

## **NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY: PRIORITIES AND PARADIGMS**

**Adopting a national youth policy is first and foremost an indication of the society's commitment towards its citizens. It is also a statement of a common national vision concerning the young generation. Such a policy provides a basis for a fair distribution of necessary resources to fulfill needs and priorities of youth. Through their active participation in the formulation and implementation of a national youth policy, young people get involved in decision-making at a national level.**

## **NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY: PRIORITIES AND PARADIGMS**

### **What is a national youth policy?**

A national youth policy is a set of governmental provisions that reflect the State position on youth issues. It determines a set of direct or indirect interventions and measures aiming at achieving the qualitative and quantitative objectives set forth by the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. This policy helps integrate and involve youth in the economic, social and political activities of the State.

### **What are the foundations of a national youth policy?**

There is no common paradigm for the concept, structure and content of a national youth policy. Each State shall elaborate these details based on its own social and cultural heritage and reflecting the inputs of the parties concerned. However, guided by three main principles, a national youth policy should:

- (1) Adopt a positive attitude in order to eliminate the marginalization of young people and strengthen the concept of participatory development;
- (2) Recognize the needs, problems, aspirations and innovations of young people;
- (3) Make use of youth capacities as a main asset to economic, social and political development.

### **What are the main issues addressed by a national youth policy?**

- (1) Cross-cutting issues, namely youth participation, youth and development, youth and peace, youth and reform, and democratic governance;
- (2) Sectoral priority issues, namely education, employment, health, poverty, hunger, globalization, information and communications technology, HIV/AIDS, environment, substance abuse, juvenile delinquency, sport, and entertainment activities;
- (3) Youth issues and services, namely military service, voluntary social relief service, international youth service, and exchange of expertise;
- (4) Youth sub-groups, namely urban youth, rural youth, male and female youth, young workers, disabled youth, young refugees and immigrants, etc.

These issues were grouped following the fifteen priority areas of the World Programme of Action for Youth and further classified into the following three main clusters:

- a. First cluster: youth in the global economy: (1) hunger and poverty, (2) education, (3) employment, (4) globalization;
- b. Second cluster: youth in civil society: (5) environment, (6) leisure-time activities, (7) full and effective participation of youth in society and in decision-making, (8) information and communications technology, (9) intergenerational relations;
- c. Third cluster: youth and their well-being: (10) health, (11) juvenile delinquency, (12) substance abuse, (13) girls and young women, (14) HIV/AIDS, (15) armed conflict.

SAMPLES OF GOALS IN THE AREAS OF YOUTH EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT	
Goals	Targets
<b>Education:</b>	
<b>Goal 5: promote access to quality education and ensure that formal and non-formal education of youth supports lifelong learning and skills development</b>	<p>Target 5.1: achieve universal access to quality basic education and ensure gender equality in education by 2015</p> <p>Target 5.2: between 2005 and 2015, increase by 50 per cent the proportion of students completing secondary education</p> <p>Target 5.3: by 2015, develop and implement policies to promote the transition to quality post-secondary education, including vocational education and non-formal programmes, and other skill-building opportunities</p> <p>Target 5.4: ensure that opportunities for technical and vocational education and skills training are available to all youth by 2015</p> <p>Target 5.5: by 2015, develop and implement national systems of quality assurance in education based on internationally agreed upon standards and tools</p> <p>Target 5.6: by 2015, increase by two thirds the proportion of young women and men with the ability to use computers and the Internet as a tool for learning and knowledge acquisition</p>
<b>Employment:</b>	
<b>Goal 6: increase decent and productive employment opportunities for young women and men</b>	<p>Target 6.1: halve, between 2005 and 2015, the proportion of youth who are neither in education nor in employment</p> <p>Target 6.2: halve, between 2005 and 2015, the proportion of employed youth in vulnerable employment</p> <p>Target 6.3: by 2015, reduce the gap between youth and adult unemployment rates</p>

**What are the functions of a national youth policy?**

- (1) A national youth policy clearly determines the position and role of youth in society. Based on the vision young people have for society in the present and the future, it also identifies the obligations of society towards the young;
- (2) A national youth policy addresses youth needs, problems and ambitions through an integrated and balanced approach and promotes gender equality;
- (3) A national youth policy encourages the establishment of appropriate services and structures to fulfil the needs and aspirations of young people from a pro-youth perspective. These services are designed to work for and with the young to help them improve their situation;

- (4) A national youth policy encourages the active participation of young people in the life of the community and in decision-making, with the objective to enhance their influence on national development and international cooperation.

#### **What are the tools and conditions favourable to the formulation of a national youth policy?**

The formulation of a national youth policy requires the following enabling tools:

- (1) A national constitution;
- (2) Legislation on youth, education, employment, health, environment, voluntary service, etc.;
- (3) National development strategies and priorities;
- (4) National development plans and policies;
- (5) International and regional legal instruments on youth ratified by the national parliament.

#### **What are the goals and targets of a national youth policy?**

The goals and targets of a national youth policy include the following:

- (1) To develop the spiritual, moral, intellectual, professional and physical potential of young people who are to grow into good citizens, leaders and guardians of the cultural heritage;
- (2) To encourage youth participation in economic and social development and decision-making at all levels;
- (3) To protect the rights of young people and develop their sense of responsibility so that they can become active members of the society, namely the right to establish organizations, express their views, travel, assemble, adequate education, health services and employment;
- (4) To support such extra-curriculum activities as youth associations, and promote community voluntary services and exchange programmes to ensure youth involvement in international cooperation and culture;
- (5) To provide young people with protection and guidance, especially those living in difficult conditions and within economically disadvantaged families, juvenile adolescents, indigenous youth and victims of racial discrimination.

#### **What is the rationale of a national youth policy?**

A national youth policy yields general benefits, including:

- (1) Devising a national framework and a set of priorities to develop youth policies and programmes;
- (2) Developing a comprehensive perspective of youth needs and aspirations to be assessed in all areas;
- (3) Reinforcing in youth a sense of citizenship and contribution to public service for the purposes of national development and international cooperation;
- (4) Setting youth policy-related national objectives for young people, the Government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector.

#### **Who is responsible for the formulation and adoption of a national youth policy?**

National youth councils, ministries, bodies and committees entrusted with youth issues are responsible for the formulation of a national youth policy in collaboration with non-governmental youth organizations and with the support of United Nations bodies. This policy shall be adopted by the Government and council of ministers for implementation.

## **What is the general framework of a national youth policy?**

- A national vision on the role of youth in society

A national vision considers youth as the target and means of development and as an engine for economic, social and political change and progress. A national youth policy states priorities and commits to their implementation. It lays the foundations of the practical approach of the State to the development of young people in a given country. It embodies an overview and an understanding of young people and the conditions under which they live. As a national vision, it constitutes a framework for the involvement of young people in community and national activities. Those visions and concepts can be implemented as shown by the following examples:

- (1) Empowering young people and involving them in State building and decision-making by supporting efforts aimed at enhancing youth capacities and opportunities (Bahrain National Youth Strategy);
  - (2) Instilling in young people the sense of citizenship by reinforcing the principles of social justice on the basis of rights and obligations. To do so, it is necessary to strengthen in youth the sense of belonging to their country and culture and to ensure their full and effective participation in national development and progress (National Youth Policy in Jamaica);
  - (3) Raising the awareness of young people of their capabilities and developing their knowledge as well as ensuring their physical, mental, emotional and psychological well-being (Medium-Term Youth Development Plan (MTYDP) in the Philippines);
  - (4) Promoting a youth perspective that targets young people as a social group with special needs and aspirations, which should be integrated into all development phases through a comprehensive development approach (Youth Development Strategy in Iraq);
  - (5) Reinforcing the concept of citizenship based on rights and obligations, raising the awareness of young people of their independent existence and capabilities, instilling in youth a sense of belonging to their country and advocating their true and effective participation in national development and progress; developing youth capacities to deal with the ongoing changes and developments of the century with awareness and self-confidence in a positive and safe environment (National Youth Strategy for Jordan).
- Mainstreaming the national youth policy
- (1) The national youth policy should be linked to other governmental sectoral policies and integrated into the national development policy;
  - (2) Needs and aspirations of youth should be an integral part of national planning and policymaking;
  - (3) The national youth policy should be tailored to the needs of youth and yet be integrated into national development plans.

## **What are the steps towards the adoption and implementation by the Government of the national youth policy?**

- (1) To invite all parties involved to participate in considering, analysing and assessing youth conditions, and to develop a vision of appropriate measures to improve them. Such measures should be taken within a joint project between the Government executive, legislative and judicial authorities and non-governmental youth organizations throughout the country;

- (2) To devise an integrated national policy which involves all youth sectors. This policy shall build on a vision developed by young people and other stakeholders. It shall also draw upon core indicators of youth conditions as perceived by young people, on definitions of the term ‘‘youth’’ and youth subgroups, and shall be based on realistic cost estimates;
- (3) To coordinate a national youth policy which involves all sectors and comprises a partnership between non-governmental youth organizations, ministries and governmental departments entrusted with youth affairs and main stakeholders; to upgrade the performance of institutions concerned within a coordinated, collaborative and integrated framework;
- (4) To encourage the establishment of national youth councils, national youth service and voluntary service programmes for the implementation of the national youth policy at the district and local levels; to determine the steps, goals and targeted groups, timetables as well as plans to manage human and financial resources in order to enhance the monitoring and evaluation process.

**What are the techniques for the formulation and advocacy of a national youth policy?**

- (1) Launching a national information campaign to raise public awareness of the recently adopted national youth policy;
- (2) Reaching out to all youth sectors, organizations providing services for youth and the public at the national, local and district levels;
- (3) Undertaking a number of activities within this campaign, such as:
  - a. A press release, issued by the head of State or the youth minister, on the significance of the national youth policy, etc.;
  - b. Preparation of television, radio and video broadcasts, as well as press articles;
  - c. Distribution of simplified versions of the national youth policy to schools.

**What are the chapters of a national youth policy?**

(1) Introduction: vision statement; (2) target and rationale; (3) definition of the term ‘‘youth’’; (4) youth statistical information; (5) past and present issues affecting youth; (6) reference to other policies and programmes; (7) principles and values supporting youth policy; (8) policy targets and time-bound goals; (9) rights and obligations of young people; (10) main strategies; (11) priority target groups; (12) implementation and action plans at the national, local and district levels; (13) evaluation, updating and possible adaptation of measures; (14) references.

**What are the general steps towards the adoption of a national youth policy?**

- (1) Negotiating and adopting a draft national youth policy. The negotiation process shall involve all governmental and non-governmental parties concerned. Its adoption as State policy takes place in different phases, namely first by all parties concerned and then by the Government as a final step;
- (2) Adopting a national youth policy at the governmental level (with the support of the head of State, the approval of political parties, through national consensus, by ministerial decision, through endorsement by non-governmental youth organizations, etc.);
- (3) Integrating the policy into detailed development plans to be ratified at the legislative level, as part of a long-term national development strategy devised and adopted by the State.

**What are the general steps towards the implementation of a national youth policy?**

- (1) Launching of a coordinated initiative to be adopted by all governmental parties (executive, legislative and judicial) for the implementation of a national youth policy;
- (2) Coordination between the Government and such non-governmental youth organizations as the national youth council to advocate and monitor the implementation of a national youth policy;
- (3) All parties involved in the implementation of the national youth policy to join in such measures as the development of a comprehensive programme of action for the national youth policy covering all priority areas;
- (4) Allocation of appropriate funding to ensure the effective implementation of the programme of action;
- (5) Promotion of the national youth service programme or the voluntary national youth programme led by non-governmental youth organizations at the local and district levels, in order to guarantee a high voluntary participation of young people;
- (6) Efforts should be made to: (a) increase opportunities for young people to join civil services directed at co-citizens and the nation as a whole and reward their activities in this field; (b) enable young people to acquire skills that make them productive members of their societies; and (c) guide young people in their strife towards self-development.

**What are the steps towards the evaluation and possible adaptation of the national youth policy?**

- (1) Developing performance indicators to reflect the joint commitment by the Government and non-governmental youth organizations; adapting the national youth policy when needed;
- (2) Monitoring progress and identifying obstacles related to national youth policy issues in a joint effort by youth ministries and departments at the regional and international levels;
- (3) Organizing regular meetings for all parties involved to review the implementation of the national youth policy at the short, medium and long terms;
- (4) Developing performance indicators for each of the national youth policy outputs and evaluating achievements and obstacles on an annual basis;
- (5) Creating electronic information systems for collecting core data on youth conditions in order to follow up the implementation of the policy at the national level;
- (6) Scheduling and coordinating all the above steps with the evaluation of the national development plan, and adapting the national youth policy according to the lessons learned throughout the assessment process.

**Strengthening national capacities to formulate national youth policies and plans of action:  
Responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY)  
ESCWA project proposal**

The assessment of the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the year 2000 and Beyond in the Arab countries revealed that the commitment of Arab countries towards the World Programme of Action for Youth to formulate a national youth policy faced various structural, institutional and circumstantial obstacles. Those obstacles are mainly brought about by a number of factors impeding the formulation of such policy. They include:

1. Lack of knowledge about the newly adopted approach towards youth issues. According to this approach, young people are treated as an individual social and demographic group facing particular challenges, and are considered as human asset in the context of an integrated agenda for the formulation and implementation of youth policies.
2. Absence of tangible efforts aiming at the assessment of needs and priorities of youth at the national and internal levels (urban and rural), lack of statistical data on young people grouped by age, sex and geographical distribution (rural and urban), and lack of youth-related research.
3. Lack of efforts aimed at building capacities of decision-makers in the formulation of national youth policies, building the capacities of national officials, and allocating financial resources needed for the implementation of youth-related activities and programmes.
4. Absence of a national vision to determine the role of young people in development and of well-established coordination mechanisms between Government and the civil society.

Thus, ESCWA has devised a regional project aimed at strengthening national capabilities in the formulation of national youth policies and plans. The project is being implemented at ESCWA headquarters in Beirut, along with advisory services provided to member countries when needed, within an estimated initial three-year period.

United Nations organizations, regional organizations, ministries and national institutions involved in the formulation of policies and plans for youth are all taking part in this project. The project is addressed to decision-makers involved in youth-related matters, experts in youth issues and policies, as well as data producers and users. The beneficiaries of the project are divided into two groups: direct beneficiaries, young people aged between 15 and 24 years; and indirect beneficiaries, the families of young people and the society as a whole.

**The expected project accomplishments are summarized as follows:**

Expected accomplishment 1: Enhanced awareness of the importance of endorsing national youth policies.

Expected accomplishment 2: Youth issues studied and their priorities specified.

Expected accomplishment 3: Strengthened capacity of policymakers to formulate national youth policies in line with the identified youth priorities.

Expected accomplishment 4: Strengthened capacity of policymakers to formulate a national plan of action for youth that includes a national list of indicators to monitor progress in World Programme of Action for Youth priorities.

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