind this guide is to provide practical information and good practices on participation which could also help youth engage with decision-makers on a range of youth development issues. In doing this the guide draws heavily on YEN Core partner literature.⁵

The publication of this guide is in line with the commitment of the YCG to support both their members and other youth groups, through the provision of practical advice, tools and support, and to obtain their rightful place amongst those decision-makers responsible for the drafting and implementation of youth employment policies. This guide is a reflection of the YCG members' own experiences. It is also an expression of hope on how the participation of young people in policy-making processes can be strengthened.

⁵ The generic information on youth participation and empowerment presented in this guide draws primarily on the work of the UN Programme on Youth as well as a range of other sources. Readers looking for a detailed generic guide to these issues should see the UN Programme on Youth publication, *Making Commitments Matter – A toolkit for young people to evaluate national youth policy*, available at www.un.org/youth.