



Youth
Forum

United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

7th UNESCO YOUTH FORUM
of the 36th session of the UNESCO General Conference
17-20 October 2011
CONCEPT NOTE



“Young people must be given opportunities to participate as respected partners in decision-making and action at all levels”¹

Irina Bokova, UNESCO Director-General

The 7th UNESCO Youth Forum marks a time when youth are raising their voices to claim their place in the future of their countries. The need to be heard, and to go beyond and actually shape decision-making, is embodied in the objectives of the UNESCO Youth Forum.

CONTENT AND THEME

The theme must be dynamic, topical and capture today’s youth realities and developments. It should be appealing to youth and link to the theme of the International Year of Youth theme “Dialogue and Mutual Understanding”. It should also generate discussion on topics relating to the areas of UNESCO’s work.

► **THE PROPOSED WORKING THEME** of the Youth 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.

As youth shape their human and social capital during the crucial transitions they undergo towards adulthood, they question stagnating ideas and perceptions. In many occasions, young women and men are driven by a need for change; a change that would reshape, among others, the political and socio-economic situation in their countries or communities. Most of the times, their reaction is triggered by the feeling that they are not heard, consulted or that they cannot contribute to effective responses to persisting challenges.

Through their action, youth have proven that they want to be considered as active partners in society and that they can be recognized as problem-solvers. Through concrete examples, the 7th Youth Forum will examine the different ways in which youth constructively contribute towards building a culture of peace, supporting good governance and promoting economic opportunity: through their participation in governance or in public affairs; through volunteerism and social entrepreneurship, which strengthen their soft skills and generate benefits for the entire community; through a responsible use of the internet to network, learn, share information, involve and sensitize different groups.

The Forum will equally examine the challenges facing youth and which impede upon their capacity to contribute to their societies: unemployment, gender inequalities, lack of access to education, marginalization, poverty, discrimination, limited or no involvement in public affairs. It will also examine how these challenges, if not properly addressed, can lead to

¹ Message from Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO on the occasion of the International Youth Day and the launch of the “UN International Year of Youth: Dialogue and Mutual Understanding”, 12 August 2010

youth taking on at risk behaviors, namely violence. The Forum will argue the value of supporting youth development and constructive engagement as a way to prevent violence.

► **SUB-THEMES:** under the main theme, the Youth Forum will be focusing on three interconnected thematic areas (sub-themes), which are highly topical and have the potential to generate dynamic exchange and concrete ideas. The unifying thread is the recognition of the importance of democratic values for youth.

- “*Citizens in action: youth in political and public life*”: this thematic area will examine the benefits of social and political inclusion of youth as well as mechanisms and processes to engage youth as decision-makers and key stakeholders in their communities. It will particularly reflect on the role of social networking and new media in fostering democracy, inclusion and active participation of youth in public life. Youth activists, members of community and national youth councils, bloggers and youth leaders will be particularly invited to share their experiences. The Forum will also examine the contribution that youth can make in their communities, particularly by engaging in post-conflict and post-disaster reconstruction.
- “*Countering youth exclusion, vulnerability and violence*”: this thematic area will examine the different facets of exclusion and their causal relation with violence and vulnerability among youth. It will look into different types of violence, including street violence, gender-based violence and violence in school. The objective would be to identify concrete and innovative ways to address social exclusion as a way to prevent violence affecting youth, both as victims and as perpetrators, and to address the needs of vulnerable groups. The debate on this sub-theme will build on experiences of youth organizations, testimonies of vulnerable groups of youth participating in the Forum, as well as on UNESCO’s work to provide youth with opportunities to integrate their communities through educational, cultural and sport activities.
- “*Breaking through employment barriers*”: addressing the economic aspect of youth development and civic engagement strategies, this thematic area will focus both on the skills (life skills; technical and vocational skills; employability skills) and the opportunities (job placements for youth; internships; social and economic entrepreneurial schemes) to support the constructive participation of youth in the economic life of their communities and their countries. This area will also examine gender-related barriers to employment as well as challenges in terms of access to employment opportunities, deriving from non-inclusive practices.

The Forum will also look transversally into global issues in which youth have the potential to drive change; for example, youth input to the “Rio+20 Conference” and to the Mauritius Strategy and Plan of Action; the linkages between culture and development, particularly the contribution that youth can make through creative industries; the role of youth in the implementation of the UNESCO Strategy on African Youth, as well as the role of the youth African Diaspora. Examples of UNESCO’s work to engage youth in their communities, such as the “Youth Visioning for Island Living” initiative, the “World Heritage in Young Hands”, and the “Open Schools” programme will also be showcased.

The sub-themes will be explored through break-out-sessions which will focus on topical issues of concern to youth and identified in consultation with them. They will run in parallel and will identify specific opportunities and challenges and 2-3 succinct recommendations for innovative action on the ground, by the youth delegates and key partners, in follow-up to the Forum. These recommendations will be considered by the Drafting Committee for the Final Report of the Youth Forum.

► **ADDITIONAL FEATURES** incorporated in the content of the Forum include:

- **Building the capacities of youth:** for the first time the Youth Forum will include workshops on capacity-building for the youth delegates, so they can acquire or strengthen personal skills and competencies, particularly advocacy and “soft” skills that would enhance their employability. Key global partners will be invited to organise such sessions and share their know-how with the participants (eg. ILO, the International Youth Foundation, Peace Child International, Junior Chamber International and the Goi Peace Foundation).
- **Reviewing the International Year of Youth:** achievements and the way forward: youth delegates and key partners will review achievements and lessons learnt during the International Year of Youth and will discuss ways to maintain and capitalize on the momentum created by the Year, in order to generate greater commitments to youth development.
- **Designing a joint follow-up mechanism of key global and regional events on youth:** proposed and led by UNESCO, this initiative has been endorsed by the UN Interagency Network on Youth Development as one of the collaborative initiatives of the Network for the celebration of the International Year of Youth. It seeks to strengthen the accountability and responsibility of both the organizers and the participants of such events, as well as to facilitate partnerships for joint action, in order to strengthen synergies and avoid duplication. UNESCO has collected and analyzed the results of 47 global and regional events on youth since 2008 and has developed a matrix with common clusters of recommendations, built around the 15 standard areas of the World Programme of Action for Youth and a number of cross-cutting areas and emerging issues that have been identified through these events. The matrix will be regularly updated and will be presented at the 7th UNESCO Youth Forum where partners and young participants will identify key next steps for collaborative action on common priorities, at national and community level.
- **Reporting on follow-up of the 6th UNESCO Youth Forum:** one youth delegate, per region, of the 6th Youth Forum will be invited to report on his/her efforts to follow-up on the recommendations of the Forum.

PARTICIPANTS

► **YOUTH DELEGATES:** One of the key challenges is ensuring that the nominated delegates are abreast of issues related to youth in their countries and could engage in quality discussions during the Forum. UNESCO will work closely with National Commissions and partners to support the selection of the most representative delegates. In order to ensure that the participants are more representative, specific selection criteria are proposed, as well as more youth observer groups.

Upon receipt of the invitation letter by the UNESCO Director-General, each UNESCO National Commission will nominate up to two youth delegates, selected through a participatory process involving their peers. In preparation for the Youth Forum, the youth delegates are encouraged to consult with as many youth groups in their country as possible so as to be able to convey their opinions to the Youth Forum. Whenever possible, UNESCO will encourage National Commissions to work with youth networks in order to organise consultation meetings with different youth groups in the country to discuss the theme and topics of the Youth Forum.

All costs associated with the participation of youth delegates will be born by their countries. Subject to availability of funds, UNESCO will support the participation of youth delegates from LDCs, through an appeal to Member States for voluntary contributions.

▶ **YOUTH FROM DISADVANTAGED & VULNERABLE GROUPS & YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES:** UNESCO will mobilize Member States and partners to support the participation, in the Youth Forum, of disadvantaged and vulnerable youth (particularly indigenous youth, youth living in conflict settings or in poverty, former members of youth gangs) and of youth with disabilities.

▶ **CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPANTS:** Representatives of national governments (other than the official youth delegates), NGOs maintaining official relations with UNESCO and the UN, UN agencies and major IGOs and youth-related NGOs, UNESCO Chairs, Institutes, Clubs and Centers as well as private sector and media partners, will be invited to participate in the Youth Forum as observers. All observers are expected to bear the expenses relating to their participation in the Youth Forum.

▶ **ONLINE CONTRIBUTORS AND PARTICIPANTS:** young people from all over the world and different backgrounds will be invited to contribute to the content of the Youth Forum through online spaces and threads that will be developed for the preparation of the forum (see below).

▶ **SPEAKERS AND PANELISTS:** UNESCO would target influential and compelling youth speakers, youth activists who have been driving positive change, technical experts and high profile public figures. As appropriate, researchers and practitioners, UNESCO and UN officials, key stakeholders including private sector and media, could also be invited as speakers or panelists.

▶ **YOUTH JOURNALISTS:** 5 youth journalists, 1 from each world region, will attend the Youth Forum in order to ensure continued internal coverage of the Youth Forum, through various media, for eg. daily newsletters, online uploads, blogs, articles and radio coverage. They would report back on the Youth Forum to their regional and local communities, networks and organizations.

▶ **FACILITATORS:** the Youth Forum will be led by an experienced facilitator assisted by 5 co-facilitators, 1 from each region. All will be young facilitators, selected by UNESCO through a competitive process. The facilitators' team will lead the participation of youth delegates during the Youth Forum, helping to avoid lengthy processes with regards to elections, associated rules and procedures of the sessions and will guide the discussions.

▶ **VOLUNTEERS:** UNESCO will invite young motivated women and men to support the Secretariat in the organization of the Youth Forum.

FORMAT AND DURATION

The format of the Youth Forum should be conducive to certain debates being able to be televised (eg. in the breakout sessions). It is proposed that the Youth Forum runs for 3.5 - 4 days and incorporates:

▶ **PLENARY SESSIONS**, including opening, closing and thematic sessions

▶ **BREAKOUT SESSIONS**, organized on specific issues relating to the Youth Forum's theme.

▶ **CAPACITY- BUILDING SESSIONS** (see above under content)

► **THE “YOUTH EXPO”**, running parallel to the working sessions will provide space for participants to exhibit their work and exchange with youth delegates. This space will also provide the opportunity to host café discussions on topical issues relating to the Youth Forum’s theme.

► **CULTURAL EVENINGS**, sponsored by partners: to date, interest has been expressed by the Goi Peace Foundation, Peace Child International and “Les Offices Jeunesse internationaux du Québec”.

► **A “MEDIA HUB”**, run by the young journalists (in cooperation with ERI) who will report daily on the Forum. The media center would ideally host media groups covering the Youth Forum and would provide a space for interviews, press conferences etc. The media center would also provide a space for young participants themselves to update directly on the proceedings of the youth forum through blogs, online uploads etc.

MEDIA AND VISIBILITY

The Youth Forum will incorporate the use of new technologies and digital media to introduce the voices of youth around the world to the debates. In the run up to the Youth Forum, an online dialogue platform will be set up to enable youth delegates to interact, to get to know one another and to discuss the topics of the Youth Forum. Online threads, tweets, blogs and discussion forums will be open to youth from around the world to allow UNESCO and the youth delegates to gather broader youth views, concerns and experiences. Through these media, youth will be invited to create and provide content relating to the theme and topics of the Forum. UNESCO will also capitalise on content available through existing platforms, such the Power of Peace Network.

UNESCO will make use of social networking tools, online and digital media and networks, as well as partnerships with the media sector to increase visibility and spread the message of the Youth Forum. Short videos, press releases, media advisories, branding, as well as the inclusion of a media centre (“media hub”) and of a “Youth Forum web TV” will be key components of the communication strategy for Forum.

ADDED VALUE

► **MORE THAN AN EVENT, AN INSTITUTIONALIZED PARTICIPATION PROCESS:** the UNESCO Youth Forum is institutionalized as an integral part of the UNESCO General Conference (32C/Res.82)², thereby being among the few regular mechanisms, at global level, which allow youth to submit their recommendations to representatives of national governments.

The Youth Forum is an event where youth are the primary delegates and “own” the content and outputs. Since 1999, the Forum is held every two years and brings together youth delegates from all UNESCO Member-States to debate, exchange and identify recommendations for action on emerging issues. The Report of the Youth Forum is drafted by an elected drafting committee composed of representatives of youth delegates (one per region) and representatives of one or two youth NGOs as observers.

The Report is presented to the plenary of the 36th UNESCO General Conference, as well as during thematic roundtables and related programme commissions, by the youth delegates. In 2009, the 35th UNESCO General Conference decided that a specific item on the results of the Youth Forum should be added in the agenda of the 36th session of the General

² “The General Conference, ... Recognising the importance of youth participation in the development and implementation of UNESCO’s programmes ... Decides that a Youth Forum shall be an integral part of every session of the General Conference...”

Conference³. In addition, the call of the 6th UNESCO Youth Forum called for greater participation of youth in their countries' official delegations to the General Conference. In 2011, this call should be pursued through the National Commissions.

More than a simple event, the Youth Forum is also an ongoing process (preparation, organization, follow-up) designed to raise the responsibility of youth themselves in undertaking concrete action to support the implementation of their ideas. Youth delegates at the Youth Forum are encouraged to follow-up on their recommendations, in cooperation with national governments, especially the UNESCO National Commissions, as well as with civil society, the UN System and key partners. In order to develop accountability and to ensure follow-up on each Youth Forum, UNESCO works with youth delegates, Member States and key partners to encourage and support tangible action on the recommendations⁴.

► **TAKING STOCK OF THE “INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF YOUTH: DIALOGUE AND MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING” (12 AUGUST 2010-11 AUGUST 2011):** the proclamation of the Year by the UN General Assembly⁵ provides an opportunity to take the youth development agenda a step further and to advocate for strengthened commitments to, and increased investments in, youth. Partly coinciding with the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures, the two Years reinforce UNESCO's messages on a culture of peace and non-violence and the promotion of intercultural dialogue and reconciliation.

The 7th UNESCO Youth Forum is planned to provide a space for youth delegates, UN agencies and other partners to report on the activities they have carried out during the International Year of Youth and chart a future course of action. Within this context, the Youth Forum will also review important youth-related initiatives organized within the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures as well as the Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence.

► **POTENTIAL FOR INCREASED SYNERGIES:** the Youth Forum also has the potential to be a powerful tool to mobilize partners around a common set of priorities on youth, by linking to other major global and regional youth-related events and building synergies for collaborative follow-up action. Such potential, coupled with a greater investment in information technologies, OSNs (online social networks) and new media, would enable the Youth Forum to be a catalyst for youth engagement in promoting national and community development, peace and social cohesion.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FOLLOW-UP

As with the 6th UNESCO Youth Forum, UNESCO will identify a follow-up strategy in the to the 7th UNESCO Youth Forum. The strategy will guide the work within UNESCO and in cooperation with the National Commissions, the youth delegates and key partners to support the follow-up of the recommendations, leading up to the 8th UNESCO Youth Forum in 2013. UNESCO will also advocate in support of concrete follow-up action at national and community level. Within a period of three months following the Forum, each youth delegate would be requested to report on concrete steps that they have undertaken to initiate follow-up action. A monitoring matrix will be developed and updated regularly based on the exchanges with the young participants and the different partners.

³ 35C/Resolution 99

⁴ See Annex I for an outline of key follow-up work since the 6th UNESCO Youth Forum (1-3 October 2009)

⁵ A/RES/64/134

FOLLOW-UP OF THE 6TH YOUTH FORUM

In October 2009, the Final Report of the 6th UNESCO Youth Forum (35C/INF.5) was presented to the 35th UNESCO General Conference. Member States welcomed the Report and invited “*the Director-General and the Executive Board, when preparing future sessions of the General Conference, to include an item on the results of the Youth Forum in the agenda of the General Conference*” (35C/Res.99).

In line with this decision and recognising that the preparation of the 7th UNESCO Youth Forum is embedded in the follow-up of the 6th Youth Forum, UNESCO has developed a follow-up strategy which is geared towards supporting the youth delegates in their follow-up actions at national and community level.

Among the most important follow-up action to note are:

-  Youth delegates in 11 countries have reported to the Secretariat that they have initiated consultations with their National Commission for the establishment of the youth representative bodies (eg. youth desks, youth advisory bodies, youth coordination offices etc). Out of those, 5 have been successfully completed and launched todate.
-  Supporting North-South-South cooperation and exchange of practices, the National Commission of Canada has been advancing, jointly with UNESCO, in the development of a handbook on “Youth engagement in National Commissions” to highlight successful experiences of National Commissions that engage youth in their work. The handbook should be ready for distribution at the 7th UNESCO Youth Forum.
-  The National Commission for UNESCO of the Republic of Korea has organized, in cooperation with UNESCO, the 4th UNESCO Asian Youth Forum on “Youth Creativity and Vision for Community in Asia” (Republic of Korea, September 2010). In August 2011, the National Commission will organize the 5th UNESCO Asian Youth Forum which will be linked to the International Year of Youth and the theme of the 7th UNESCO Youth Forum. The results of both the 4th and the 5th UNESCO Asian Youth Forums will feed into the preparations of the 7th UNESCO Youth Forum.

The National Commission of Austria is preparing a “Regional Youth Participation Conference”, in cooperation with UNESCO, which will examine successful experiences of youth involvement in the work of the National Commissions (September 2011, Vienna). The Conference will be held from 22 – 24 September 2011 in Vienna.

UNESCO has developed a reporting template for the youth delegates of the 6th UNESCO Youth Forum to provide further feedback on their follow-up action. More information on the follow-up of the 6th UNESCO Youth Forum is available at <http://www.unesco.org/youth> .