

Youth policy: Doing it and getting it right

chapter 9

In a world that demands more than basic skills, expanding the opportunities for young people to learn means going beyond primary schooling. Because building human capital takes more than schooling, it also means including young people more in their communities and societies so that they have opportunities to use their talents at work and to participate as active citizens. Informing and facilitating their decision making—so that they choose well—adds to their success as workers and entrepreneurs, as parents, and as citizens. And for those who have to recover from poor decisions or poor circumstances providing second chances—to make up for missed opportunities—can keep young people from being irrevocably left behind.

For many low-income countries, the priority is to provide quality basic education (including lower secondary education) for young adolescents and, where HIV/AIDS prevalence is high, such as in parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, to safeguard health by preventing transmission among young people who are beginning to be sexually active. Both will help in the transition to work. For many young people in these countries, basic skills for life and work will have to be acquired through second-chance programs. Making full use of young people's skills and providing them further opportunities to build skills on the job will require maintaining an overall macroeconomic environment conducive to growth.

For middle-income and high-growth countries that have already provided mass basic and then secondary education, like those in East Asia and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the challenge is to develop a tertiary education system and to address new health threats to youth, such as tobacco use, obesity, and road acci-

dents. Second-chance programs will still be needed, but not on the scale of low-income countries. In addition to a macroeconomic climate conducive to growth, countries may need to reform labor market institutions to better accommodate new entrants.

Knowing what to do is not enough—policies directed at young people often fail. Why? For three main reasons: First, influencing youth transitions requires working across many sectors, yet few countries take a coherent approach to establish clear lines of accountability for youth outcomes. Many countries have a vision for young people—typically articulated in a “national youth policy” that fails to set priorities or coordinate action. These policies need to be revisited and revamped. Even where policy is well articulated, it may stand alone from national development policy. Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers in low-income countries are a case in point. Until recently, there was little integration of young people's issues as part of a wider societal effort to combat poverty. This is changing, but not fast enough. Greater capacity is also needed—for analysis, for integration with national policy planning and budgeting processes, for coordinated implementation, and for monitoring and evaluation.

Second, young people often lack voice in the design and implementation of policies that affect them.¹ Governments at all levels also need to be more open to listening to young people, particularly older youth beginning to engage more formally as citizens. As important clients of many public services, young people can improve quality by participating in implementation and providing feedback. Promising experiences of this kind of voice are having an impact on service delivery, as in the anticorruption efforts of tertiary level students in Eastern Europe.

Third, there are few success stories—few policies and programs that have proven effective. Too many policies directed at young people, including many discussed in this Report, are promising but unproven, and this is a serious impediment to wider replication. More needs to be done to find out which policies and programs improve youth outcomes and why. This is not easy, because of spillovers from one youth transition to others, and because some policies may be more effective in combination than on their own. Knowing what works, what does not, and in what circumstances would be of tremendous value in improving policy for all countries.

Youth policy priorities vary by country context

Previous chapters focused on policies to influence investment decisions across five youth transitions: learning, working, staying healthy, forming families, and exercising citizenship. This entire range of policies that influence youth outcomes constitutes what shall be referred to as “youth policy” in this chapter.

We will not repeat these policies here but ask instead: how are the policy recommendations discussed in chapters 3–8 and summarized in the overview of this Report to be customized to each country context? It would seem that at least four dimensions should be considered. First, as discussed in chapter 1, the starting levels of young people’s skills and capabilities (their human capital) is the basis on which countries can build. This can be determined from answers to questions such as: what are primary and secondary completion rates? How healthy are young people entering adolescence? What are the main threats to their health in the short and long terms? Are young people building skills through productive employment in the labor market? Are they prepared for parenthood? And are there opportunities for them to participate in community and society?

Second, country income determines the extent to which young people and their families can afford to pay for these investments themselves. It is also a proxy for administra-

tive capacity to implement policies and programs. Managing income-contingent loan programs to encourage the take-up of higher education requires high levels of administrative capacity (especially in tax administration), making such programs difficult to implement in a low-income country. Other financial incentives—such as conditional cash transfers—are found to be effective in a wide range of contexts where many young people do not go to secondary school even though the facilities are there.

The third dimension is the stage of the demographic transition. Is the country proceeding through the demographic transition, and is there a window of opportunity from declining dependency? Or is the demographic transition yet to start? If the latter, the resources available for investment in the human capital of children and youth are steadily falling (Chad, Niger). In these countries, an emphasis on basic child and maternal health services is essential to lower fertility and improve the lives of children and youth. At the other end of the spectrum are countries where the window of opportunity from falling dependency will soon close (Armenia, China). These countries should act now before rapid aging results in sharper trade-offs between the needs of the young and those of the elderly.²

Fourth is the degree to which young people influence decisions concerning themselves, discussed in chapter 2. In societies where decision making is communal, the family or community may have as much say, or more, in decisions affecting young people (as in Bangladesh). In societies that are more individualistic, the views of young people may be more important to the final decision (as in Malaysia or Romania). While autonomy in decision making bears some relationship to income, some young people in poor countries report as much autonomy in decision making (Ethiopia) as their peers in richer countries (Iraq).³

While they may overlap, these dimensions are distinct. In general, starting levels of human capital and income are important in setting priorities for *what* countries should focus on. The stage of the demographic transition indicates the *urgency* for country action. The autonomy of young

people in decision making influences *whom* to target and the *type* of intervention.

A very low-income country

Take Sierra Leone (see spotlight following chapter 7). Typical of many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa with very low levels of income and human capital, it is also shifting from postconflict reconstruction to long-term development. However, it has yet to undergo the demographic transition. So, in addition to maintaining sound fundamentals for growth, improving access to and the quality of primary education and primary health care must be a priority. This will give young people the basics for life and work as well as create the conditions for the transition to lower fertility.

Getting children into school is not enough, as many of today's youth in Sierra Leone did not go to school and are now illiterate. Offering them a second chance at school (as undertaken in Ghana's functional literacy program) will improve their chances of doing more remunerative work. Building skills through employment in public works programs in conjunction with or as a complement to basic literacy should also be considered (as with Senegal's Agetip). For many young men directly involved in conflict, rehabilitation that leads to work is essential.

The basic skills for good health and parenting can be imparted through a combination of life-skills training in school (as in Namibia's "My future, my choice" program), through second chance programs, and through social marketing and media campaigns attractive to young people outside schools (as in Horizon Jeunes in Cameroon). Even as young people take greater responsibility themselves, information and outreach—on health risks, on birth spacing, and on other reproductive health issues—should be targeted not just at young people but more broadly at families and communities.

In a society rebuilding itself, institutions should be genuinely open to the participation of young people. Ensuring their legal identity and their representation in local community organizations and imposing milder penalties on young offenders can do much to promote a sense of solidarity.

A fast-growing economy

Vietnam is a low-income country that has gone beyond the basics (see spotlight on Vietnamese youth following chapter 3). Enjoying its demographic dividend, secondary completion rates are high, and a rapidly growing economy readily employs young people. Dependency rates will continue to decline for the next two decades, giving scope to address the challenge of improving the quality of higher education and the risks to young people from the rapid pace of economic and social change.

Vietnam now needs to expand access to a more diverse and flexible upper secondary and tertiary education system, reorienting curricula so that young people learn relevant practical skills (information technology, languages) and life skills (problem-solving, working in teams) while creating stronger connections between school and work (as with the university-industry link in China). Tertiary education could be expanded by reaching out to the private sector (as in Chile). But to ensure its quality—something that many developing countries often get wrong—Vietnam will need good accreditation and evaluation systems (Chile and the Republic of Korea provide good examples). Creating opportunities may not be enough, especially for deserving students from poor or rural backgrounds. So loans or scholarships should be targeted to the needy or those who face the greatest conflict with work (as in Mexico's individual learning accounts).

Health risks in Vietnam are growing due to alcohol and drug abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, and other risky behavior. So, young people could benefit from more information and stronger incentives to make the right decisions. Providing life skills necessary for better health in lower secondary schools could help (South Africa recently reformed its secondary curriculum to include these skills). Given the substantial increase in road accidents among young men, traffic safety is a life skill worth emphasizing.

Outreach and dissemination of information on sexual and reproductive health for youth, the primary decision makers in these matters, need to be undertaken with a respect for confidentiality. Even with the best information, however, many young Vietnamese

"We are not respected in the community; they call us rude and unruly ex-combatants."

Young, commercial bike rider and ex-combatant, Bombali District, Sierra Leone
February 2006

"The shortest adult is taller than the tallest youth."

Young person, Tonkolili District, Sierra Leone
February 2006

“Teachers. . . teach theoretically, so this disadvantages youth in learning well and being able to find work.”

Young person, Hanoi, Vietnam
March 2006

will stumble, making second-chance programs important. They are also important for vulnerable youth such as street children and commercial sex workers.

Vietnam is increasingly providing more opportunities for youth to participate in public life, but it could do more to legally recognize young migrants to urban areas, whose access to public services is often compromised.

As different as Sierra Leone and Vietnam may be, they present only a small part of the diversity among developing countries in the five transitions of young people, diversity that makes it difficult to draw more general conclusions about where priorities should lie. That is why each country needs to choose policies based on its circumstances.

Youth policy often fails young people

Knowing what to do is in many ways the easy part of devising policy. Making sure it gets done, and done well, is more difficult. Youth policy has had at best mixed success in ensuring smooth transitions for the young, for at least three reasons:

- Poor coordination among policies and sectors that affect youth and limited accountability for youth outcomes
- Weak voice of young people in monitoring and providing feedback on the quality of policy and service delivery
- The paucity of proven successes

Poor coordination and limited accountability

Youth outcomes, extending across the five transitions, are influenced by more than just the health sector or the education sector. Because the transitions overlap—outcomes in one sector are influenced by policies in another—many sectors need to work together when devising policies to influence outcomes. Addressing the difficulties in going to work requires looking beyond the labor market to macroeconomic policy and the investment climate and to the quality of education and training (as discussed in chapter 4). Inculcating citizenship involves learning in school (chapter 7). Raising enrollments requires reconciling the conflicting choices of work and marriage against

education. The success of conditional cash transfers—such as Oportunidades in Mexico, not the standard education sector policy instrument—lies precisely in the fact that they address competing demands on young people’s time (see chapters 3 and 6). And with individual transitions as diverse as they are, young people can be hard to reach. Health information and education campaigns have to work across a broad range of sectors to reach young people because they can be in school or out of school, or in work or out of work (see chapters 4 and 5).

Even where there are no spillover effects from one transition to another, there may still be a need for coordination across sectors. Making lower secondary education universal (chapter 3) will in many countries require improvements in transport and other infrastructure to increase physical access to schools. In Vietnam, addressing the high death rate from traffic accidents may require better road safety rules and stronger enforcement (see spotlight on Vietnamese youth following chapter 3). For many young women, taking advantage of opportunities to learn or work may also require relief from some element of domestic drudgery through investments in efficient sources of energy and water (see spotlight on gender following chapter 2).

In most countries, sector ministries are responsible for the bulk of policies that affect youth, while ministries or departments of youth are responsible for youth outcomes (box 9.1). This does not make for clear lines of accountability, because departments of youth typically have little influence over their sector counterparts. In some countries, youth ministries have triggered opposition from sector ministries to the detriment of youth policies. In others, leaders of youth departments are political appointees with no particular interest in developing or monitoring a medium- or long-term vision for youth. With a range of sectors responsible and the lines of accountability weak, no sector is fully accountable—and youth outcomes suffer as a result.

Weak voice in policy formulation and service delivery

Although the interests of young people may be reflected by other, older groups in

decision making at the local and national levels,⁴ it is striking how seldom young people are consulted on policies that affect them. According to one estimate, about two-thirds of countries with national youth councils, bodies intended to reflect the views of different stakeholders, do not listen to youth nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).⁵ Very few young people or youth NGOs are consulted as a part of the poverty reduction strategy process in low-income countries (discussed further below).

Service delivery is another area in which youth are not visible. Even though young people are important clients of public services, they often are not consulted. Yet as direct clients, they can be crucial to improving the quality of service delivery (see box 2.2).⁶ Many health services suffer from a very youth-unfriendly image, paying little attention to young people's concerns and needs (see chapter 5). Few school systems recognize young people as stakeholders who can improve the quality of education (see chapter 3). Yet young people have every incentive to hold public services accountable, something they get better at as they mature.

Paucity of proven successes

Few solid evaluations of youth programs in developing countries unambiguously identify the causality from policy to program to effect.⁷ This gives youth policy the aura of being soft, lacking in rigor. Much more is known about what affects outcomes in childhood, thanks to a large and growing body of solid evaluations of the impact of early childhood development programs, school nutrition programs, school management reforms, remedial primary education, and so on.⁸ As the tables at the end of the chapters 3–8 detail, many programs that are important for expanding opportunities and building capabilities fall into the “promising but unproven” camp. They include most life-skills programs (which many countries are investing more in) and most programs for promoting youth citizenship, including student councils, youth parliaments, and service learning (including national service). The lack of evidence is not confined to expanding opportunities.

BOX 9.1

What do ministries of youth do?

Youth issues typically do not command an entire ministry of their own. In most countries, youth issues are dealt with by departments of youth housed within other ministries—typically education (Jamaica and Sweden) or in omnibus ministries responsible for youth as well as sports, culture, social affairs, or local government (India and Singapore).

Their functions vary but broadly consist of developing a framework for youth issues and formulating policy, fostering coordination, collaboration, advocacy, research, technical assistance, and monitoring. The departments sometimes support special programs, outside the traditional line ministries, directed to youth at the national or local level. They may also maintain contact and channels of communication with young

people and their organizations.

The role of departments of youth is partly a function of how far countries have progressed in developing and implementing policies for the young. In many Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries where policy development has been well established over several decades, the role of youth departments is mainly policy development, coordination, and monitoring.

In many developing countries only beginning to develop coherent policies toward young people, there is more emphasis on advocacy and advice. In others, departments have moved to policy development (Chile, El Salvador, and Nicaragua) and coordination (Chile).

Source: Mattero (2006).

Except for the Jovenes programs from Latin America (which train out-of-school youth), almost no second-chance programs are rigorously evaluated. Even where evaluations exist, they may be on narrow outcomes. The Jovenes evaluations look largely at impacts on employment and wages, and not the better health or lower crime that may go hand in hand with employment.

Getting it right— by developing a coherent framework and integrating it with national policy

What can be done to ensure that policy is not destined for failure? To increase the chances of success, policy makers must as a start articulate a coherent view of desired outcomes for young people, integrating that view with national planning and implementation mechanisms. This will improve accountability for outcomes. The capacity to implement this strategy at all levels is also required.

A coherent national framework for youth

Accountability is easier to assign if there is a well-articulated set of national objectives for youth, developed with key ministries and stakeholders. This is especially important where countries are decentralizing public service delivery, a growing trend (see

“Many organizations have visited us, but after we explained our situation to them we do not see them again [there is no follow-up].”

Young person, Kissy, Sierra Leone
February 2006

“Youth participation is token and . . . it is frustrating when [the authorities] send you . . . to a meeting and they are not bothered by the sets of recommendations and follow up. . . .”

Rotimi, 22, Nigeria
June 2006

chapter 1). Many initiatives that focus on youth—from smaller schemes responding to the needs of special groups to programs that tackle national issues—often intersect at the local level, where most services that influence youth are provided. Appropriate enough in federal systems, they can be plagued by fragmented effort and poor coordination, especially when services are provided by more than one level of government (such as education in Brazil) or where effects overlap across jurisdictions (as in

HIV/AIDS campaigns). A clear national framework can guide coordination.

However, the policy vision at the country level—often articulated through national youth policy—is usually very narrow in scope. In 2001, 82 percent of all countries had a national youth policy, 89 percent had a designated national youth coordination mechanism, and 60 percent were implementing a national youth program of action. But in 70 percent, national youth policy was focused on the narrow range of concerns of the department of youth, with few links to other youth-serving ministries, such as education, health, or labor.⁹ Even where broad, it may not be very strategic, reading more like a laundry list of desirable policies than a strategic program of action.

Revisiting these policy statements can sharpen the focus on youth in conjunction with building a broad constituency for youth outcomes. Having the key economic and finance ministries on board obtains wider ownership of policy among public agencies, as evident from the progress with policy development in areas such as gender, which—like youth—cuts across sector lines (box 9.2). And the development of youth policy would greatly benefit from consultations with young people.¹⁰

In a national framework, many policies affecting youth outcomes are best addressed within individual sectors. For example, expanding the range of options open to young people in upper secondary school and increasing flexibility among them, recommended in chapter 3, can be tackled largely within the education sector. Making preventive health services more youth friendly, recommended in chapter 5, can also be handled within the health sector. What is required for many policies is that ministries or agencies help rather than hinder the efforts of others. In Chile, the Department of Youth conducts a survey of youth conditions every three years, providing valuable feedback to line ministries on the efficacy of their programs. Departments of youth have limited expertise implementing health or education policies. Some, though, have considerable expertise convening groups of young people and their organizations. This could be put at the disposal of traditional

BOX 9.2

Does addressing gender issues hold lessons for youth policy? The view from East Asia

Since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, governments in East Asia have set up legal and institutional frameworks to promote gender equality. Most have defined and approved gender plans of action, establishing mechanisms and bodies to ensure that gender concerns are adequately addressed at all stages of policy planning and implementation. Departments dedicated to women's empowerment have been elevated to ministries, as in Cambodia and Indonesia, and high-level intersector coordinating bodies have been formed, as in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Philippines, and Vietnam.

What needs to be improved?

Weaknesses in implementation and in monitoring and evaluation are common throughout the region, because many relevant public institutions are still weak, lacking resources and capacity, and struggling to define their roles with the more established sectors.

What has been learned?

Four lessons:

Design a comprehensive gender strategy involving all key ministries. A comprehensive gender strategy is needed so that gender concerns are addressed up front in a country's overall development program. All line ministries and specialized agencies should be involved, so that gender equality falls to the Ministry of Women's Affairs. The involvement of the Ministries of Economy and Finance ensures that gender concerns are effectively addressed in the formulation and execution of the national budget. For instance, the interministerial working groups set up in Cambodia involve line ministries in the design of the gender strategy and in specific gender actions. And the 2002 National Strategy for the Advancement of Women in Vietnam sets out the

responsibilities of different government departments.

Build the capacity to mainstream. The agency responsible for making sure that gender concerns are part of sector policy needs strong capacity, as do the sector ministries and other agencies—through suitable mainstreaming mechanisms, adequate budget allocations, and technical training. In some countries (Cambodia), the appointment of gender focal points responsible for incorporating gender issues into sector agendas has been only partly effective, and alternative or complementary mechanisms (interministerial working groups) are being pursued. In most countries, technical training on gender issues has been easily incorporated into general training programs.

Strengthen the women's movement in civil society. Although the position of women in national parliaments has hardly changed over the decade, there has been significant progress with policies that affect women. Much of this is the result of women's stronger voice in civil society to exert pressure for change. In Indonesia, Korea, Mongolia, the Philippines, and Thailand, women's movements have brought about changes in policies and helped implement laws on labor, family, domestic violence, and trafficking.

Monitor and evaluate. Few countries have put adequate systems for impact evaluation in place on time. Suitable indicators and data collection and analysis mechanisms need to be developed from the beginning, involving national statistical institutions and research institutes. In Cambodia and Lao PDR, national statistical systems are being adapted to incorporate disaggregation by sex into national statistics.

Sources: Asian Development Bank and World Bank (2005); Brown, Al-Hamad, and De Paz Nieves (2005); Javate de Dios (2002); World Bank (2005g); and World Bank (2005h).

line ministries that may wish to consult or obtain feedback from young people on the quality of services provided to them.

Coordination is needed, however, in developing an overarching strategy for addressing youth outcomes; assigning clear roles and responsibilities for implementation; getting ministries and agencies, civil society organizations, and the private sector to work with each other; monitoring progress with implementation; and policy development. Coordination in this sense is no different from what is required for other cross-sector objectives of national policy, such as improving gender outcomes. Because youth transitions affect one another, the evaluation of policies and programs also needs to be coordinated.

Integration with national policy planning and implementation mechanisms

Policies are more likely to be successful if youth issues are well integrated into national policy planning and implementation mechanisms, because most of them are

implemented by traditional line ministries. Ensuring that they understand their roles and responsibilities builds and maintains a constituency for youth issues.

Integrating youth policies with national development frameworks is in its infancy in most developing countries. In low-income countries, youth issues often sit outside the poverty reduction strategy (PRS) process, failing to tap the various constituencies that support PRS outcomes. Although more recent PRS papers do a better job than older ones of integrating youth outcomes, coverage is still far from universal (box 9.3).

Many middle-income countries suffer from the same poor integration with national development frameworks, perhaps attributable to the strong regional and historical flavor of national youth policy. According to one view, the European Union and the British Commonwealth have traditionally promoted cross-sector, integrated approaches, while the Arab Council of Ministers of Youth and Sports and the Conference of Ministers of Youth and Sports of the French-speaking Communities have

BOX 9.3 *Neither seen, nor heard—youth in the poverty reduction strategy process*

For a group that makes up a large share of the population in most low-income countries, young people are underrepresented in the poverty reduction strategy process.

Youth in consultations

In a study of 31 poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs) completed by September 2003, around half of the papers (14 PRSPs) were found to be drawn up without consulting youth groups at all as part of their overall consultation process.

Youth in poverty diagnostics

Only one in five papers (6 PRSPs) identified young people as a group vulnerable to poverty. A little over a third (12 PRSPs) identified youth vulnerability to poverty in a minor way, while another one-fifth (6 PRSPs) identified youth as one of several groups vulnerable to poverty (see table 1). In part an issue of how people in this age range get classified, many PRSPs also take a relatively static view of poverty. A more dynamic view would look at factors that predispose indi-

viduals to poverty over the long run, such as the failure to acquire an education.

Youth in poverty action plans

Few PRSPs take an integrated view of the needs of young people in their action plans. Just three-quarters of the papers (24 PRSPs) mention young people in their action plans, only a half address youth issues as a key goal. A quarter of action plans do not mention youth at all (see table 2). This is not to say that policies that affect youth outcomes, such as education, do not figure prominently. They do, but not as part of a coherent cross-sector approach to addressing the needs of the young. Even where there is reference to young people in the PRSP action plans, there is little follow through in specific targets or budgetary allocations for implementation.

Progress since 2003 is mixed. Provisional analysis of 55 PRSPs completed by April 2006 suggests that more PRSPs now identify young people as a group vulnerable to poverty. However, a coherent cross-sector approach to youth issues is still lacking.

Source: Curtain (2006) and United Nations (2003).

Table 1 Are youth identified as a group vulnerable to poverty?

| | Major focus | Minor focus | One of many | No mention | Total |
|---------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------|-------|
| Number | 6 | 12 | 6 | 7 | 31 |
| Percent | 19 | 39 | 19 | 23 | 100 |

Table 2 Are youth in PRSP action plans?

| | Major focus in key goal | Minor focus in key goal | No mention | Total |
|---------|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------|-------|
| Number | 17 | 7 | 7 | 31 |
| Percent | 55 | 23 | 23 | 100 |

given more sustained attention to youth and sports than to policy integration.¹¹ Making progress on integration with national policy is thus relevant in a wide range of contexts.

Integration with budgeting frameworks is equally weak. Only a handful of developing countries systematically track how much is spent on young people, let alone relate it to youth outcomes.¹² This kind of integrated view is essential to making progress with youth policy.

Building capacity

Implementing a coherent and integrated national framework requires strong capacities—for analysis, policy development, implementation, coordination, monitoring, and evaluation. However, those capacities have traditionally been weak in developing countries. In countries with a long history of youth policy, the department of youth plays the role of “champion” and “policeman” of youth policy effectively, as in Sweden (box 9.4); but in many developing countries, departments of youth are under-resourced both in financial resources and in personnel—and thus lack the clout to be effective.

Building this capacity is clearly critical and will take resources, but given what is spent on youth through traditional line ministries, the additional resources are likely to be a small proportion of what is already expended. The ability to hire staff with the right skills is absolutely vital. In addition to analytical skills, staff need to communicate effectively with young people and their organizations and work across traditional sector boundaries. The ability to work with those outside government—including the corporate sector and not-for-profit agencies, both engaged in improving outcomes for young people—is equally important. The work of youth departments is likely to be enhanced by having strong inputs from organizations that represent the interests of young people. So building capacity in youth-serving NGOs is also important.

With youth policy still new in many developing countries, there are few good examples of where capacity has been built effectively. However, in some countries in Latin America, youth agencies are moving in the right direction, focusing less on implementing programs and more on

BOX 9.4

How do developed countries handle youth issues? Consider Sweden

Sweden has a coherent national framework for youth, well integrated with national policy planning and implementation mechanisms, and with a strong capacity for implementation.

Policy framework

Swedish youth policy stretches back more than 50 years. At the beginning, the main ambition was to create good scope for after-school activities. Policy has since moved on. The foundations of an integrated national youth policy were laid in the mid-1980s, with continuous evolution since.

The latest policy revision—set out in a new youth policy law, *Power to Decide*, enacted in 2004—provides a new structure for national youth policy with the aim of giving all young people equal opportunities to develop, to be empowered, to gain influence over their everyday lives, and thus to be able to realize their dreams. The target is young people between the ages of 13 and 25. Five main fields have been created to facilitate analysis and coordination—learning and personal development, health and vulnerability, influence and representation,

self-support, and culture and leisure—the five transitions as it were, Swedish style.

Integration with national planning and implementation mechanisms

Swedish youth policy is highly “mainstreamed,” well integrated with national policy planning and budgeting processes. Ten or so ministries take responsibility for realizing the established youth policy goals. As in most other countries, government activities are divided into various sectors, each with its own goals and its own budget. All sectors that affect young people are expected to help achieve national youth policy objectives.

Goals are established within each of the sectors for each of the five transitions identified in the new law. This integrates youth policy into the relevant sectors and facilitates realizing and monitoring the overall objectives within the framework of the normal day-to-day activities in the area. Each sector contributing to the national youth policy has its own indicators to measure how it is doing from a youth perspective.

Capacity

The implementation of national youth policy is aided by strong institutions. The Division of Youth Policy at the Ministry of Education, Research and Culture coordinates youth policy within the government. The Minister for Pre-School Education, Youth Affairs, and Adult Learning leads a system in which 20 or more governmental authorities monitor the living conditions of young people.

Most of the responsibility for living conditions of young people in Sweden rests with municipalities. A special agency, the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs, supports the development of municipal youth policy and monitoring of the objectives of national youth policy. It supplies up-to-date knowledge of young people’s living conditions both locally and nationally. It also provides support for the development of knowledge-based intersector youth policy at the municipal level with a high degree of youth influence.

Source: Forum 21, *European Journal on Youth Policy*, available online at www.coe.int/youth/forum21.

policy development, coordination, and monitoring (box 9.5). Governments clearly need to experiment and innovate, especially where they may be starting to build capacity from scratch. The lessons from attempts to address other cross-sector issues, such as gender equality, suggest that much can be achieved over a decade (see box 9.2).

The payoff from having a coherent national framework for youth integrated into national policy with capacity for implementation is well illustrated by the model described in chapter 1, projecting the impact of HIV/AIDS in Kenya. As discussed in chapter 1, the model predicts that the HIV/AIDS epidemic will take a heavy toll on growth in Kenya because of its impact on human capital accumulation and in particular on secondary school completion rates. To combat the impact of the epidemic on school enrollment, the government can either act directly on enrollment by providing a subsidy to encourage school attendance or act indirectly to improve young people's health. The model suggests that at plausible discount rates, the net present value of the benefits from the education subsidy lies between 1.7 and 3.5 times that of the costs. Under a combined program—in which the educational subsidy is halved and the other half is spent on measures to combat the epidemic and treat its victims—the net present value of the benefits would be 8.9 to 13.3 times greater than the costs (box 9.6). This striking improvement is due not only to saving lives under the combined intervention but also to the fact that the resulting reduction in expected mortality provides an additional potent incentive to invest in education.

Getting it right— by listening to young people

As the most important clients of policies and services directed at them, the ability of young people to exercise voice, or client power, can be invaluable to ensuring quality. Governments should thus be open to consultation and feedback from young people on the design and implementation of policies that

BOX 9.5

Where departments of youth are headed: Evidence from Latin America

Over the past two decades, most Latin American countries have aimed to strengthen youth departments (called secretariats, vice ministries, or presidential programs). The record is mixed. A general lesson from the more promising reforms is that youth departments should focus on guiding—rather than implementing—national youth plans.

In countries such as El Salvador and Nicaragua, youth departments have achieved substantial success in contributing to the formulation of national plans, defining priorities, and helping to align sector policies.

In many countries where sector ministries already identify their own priorities for youth policy, the most appropriate contribution of youth departments is to help coordinate such policies.

In countries that have set forth ambitious long-term visions for youth development, such plans need to be translated into short- and medium-term action if there is to be a realistic attempt at implementation.

In Chile, a two-year youth action plan (Chile se Compromete con los Jóvenes)

complements the longer-term vision and proposes interventions that are immediate, measurable, and capable of being evaluated. Each intervention has an assigned budget and relies on implementation by designated sector ministries and agencies. Because most programs are implemented by line ministries, the youth agency, INJUV (Instituto Nacional de la Juventud), focuses on coordination among sectors and critical follow-up. INJUV's national survey on youth, conducted every three years, provides sector ministries with critical knowledge upon which to base programs targeting youth. Through its evaluations and research on youth programs, INJUV also contributes to the formulation of policies affecting youth. The next step will require further collaboration with sector ministries to address issues identified in the evaluations related to youth. For many youth agencies, including INJUV, reaching out to youth will also require collaboration with NGOs and youth organizations.

Source: Instituto Mexicano de la Juventud (IMJ), Organización Iberoamericana de la Juventud (OIJ) (2006) and authors.

affect them. Many national youth policies are drawn up without adequate consultation with young people. Even the institutions meant to reflect the voice of young people, such as national youth councils, often fail to do so.¹³ Many low-income countries do not consult with youth groups as a part of the PRSP process (see box 9.3). This should be remedied, particularly for older youth, who may be exercising more indirect voice through the ballot box. Efforts to give young people voice need to go beyond the tokenism that often characterizes such attempts. Not only does there need to be a process for listening to young people—there also needs to be a process for careful consideration of the suggestions and feedback that emerge.

An often-voiced criticism of more participatory approaches is the danger that youth elites or other unrepresentative groups will capture the process. With adequate planning, however, a wide representation of young people can be ensured, bringing benefits both to policy making and to young people (box 9.7). Denying young people an adequate

“As youth we are passionate and eager to make a difference. We are like warriors; all we want is just to be heard and given the chance to make a difference.”

21-year-old Liberian-American
June 2006

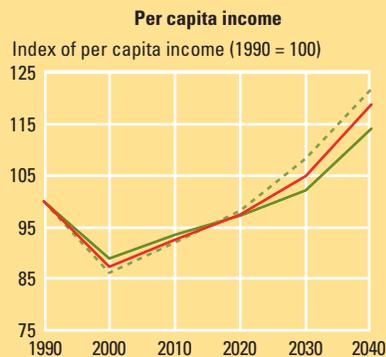
BOX 9.6

Successful policy coordination and implementation: How health and education policies can work together to combat the AIDS shock

Box 1.3 in chapter 1 discussed one model of how HIV/AIDS could affect human capital accumulation and growth, calibrated using data from Kenya. Here, this model is taken a step further and asks what would be the impact on human capital accumulation and growth of policies to increase enrollments and reduce infection rates among the young.

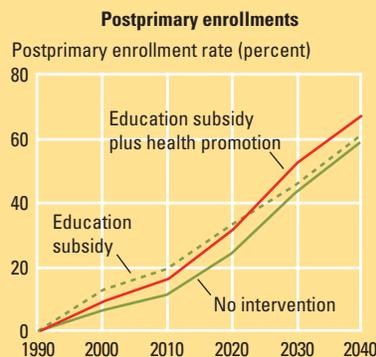
Education subsidies are modeled assuming that 50 percent of the cost of secondary education is borne by the state and funded by donors. An alternative to this is to reduce the subsidy to education by half and allocate the same stream of outlays to combating the epidemic. Measures that promote education directly, such as school attendance subsidies, increase income by increasing human capital. Measures to combat the epidemic, primarily through reducing infection rates among 15- to 24-year-olds, not only reduce the toll of suffering and death but also promote investments in education by increasing the families' lifetime resources and the expected returns to education investments.

Figure 1. Impact of interventions on per capita income



Figures 1 and 2 plot the impact of these interventions on postprimary enrollment and on per capita income. Both measures raise postprimary enrollments, but with different time profiles. The education subsidy, which costs 0.9 percent of GDP in 2000, rising to 1.8 percent of GDP in 2020, has the greatest impact on raising enrollments up to 2020. If some of these funds were allocated instead to health promotion, all the effects of reduced mortality—and the expectation of reduced mortality—on investment in secondary education come into play. In comparison with the direct working of education subsidies, these effects are small at first, but they accumulate over time, so much so that, in the model as calibrated, enrollments are higher under this program from 2020 onward. The combined program would, in fact, cost slightly less—0.8 percent of GDP in 2000, rising to almost 1.8 percent in 2020. Yet it yields higher secondary enrollments by 2030 than an education subsidy alone. This points to an important, long-run synergy between education and health policy.

Figure 2. Impact of interventions on postprimary enrollment



Both interventions hasten the recovery of per capita income to 1990 levels—that is, they reduce the impact of the AIDS shock. Recovery is fastest under the education subsidy. Even though the combined intervention leads to higher postprimary enrollment and greater human capital in the long run, the lags in the system are such that in 2040, the outer year of the projections, per capita output is higher for the education subsidy.

In view of the very different time paths of the streams of costs and benefits for the two interventions, an evaluation of their social profitability requires that they be discounted at an appropriate (real) rate. Assuming a discount rate of 4 percent, both programs yield significantly higher benefits than costs (see table below). However, the intervention that involves the promotion of health has a benefit-cost ratio roughly three to four times that of the intervention involving educational subsidies alone.

The social profitability of education and health programs

| Index | Aggregate GDP benefits/costs | Per capita GDP benefits/costs |
|---|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| School attendance subsidy | 3.5 | 2.9 |
| Combined program—school attendance and health promotion | 13.3 | 11.7 |

Source: Bell, Bruhns, and Gersbach (2006).

Note: All benefits and costs discounted at the rate of 4 percent a year.

“The lack of youth participation leads to a lack of sense of belonging to the society which in turn leads to further alienation.”

Young person, Thailand
December 2005

hearing can lead to less constructive expressions of voice.

The voice of young people can also improve service delivery by monitoring and giving feedback on the quality of services. For example, students and student organizations in Eastern Europe have notched important early wins in the fight against corruption in tertiary education through the exercise of voice. In 2003, a regional network of student NGOs from Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, FYR Macedonia, Moldova, and Serbia and Montenegro was formed to improve governance in higher education. It focused on changing regulations govern-

ing tertiary education, introducing student rights and mechanisms for student protection, and reducing corruption. The results so far—more effective students' ombudsmen are being instituted in several universities; the monopoly of old-time student unions (often dominated by ruling elites) has ended; and dialogue has been initiated with parliaments, education ministries, and university administrators and faculties to reduce corruption in higher education. While it is too early to say if this process will lead to sustained improvements in issues that particularly affect students, this is a start.¹⁴

BOX 9.7

Vozes Jovens: Opening national youth policy to youth voice and participation in Brazil

It should come as no surprise that Brazil's strong civil society has given birth to an energetic youth movement. As part of the government's effort to open up to civil society, it took on the challenge of incorporating the voice of youth into policy development. As a complement to this process, the World Bank initiated a dialog with youth, Vozes Jovens (Youth Voices), to assist in the development of the World Bank's country assistance strategy in Brazil.

Over time the Vozes Jovens grew into a broad dialog on youth issues, independent of the World Bank, involving representatives of the Brazilian government and congress, political parties, other civil society organizations, and the private sector. It provided valuable input for establishing the National Youth Secretariat, which coordinates youth policies at all levels of government.

Vozes Jovens allows youth to express their needs, consolidates efforts of many youth organizations, and most important, institutionalizes youth voice through participation on the

National Youth Council, the governing body of the National Youth Secretariat, made up of government and civil society representatives. State governments are now applying the Vozes Jovens methodology, with the states of Ceará and Pernambuco recently hosting Vozes Jovens events to enhance local policies. Today, more than 300 youth organizations participate in local, subnational, and national policy processes.

This process has brought benefits to both the government and young people. According to Minister Luiz Dulci, of the General Secretariat of the Presidency, "Vozes Jovens has been fundamental in contributing to the dialogue the President has launched to ... empower Brazilian youth, and has resulted in the creation of sound policies for the country's youth, such as the second chance program PRO JOVEM, the National Youth Council and the National Youth Secretariat, within two years of President Lula taking office."¹⁵

The young civil society leader and National Youth Council member Josbertini Clementino

notes, "We were able to form our own youth network, Rede Nacional de Juventude-RENAJU, which is represented in the National Youth Council. Vozes Jovens provided young leaders with the opportunity to sit on the National Youth Council, where they can help build the youth policies Brazil needs."¹⁶

Challenges, however, remain. A truly national youth policy in Brazil requires harmonizing a diverse array of social and political interests (see spotlight on Brazil following chapter 5). Young people also introduce new ways of doing business—different language, different organizing methods, and different ways of presenting cases and results—that need to be incorporated into policy development and programming. There is also a need for greater policy integration at various levels of government, better priority setting across policies, and even more recognition of the diversity of needs among Brazil's youth.

Source: Authors.

Young people can also do a great deal to create opportunities to exercise voice. The spotlight that follows this chapter, by young people and for young people, provides examples of how to go about this.

Getting it right—through monitoring and evaluation

Youth policy, as mentioned previously, is bedeviled by the shortage of solid evaluations establishing the impact of policies and programs on youth outcomes. There is also little consensus on what the most relevant outcomes might be. So establishing priority outcomes and developing a body of evidence on what works, what does not, and in what circumstances are critical to advancing policy.

Monitoring

Because many interrelated outcomes are relevant to poverty reduction and growth, this chapter lists a range of indicators that emerge from the discussions in chapters 3–8 (box 9.8).¹⁷ (The tables at the end of this Report present data on many of these indicators for a large number of countries, disaggregated by sex). The indicators allow benchmarking and country comparisons to monitor progress in different dimensions.

They can be used to arrive at an assessment of the main issues confronting the young, in some cases, serving as an "early warning" on problems (risky health behavior, lack of legal identity). Where there are large disparities within countries, it would be important to go deeper than these countrywide measures to subnational or local estimates.

Owing to the importance of learning in school, several measures are recommended to monitor schooling, including school participation, school completion, and schooling quality. At a minimum, the preparedness of children for postprimary learning could be assessed on the basis of literacy rates at the end of the primary (or early secondary) cycle. More sophisticated measures of learning could also be used, such as those derived from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), which monitor learning at the end of the primary cycle and at the end of compulsory schooling (lower secondary). This would require a substantial expansion in coverage of these tests in developing countries.

Because the productive use of young people's labor is important for both individuals and society, detrimentally early tran-

BOX 9.8 *A youth scorecard? The many indicators of youth development*

In selecting indicators, the focus is on those relevant from a poverty reduction and growth perspective. Some may not be readily available from existing data sources, and are marked with an asterisk; most could be collected with little effort by adding questions to existing survey and census instruments.¹⁸

| | |
|---|---|
| Learning | 1. School enrollment by gender |
| | 2. Primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary completion rates among youth, by gender |
| | 3. Learning achievement—end-primary and end-secondary—by gender * |
| Going to work | 4. Incidence of child labor, by gender |
| | 5. Labor force participation rates, by gender |
| | 6. Unemployment rates, by gender, for rural and urban youth |
| | 7. Percentage not at work and not in school, by gender |
| Staying healthy | 8. Percentage currently using tobacco, by gender |
| | 9. Percentage currently using drugs including inhalants, by gender * |
| | 10. Body mass index, by gender * |
| | 11. Percentage of sexually active youth engaging in unprotected sex, by gender and by marital status |
| | 12. Percentage of youth with knowledge of how to prevent HIV/AIDS, by gender |
| | 13. Percentage of 15-year-olds who will die before reaching their 60th birthday, by gender |
| Forming families | 14. Age specific fertility rates |
| | 15. Percentage of young women giving birth before 18 |
| | 16. Percentage of young women using antenatal care |
| Citizenship | 17. Percentage of youth who have worked together with someone else or some group to solve a problem in the community where they live, by gender * |
| | 18. Percentage of youth who correctly answer a question concerning political knowledge appropriate to the country, by gender * |
| | 19. Percentage of youth without identity papers, by gender * |
| | 20. Number of youth in presentence detention, per 100,000 population, by gender* |
| Moving across borders and communicating | 21. Percentage of youth studying abroad, by gender* |
| | 22. Percentage of youth working abroad, by gender* |
| | 23. Percentage of youth migrants returning within 10 years of migrating, by gender* |
| | 24. Percentage of youth who have used the Internet in the past month, by gender* |

Source: Authors' recommendations based on discussions in chapters 3–8 of this book.

* The indicator is not currently collected on a regular basis.

sitions to the labor force could be monitored through the incidence of child labor. Postponed transitions, also costly from a human capital development perspective, could be monitored through measures of unemployment and discouragement (being not at work and not in school). It is not enough to know whether the young are employed. The quality of employment also matters, especially in low-income countries where unemployment may be something of a luxury, but it is notoriously difficult to pin down.

Young people incur multiple threats to their health, so monitoring tobacco use, drug and inhalant use, unsafe sexual activity, body mass, and the probability of dying before the age of 60 can provide estimates of the extent of these risks. Of these measures, statistics on drug and inhalant use and body mass index are not collected systematically in large numbers of developing countries. Because the efficacy of health service

delivery for this age group is important for influencing risk-taking behavior, indicators are proposed for both knowledge (of safe sexual practices and methods of preventing HIV/AIDS) and use (antenatal care) among the young. The focus in family formation would be on the incidence of early motherhood (before the age of 18).

Encouraging young people to participate in the broader political and democratic processes of society builds a responsible citizenry, so participation in the local community and broader political awareness are proposed as measures of active and passive citizenship. It would also be important to document government failures to provide legal identity to youngsters—and harsh punishments for young people (presentence detention).

Under migration and communication, the proportion of young people abroad for work and for study is of interest, as is the

proportion who return after a reasonably short time. Access to the Internet would also need to be monitored.

All these indicators are either collected routinely or could be collected routinely at little marginal cost. Better monitoring of outcomes for young people is thus within easy reach, and could contribute enormously to the analytical basis for improving policy.

Evaluation

Evaluation is not within easy reach because it is more intensive in both skills and resources. However, concerted efforts could improve the knowledge available for policy making.

Spillovers from one youth transition to others make impact evaluation difficult. For example, the impact of investing in an additional year of schooling for girls beyond primary school would need to take account not only of potential additional earnings (which may be small in societies where female labor force participation is low),

but also the mother's health (through likely lower fertility) and her children's health and mortality.¹⁹ For another example, the impact of reducing crime among youth may have returns that go beyond direct improvements to the safety of local citizens and may include indirect benefits through increases in international tourism and foreign investment. Fully accounting for these spillover effects is important for understanding the full benefits of investing in young people.

These spillover effects also make it more difficult to evaluate youth investments using traditional cost-effectiveness analysis. Such analysis—of, say, cost per disability life year saved or cost per beneficiary placed in employment—is widely used to evaluate investments in health, training, and other activities. It requires a single effectiveness measure for comparing alternative investments, impractical where outcomes are multiple and varied.²⁰ The alternative would be to use cost-benefit analysis, comparing cost with the monetized sum of

BOX 9.9

Credible proof of a program's success can ensure continuity: The case of Oportunidades

Oportunidades (formerly Progresá), one of Mexico's best known "brands," gives cash benefits to poor households conditional on their maintaining the use of education and health services, particularly for children and youth. Introduced in 1997 as a part of an effort to break the intergenerational transmission of poverty, it now covers some 25 million of the poorest people throughout the country, with a budget of about 0.36 percent of GDP in 2005. The evaluation program was designed at the same time as its implementation, permitting rigorous evaluation of a complex program with many components.

What has it achieved?

Oportunidades has boosted enrollments and narrowed the gender gap in secondary school. The bulk of the positive impact on school enrollment lies in higher continuation rates rather than in returns of children who had left school. Grade repetition is lower, as are dropout rates, especially in the critical transition from primary to secondary school. Adolescents engage in less risky health behavior. Qualitative analysis suggests that the program is raising the aspirations of young people, especially those of girls to become teachers and nurses and to put off marrying until they can acquire the necessary skills.

Why has it been successful?

Multisector programs are notoriously difficult to implement because of the complexity of coordinating operations across ministries, with different mandates and sometime conflicting objectives. How have programs such as Oportunidades managed successful implementation?

Central backing. From the beginning, Oportunidades had very strong central backing, including the full confidence of the executive arm of the government, from the president to the finance ministry official who was one of its cofounders. This allowed it to break through bureaucratic logjams and to secure adequate funding despite the usual vicissitudes of annual budget appropriations. Fiscal space permitted the program to grow over time.

Piloting and outreach. Many operational issues that needed to be addressed—such as efficient targeting, the need for better monitoring and evaluation, and interagency coordination—were identified in an early pilot. Great effort before the launch of the program built consensus and support for the program. This effort continues, particularly through educating beneficiaries about their rights.

Apolitical allocations. The program goes to great lengths to avoid any impression of partisan-

ship or close ties with the administration in power. It is run by a new agency that coordinates with the ministries responsible for various government services. The national parliament establishes the program's budget and annually publishes its operating rules and the number of families enrolled. Enrollment is closed for several months before national elections, and payments are not made before voting days in any jurisdiction. A transparent and nonpolitical system for allocating benefits is one of the program's hallmarks.²¹

Rigorous monitoring and evaluation. From its inception the program has emphasized monitoring and rigorous evaluation, collecting baseline data and longitudinal household and service-provider data with treatment and control groups. Initial evaluation was contracted to an outside agency (International Food Policy Research Institute), and continues to this day involving academics from three continents. Credible empirical proof of the program's achievements has been essential to the program's longevity. The program survived a change in presidents, and was even expanded by the new government.

Sources: Bate (2004); Behrman, Sengupta, and Todd (2001); Levy and Rodriguez (2004); Murray (2004); and Schultz (2000).

benefits, but this requires knowledge of the effectiveness of the interventions across the range of potential outcomes, which is rarely available. For example, no evaluations of the Jovenes training programs in Latin America look into the impact on health, civic participation, or crime.

Another aspect of youth policies is that they may be more effective when administered jointly, because outcomes may have common determinants that need to be targeted together. For example, health information and job skills training may be more effective in ensuring that young people obtain and retain a job when offered jointly than when either is offered on its own—because obtaining a job is a function both of being healthy and being qualified. Similarly, discouraging girls (and their parents) from early marriage may be more effective when girls are in school. In the model discussed in box 9.6, targeting both education and health outcomes of young people is more effective in encouraging human capital development than education interventions alone.

Both these features—spillover effects and complementarities across transitions—suggest that when it comes to youth there may be a case for coordinated evaluations of outcomes. Traditional evaluations focus on programs and judge the impact of the pro-

gram on a specified outcome. Perhaps more relevant for young people would be, what is the most cost-effective way of reaching a given outcome? This may require coordinated evaluations across a range of relevant interventions.

Meeting the challenge is essential to advancing policy development. True, evaluating is expensive, but because the knowledge generated is a public good, there is a strong case for greater donor effort to assist in evaluation. Donor assistance has already advanced the evaluation of policies and programs, but much more remains to be done (see spotlight on donors following chapter 8).

On top of adding to the pool of policy-relevant knowledge, one neglected outcome of rigorous evaluation is the possible benefit of insulating good programs from politics. Oportunidades, the conditional cash transfer program in Mexico, provides a good example. Found to be effective in boosting secondary school enrollment, the evaluation of its outcomes was built in at the outset. This helped ensure the program's longevity (box 9.9). Changes in political leadership during program implementation did not derail the program because its established effectiveness in addressing the long-run causes of poverty was hard for the new government to question.

This Report's simple message to governments and policy makers is that investing in young people is essential for development—and for those investments to be most effective, young people must be included as stakeholders in decisions that affect them. But what can young people do? This spotlight addresses young people directly about how to develop their own capabilities so they can seize the opportunities provided to them, but especially, so they can create opportunities for themselves, for other young people, and for everyone. The spotlight benefited greatly from consultations with youth from many countries who have successfully taken action for development. It was written by young people, for young people.

Young people make a difference

*People will decide their lives
People will identify their problems
People will lead to self-help
People will share the fruits*

This is the motto of Chamila, Kamili, Wacheeri, and Milmini—four young women from villages in Sri Lanka who are helping young people and all people in their villages overcome poverty. Kamili (age 22) says, “Our problems are village problems, and the village’s problems are ours.” They have seen resources wasted and misguided projects implemented by those trying to help their villages, but instead of becoming disillusioned with development work they became engaged in it. They sum up their work as “Strengthen the village by increasing your individual capacity.”

Powerful older villagers haven’t always appreciated their involvement: when Chamila (age 19) was elected to the village council, it would not allow her to take office because of her youth. But the community, remembering her past hard work and cooperation while volunteering on village projects, forced the whole council to resign instead. Chamila was then reinstated with a new council.

These four women are just a few of the hundreds of poor young people (ages 16–25) who are volunteering and working together for community development in Sri Lanka.

Source: Interview with Samantha M. Constant and Sarath K. Guttikunda. Social Accountability Workshop. Gemi Diriya Project, Sri Lanka. March 2006.

This Report recommends that governments should invest in and recognize young people. For it to become reality, young people must seize the initiative and invest—by developing your own capacity, and taking action to make youth investments successful. And as young people in Sri Lanka recognize, (see the box above), all meaningful investments in development can positively affect young people. What can be done and how to do it?

Take action: What can be done

No matter who you are, you can take action as young people to make life better for yourself, and at the same time, for others around you. Some of the poorest boys and girls (ages 12–15) in Malawi and Nepal, for example, have formed sanitation clubs—sometimes in spite of ridicule from their peers—to build latrines and maintain water pumps for their schools, improving their daily experience and the health of their communities.

The many things young people have accomplished fill books and reports,¹ and there are few limitations on the ways young people can contribute to development.

Action can be as simple as developing one’s own capabilities—learning about and taking advantage of a training program, a health service, career options—or finding out about and discussing with friends an issue that matters to them (the environment, HIV/AIDS). What you decide to do and how you do it will depend on your skills, your personality, the issues that inspire you, the resources you have available to you, and the circumstances in which you live.

Working with the system

Few societies readily include young people in policy decisions (chapters 7 and 9), but many young people overcome that challenge to volunteer or work for existing NGOs, or cooperate with governments to improve policies. Through youth service organizations in countries such as Kenya, Pakistan, and the Philippines, youth have developed and carried out active solutions to community and national problems. In Mexico 2,000 young people volunteer to improve literacy and civic participation through one of many large programs that involve young people. Young people have a key role in exercising their “client power” to

hold governments accountable—as young people have done in Brazil (see box 2.4), FYR Macedonia, and Russia (chapter 3). And “government” can be anything from a local teacher to a global institution.

Going beyond the system

Many young people decide to start something new, be it an activist campaign for social justice or a motorbike transport business (chapter 7). These youth-led projects usually work best when young people work together, and train the next “next generation” to continue their efforts. Students at one college in the United States started the first student-run think tank in 2004, and already, students at 50 other colleges have joined the network, and lawmakers have begun to use their research.

Young people face many challenges, but every challenge to taking action is an opportunity to take action. Most young people see a lack of jobs as just a challenge to employment. Several large groups of young ex-combatants in Sierra Leone took it as an opportunity and joined together across opposing sides of the conflict to start a motorbike transportation business. By starting a new trade (motorbike transportation did not exist before the war), they avoided the challenges faced by youth breaking into established trades and instead were very successful. Plus, they found a job that they particularly enjoy as young people. As one bike rider (age 18) says, “The war was exciting, but bad. To be a bike rider is exciting and good.” Still they had to work to gain the trust of clients, and learn to cooperate with the traditional system: rather than reacting violently to perceived unfair treatment by police, they hired a lawyer.²

Tools for action: How to get it done

Young people often face complex challenges, such as lack of information and experience, skeptical and resistant authorities, bureaucracies that favor qualifications over hard work and skills, lack of resources, and lack of recognition for their work. Despite these

obstacles, young people can still take action to develop their capability—through persistence, a willingness to experiment, and four basic tools.

Learn

Find out as much you can about how to build skills for your work and your life, about both sides of development issues you are passionate about, about different ways of taking action.

One youth UN delegate from the Netherlands, spent “half a year” lobbying his government to participate in the Millennium Summit, and relied on his expertise on the issues to convince them to allow him to go:

After a certain time they knew me, they knew that I wasn't just smiling and representing the youth, but also, I could really help them with experts on different youth issues. What I know a lot about because of my work at the Red Cross is HIV/AIDS. But if they wanted to talk with child soldiers, I could help them. . . .³

How can this be done?

- “Use the power of ICTs to get information,” writes a young volunteer in Nigeria (chapter 8). To start, learn from Web sites such as the Development Gateway, the UN, and the World Bank, and the many sites for specific issues and national organizations.*
- Take advantage of programs that provide information to young people, such as Umsobomvu Youth Fund in South Africa, or those that provide information about services for young people (education, jobs), such as the ASER project in India (chapter 3).*
- Learn how to apply for small grants for projects, work with people, and write proposals for the many resources provided by youth organizations, for example, “Global Youth Coalition on HIV/AIDS (GYCA) conducts online courses in proposal writing, advocacy, etc.” advises one youth leader.*

Evaluate

Be critical. Question your interests, the circumstances around you, and the poli-

cies and actions of those who are supposed to serve you and your community. Reconsider what you already know and what you hear. As you take action, do research to evaluate whether your efforts are making a difference for those you want to help.

- “Asking for advice is the most important tool that we have as youth. . . . My advice to other youth leaders is not to ignore the small people . . . sometimes they know more than those at the top,” says a Liberian youth leader.
- Check out TakingITGlobal’s youth action guide, search for others, or create your own.*
- Talk with an open mind to people who you think your action will help, and find out what they need—and then adapt your plan to make it work
- Find out about youth involvement in monitoring and evaluation of programs that are designed to serve youth.

Cooperate

If you are going to make change effective, you must work with others: form alliances, collaborate, work collectively. Just as important, learn work to with people who have the power to help.

A young woman from Kenya became the first UN youth delegate from Kenya in 2005 by taking initiative to voice important issues and cooperate with Kenyan officials:

From the beginning of the year, from my organizational level, I lobbied and advocated for the youth to be included in all the processes on the MDGs. . . . We never missed their meetings, we worked so hard to have our thoughts and ideas put in. When it was time for the ministry to appoint the delegation, they appointed the most active and persistent.⁴

Join a local or national youth organization, or a global network of young people (such as TakingITGlobal, Youth Employment Summit campaign [YES], the Global Youth Action Network) who are taking action. This is an opportunity to find other young people that you can learn from and work with and a way to make your voice heard.*

Voice

You can hold civil servants, social workers, and policy makers accountable. Another important way to use your voice is to inform and learn from other young people.

One young activist from Italy found an alternative way to express her voice in the face of challenges:

I was tired of taking part in pro-youth consultation processes ending up in nothing, and was tired to keep talking but not having anyone listen. . . . I then decided that I [would] try to change it, and worked toward the aim of setting a youth platform, Youth Action for Change, to make my voice heard—and every other young person for that matter—heard. . . . The project proved very successful. . . .⁵

A youth leader in Singapore says:

About voice: know how it works. It's difficult to effect any real change if you don't know the political infrastructure. . . . Talk to youth-friendly people in civil service or NGOs which effectively engage with government.

These four tools are just the beginning. Use these and others to motivate your plans and develop capabilities for action.

Who can help

Many groups exist to help young people take action. If you would like their help, make your voice heard. As in the story from Sri Lanka, young people can often have a big impact at the local level. Global youth organizations (mentioned above) are a network for many small, local organizations. At both the local and global levels the UN has worked to include young people. The World Bank has begun to involve youth organizations by providing courses, and by consulting with youth about its programs. At the local level, the World Bank has civil society and youth liaisons in its country offices. At the global level, see the work of the Youth, Development and Peace Network.

In the end, it is up to you—your involvement is crucial to increasing the role of young people and youth issues in efforts to alleviate poverty.

*See the following Web sites: Development Gateway: www.developmentgateway.org/youth, GYCA: www.youthaidscoalition.org, Taking IT Global: www.takingitglobal.org, Umsobomvu Youth Fund: www.uyf.org.za, UN: www.un.org/youth, World Bank: www.worldbank.org/childrenandyouth, www.youthink.org, Youth Employment Summit Campaign: www.yesweb.org.