

# *Samah Hadid*

## **Intercultural and Intergenerational dialogue from an Asia Pacific Perspective**

### **Introduction**

Using the UN framework approach for the International Year of Youth the discussion paper will explore regional frameworks for intercultural and intergenerational dialogue; outline the gaps, challenges and opportunities for initiatives in the Asia Pacific region in particular and internationally.

The aim of this discussion paper is to outline regional experiences of successful youth participation models and intercultural dialogue frameworks. These can be used for future design of youth participation policies and programs.

### **Challenges**

- Present challenges facing young people can be broad ranging and common across the age group, while other challenges are particular to certain categories of young people. Issues of poverty, youth unemployment, marginalization and lack of youth participation opportunities are widespread and yet also severely felt by young people in developing countries. These challenges include:
- Demographic changes, i.e. aging societies, lower birth rates, family structures have impacted on the social, economic and cultural conditions underpinning young people's lives.
- 85 per cent of young people live in developing countries, with 60 per cent of these in Asia. The largest proportion of the world's poorest youth can be found in South Asia, which accounts for 4 out of every 10 young people living on less than US\$ 1 or US\$ 2 a day.<sup>i</sup>
- Youth unemployment stood at 13 percent globally at the end of 2009, equaling 81 million young people. More than 36.4 million of this 15-24 year-olds were in Asia Pacific. The youth unemployment rate in South – East Asia and the Pacific is projected to peak to 14.6 per cent in 2011<sup>ii</sup>.
- The lack of institutional avenues and spaces for young people limit their participation. This is reflected on a regional level in Asia Pacific in its lack of regional institutional mechanisms fostering youth participation.
- A clear challenge within the process of youth participation and development is reaching young people from vulnerable backgrounds and communities. These groups

can include but are not limited to minority, indigenous, rural and migrant youth among others. Areas of vulnerability vary from country to country.

### **Intergenerational dialogue**

Adult- youth partnerships need to encompass different modes of attitudes and behavior. This would mean breaking down traditional communication barriers and power dynamics.

Youth-Adult Partnership can be defined in various ways, involving different principles including:

- Sharing decision making power equally
- Youth along with adults engage in planning, implementing, and evaluating work and programs related to present and future challenges
- Combines skills and insights of young people with experience and knowledge of adults
- Adult and youth partnerships meet the development needs of young people while investing in their leadership skills, equipping them for future leadership roles.
- It allows for meaningful dialogue between adults and young people
- An effective and meaningful adult – youth partnership requires investment in the skills and development of young people. This involves mentorship and training provided to young people.

### **Intercultural dialogue**

Intercultural dialogue occurs between and within cultures, faiths and ethnic communities. The meaningful exchange of ideas and attitudes has social benefits including sustaining cohesive and harmonious societies, and is an important step in conflict prevention.

Young people seem to be leading initiatives based on intercultural learning and dialogue. This is supported by research that indicates young people are far more accommodating of cultural diversity and different cultural ideas and beliefs <sup>iii</sup> However challenges of racism and xenophobia still cripple social and racial relations in numerous countries to varying degrees. This occurs and has effects across generations.

As it is reflected in the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action national and international dialogue amongst youth is crucial in building intercultural respect and understanding<sup>iv</sup>. Building networks among young people and different youth groups is also key in the elimination of racism, xenophobia and intolerance.

Information communication technology (ICT) has opened up new opportunities for intercultural and even intergenerational dialogue. The possibilities for non traditional forms of communication and global connectivity are very apparent. This can be tapped into by

organizations in reaching young people that are otherwise difficult to engage due to geography or separation from mainstream communities.

ICT has created a digital culture that encompasses dialogue on politics, social commentary, arts, music and plethora of other interests.

Social networking and media is a significant part of the ICT phenomenon. One does run the risk however of over estimating the role that social networking and media plays in creating positive change. It is however important to acknowledge that these spaces have become a frequent and important site of youth engagement and participation. It also has to be highlighted that a significant byproduct of social networking is dialogue created across cultures and in part across generations.

### **Regional frameworks for intercultural & intergenerational dialogue**

Various examples exist of relevant effective partnerships aimed at promoting intercultural dialogue among young people. These examples can be replicated across regions and explored when designing youth participation models.

- Oxfam International's Youth Partnerships program is an effective model of youth engagement. It has created linkages across developing and developed countries alike. This Australian funded program brings together 300 young people from 98 countries over a three year period promoting participation in annual forums, meeting groups and projects. Throughout the three year cycle, the OIYP program focuses on building skills and knowledge, supporting action and facilitating networking. In addition to networks amongst Action Partners, members of OIYP are given opportunities to network and form partnerships with many other organizations and communities around the world to support them in their work.
- Strong regional frameworks for intercultural and intergenerational dialogue exist for the European region. Intercultural dialogue is a cross cutting theme for the Council of Europe and the European Commission. An effective framework is the Council of Europe – European Union Youth Partnership Programme on Euro-Mediterranean co-operation, Human Rights Education and Intercultural Dialogue.<sup>v</sup>
  - Part of this framework is the important partnership with the Anna Lindh Foundation. The Anna Lindh Foundation supports the activities of the Euro-Mediterranean Region , the primary focus in is in fields human and social dialogue: Education and Youth; Culture and Arts; Peace and Co-existence; Values, Religion and Spirituality; Cities and Migration; Media.
- European Youth forum is a regional body of national youth councils and International Youth Organizations from across Europe. The EYF works with European Institutions, the Council of Europe and the United Nations in advocating on the needs and interests of young people.

When exploring the Asia-Pacific region, there appears a gap in regional frameworks fostering youth participation, intercultural and inter-generational dialogue. On a regional level in Asia and the Pacific there are various individual and ad hoc bodies working in part on intercultural dialogue across generations and youth participation. These programs exist within regional multilateral bodies on a formal or informal basis. They include:

### **ASEAN Youth**

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations promotes regional peace and stability, as well as active collaboration and mutual assistance on matters of common interest in the economic, social, cultural, technical, scientific and administrative fields. It has over the years promoted youth participation in institutional settings. Through Youth@ASEAN, an online portal for youth of ASEAN, young people in the region can interact and exchange information and knowledge. The primary purpose of Youth@ASEAN is to create meaningful networks and partnerships.

### **ASEM Youth Dialogue**

The Asia-Europe Foundation promotes greater mutual understanding between Asia and Europe through intellectual, cultural and people-to-people exchanges. Through ASEF, civil society concerns are included as a vital component of deliberations of the ASEM.

The annual ASEM Youth Dialogue provides a valuable channel through which youth in Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) countries can exchange perspectives on priority themes in the ASEM agenda. The focus is on the role and participatory nature of youth in the ASEM process, particularly with regard to providing solutions to identified common challenges.<sup>vi</sup> ASEM Dialogues create and foster networks among young people by encouraging a common vision.

### **Commonwealth Youth Programme**

CYP works to engage and empower young people (ages 15-29) to enhance their contribution to development in commonwealth countries. They do this by creating partnerships with young people, governments and other key stakeholders. It sits within The Commonwealth, a voluntary association of 54 countries that work together towards for shared goals in democracy and development. The Commonwealth Youth Caucus leads a network of young people which spreads across all 53 countries of the Commonwealth. There are five members of this caucus - the Pan-Commonwealth Youth Representative and representatives from the regions of Africa, the Caribbean, Asia and the South Pacific.

### **Case study - Indigenous youth: intercultural and intergenerational dialogue in practice**

Indigenous youth represent 50 to 70% of global indigenous populations; they play an important role in cultural identity formation and sustainability of cultural practices and traditions in indigenous communities.

Successful cross -generational partnerships and dialogue can exist in certain indigenous communities. In the case of Native Americans in the United States and in Latin America there exist effective examples of inter-generational communication that could provide a model for other cultural contexts and international decision making processes concerning adult – youth partnerships.

In Australia the National Indigenous Representative Body is a decision making body for indigenous Australians. It plays a critical role in supporting inter-generational dialogue among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. One of its principles is building a shared journey and vision between generations to ensure that a future plan is developed. It also aims to nurture future Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership. It promotes dialogue and active participation and investment of young people in the body. The goal of this kind of intergenerational dialogue is to ensure a lasting legacy for future generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The United Nations Global forum of indigenous peoples and the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues promote the active participation of indigenous young people. They have provided platforms and spaces for intergenerational dialogue and partnerships. Indigenous youth participate actively in many regional and international forums with their input ranging widely from human rights mechanisms, climate change mitigation and adaptation processes, to cultural preservation consultations. The United Nations Indigenous Youth Caucus has been actively contributing to the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues with their youth perspective and clear and tangible recommendations. The IYC comprises indigenous young people from various states, organizations, and socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.

However, the number of indigenous youth representatives present in international occasion is still limited. The barriers include financial limitations or limited seats, where youth representatives are often not given the priority. Other barriers include the denial of entry visas due political interference. Many indigenous youth are excluded from international conferences, especially those hosted by or in the United Nations Headquarters, due to their nationality or political orientation.

Access to information is a key factor determining indigenous youth's participation in decision-making. Rights education is another key area of improvement. Policies related to indigenous young people, such as education, vocational training, cultural survival and

environmental protection are often made by senior officers without input from indigenous youth for their opinions.

The indigenous youth participation example does however provide insight into best practice initiatives in the way of intergenerational and intercultural dialogue. This may warrant further research into indigenous practices in these countries. The approaches of indigenous youth participation in the UN system can always be improved but it does provide for a good practice model of youth participation that can be replicated in other areas of the UN system.

### **Recommendations**

**These recommendations apply to the United Nations system, civil society organizations and research institutes:**

#### **In the area of youth participation:**

- Organizations are encouraged to ensure representation of minority and marginalized young people in decisions about our issues, including through supporting representative bodies
- UN system to encourage youth participation in regional and international fora and processes, as well as capacity-building and training programs hosted by UN agencies
- Encourage member states to assist and implement youth parliaments within their countries
- Encourage youth sector and organizations to create greater regional coordination of youth groups and bodies
- Organizations should incorporate ICT's in youth participation programs and strategies. Allow young people to actively participate in the design for digital spaces that meet their needs and interests.

#### **In the area of intercultural dialogue :**

- Greater support and investment in intercultural and inter – generational dialogue is required for the Asia and the Pacific region
  - Investing in stronger institutional frameworks in existing organizations and bodies across the region is needed
- Support existing youth led and driven initiatives aimed at intercultural understanding and
- dialogue on regional and international levels
- Greater coordination of existing intercultural programs and youth based groups is needed on a regional level across the globe.

- UN system should encourage education systems and institutions to explore ways of incorporating intercultural learning into curricula, in pre-school, school and tertiary curricula, including out-of-school and non-formal education programmes
- Strengthening non formal education programmes and their commitment to human rights principles, intercultural learning and dialogue
- Youth organizations to support and implement public formal and non-formal education programs designed to promote respect for cultural diversity
- Seek youth participation in the development of regional and international strategies and frameworks aimed at eliminating racism, xenophobia and intolerance
- Support research and academic inquiry into identity formation and intercultural dialogue models for young people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century context
- Support arts projects and community cultural development which allow for the joint participation of adult and young people.

**In the area of intergenerational dialogue organizations are encouraged to:**

- Develop consultative mechanisms, advisory bodies including both young people and adults. These advisory bodies allow adults and young people to work together in planning, implementing, and evaluating relevant work and programs
- Encourage spaces and programs that are aimed at skills sharing and skills transfer between adults and young people in relevant areas of work
- Encourage mentorship programs that allow adults to support young people in professional endeavours, community and or volunteer work

**In the area of youth unemployment member states are encouraged to**

- Promote the entrepreneurial spirit amongst youth in society including encouraging financial and governmental institutions to provide long-term loans for young people to establish small and medium businesses that develop the economy on the long-run.
- Provide more support to the on-going training programs, and establish similar approaches in countries where training programs do not exist.
- Ensure that youth employment measures and successes are positive and efficient in the long-term and that jobs created and targeted at youth are in line with principles for sustainable development.
- Ensure the active participation and consultation of young people in design and implementation of employment strategies.

- <sup>i</sup> <http://www.unfpa.org/public/lang/en/home/adolescents> [http://www.ilo.org/asia/info/public/pr/lang--en/WCMS\\_143339/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/asia/info/public/pr/lang--en/WCMS_143339/index.htm) [www.interculturaldialogue.eu/web/files/67/en/CP-Neisse-d02.doc](http://www.interculturaldialogue.eu/web/files/67/en/CP-Neisse-d02.doc)
- <sup>ii</sup> <http://www.un.org/durbanreview2009/ddpa.shtml> <http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth-partnership/euromed/index>
- <sup>iii</sup> [http://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/shared/documents/publications/2007/framework\\_youth.pdf](http://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/shared/documents/publications/2007/framework_youth.pdf)
- <sup>iv</sup> [http://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/shared/documents/publications/2007/framework\\_youth.pdf](http://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/shared/documents/publications/2007/framework_youth.pdf)
- <sup>v</sup> [http://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/shared/documents/publications/2007/framework\\_youth.pdf](http://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/shared/documents/publications/2007/framework_youth.pdf)
- <sup>vi</sup> [http://www.asef.org/index.php?option=com\\_programme&task=view&id=29&Itemid=162](http://www.asef.org/index.php?option=com_programme&task=view&id=29&Itemid=162)