

HOW YOUTH DRIVE CHANGE
7th UNESCO YOUTH FORUM

CANADIAN COMMISSION FOR UNESCO
NATIONAL YOUTH CONSULTATION REPORT

OCTOBER 2011

CONTEXT

Since the 1990s, the Canadian Commission for UNESCO has remained highly involved with and for youth (15-30 years old). Youth represent essential partners in building more just and peaceful societies throughout the world. For this reason, the Commission ensures that youth fully participate, not only in the activities of the Commission, but in those of UNESCO and in all other forums of civil society as well.

The Commission currently has youth sitting on its three sectoral Commissions (Education; Culture, Communication and Information; Natural and Social Sciences), and on its Executive Committee. The Commission also works with its Youth Advisory Group (YAG) as with a vast network of youth and youth organizations that help guide the actions of youth engagement at the Commission.

The youth consultations, in preparation for the UNESCO Youth Forum held in Paris every two years prior to the UNESCO General Conference, constitute one of the Commission's initiatives wherein young Canadians are invited to share their vision regarding the theme of the Forum. The recommendations that arise from the consultations serve as a basis for the formulation of Canada's position at the Youth Forum.

Since 1999, the UNESCO Youth Forum has united, at UNESCO headquarters in Paris, youth delegates from Member States and NGOs around the world. The delegates debate and develop the proposals for action, which are subsequently submitted in a final report to the UNESCO General Conference. Given that the General Conference is the supreme decisional body of the Organization, the UNESCO Youth Forum constitutes a unique occasion for youth to participate actively in the work of the UNESCO General Conference and to have input on some issues being discussed there.

This year the working theme of the Forum is: "How Youth Drive Change". The entire thematic agenda of the Forum is designed to specifically showcase how youth can drive social change towards peace and economic opportunity. The 7th UNESCO Youth Forum represents a unique opportunity to bridge the gap between youth and worldwide decision-makers and the Canadian Commission for UNESCO is proud to enable the participation of young Canadians in this worthwhile event.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of the consultations was to recommend, both to UNESCO and the Commission, ideas on how youth can drive social change towards peace and economic opportunity. These youth-led recommendations will be further studied by the Canadian Commission for UNESCO and will serve, among other things, to develop Canada's position at the 2011 Youth Forum and provide a framework to the work of the two youth delegates representing Canada at the Forum, Yassen Tcholakov and Victoria Lesau. The results will be shared with the members of the Canadian delegation to the 36th UNESCO General Conference, and with all the Commission's members and partners.

METHODOLOGY

In September 2011, the Provincial Youth Advisory Group (YAG) Coordinators organized seven consultations throughout the country. Under the supervision of the Commission's Programme Officer, the Coordinators recruited participants within their own provincial networks and other YAG members' networks. Coordinators were responsible for confirming the participation of all participants in their province as well as for related logistics.

Provincial Coordinators then gathered the data from their respective consultations and provided a concise report to the Commission. In-person consultations were held in Quebec, Ontario, Alberta (in the context of the Global Youth Assembly¹) and British Columbia. Online consultations were held in New Brunswick, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

The Commission then invited the two selected delegates to this year's Youth Forum to take part in a Drafting Committee. With the assistance of the Programme Officer for Youth, the two delegates deliberated and selected those recommendations that most represent the views of young Canadians across the country. The subsequent report embodies the result of these efforts. This year's report was purposely abridged and was intended to provide concise and specific recommendations to the two youth delegates attending the UNESCO Youth Forum, thus facilitating their work in ensuring that Canadian youth recommendations resonate among others.

¹ The Global Youth Assembly (GYA) is about bringing youth between the ages of 16-28 together from diverse geographical and personal backgrounds to learn from each other and become part of a movement to advance peace and human rights.

“HOW YOUTH DRIVE CHANGE”

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following themes will be debated in sessions at the 7th UNESCO Youth Forum, from October 17 to 20, (one session per theme) and will focus on specific topical issues of concern to youth. These sessions will identify specific recommendations for innovative action which will be considered by the Drafting Committee of the Youth Forum. The following are the Canadian youth recommendations.

EDUCATION, SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

1. PRIORITIZING INTER-DISCIPLINARY LEARNING AND TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

- As a forerunner in education for sustainable development around the world, UNESCO, through its Member States, should prioritize inter-disciplinary learning and develop related guidance tools for the use of schools, teachers, NGOs and those involved in informal teaching as well. For example, we suggest that UNESCO Member States integrate sustainable development concepts and issues in economics, history and even arts-based courses.
- We commend the UNESCO LINKS Programme² which strives to strengthen knowledge transmission between elders and youth, and explore pathways to balance community-based knowledge with global knowledge in formal and non- formal education. However, we recommend that UNESCO continue to recognize the value of local and traditional knowledge in all of its mandated sectors. We particularly encourage National Commissions to promote the value of traditional teachings in the context of education for sustainable development.

2. CULTURE OF PEACE, CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION

ENCOURAGING A YOUTH-LED CULTURE OF PEACE

² For more information: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/priority-areas/links/>

- We believe that young people must be empowered to contribute to their communities in a peaceful and positive manner. They must be encouraged to take ownership over their ideas and initiatives.
- By providing safe spaces for youth to congregate, creating advisory positions for youth in all levels of government, and providing in-kind and financial support for youth-led initiatives, organizations and governments encourage young people to be positive change-makers and consequently help foster a culture of peace in their communities.

3. CULTURE FOR DIVERSITY, DIALOGUE and DEVELOPMENT

ENCOURAGING ART-BASED METHODS OF SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT AMONG YOUTH

- We believe that creative outlets such as painting, literature, theatre, poetry, photography, and music can serve as methods to promote inter-cultural dialogue and social engagement among youth.
- Based on UNESCO's Medium-Term Strategy for 2008-2013 stating that "UNESCO will promote the potential of dialogue based on music and the arts as a vector for the strengthening of mutual understanding and interaction as well as for building a culture of peace and respect for cultural diversity, we strongly believe that UNESCO should strengthen its support for these mediums and that they should be increasingly promoted as valuable methods of youth engagement and civic participation ³ .

4. TOWARDS GREEN SOCIETIES: ENGAGING THE YOUTH TO CREATE LOCAL SOLUTIONS FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

FOSTERING CHILD AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN THE MAN AND BIOSPHERE PROGRAMME

- Young Canadians recognize the important role of UNESCO's Man and Biosphere Programme (MAB). We strongly believe that education of one's relationship to the environment should begin at the earliest age and as such, urge UNESCO to foster increased child and youth participation in the management and development of biosphere reserves around the world. UNESCO should also reinforce its efforts to sustain youth involvement

³ One example of how art was used to promote dialogue and counter youth exclusion is a show entitled GRUBB (Gypsy Roma Urban Balkan Beats) led by Quebec director Serge Denoncourt, and includes 25 underprivileged Roma youth from Serbia. The show aimed to give the young participants a voice to express what it means to grow up Roma and deal with discrimination and exclusion every day¹. In the words of one participant: "(...) art is a homeland to those who have none." For more information: <http://rpointonline.blogspot.com/>

in the promotion and preservation of World Heritage Sites both from a cultural and from an environmental perspective.

5. CHANGING THE WORLD THROUGH THE INTERNET: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

MAKING USE OF TECHNOLOGY TO OFFER EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES OF ENGAGEMENT TO ALL YOUTH

- Recent technological advances have allowed instantaneous communication in ways never seen before. While social networking has become an important tool for dissemination of information, we believe that UNESCO must work to promote the use of technology in all of its sub- themes, and ensure that the ICTs that are beneficial in our daily lives are not utilized in a detrimental manner.
- We also believe that UNESCO can act as a unique player within this sphere, and more importantly, provide some innovative ideas through involvement of young people throughout the world and other stakeholders. These developments must be made in an attempt to equally engage youth without regards to their socioeconomic status and their geographic location. Online collaborations can bring youth to work together, create bridges and foster multicultural understanding between countries.

UNESCO YOUTH FORUM SUB-THEMES

The following sub-themes will be discussed in a main thematic plenary during the 7th UNESCO Youth Forum.

1 - "CITIZENS IN ACTION: YOUTH IN POLITICAL AND PUBLIC LIFE"

*"For the most part, youth believe in building partnerships to collectively surmount challenges."
(Consultation Participant)*

"Youth should be asked what issues are important to them instead of applying cookie cutter assumptions to their needs." (Consultation Participant)

A. GIVING YOUTH THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK AND BE HEARD, BOTH AT RESERVED POSITIONS FOR YOUTH IN NON-YOUTH COMMITTEES/ORGANIZATIONS, AS WELL AS IN YOUTH-ONLY SETTINGS

- Bringing youth to take part in political and public life, both in youth and non-youth-related settings, is the first and most important step in ensuring that they become positively engaged in their communities, in the present and in the future. Youth often offer different perspectives to social issues and civil society can benefit from these new approaches in their decision making processes.
- We firmly believe that positions within political, public and civic organizations should be reserved for youth. Thus, we encourage UNESCO, National Commissions and national and international partners, to continue promoting youth involvement in their own structures and in other committees and organizations and to create more opportunities for youth dialogue. We also invite Member States to read the toolkit on fostering youth engagement in national commissions for UNESCO, the product of a concerted effort by UNESCO, the Canadian Commission for UNESCO and 13 national commissions from various regions around the world.

B. PROVIDING YOUTH WITH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT EDUCATION

- Because engagement in one's community should start at an early age, we strongly believe that civic engagement, described as a sense of personal responsibility individuals should feel to uphold their obligations as part of a community, should be taught at all levels of schooling. We firmly encourage UNESCO and its educational partners to strengthen its support for the development and promotion of civic engagement education tools in formal and non-formal educational settings.

C. FACILITATING ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF YOUTH IN THE POLITICAL SPHERE BY USING YOUTH-FRIENDLY ITCs

- The internet allows for a very different type of democracy, one in which direct citizen engagement is possible and this opportunity should be maximized by those concerned. Examples include the growing popularity of Twitter among certain politicians and political groups as a tool to provide real time information to their followers.
- In order to include and engage youth and other citizens in political and public affairs and to help foster peaceful youth movements, we encourage UNESCO's Member States and other related groups and organizations to further examine and make use of new technologies.

2 “COUNTERING YOUTH EXCLUSION, VULNERABILITY AND VIOLENCE”

“Youth want to feel valued. They want to feel a sense of belonging. It is worthwhile to include them in building a positive community. It is a direct investment in our future and we can only benefit from it.” (Consultation Participant)

“When youth feel that they are not heard, they seek justice through other forums, of which violence is a last resort of expression.” (Consultation Participant)

A. CREATING SUPERVISED SAFE SPACES FOR YOUTH

- We strongly believe that providing young people with a safe space to congregate, both for those in school and those who are not, is of uttermost importance. These sorts of supervised 'safe spaces' allow young people to build life skills such as effective communication, team building and leadership. Such spaces are also beneficial in that they allow for affinities to develop among peers - a vital element in preventing violence amongst groups of individuals who may have different skin colours, be of different religions or dress differently. Helping to provide these spaces enables youth-led discourse, exchanges, mutual support and promotes a sense of belonging which in turn favours positive youth engagement in our communities.

B. ENABLING YOUTH GATHERINGS

- Consultation participants felt that youth often face “stereotypical negativity”. They can, for example, be perceived as agitators by the general public. However, rather than “fighting the system”, youth need to channel their ideas through innovative ways.
- We strongly encourage UNESCO and its Member States to continue promoting – as was done with the recent regional youth forums- youth gatherings to enable possibilities for youth dialogue. Opportunities during which the collective youth voice can be heard are essential for positive social change. In addition, we urge UNESCO, Member States and related organizations to provide opportunities for intergenerational partnerships. Such partnerships can create bridges between generations and can provide much sought-after support for youth in need of guidance⁴.

⁴ See point b. under Breaking Through Employment Barriers

C. SUPPORTING EXTRACURRICULAR PROGRAMMING IN SCHOOLS

- Extracurricular programming can be effective at minimizing social and other forms of exclusion. Sports, arts and music programs allow students to engage with their schools, allowing students to feel a sense of belonging and increased self-esteem and therefore, providing another support system for youth outside of the home.
- We strongly emphasize the importance of funding and supporting extracurricular activities and programs, such as the UNESCO Associated Schools Project network and *Right to Play*⁵ to teach social responsibility and human rights-based values at a young age. In addition, by incorporating volunteer programs in schools, youth can act as positive role models for younger peers.

D. INCREASING YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN THE INTERNATIONAL COALITION OF CITIES AGAINST RACISM INITIATIVE

- In light of the global economic crisis and of resulting harmful consequences related to social intolerance, we reiterate our support for the International Coalition of Cities against Racism. We recommend that the National Commissions and national organizations of municipalities strengthen their support for the widespread promotion of this Coalition and of its objectives and encourage local groups to identify with them.
- We also encourage UNESCO, through its National Commissions and lead-cities, to support the work of municipalities interested in developing and sustaining youth involvement in the activities of the Coalition through the sharing of good practices, exchange programmes informative workshops in schools, and creative methods for raising awareness.

⁵ Right to Play aims to improve the lives of children in some of the most disadvantaged areas of the world by using the power of sport and play for development, health and peace. See: www.righttoplay.com

3 - "BREAKING THROUGH EMPLOYMENT BARRIERS"

"I didn't think that the once-a-week mentorship experience would do much, but it has made a huge impact on my life." (Consultation Participant)

A. INCLUDING PRACTICAL JOB TRAINING IN THE EXISTING HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

- Often youth are qualified academically, but lack tangible work skills needed to enter the workforce. Recognizing that the current UN decade of Education for Sustainable Development promotes education systems that prepare learners to enter the workforce as well as to become responsible citizens, we recommend that UNESCO further promotes the inclusion of practical job skills within higher education curricula in addition to ensuring that formal learning is hands-on and relevant to life outside of school.

B. INCREASING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PRACTICAL EXPERIENCES AND INTERGENERATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

- We urge UNESCO to create opportunities for youth to gain practical experience through internships and peer-based training programs and to foster a culture that encourages youth to volunteer in various organizations. We strongly feel that volunteering should be made a mandatory component of school curricula and that volunteer organizations should be encouraged to reward volunteers positively for their efforts.
- In addition, based on the premise that youth can gain a great deal of knowledge from partnering with members of other generations and that, in turn, adults can benefit from certain youth-specific skills sets, we strongly encourage UNESCO and Member States to consider the creation of wide-ranging opportunities for intergenerational partnerships. These partnerships are based on the idea of a mentorship but are distinct in that they encourage the flow of exchanges and teachings in both directions, from adult to youth and from youth to adult. UNESCO should create a model of such intergenerational partnership opportunities and advocate its successes and lessons learnt to Member States and other organizations. Member States should also support the development of such programmes within their own governmental structures while offering parallel assistance to those who wish to enter the workforce. We strongly urge UNESCO to advocate for the recognition that youth are beneficial to all types of workplaces.

C. PROMOTING MICRO-CREDIT AND MICRO-FRANCHISE⁶ INITIATIVES FOR COMMUNITIES AND SMALL NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

- In communities with low employment rates and a single source of employment, micro-credit and micro-franchise programmes offer some solutions to youth employment barriers. Through this model, youth have the opportunity to grow a self-sustaining business, gaining valuable life skills in the process while earning income.
- We encourage UNESCO to prioritize the training of youth and women in particular, in micro-credit and micro-franchise programmes, particularly in areas where employment rates are low, and in conjunction with UNESCO's programme to reform technical and vocational education and training (TVET) systems to ensure that good quality opportunities for acquiring skills for the world of work are made available to youth⁷.

⁶ The overall objective of microfranchising is to promote economic development by developing sound business models that can be replicated by entrepreneurs at the base of the socio-economic pyramid.

⁷ UNESCO Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) Programme: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/education-building-blocks/tvet/programme/>