



DFID | CSO

Youth Working Group



Key points

- Investment in young people has significant economic, social and human gains in the short and long term.
- Young people are essential partners across all aspects of international development, from formulating goals and designing policy to implementing programmes and adopting lessons learned.
- Investment in youth should be a key part of the post-2015 agenda.

Overseas Development Institute

ODI is the UK's leading independent think tank on international development and humanitarian issues.

ODI Project Briefings provide a focused and specialised summary of a project, a country study or regional analysis.

This and other ODI Project Briefings are available from www.odi.org.uk

Youth and international development policy: the case for investing in young people

Paola Perezniето and James Hamilton Harding

The world now has the largest generation aged 15 to 24 in history, and almost 90% of these young women and men live in developing countries. High fertility rates in the developing world mean that their share of the global population is likely to increase over the next 20 years (UNICEF, 2012) and many developing countries are already experiencing a 'youth bulge'.

The international community is assessing its progress toward the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and preparing the post-2015 agenda. This presents a one-time window of opportunity for a concerted international effort to help developing countries reap a 'demographic dividend' from educated, healthy and gainfully employed young women and men, and achieve far higher economic growth rates.

Young people are diverse, with distinct needs and interests shaped by their gender, context, ability, wealth, and age. For all of

them, however, youth is a time of transition: from school to work, from dependence to autonomy, and into sexual maturity. Investment in youth generates the greatest returns when started in early childhood and continued through these transitions.

Experts interviewed for ODI's research on *Youth and international development policy: prospects and challenges* agree that young people, particularly adolescents, are more adaptable and learn more quickly than adults. Investment in this age cohort is an effective development strategy because it generates changes that will last throughout their lifetime, with higher absolute returns than investment in older adults.

The benefits to countries in terms of human, social and economic development include increased productivity, lower health costs, enhanced social capital, and greater individual and community resilience to cope with shocks. Investment in mechanisms for youth participation at every level can improve policy and programming, promote civic engagement and encourage good governance. Investment in young people is, in short, an effective way to meet development priorities amid the global contraction of development assistance.

This briefing accompanies a report analysing secondary evidence, key expert interviews and case studies to argue for the application of a youth lens to development agency funding and policies.

Why invest in young people?

Inequalities fuel poverty, undermining the impact of economic growth on poverty reduction. Age itself is a vector of inequality, excluding millions of young women and men from access to financial resources, work opportu-

- Today's youth generation is the largest cohort of young people ever: 1.2 billion people aged 15 to 24 (Beyond 2015, 2013).
- In 2012, almost 75 million young people were unemployed worldwide (World Bank, 2012b).
- 34% of women aged 20-24 in the developing world were married before the age of 18 and 16 million girls aged 15-19 give birth every year (the vast majority in developing countries), accounting for 11% of all births worldwide (WHO, 2011).
- By the end of the century, 41% of the world's youth will be African (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2012).
- 20% of adolescents in any given year will experience a mental health problem, most often depression or anxiety.

nities, social welfare mechanisms and decision-making spaces, despite their rights to all of these.

This exclusion is compounded by further inequalities based on gender, income, ethnicity, disability, class or location and can become a source of social tension and even civic unrest. Young women are particularly disadvantaged by entrenched discriminatory social norms.

This briefing focuses on six distinct but inter-related areas where the investment of development assistance in the most vulnerable young people would expand the reach of development assistance and support poverty reduction through equitable growth.

Post-primary education

A high quality, comprehensive education that is relevant to young people's lives can build resilience among youth and pave the way for livelihoods that will contribute to the development of their communities. It is recognised by the UN as the best method of building the skills required to meet labour market demands, with basic and life skills needed to find decent work and continue in education. Comprehensive sexuality and risk education can help to prevent early pregnancy and HIV and AIDS as well as the risky behaviours that gain prevalence in adolescence, such as smoking or alcohol consumption.

Inequalities in access to education, skills and training, however, can perpetuate and exacerbate other disadvantages faced by young people. Those with disabilities, for example, are among the most excluded, often cut off from education opportunities and disadvantaged by discrimination and social exclusion. The enrolment of girls and young women drops significantly after primary education and similar trends are observed among other marginalised groups.

Governments continue to play an instrumental role in providing secondary and post-secondary education. There is, however, a greater role to be played by the private sector, facilitated by development agencies as knowledge brokers. This sector can provide coordination and technical support to improve the relevance of curricula, increase youth employability, and facilitate investment in relevant quality education. Information communication technology represents one of the greatest growth areas for youth employment and should be embedded in curricula to provide modern labour-market skills and create pathways out of poverty.

Work

Half the world's unemployed are young people, with youth three times more likely to be unemployed than adults (UNESCO, 2012). Similarly, young people, especially women and those from marginalised groups, are more likely to work in the informal sector or in unsafe and exploitative conditions. Decent

work fosters social inclusion, not just through wages, but by forging identity and social networks.

Young people need training that meets the demands of the private sector, both to find jobs and to create their own businesses. Entrepreneurship and sustainable businesses generate economic growth and jobs, but also stimulate structural change and innovation by encouraging the development of entrepreneurial skills and attitudes among future leaders.

Entrepreneurial and technical training must, in turn, be combined with adequate financial services, but youth may lack access to existing finance options. Development assistance that works through governments, NGOs and the private sector can support youth entrepreneurship, apprenticeships, on-the-job training, and other non-traditional routes into employment. It can also draw on the competitive advantage of young men and women in particular sectors, including agriculture in which 65% of African youth are primarily employed. Solutions should be contextually appropriate, mitigating the impact of inequalities on employment and opportunities.

Governments have a clear responsibility to ensure the rights of young people at work, including hiring and firing practices and collective bargaining, consistent with international conventions. In countries emerging from conflict, in particular, youth employment matters for poverty eradication, sustainable development, and lasting peace. Helping young people find employment should, therefore, form a key component of peace-building or conflict resolution processes.

Health

Gender-based power imbalances and discriminatory social practices have a disproportionate impact on girls' and young women's sexual and reproductive health. Early and forced marriage, unplanned pregnancy and exposure to sexually-transmitted diseases undermine their education, their work prospects and their health, with a knock-on effect on their families. One study on the depletion of human capital found that if, in Burundi, today's cohort of girls were to complete an additional year of secondary education, their lifetime earnings would be equivalent to 68% of the country's annual GDP, but many are held back by unplanned or unwanted pregnancies (Chabaan and Cunningham, 2011).

Young people, in particular, face other health risks, including tobacco use, drug use, excessive alcohol consumption, unprotected sex and the increased likelihood of sexually-transmitted diseases, as well as poor diet and lack of physical activity. These have consequences in later life, in the form of non-communicable diseases such as lung cancer, diabetes, and heart disease, depleting productive human capital into the future.

Sustainability

Young people stand to be among those most seriously affected by climate change (UNDESA, 2010), which threatens their livelihoods, particularly in rural areas but also in high-risk urban areas, such as settlements along riverbeds. The impact on rural areas, in particular, may drive more people into precarious peri-urban communities with all the associated risks to health, livelihoods and opportunities.

Youth are instrumental to reducing the exposure to such risks and altering the trajectory of climate change by learning about, understanding and improving resource management. The resulting community knowledge-sharing can aid climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Climate finance is increasing, with a strong focus on green growth. Economic opportunities in the green economy to preserve and restore the quality of the environment can be found in agriculture, industry, research and development, services, and administration. Young people looking for work opportunities, and who are open to innovation and new knowledge, are well suited to jobs in these sectors.

Conflict and crime

Young people are affected by violence as witnesses, victims and perpetrators. They are deeply affected by displacement, loss of livelihoods, reduced opportunities and threats to social cohesion. There is evidence of strong linkages between poverty, lack of opportunities, inadequate education, and violence amongst youth, creating a negative cycle that entrenches their disadvantages (McLean Hilker and Fraser, 2009). However, the vast majority do not get involved in violence at all. Instead, many make a positive contribution to peace-building and development. Investments that help young people meet their socio-economic demands can, therefore, benefit national security and reduce exposure to civil disorder and even armed conflict.

Civic engagement

Adult civic participation is determined by habits of participation developed during youth and has a positive correlation with education and employment. Supporting young people to engage socially, politically and economically and creating opportunities for them to contribute to development processes creates effective policy and builds a generation of engaged citizens.

Too often, however, their engagement is inhibited by traditional, customary and legal structures that do not value their perspectives. In Africa, youth-voter turnout has declined since 2000 across the continent, except in Malawi, Tanzania and Uganda (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2012). Dramatic examples of youth engagement in political and social processes, such as the Arab Spring, are often treated as threats to stability rather than opportunities to harness

the creative input and energy of young people to transform societies and promote democracy. Fostering youth participation is a bulwark for democracy and a chance to harness the contributions of the next generation. Building on youth voices, particularly at the grassroots level, must be part of policy, programming and implementation to increase accountability.

Youth, development priorities and the post-2015 agenda

There is strong support from international aid organisations and policy-makers to retain poverty reduction, human development, environmental sustainability and economic growth in the emerging post-2015 agenda, underpinned by good governance and democratic values. Young people have a pivotal role in all of these areas. Recent fora, such as the Bali High Level Panel meeting on the post-2015 agenda, have called for equal partnerships with developing countries for international development. New partnerships are now going beyond government-to-government relationships to include civil society groups, organisations of vulnerable and marginalised people and the private sector.

Today's aid architecture has a greater number of actors and diverse sources of funding (including China and Brazil), climate finance funds, philanthropists, global funds, and financial institutions that provide fewer concessional loans and grants. Donors, national governments, youth activists and practitioners must find new ways to work within this new aid landscape to explore all possible avenues to support youth in developing countries.

Young people are active partners in development in their communities, as well as in international fora. Youth movements and activists are channelling their productivity toward supporting their communities and countries to benefit every generation. They are strong partners in sustainable and rights-based development. It is critical, therefore, to foster their meaningful participation from the grassroots through institutionalised support mechanisms.

During their participation in the post-2015 agenda-setting process, young people have expressed their priorities and made a case for the visibility of the issues that matter to them and to society, including good governance, quality and relevant education, access to affordable health-care, access to decent work and progress toward environmental sustainability. Donors, national governments, international organisations, the private sector and national civil society groups all have a key role to play in promoting young people's rights through funding and capacity-building of young leaders and creating clear pathways to meaningful participation in governance at every level.



Overseas Development
Institute

203 Blackfriars Road,
London SE1 8NJ

Tel +44 (0)20 7922 0300

Fax +44 (0)20 7922 0399

Email
publications@odi.org.uk

Readers are encouraged to reproduce material from ODI Project Briefings for their own publications, as long as they are not being sold commercially. As copyright holder, ODI requests due acknowledgement and a copy of the publication. For online use, we ask readers to link to the original resource on the ODI website.

The views presented in this paper are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of ODI.

© Overseas Development
Institute 2013
ISSN 1756-7602

Conclusions and recommendations

Young people need support to become catalysts for poverty reduction, good governance and economic growth and to ensure that their voices are heard. There are specific ways in which investment in youth can be put to work to achieve the greatest benefits in terms of economic, social and human rights.

- Young women and young men must become more engaged in transforming the lives of their communities and their countries. Development assistance should continue to fund work by civil society and non-government organisations in developing countries to foster youth participation and civic engagement and provide technical assistance to governments to support spaces for youth participation.
- Young women are particularly disadvantaged by entrenched discriminatory social norms. Work with young people must recognise gender differences and provide equitable opportunities for young men and women in all relevant areas of policy and programming.
- While some social protection mechanisms are improving the situation of young people in a few countries, social protection is, in general, under-used for this age group. Cash-transfer programmes, for example, could enable girls to transition from primary to secondary school. Cash-for-work programmes could enable young people to develop transferable skills while earning an income. Asset-transfer programmes, particularly for rural youth, could include capacity-building components to provide pathways out of poverty.
- There is a need for disaggregated data by age, gender, disability, and other factors that

influence the risk of youth exclusion. Donors should ensure the adequate disaggregation of data collected in all their programmes and projects. Support is needed for efforts to collect data on youth, including real-time data collected by young people themselves.

- Inequalities cut across all issues related to young people and need to be accounted for specifically in the post-2015 agenda, which should include youth-focused targets and indicators. Based on the evidence, an international agenda focused on extending and improving education and expanding work opportunities for youth should be the cornerstone of development planning.
- Donors, national governments, youth activists and practitioners must find new ways of working within this new aid landscape to explore all possible avenues to support youth in developing countries. The UK's Department for International Development (DFID), for example, prioritises young women and adolescent girls in a number of areas and these could be integrated into a comprehensive youth agenda. DFID is well-placed to become a leader in youth-centred development, rejuvenating its commitment to design transformative interventions with and for youth, and sharing good practice examples with other donors.

In addition to funding key policy and programmatic areas for young people, international development agencies have a role to play in fostering new partnerships and ensuring they meet solid rights and equity standards.

Written by: Paola Perezniето, ODI Research Fellow (p.perezniето) and James Hamilton Harding, Consultant (jameshamiltonharding@gmail.com)

References, endnotes and project information

References

Beyond 2015 (2013) 'Population Dynamics: Realizing the Future We Want for All'. The Post-2015 Development Agenda Global Thematic Consultation. February 2013. Brussels: Beyond 2015 campaign.

Chaaban, J., and Cunningham, W. (2011) 'Measuring the Economic Gain of Investing in Girls: The Girl Effect Dividend'. The World Bank Human Development Network. Children and Youth Unit & Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Network. Gender Unit. August 2011. Washington DC: World Bank.

McLean Hilker, L. and Fraser, E. (2009). 'Youth exclusion, violence, conflict and fragile states'. Report prepared for DFID's Equity and Rights Team. Final report: 30th April. London: UK Department for International Development.

Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2012) African Youth: Fulfilling the Potential. London: Mo Ibrahim Foundation

Perezniето, P. and Hamilton Harding, J. (2013) 'Investing in Youth in International Development Policy: Making the case'. ODI project report. London: Overseas Development Institute.

UNESCO (2012) Youth and skills: Putting education to work. Education for All progress report. Paris: United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture.

UNDESA (2010) *World Youth Report 2010*. The Youth and Climate Change. New York: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

UNICEF (2012) Progress for Children: A Report Card on Adolescents. New York: UNICEF.

WHO (2011) Young people: health risks and solutions (Fact sheet N°345). Geneva: World Health Organization. Accessed 11 March 2013 from: <http://bit.ly/PBPPyouth1>

Project information

ODI's research project on *Youth and international development policy: prospects and challenges* brings together evidence of how investment in young people can help to meet development priorities. This research has been commissioned by Y Care International on behalf of the DFID/CSO Youth Working Group with support from Restless Development, War Child and Youth Business International.