

#### Issue

Approximately one billion youth live in the world today; representing 18% of the world's population.

Almost 85% of the world's youth live in developing countries, with approximately 60% in Asia alone. A remaining 23% live in the developing regions of Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean. By 2025, the number of youth living in developing countries will grow to 89.5% (United Nations Population Fund).

For the purpose of this document, youth refers to all people aged 15 to 24 years old. Youth hood represents a period of transition, a shift from dependence to independence.

Youth and culture is a crosscutting issue that presents particular challenges in more than one respect for policy makers. In the World Youth Report 2005 of the United Nations, it is argued that too often, youth policy is driven by negative stereotypes of young people, including delinquency, marginalization and violence. What seems to be forgotten is that young people can be a positive influence for development, social inclusion and democracy.

This paper aims to provoke and facilitate future discussions on issues pertaining to Youth & Culture. More specifically, it explores ways culture can be identified as a means for social inclusion; it outlines the importance of fostering access to cultural products at the same time as giving youth a voice.

#### Perspectives

##### **Part 1: Culture as a vehicle for social inclusion**

Culture is a fundamental pillar of a community and of society. Young people influence and are influenced by their surroundings, through their family unit, their school, their sports clubs, cultural groups, etc.

Young people often lack opportunities to participate in society and inequalities in social, economical and political conditions are leading causes of their marginalization and social exclusion.

Engaging young people is key in the promotion of social inclusion. Exchange programs from different cultural groups can foster a better understanding of others and of diversity while providing individuals with opportunities to discover commonalities and promote their values despite their differences.

A study by the University of Southern California has shown that investment in arts education for school age children more than pays for itself in terms of savings in the justice system and future increases in tax revenues.

Educational programming that includes elements of culture including the arts, languages and beliefs, can promote understanding of and respect for diversity while creating a sense of identity and belonging, especially among young people.

By using culture as a vehicle for social inclusion, marginalized groups, such as youth, can develop stronger identities, which will help them influence policies aimed at eliminating inequalities.

#### ***Best practices***

At a workshop organized as part of the Organization of American States (OAS) in El Salvador in February 2007, cultural experts from across the Americas shared their experiences and best practices in preventing social violence through arts and culture.

One theme raised at this workshop was the importance of integrating, within these arts programs, the beliefs and cultural practices of the various communities contained in a given society. In order for young people to see themselves represented in the institutions and the society in which they live, and to feel like they contribute to it, their culture must be valued within that same society.

Such programs show that young people play a leading role in overcoming the challenges in achieving social inclusion. Furthermore, youth can develop artistic competencies and more self-confidence, better interpersonal relations, better capacity to resolve conflicts and problems, and a decrease in academic failure. Youth are not just “problem” groups who need a helping hand; they are an intrinsically part of the solution.

Some programs also include a training component. By seeking to develop certain basic skills, these initiatives also ensure the constructive and active participation of these young people in their community’s life.

#### **Part 2: Fostering access to cultural products – giving youth a voice**

"While there is still enormous diversity among young people worldwide, the processes of urbanization and globalization and rapid advances in information and communications technology have arguably contributed to the emergence of a new global media-driven youth culture," UN Undersecretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs Jose Antonio Ocampo.

Most youth are adaptable, and, when given the opportunity, have more access to and are the most frequent consumers of media.

Young people are however more than just consumers of media products; they are also major creators of it. They make particular use of the Internet to share and promote their creations, such as photos, videos and music. They also use the new digital mediums to remix digital content found online, thereby transforming the content into new creations; creations of their own.

However, according to the World Youth Report 2005, a large number of young people, especially in developing countries, lack the economic power to benefit from such opportunities offered by globalization. These youth have been left out of the globalization process and remain on the other side of the digital divide.

It is imperative that our thinking be as inclusive as possible. We must focus on marginalized youth; those who do not have access to cultural products, as opposed to only focusing on youth who do have the economic capacity to access cultural products.

By having access to cultural products, youth are given a voice – they are given the opportunity to make a change and to make a difference in society- they are given the opportunity to express themselves while making their own culture known. Youth are often known to form groups with individuals from different backgrounds, experiences and perspectives, regardless of their own identities. Giving youth a voice can be an important tool for social inclusion.

Youth must also be given access to a diversity of cultural expressions. The increasing presence of media products in the lives of young people is evident. In some communities, the audience of more traditional cultural institutions, such as museums and theatres, are mainly adults and retirees. In order for them to appreciate and value the richness of their culture, young people must be given the opportunity to have access to a great variety of cultural products. Art awareness programs aimed at exposing young people to various art forms starting at childhood represent an interesting avenue in this regard.

Fostering access for youth to cultural products can be a challenge, especially in developing countries. Governments are faced with situations that can be particularly challenging, for example: How can governments offer youth programmes and policies that provide them with access to culture and cultural products? How can governments reach out to marginalized youth who do not have access to culture? Can early exposure to cultural goods and products influence youth to use and enjoy a diversity of cultural expressions?

#### ***Best practices***

The Brazilian government's cultural policy, known as *Cultura Viva*, is supporting the eventual development of 2500 *Culture Points* (or *Puntos de Cultura*). As of 2007, 650 of these culture points are spread throughout the cities and rural communities in that vast country.

*Culture Points* are selected through a nationwide competition for proposals from communities. Grant financing and technology such as video cameras and computers are provided to the winning communities. This gives them the means to express their cultural wealth and allows them to realize how cultural activities can enrich their lives.