

YOUTH VOICE IN DECISION MAKING

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Youth participation leads to better decisions and outcomes. Many of the profound difficulties faced by young people around the globe illiteracy, poverty, HIV/AIDS, substance abuse, discrimination and forced engagement in armed conflict, are subjects of widespread concern at the national and international levels. In all regions of the world, young people are having to deal with increased unemployment and insecurity at work, greater family instability, and reductions in social welfare programmes. Young people are often characterized by uncertainty and risk; effective strategies are needed to resolve these concerns. Young people have a body of experience unique to their situation, and they have views and ideas that derive from this experience. They are social actors with skills and capacities to bring about constructive resolutions to their own problems. Too often, though, there is a failure or even a refusal to recognize the benefits of Youth Participation in Decision Making, the legitimacy of young people's contributions to programmes, policies and decision making.

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The youth have become active in processes as varied as the following: Research: Many examples exist of young people being provided with training as researchers and then undertaking independent investigations focusing on issues of direct concern to them. Youth are also interested in programme design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation: Young people share their views and experiences to help design and implement programmes that target their specific needs; by playing a key role in monitoring and evaluation, youth are able to help the programme to meet its objectives and adjust to changing circumstances as necessary.

Also, there is an interest in peer support, representation, and advocacy: Young people are increasingly being provided with opportunities to elect or be elected by their own peers to serve as advocates, working with adult institutions to lobby for greater respect for their rights. Furthermore, youth are being engaged in policy analysis and development: Many initiatives involve young people in reviewing existing legislation and policies from the perspective of their own experience.

In addition, there is the spirit of campaigning and lobbying: Once young people are afforded the chance to come together and articulate their experiences and concerns, many are able to develop campaigns for the realization of their rights and lobbying for the necessary changes from grass

roots to international levels. The youth also get involved in development and management of their own organizations: Within a growing number of youth-led organizations throughout the world, young people are defining their own structures, policies, and priorities for action.

There is also willingness in participation and use of the media: Young people have traditionally been excluded from active participation in the media, but in many countries they are receiving training as youth journalists, running their own radio programmes, developing video tools for the promotion of rights, and publishing journals and newsletters. Most importantly is the youth interest in conference participation: Young people have participated in local, national and international conferences as organizers, speakers, delegates and rapporteurs, often with significant impact on the outcomes of such events.

There is also youth interest in youth councils and parliaments: In a number of countries, young people have participated in the development of democratic political structures that parallel those of the adult world and provide opportunities to inform and influence key economic, social and political agendas. All of these activities offer opportunities for empowering young people to take action and influence or change aspects of their lives for the better. However, several different models and structures are employed to achieve specific objectives. These may be conceptualized in terms of the degree to which control and power are actually transferred to young people in practice.

Promoting youth voice through WAY

Activities

Young people are involved in decision making through the two main tasks of WAY which are: to represent its members towards international organisations and institutions, and to promote the work of voluntary youth organisations all over the world. It is within these tasks that young people are given opportunities to take part in decision making on issues pertaining them.

This is done through the platforms which were created for young people to come together and work as a team, to learn, discuss and find solutions on their welfare. It is done through the observation and guidelines of WAY. Some of these have been done annually at international, regional and local levels.

These events are often carried out in co-corporation with WAY members, international youth organisations, regional youth structures and national affiliates. WAY's representatives participate in various UN working groups and other meetings promoting youth issues and the interests of member organisations.

The events bring young people together, to address major related youth issues. The spotlight of these events is to give culturally inclusive results for young people so as to have culturally sensitive behaviour and activities, and where differences are valued, respected and explored. This enables youth to change in the development of policies and strategies on issues that concern them.

These activities aim to increase inter-ethnic respect and foster inter-cultural and international understanding and cooperation. It also facilitate the collection of information about the needs and problems of youth. The main problem is the communication gap between them and their elders, the former believing themselves to be old enough for taking their own decisions for matters personal or social while the latter just refuse to hand over this responsibility to them. This leads to temperaments rising high more often.

The most common problem a person faces at this phase of life is peer pressure. They are pressured by either dares or threats into doing what one would rather avoid. Some young people are naturally competitive and they strive to act in ways that could help settle their 'image' either to impress or intimidate others. This can be seen in their disobedience of their elders who try to advise them through experiences which these young ones lack at the moment but fail dismally.

Furthermore it disseminates information about the methods, techniques and activities of youth organisations. In addition it promotes the interchange of ideas between youth of all countries. Assist in the development of youth activities and to promote, by mutual aid, the extension of the work of voluntary youth organizations.

Promoting youth voice through participation

When the youth participate in events and activities their voice will be heard, that is why we emphasise and ensure that they are fully represented in activities that we organize. At World Assembly of Youth, we make sure that the derived declaration from our activities are decided by the youth for the youth.

Our youth participation extends to Volunteer Programme, initiated as a platform that links the youth all around the world that seek and develop a dedicated group of young people who are willing to assist in WAY programmes and activities around the world. This programme works towards the elevation of youth and their development into leaders, who are willing to donate some of their time and energy to support WAY in achieving its goals and aims.

The Volunteers Programme aims at bringing together youth of different age, race, background, and ethnic group, to interact and share ideas while fulfilling their duties as volunteers. It also

strives to develop the youth by exposing them to an environment in which they get to realize their potential and explore their untapped capabilities.

Presently, we have over 900 volunteers from all over the world, striving to make a difference. Volunteers gain experience and become very innovative while participating in these programmes, some of these innovative ideas they execute in their respective locations. The participants have the opportunity to meet people, make contacts, form relationships and thus gaining access to business-related benefits such as: career advice, job leads, business referrals, useful information and emotional support.

Promoting youth voice through development of national youth council

Not only do we promote youth voice globally, but we also promote youth voice nationally. We emphasise on the importance of youth voice being heard in other countries. To achieve this goal, we promote youth voice in other countries through our members, the national youth councils. In accordance with Article IV and V of the WAY Charter, membership of WAY is granted as follows: Full members of WAY are national youth councils which are representing a cross section of democratic, voluntary youth organisations in a country or territory, and which have ratified the Charter and are admitted by the Assembly by a vote of the majority of its members.

Now, more than ever community leaders are realising the positive connection between involving youth in community activities and the increase in overall community vitality and engagement. Youth bring new energy and ideas to standard issues and concerns, often with a unique perspective as to how best to tackle challenges and opportunities.

A youth council is a formal group or board of young people that provides representation or a voice for youth in the community. Councils facilitate the involvement of young people in local governance and decision-making.

Youth councils also make decisions and set directions for promoting the social, cultural, environmental and economic well-being of the youth and community.

The participation of young people includes:

Making submissions to council, on matters of interest or concern to young people;

Making a submission to government on an issue affecting youth in the community;

Creating a petition to the council or government;

Speaking at a youth council meeting; and / or,

Speaking at a council meeting.

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