

Skills for Work in the Future: A Youth Perspective

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As a research scholar in Sustainable Development studies at the London School of Economics and Political Science¹ and as a representative of the Youth Employment Summit (YES) Campaign² and the Global Youth Action Network³ (GYAN), it is a great honour to address this Seoul + 5 UNESCO International Technical Experts' meeting on Learning for Work, Citizenship and Sustainability. I want to take this opportunity in saluting UNESCO for organizing this meeting and for the important role it played as task manager for Education since the Earth Summit in Rio back in 1992. On behalf of the YES Campaign and GYAN, I would also like to extend my full support to UNESCO as it leads the United Nations Decade on Education for Sustainable Development⁴ which is to commence in March 2005.

The point of my presentation is to try and set the tone for the next few days of the meeting in terms of the important 'Voice of Youth'. As the youth speaker I hope to help all the participants to be mindful of the youth demographic throughout the meeting, in the ideas and policies that will be carried forward into the declaration and other meeting outcomes. The focus of my presentation will be on 'Skills for Work in the Future: A Youth Perspective' and it will combine many different elements such as: Sustainable Development (3 pillars - economic, environmental, social); the role of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET); how the role of youth plays out in all of this;

how does it affect them in particular; what do their specific roles need to be. I will try to draw the connections between skills development for employability and the changing nature of work using success stories from some of the 70 YES Country Networks.

We know that many developed countries face challenges associated with aging populations. However, the situation in most developing countries is the very opposite. The rapid youth population growth rates in many developing countries require attention and the voices of youth need to be given central roles in any comprehensive approach to vocational education and training. The creation of Sustainable Livelihoods has become an important factor in sustainable development, particularly in developing countries and among disadvantaged populations. A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets and activities required for a means of living. It is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and still maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base. Therefore more support should be given to the promotion and development of social, economic and environmental sustainable youth livelihoods.

According to a new ILO report⁵, young people represent 130 million of the world's 550 million working poor who are unable to lift themselves and their families above the equivalent of the \$1 per day poverty line. These young people struggle to survive, often performing work under unsatisfactory conditions in the informal economy. The report puts global youth unemployment at 14.4 per cent in 2003, a 26.8 per cent increase over the past decade, with rates highest in the Middle East and North Africa (25.6 per cent),

followed by sub-Saharan Africa (21 per cent), transition economies (18.6 per cent), Latin America and the Caribbean (16.6 per cent), Southeast Asia (16.4 per cent), South Asia (13.9 per cent), industrialized economies (13.4 per cent), and East Asia (7 per cent). The industrialized economies region was the only region where youth unemployment saw a distinct decrease from 15.4 per cent in 1993. The report shows that the growth in the number of young people is rapidly outstripping the ability of economies to provide them with jobs. While the overall youth population grew by 10.5 per cent over the last 10 years to more than 1.1 billion in 2003, youth employment grew by only 0.2 per cent to around 526 million.

While young people often comprise 70% of the population in many developing nations, much work needs to be done to address their needs and their potential to contribute significantly to achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals⁶ (MDGs). Therefore I believe that addressing these concerns of young people worldwide is critical to the success of achieving the MDGs because they are the current and future leaders of our communities. As a matter of fact, young people have responded to the challenge⁷ made by Prof. Jeffrey Sachs⁸ on the MDGs. An international team of youth experts lead by GYAN have responded by producing a report that contains recommendations on how national and international institutions can successfully engage young people in efforts to achieve the MDGs. Distinctively, the report has been authored not by World Bank economists or UN diplomats, but by a global team of young people themselves. The Ad Hoc Working Group on Youth collaborated in research and drafting the report, and organized a consultation process that spanned more than 100 countries. An interim

version of the report⁹ will be released in November 2004, and circulated for feedback from young people. The final report,¹⁰ *'Youth and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): Challenges and Opportunities for Implementation,'* will be launched on April 2005 at the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development.

Encouraging civic involvement and investing in youth's key concerns must be an urgent priority of governments and civil society. Recent major international conferences have addressed issues surrounding youth livelihoods development through technical and vocational education and training. However the resolutions that emerged from these conferences have, in some areas, failed to be sufficiently acted upon. Therefore it is up to us the youth, to take actions consistent with the commitment made by governments in these world conference. To that end we have created a global movement called the Youth Employment Summit Campaign, which is working with all concerned stakeholders to implement the MDGs of the United Nations through its 70 YES Country Networks. About 1500 young people from 150 countries launched a Decade Campaign of Action in Alexandria, Egypt at the first Youth Employment Summit in 2002 so that young adults, especially youth facing poverty, will be engaged in educational, technical and vocational training programmes that will then give them the skills and capacity to create productive and sustainable livelihoods for themselves and their communities. Policies to tackle global youth unemployment have also been identified by Secretary-General Kofi Annan's Youth Employment Network¹¹ (YEN), a UN-World Bank-ILO partnership that pools the skills, experiences and knowledge of diverse partners at the global, national and local level.

Young people are in the forefront of social, economic and political developments, and they are often agents of change and innovations. The world of work provides the environment through which youth can actively participate in society, contribute their talents and visions for the future and develop a sense of commitment and belonging. Yet, youth unemployment is on average two to three times higher than that of the older populations. While 88 million young women and men are unemployed throughout the world, millions more barely eke out a living, often under hazardous conditions. Therefore I believe that TVET for Sustainability issues are particularly important for youth because they will inherit many of the environmental, economic and social problems created over the past decades and incorporating their opinions and perspectives into the educational and training programmes at all levels is critical to the success of achieving sustainable development. This will help build and shape the capacity of young people to address sustainability issues and become leaders in their communities and countries. Furthermore, the establishment of grant making programmes for young ‘social entrepreneurs’ who are leading development programs but lack access to mainstream funding and loan financing must be encouraged. There needs to be more emphasis on partnerships between youth and their local authorities, and peer-led awareness campaigns should rally young people in western countries in support of their peers in developing countries. We must also realise that sustainable development isn't solely about tackling the environmental issues, but also the economic and social sustainability aspects that it includes. Therefore by implementing TVET for Sustainability young people will benefit in the following ways:

Economic:

Youth face higher unemployment than any other demographic. Youth make up the majority of the enrolled in TVET courses. Therefore, it seems like a natural fit for TVET courses to use one disparity to counteract the other. Young people aged 15 to 24 represent nearly half the world's jobless although they are only 25 per cent of the working age population, and halving world youth unemployment rate would add at least \$2.2 trillion to global gross domestic product (GDP) equal to around 4 per cent of the 2003 value, according to a new ILO analysis - "Global Employment Trends for Youth 2004."¹²

Environmental:

Because the youth in TVET are learning working habits that will be carried on throughout their working lives it is important that sustainability issues are adequately addressed in curricula to instill environmental-friendly work habits.

Social:

Using TVET to create sustainable livelihoods can combat feelings of despair and desperation among youth. Integrating life-skills into TVET can help youth to: cope with daily struggles, integrate into their community/society, decrease criminality, etc.

The YES Campaign sees the relevance of working in partnership with UNEVOC which can offer the services of UNESCO's Network of over 250 UNEVOC Centres in 156 countries to help promote the decade long global campaign for youth employment.

Now I want to draw upon examples of good practices from some of the YES Country Networks that are actually using and shaping TVET to further sustainability in the economic, social, and environmental sense in their countries. The 6E's of the YES Campaign, i.e. Employability, Entrepreneurship, Employment Creation, Equity, Environmental Sustainability, and Empowerment, are the cornerstones of the all YES Strategies. However Education¹³ is a fundamental pillar upon which each of these 6E's of the YES Campaign is built. The different projects that are being implemented by the YES Country Networks target the 6E's of the YES Campaign and include a range of activities such as:

Translating Ideas into Action:

The YES Country Network in Honduras has launched an US\$80,000 project funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). YES Network member organization, Center for Health and Family Assistance (CEPROSAF) was awarded the grant on behalf of YES-Honduras to work with persons infected with HIV/AIDS, the majority being youths under the age of 35. The project focuses on building the capacity of people living with, or affected by HIV/AIDS. The focus is on youth creating productive and sustainable livelihoods, in line with the goals of the YES Campaign. Activities include vocational and technical training in a wide variety of skills. This 15 months project that has translated ideas into real action on the ground using TVET will also include other stakeholders such as local authorities, churches, health workers, communities and families of people living with HIV/AIDS.

Building Trust and Respect:

The YES Country Networks in Burundi and Holland have been building trust and respect with each other since they met in Alexandria in 2002 by collaborating on a joint project. Youth in Reconstruction of World in Destruction (DRWD), the lead YES agency in Burundi, teamed up with the Dutch YES 2002 delegates from Foundation Zero-Kap, to fund a micro-credit scheme for Burundian families. About 37 families received 100 Euros each to begin micro-enterprise activities in late 2002. Other activities included technical training provided by the lead agency for youth to set up small businesses in different villages. In addition, a shipment of school materials arrived in Burundi from Europe in late 2002. The shipment consisting of basic classroom items such as notebooks and pens was donated by HEMA, a Dutch department store and Villa Zebra, a children's art museum.

Developing a Shared Vision:

The YES Country Network in Jordan provides schools with tools to link education to market policies by developing a shared vision and working closely with the academic and training institutions. The campaign on national youth employment started in early 2004 with a national conference attended by concerned stakeholders such as government, private sector, academic institutions, NGOs and other organizations to develop a national strategy for fighting youth unemployment and integrating and empowering youth in productive societies.

Negotiating and Impacting the System:

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism and the Ministry of Social Protection of Colombia are working together to construct a government bill for employment creation through technical and vocational training for youth. The members of the YES Country Network in Colombia consulted and negotiated on the initial design of the legislation, and they are developing proposals to support its implementation and hence impacting the system.

From the success stories presented above it is clear that young people bring entrepreneurship, dedication and a sense of possibility to international policy planning. Therefore I believe that youth organisations worldwide must maintain sustained international pressure to help forge a coherent follow-up to the UN world conference commitments. This is the challenge that lies ahead. Young people have contributed to each “Plan of Action or Platform for Action” adopted by the UN conferences. They have joined forces with the broader civil society. After all, issues that affect humanity also affect youth.

In order to facilitate discussions, I have identified five barriers that we face in imparting TVET for Sustainability values/education to young people for employment creation. I will share the opportunity that these barriers provide for action and advocacy, and suggest outcomes towards which the participants can focus their strategies and action plans. The other barriers include lack of skilled trainers who truly understand the concept of sustainability, lack of resources to train trainers in developing countries, lack of funding to impart training for rural youth, lack of practical implementation of skills

acquired to create employment, etc.

Barrier #1: Lack of targeted education, employment and training services to serve youth employment needs.

This provides the opportunity for initiating the development of skills-based education, targeted employment and training services to serve youth employment needs. To remove this first barrier, I would propose the following needed outcomes and recommendations. The appropriate use of new technologies in education and training for employment is vital to bridge the digital divide. There should be more support for career counseling and school to work transition programs by the public and private sector. There should be an increase in informal and formal education both contributing to providing skills for employment. Community participation should be encouraged for linking education and training to employment. Young girls in developing countries should have full access to educational programmes and training facilities. The international and regional organisations funding learning institutions should be charged with facilitating dissemination of good practices, lessons learned, success stories, and networking. Lastly governments and the private sector must embrace life long learning.

Barrier #2: Lack of access and appropriate use of new technologies to impart TVET to support youth employment.

This provides the opportunity for lobbying for the development and increased access of new information and communications technologies to impart TVET to support youth employment and training services that will serve youth employment needs. To

remove this second barrier, I would propose the following needed outcomes and recommendations. Governments and the private sector must make investments in developing and supporting innovative approaches for using technology to impart TVET to support youth employment and training. Governments and other suppliers of education and training must use appropriate technology to increase access and efficiency. Lastly national governments must invest in creating the infrastructure needed for bringing the information super highway to their countries, so that all global citizens have access to technology.

Barrier #3: Lack of enabling policies and partnerships for youth employment.

This provides the opportunity for advocating the development of key policies and public-private partnerships that promote youth employment. To remove this third barrier, I would propose the following needed outcomes and recommendations. Governments need to implement policies and models that lead to job-led economic growth; that enable self employment; that support vulnerable youth - young women, disabled, rural etc; and that promotes integration of education and training with employment services. There should be more awareness among policy makers or the high cost of neglect may lead to violence, alienation, etc. There should be more meaningful youth participation - including lobbying and solidarity groups for creating policies for youth employment. National governments must set goals for creating employment opportunities for youth. There should be more accountability among governments and the private sector training providers for demand driven skills development. Governments must act as catalysts in supporting the private sector to join in providing a universal education and training

infrastructure. Lastly there should be more emphasis on entrepreneurship both social and economic.

Barrier #4: Lack of credit and other services to serve youth in generating self-employment after education and training.

This provides the opportunity for reaching youth with credit and other services to support self-employment. To remove this fourth barrier, I would propose the following needed outcomes and recommendations. Financial institutions should provide credit and other services for promoting self-employment. National governments must promote privatisation leading to enterprise development and economic growth. Public and private investment is needed for creating an enabling environment for youth enterprise development such as incubators, mentors, teams, etc. Governments, the private sector and communities should accept youth enterprise as a viable career option. Governments must create policies to provide support and remove barriers to youth self-employment by promotion of self-employment as a career option. Educational institutions must create an enabling environment and support structures to help youth in ensuring the sustainability and viability of their initiative. Lastly national governments must provide the infrastructure needed to ensure that potential entrepreneurs are trained and ready to face the many challenges in their communities.

Barrier #5: Discrimination against young people and specifically young women.

This provides the opportunity for lobbying and promoting the empowerment and inclusion of young women. To remove this fifth barrier, I would propose the following

needed outcomes and recommendations. All government policies must be tested to ensure that they have no ill effects on women. Government policies should respect the different needs of men and women. Governments and the private sector should ensure equal pay to men and women. All social policies should support families with the explicit aim of making sure that all girls and young women attend school. Governments must ensure no gender bias in credit policies, in education, in training and in employment. Lastly national policies should be placed for affirmative action for women in countries where they are traditionally discriminated against.

The policies and strategies that we should be considering at this meeting are to allocate more funding for TVET programmes at the country level, retrain the trainers and give them the tools that will enable them to better equip the youth in their programmes, create an enabling environment for young people to be entrepreneurs who can use their new skills to create new jobs for themselves and their peers. This meeting should consider adopting these policies and strategies in order to overcome these barriers mentioned above. With better policy and programming congruence among education, training and credit provision, youth with enhanced skill sets will be better equipped to access credit, develop and sustain self-employment initiatives. More effective and relevant education and training will result in more productive employment in micro and small businesses, particularly in the informal sector, larger enterprises that seek enterprising self-motivated employees, and government and civil society that seek enterprising employees. The improved skills and self-motivation of the emerging generation will contribute to increased social and economic productivity of communities.

Improved skills will also be conducive to fewer social and political problems that are based on youth unemployment and lack of initiative. Overall, improved skills will contribute to enhanced employment opportunities and the practical generation of sustainable livelihoods for young women and men.

Finally I want to stress that a livelihood is a broader category than employment and more in line with the actual manner in which many young people in developing countries organize themselves and their activities in order to survive. Therefore adaptability and dynamic livelihood capabilities are the key to generating sustainable livelihoods in these countries. Dynamic livelihood capabilities can be thought of as enterprising behaviour in a developing context. However the institutional challenge is to improve the effectiveness of the non-formal training system in order to mediate the latent potential of young people into productive social and economic activity, while understanding their current livelihood conditions and capabilities. National governments need to address key global policies that affect youth employment and sustainable livelihoods. They need to take strategies that promote self-employment and entrepreneurship, school to work programmes and work-based training. Partnerships with the private sector must be strengthened and the use of new information and communication technologies to support youth employment and training must be encouraged. The youth themselves must be fully empowered to generate the solutions supporting youth employment. Their best practices and success stories must be recognised and acknowledged at all levels and support must be provided for further replication of such initiatives from the grassroots to the global level.

To end I want to quote President John F. Kennedy who said, ‘The future promise of any nation can be directly measured by the present prospects of its youth.’ Let us show a true partnership with young people in the international community. The youth are the leaders of tomorrow but they are your partners for today!

Notes:

¹ www.lse.ac.uk/destin

² www.yesweb.org

³ www.youthlink.org

⁴ <http://portal.unesco.org/education/>

⁵ <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/inf/pr/2004/36.htm>

⁶ <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

⁷ When asked how the United Nations intended to involve young people as partners in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Professor Jeffrey Sachs’ reply last spring was: “You tell us!”

⁸ In 2002, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan appointed Jeffrey Sachs, an economist and professor at the Earth Institute at Columbia University, to lead the Millennium Project in developing a concrete action plan to achieve the MDGs.

⁹ <http://www.takingitglobal.org/themes/mdg/>

¹⁰ <http://www.youthlink.org/gyanv3/home.html>

¹¹ <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/strat/yen/>

¹² <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/strat/download/getyen.pdf>

¹³ <http://www.yesweb.org/docs/7Es.pdf>

Biographical note:

Bremley W. B. Lyngdoh, a 30-year-old research scholar at the London School of Economics and Political Science comes from Meghalaya, North East India. Since the age of 13, he has been passionately involved in helping people build a better life through environmentally social and sustainable development projects and programmes, which he has implemented while working with an array of different NGOs, UN agencies and the private sector. He holds a Master of International Affairs degree in Energy and Environmental Policy Studies from Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs. He speaks 5 languages and has traveled to 51 countries.

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