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WPAY! Including the family Unit

“Our cultures value wisdom and maturity over youth. But we can no longer say to them ‘I have been young, but you have never been old’ because they can respond by saying ‘but you have never been young in the world I am growing up in’. What that underscores is the imperative for greater dialogue and engagement on the issues of the moment. We who are in a position of leadership and authority must engage and involve them in creating their future”.

Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi (Traditional Leader)

Introduction

This paper outlines the history of the World Programme of Action (WPAY) and of the International Year of the Youth (IYY) to date. It also briefly analyses the links between the WPAY and the IYY 2010. It further provides an overview of the situational analysis of Youth in the Pacific region in the context of Intergenerational Relations and Youth Participation and discusses the overall challenges facing the WPAY. The paper concludes with suggestions and concrete recommendations on advancing the work of stakeholders in addressing youth issues.

Background World Programme of Action and International Year of the Youth

The first official recognition by UN Member States and the UN family with respect to the roles and responsibilities of young people dates back to 1965 when they endorsed the Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples¹. The Declaration, set against the backdrop of the UN Charter, included the need to secure a sustainable future and to take all necessary actions to raise young men and young women to believe and promote the principles of liberty, peace, equality, love, respect and creativity. It also named the family as a key player in achieving this.

¹ A/Res/20/2037 Declaration on the Promotion Amongst Youth of Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples

Following the Declaration, two decades later, the United Nations General Assembly made a historical move by marking the year 1985 as the International Year of the Youth under the theme: Participation, Development and Peace². UN member states highlighted the potential role young people play in shaping national developments during the year.

The momentum in the recognition of Youth as partners continued and UN member states adopted the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) in 1995. The WPAY, had 10 priority areas of youth issues to be addressed namely: Education, Employment, Hunger and Poverty, Health, Environment, Drug Abuse, Juvenile Delinquency, Leisure-Time, Girls and Young Women, Full and effective participation of youth in the life of society and in Decision making. In 2007, UN Member states further adopted 5 priority areas: HIV/AIDS, Information and Communications technology, Inter-generational Issues, Armed Conflict and Globalization. The WPAY framework identified practical guidelines and actions at national level with support at regional and international level. It focused on strengthening national youth stakeholder capacities and measures to increase the quality of life for young people.

In 1999, the General Assembly endorsed the recommendation by the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth meeting, Lisbon, 1998, that August 12th be declared the International Youth Day. Following this, history witnessed the first observation of the International Youth Day in 2000. The day has since been marked with the following themes:

2001: Addressing Health and Unemployment,
2002: Now and for the Future, Youth Action for Sustainable Development,
2003: Finding decent and productive work for young people everywhere,
2004: Youth in an Intergenerational Society,
2005: WPAY+10 Making Commitments Matter,
2006: Tackling Poverty Together,
2007: Be seen, Be Heard Youth Participation for Development,
2008 Youth and Climate Change Time for Action,
2009 Sustainability Our Challenge Our Future.

Once again the UN Member states endorsed August 12th, 2010- August 12th 2011 as the Year of the Youth (IYY) with the theme: Dialogue and Mutual Understanding. The framework of the IYY identifies the following three key objectives: 1. Create awareness (increase commitment and investment in youth) 2. Mobilize and engage (increase youth participation and partnerships) 3. Connect and build bridges (increase intercultural understanding among youth).

² *Economic & Social Affairs World. 2010. Programme of Action for YOUTH. Pg 1.*

At the UN level, it appears that there is ample support and recognition for young people. However the gap between such support and ensuring that the young men in a village in Tuvalu or the young woman in the highlands of Papua New Guinea are informed and can benefit from the impact of these decisions at the highest level is not always apparent. Translating international commitments onto community and national level remains a challenge.

WPAY links to IYY 2010-2011

The objectives of the IYY 2010 framework are fully aligned with the objectives of the World Programme of Action. The first objective 'Create Awareness' calls for the public and private sector to invest in youth development, stakeholders to recognize the contributions of young people in achieving the MDGs, address the needs of disadvantaged youth and conduct research to inform youth policies and programmes. These suggested actions correspond with the proposed actions of the WPAY under Education, Drug Abuse, Juvenile Delinquency, Girls and Young Women to name a few.

The remaining two objectives of the IYY also have corresponding action points under the WPAY. It is clear that whether intentional or not, the WPAY has, since its adoption, remained relevant to both the Year of the Youths and all themes of the international day. The questions of 'relevance' can be interpreted as the UN Programme of Youth either being under resourced, limited in capacity or fragmented- that it cannot provide advice to UN member states on the topics of International Youth Day/ Year themes.

According to the WPAY Publication 2010, we are at the end of the third phase- 2001 to 2010 period, focusing on the further implementation and evaluation of the action points: it attempts to suggest appropriate adjustments to long-term objectives and specific measures to improve the situations of young people in the societies in which they live³.

Meeting the objectives of the WPAY: Pacific Experience

The UNICEF State of the Pacific Report (2005) estimates that there are 1.6 million people aged 15-24 years in the Pacific Region. This accounts for 20%-50% of the nation's population under the age of 25. Traditional culture and the respect for elders and authority, coupled with urbanization, globalization and hardship feature prominently in the daily lives of our young people. Furthermore, Youth Stakeholders such as Departments responsible for Youth and Youth NGO's are under resourced, lacking capacity and having to compete with other national priorities for budgetary allocations and political support. The Youth Civil Society has also faced the same predicament,

³ *Economic & Social Affairs World. 2010. Programme of Action for YOUTH. Pg 12*

being more vulnerable, as programs tend to be ad hoc based on available government and donor funding.

The Pacific, although often isolated from other regions, have carried out a number of activities to mark the Year of the Youth 2010, in countries such as the Cook Islands, Fiji, Nauru, Vanuatu, Tuvalu and Tonga. Across the countries there have been events such as Dance Off Competitions, information booths, designing t-shirts, youth forums, clean-up campaigns, dedicated church services and a Youth Portal to name a few. Additionally, Pacific countries do acknowledge the International year of the Youth.

The WPAY unlike other Plan/Platform of Actions has not strongly translated itself in the national agenda in the Pacific. Several overarching key Regional Youth Documents such as the Pacific Youth Strategy 2010, State of the Pacific Youth Report 2005, Suva Point Declaration 2009 do not make any reference to the WPAY. Personal observations note that the WPAY is a policy document that has been loosely used by the United Nations, Government departments and divisions responsible for Youth and has been non-existent amongst the Civil Society. This of course weakens the value of the WPAY, as it does not seem to have visibility in a region like ours. However, despite the absence of references, youth development initiatives on the ground achieve action points noted in the WPAY. The question remains: Do Pacific Youth Stakeholders identify as being part of the international movement of youth stakeholders and share its vision?

As mentioned earlier, the 1965 Declaration⁴ states inclusion of the family unit as integral to addressing youth development. The question begs: Why wasn't the family unit kept as a partner in finding solutions to youth challenges? I would like to attempt answering this question from my personal experience. At present, it would be difficult for me to naturally consider taking part in activities that would aim at strengthening relationships with my parents. Growing up in a society, rooted in traditional culture, I am taught to listen, follow, and ask no questions. There is minimal room for dialogue, and certainly not on matters such as relationships or personal issues. My relationship with my father is stricter than that with my mother. I do hope I would find the grace and strength to endure programs that aim to break barriers within families.

Monitoring and Evaluation has not been a strong asset as it appears that countries and regions have steadily invested in research and data collection but it's the implementation phase of the recommendations that progresses slowly. Furthermore, the presence of experts to monitor and evaluate the impacts of youth programmes on the ground is almost absent. In the Pacific, youth attend church functions and a lot of youth-related events, but little is known about the impact and these activities remain often unreported.

⁴ Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples

Furthermore, young people's participation in policy making remains a challenge. A friend of mine from Tuvalu, an island state known for the impact of climate change, recently said: "Getting young people's voices heard sometimes feel like climbing a tree full of thorns". He is right, we talk about youth inclusion in policy making, but we should not assume that young people always know how to participate. My peers have repeatedly said they can only be heard in places where they feel secure and can openly express their views. They often want to be involved in discussions relating to them; however they need to understand the realities and the complexities of international and national development processes to be able to engage effectively and appropriately. It takes courage for young people to speak up, particularly in cultures where young people are told to keep quiet. It takes adults to reassure young people that their voices can be meaningful, even though they may lack the experience that adults have.

Recommendations

WPAY Teeth: There have been a considerable number of research reports on situational analysis of Youth the international level such as the World Youth Reports 2003, 2005, 2007, Growing Together Publication to name a few. Whilst these provide important information, greater efforts are required to strengthen our approach in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation phases to youth development. This would require a deeper commitment by member states to implement and report. Additionally, it allows us have a steady account of our progress and solidarity in meeting them.

Coordination and Partnerships: Ideally Member States should consider establishing a separate UN Entity tasked with youth issues, similarly to what was done for UN Women. It can also be argued however, that youth issues are cross-cutting and that most UN Agencies have a mandate to work with them. There is however a need to strengthen coordination among UN Agencies and to assign clear roles and responsibilities. The numerous UN inter-agency working groups on youth are often meeting to share information but there is room for improved collaboration and greater ownership and accountability. Furthermore, the effective coordination of youth programmes and policies requires partnerships: between governments, donors, communities, NGO's, churches and young people. On a regional level, it is worth calling for collaborations amongst regional agencies and international agencies that are responsible for youth.

Basket Funding: In support of youth stakeholders in developing countries, Pooling of Funds by donors, specifically in achieving youth related challenges would assist national countries run programmes/initiatives that meet their youth priorities and ultimately that of the WPAY and related international human rights conventions. This would need to be coupled with accountability of countries to properly manage these funds.