

YOUTH 21

Building for Change Multi-Stakeholder Meeting, 15-16 March Global Youth Leadership Forum on Inclusive Governance, 17-18 March

CONCEPT NOTE

CONTEXT

Since the turn of the millennium the global commitment to achieve the MDGs has triggered an unprecedented global partnership for development. However, many developing countries are currently lagging behind some development targets, impairing their ability to achieve the MDGs by 2015. There are many reasons for this, globally, not least the global economic, food and energy crises. These have impeded the processes of youth inclusion in initiatives geared toward realization of MDGs. The presence of a large numbers of unemployed youth is increasingly seen by most international actors as strongly correlated to lapses in democratic governance and in many instances this might be true. There are both positive and negative factors associated with the growing number of young people in the world.

Today, there are more people under the age of 25 than ever, totaling nearly 3 billion or almost half of the total global population; 1.3 billion of that total are between the age of 12 and 24. These youth live, by and large, in cities and towns; the cities of the developing world account for over 90% of the world's urban growth and youth account for a large percentage of those inhabitants. It is estimated that as many as 60% of all urban dwellers will be under the age of 18 by 2030 (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2003). The combined burden of a youth bulge and shrinking job market has left millions of young people jobless, underemployed and excluded from economic opportunities. The protests and sometimes violent demonstrations that we have seen in 2011 in Wall Street, London, Tahrir Square, Chile, Spain and many other cities in the world testified of the growing frustrations, in particular of the younger generations.

This demographic "youth bulge" provides a unique window of opportunity in which youth globally can be engaged in creating a more sustainable, just and equitable world. There are key global events which enable such engagement, including upcoming Rio +20 conference, in which youth can have direct impact on the decisions made by global leaders. The role of social media, which has proven to be a powerful instrument in the hands of youth, has a critical role in bringing about democracy. To this end, UN-Habitat and UNDP are geared up to engage young people (women and men) from around the world including governments, international partners, private sector players in an initiative entitled "Youth 21: Building for Change".

UNDP and UN Habitat recognize that a better, more democratic and inclusive world cannot be fashioned save with the involvement, leadership and participation of those most affected by it, the youth. Youth 21 brings together some of the most accomplished young men and women to dialogue on a broad variety of policy issues. Youth 21 is premised on the understanding that the youth are the foundation and pillars of more democratic and sustainable development pathways. They represent both present and future leadership and possess an abiding interest in the post-2015 agenda, democratic governance and inclusive urban governance.

The majority of youth are eager-the prevailing global socio-economic and political difficulties notwithstanding-to contribute meaningfully to national development processes, and demonstrate resilience and constructive engagement in their societies. The structural weaknesses in political and economic governance systems and processes across the globe have until now severely constrained youth leadership and participation in the

governance and development processes at the local, national and global levels. This exclusion of youth from major national and local democratic processes is an obstacle to fully harnessing the capacities and potential of young people as peacebuilders and agents of positive change. Changing this situation requires commitment by all stakeholders, leadership and the direct agency of young people in crafting the desired change to a more inclusive order.

The UN recognizes the centrality of programmes, policies and legislation that recognize the role and contribution of youth to sustainable development, democratic governance, global peace, environmental sustainability and inclusive economic growth. UNDP and UN Habitat, in particular, support the role of governments and development partners in devising innovative ways of enhancing youth participation in urban governance, electoral processes and socio-economic and sustainable human development of their societies. We see a clear nexus between youth leadership and participation and the education for democracy.

Education for democracy should begin with the young, to promote democratic values and principles at an early age, and also focus on guiding youth to learn and exercise democratic leadership. Education is also critical for empowering citizens to hold accountable those institutions designed to put laws and policies into effect that will safeguard their rights. In this regard, the Youth 21 Summit will provide space for activities, including media and political outreach, all of which are necessary to strengthen democratic citizenship and ensure effective popular participation.

Youth 21 will be held during March 15th to 18th in Nairobi, Kenya. **Youth 21: Building for Change** will be held from March 15th to 16th is, an international multi-stakeholder consultation, led by UN-HABITAT devoted to strengthening the youth engagement and participation within the UN Architecture. The two overarching topics that will be discussed are the mandate for the newly announced Special Advisor on Youth for the UN Secretary-General and the establishment of a Permanent Forum on Youth Issues. The meeting will produce an outcome statement where governments, youth, UN agencies and others will give the Secretary-General and the rest of the world a strong message about the need for a strong youth presence in the UN.

Global Youth Leadership Forum on Democratic Governance will be held from the March 17th to 18th, 2012 led by UNDP will focus on youth leadership and participation in democratic governance and sustainable development. The Forum will provide a global space to share perspectives, experience and concrete proposal to ensure the participation young women and men in Governance at the global, regional, national and subnational levels. The Forum will also support the Youth 21 initiative to promote the youth engagement and participation in the United Nations.

The Forum will have a particular focus on south-south learning and exchanges on the participation of young women and men in political, civic, economic and social process. The Forum will be a part of the initiative to catalyse the emergence of an inter-continental global youth partnership for democratic governance and sustainable human development.

The Forum will seek to build innovative partnership with UN Agencies; youth led organisations, governments, foundations and private sector to promote youth leadership and space to explore the interface between democratic governance and sustainable human developments at the national and international level. The various sessions in the Forum will seek to get the perspectives and proposals from young people on post-2015 development landscape and the RIO+20 agenda. It will pay particular attention to obstacles, opportunities and enablers of youth participation and leadership for agenda-setting in these areas. The Forum will seek to inform policy reforms at the Global (UN level), continental, regional and national levels. The Forum outcome will be a statement reflecting collective youth positions on issues covered by the agenda below. The outcome statement will constitute an advocacy platform for future and consolidate a strategic engagement module on these issues

Youth 21 takes place on African soil, will host a special session focused on Africa in the form of an Inter-generational dialogue.

OBJECTIVES

- Assess opportunities for increased youth leadership and participation in governance processes at the global level, including post-2015 and the Rio+20 debates and processes
- Promote acceleration of youth leadership and participation in democratic governance processes broadly and urban governance specifically;
- Promote increased participation and leadership of young people in economic, environmental, and political at national, regional, continental and global levels;

- Develop a tentative programme of action for increasing the participation and leadership of young people in post-2015 and Rio+20 processes;
- Share information on progress regarding youth leadership and participation in democratizing urban governance, monitoring governance and sustainable urban development initiatives. The African Union Heads of State and Government declared 2011, the Year of the Youth. In North Africa and the Arab world youth led revolutions against long-established repressive regimes. Youth 21 will share experiences on this and the lessons learnt for democratic governance generally and sustainable urban development, specifically;
- Share information on the extent to which national governments, multilateral institutions, inter-governmental bodies and UN agencies are implementing youth empowerment laws and policies; and
- Share best practices across themes, countries and regions on how best to promote youth leadership and participation in democratizing urban governance as well as achieving inclusive and sustainable development.
- Share experiences on the use of social media and ICTs to achieve increased youth leadership and participation in urban governance and democratic governance, generally.

KEY OUTCOME(S)

Youth 21 will offer concrete policy-relevant and development-oriented recommendations in relation to increased Youth leadership and participation for democratic governance, inclusive growth and achievement of sustainable development goals. The recommendations will feed into requisite policy and institutional reforms at national, regional, continental and global levels.

Youth 21 will also seek to catalyse the emergence of a global movement/partnership of 21st Century Youth for Democratic Governance and Sustainable development drawn from a wide cross-section of geographies, themes, disciplines, cultures and political persuasions.

KEY OUTPUTS

- A consensus position or outcome statement on youth leadership and participation in shaping democratic urban governance, post-2015 and Rio+20 agenda.
- A final statement from the Building for Change segment of the meeting advising the Secretary General on the mandate and focused areas of activity for the Special Advisor on Youth, and further mechanisms to engage youth globally such as a Permanent Forum on Youth.
- Media outreach and outcome statement.
- Web-based information and press releases (including social media).
- Inter-generational dialogue between current youth leaders and prominent global actors on issues of democratic governance, post-2015 and Rio+ 20.
- Roadmap on accelerating youth leadership and participation in global, continental and national governance (perhaps, local as well)
- Data-base of Youth initiatives on democratic governance and sustainable development
- Database of regional and international actors working on Youth and democracy issues