

Swedish Steering Group for Beyond 2015 – Input to the guiding questions to the PGA thematic high-level event of the General Assembly “The Contributions of Women, the Young and Civil Society to the Post-2015 Development Agenda”

- *What barriers exist to the full and effective participation of young people in the development of policies and programmes that affect their lives, including the post-2015 agenda?*

Two of the main barriers to full participation are lack of access and negative attitudes. The barriers exist partly because there is no recognition that young people have assets. Misconceptions about the capabilities of young people and discriminating structures are barriers which exclude youth from participating. Lack of financial resources is often another obstacle, as youth in general have less financial resources than adults. Marginalized groups of young people from LDC face more barriers to full and effective participation. Further, young persons with different kind of disabilities are particularly disadvantaged and discriminated.

In many countries, young people lack direct access to institutional systems and structures within governments, the media and private and civil society sectors. This severely impedes their ability to advocate for their rights. In the rare cases where young people have been able to influence or make decisions, barriers within complicated infrastructure have tended to limit implementation. This negatively affects young people's confidence and trust in such mechanisms.

It is wrongly argued that involving young people in decision-making at all levels is more expensive than involving adults. The positive financial repercussions of allowing young people to determine something that may have an impact on their own lives and others, and may be more readily accepted or practical are usually overlooked.

Current policy dialogue, consultation and formulation may take place in very formal environments only, excluding diversity and the final stages of decision-making may only be made by a few very senior colleagues behind closed doors.

Addressing inequality and the social exclusion of particular groups of young people is a big challenge within the youth sector, even for youth organisations. Creative mechanisms, such as the use of radio to reach out (to rural illiterate youth in particular), must always be strived for and reviewed. Further, we proposed that decision makers look at ways to empower and mainstream participatory processes such as participatory budgeting, civil society-based disaster risk reduction and recognition of urban poor federations.

Lack of transparency, accountability and democratic and inclusive structures also pose obstacles to participation. The active participation of girls and boys, young women and men, and excluded groups, in the governance of public services is not only important for holding public officials to account, but also as a catalyst for triggering positive changes from the community to the national level. The drive for decentralization in many countries is opening up opportunities for citizen participation in the local governance of services. For many young women and men living in poverty their only routine interaction with the state may be at the delivery point of services, in their school or health clinic. Inclusive and accountable governance of services therefore matters in order to engage children and youth with their government in a productive and meaningful way.

- *What can be done to better equip young people to meet the needs of today's labor market, such as the role of ICTs to support their development, inclusion and full participation in societies?*

Education. Universal and qualitative education is key to ensure that young people can take an active role in their own development and that of their communities. Education systems often fail to prepare young people adequately to participate in decision-making. They do not develop the necessary analytical skills for critical thinking or problem solving through participatory, active learning. In some cases young people are given the opportunity to participate in decision-making without ensuring that they receive adequate training or access to the appropriate information that would enable them to make informed decisions.

To empower the young, there is a vital need for a reorientation of the education sector towards education for sustainable development (ESD) including all the five priority action areas for the Global Action Programme ESD as a follow up to the UNDESD; 1) Policy support, 2) Whole-institution approaches, 3) Educators, 4) Youths, 5) Communities. To strengthen education for sustainable entrepreneurship would be a useful tool for young people's knowledge and leadership in issues related to sustainable development.

Civil society. The civil society, especially youth led organizations, also play an important role when it comes to the development of youth and their capabilities. Further, youth and civil society consultations may be artificially separated from each other.

Align formal education and the labor market. Large numbers of young people are leaving school without the skills needed to survive in the changing workplace. The problems for many young people in poor countries are even more acute. Those who leave school before acquiring the foundation skills face the prospect of extremely low pay – barely enough for their own survival, let alone to support their families. In most countries, lifelong learning improves a young person's chances of securing a better-quality job, and increases his/her productivity and income.

Any standalone goal on education must include a focus on **investing in the youth workforce**, addressing the skills gap and easing the “school to work” transition. The new framework should include targets to ensure that quality education prepares young people with the knowledge and skills necessary for productive livelihoods, including by providing those that drop out of school with a second chance for skills development.

Support for job search and job matching. With limited access to networks and information on vacancies, youth need intermediation services to improve the chances of a good match. In some countries there is an urgent need to increase the capacity of public employment services in order to effectively address the issue of youth employment, work migration and reintegration through initiatives such as the systematic organization of job fairs and career guidance.

Enabling and inclusive working environment. Governments should take on their obligation and drive investments and the creation of good-quality jobs that benefit youth. Even when youth employment is a declared priority in policy agendas, it is seldom translated into action plans with specific targets, indicators and monitoring and evaluation systems.

We support the High Level Panel's call for a **standalone goal on decent jobs and inclusive growth**. Within that, we call for a **specific target to increase youth employment** with an indicator to measure the progress in the reductions in the number of youth not in education, employment or training (especially females and marginalized populations).

- *What provisions, policies and measures could most effectively address the high levels of child poverty which are prevalent across many regions and the specific impact of inequalities on children's survival, growth and development from earliest years of life, in the context of the Post-2015 Development Agenda?*

The right to **protection from all forms of violence in all settings** is a necessary precondition for children's enjoyment of other rights such as the right to life, survival and development, the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health and the right to education. Protection from violence is essential for the full development of children in safety and dignity. Despite being recognized in the Millennium Declaration, the current Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) do not address child protection. This has been a major obstacle hindering progress in reaching the MDGs, including on poverty reduction, health, quality education and eliminating gender inequality.

Ensure all children are **registered at birth** and legally identified (Post 2015 HLP). This is a great indicator for measuring civil rights attainment and foundation stone for improving electoral participation and democracy along with enforcement of ESCR.

Universal access to complaint mechanisms. Governments should support establishment of an **ombudsman for children & youth** for every country to be able to enforce implementation of human rights. Governments should support children and communities to build resilience by investing in strong, sustainable and adequately resourced **national child protection systems** that prevent and respond to violence in all settings and provide children with safe spaces at all times and stages of development.

Ensure more equitable **public spending** with a focus on Children & Youth.

Governments' obligations as outlined in the right to **education** must be addressed. It should promote universal access to, and completion of, a quality primary and lower-secondary education for all children in all contexts as a minimum goal, with concerted efforts to improve access to a quality secondary education.

- *How can the voices, views, priorities and best interests of children, including adolescents and children from the most marginalized groups, be systematically and fully taken into account in the design and implementation by Member States of the new Development Agenda?*

A new way of thinking about the challenges that children and adolescents are facing is needed. It is essential to move towards a holistic, multi-sectorial approach that takes into account the complex drivers that affects and put barriers on this target group's prospect for empowerment.

Increased awareness and implementation of the CRC. Article 12 of the CRC states that children have the right to participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives and to influence decisions taken in their regard—within the family, the school or the community. Participation is also required for the effective realization of other rights and should be a cross-cutting theme of the post-2015 framework. Children and young people should not be considered as merely beneficiaries of development processes, but as active participants and implementing partners in such processes. Existing mechanisms should be strengthened, or new ones established, to enable children and young people to participate actively and meaningfully in setting and monitoring goals and targets and for holding their governments and other duty

bearers accountable for their delivery. In particular, children and young people from the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups must be included in genuine participatory and consultative processes.

In addition to inviting young people to the negotiations it is of importance to make sure that they have proper possibilities to prepare their input and that decision-makers listen to their suggestions.

Children and young people, including those who are most marginalized and excluded, should be **empowered** to participate meaningfully at all levels of policy, system and programme development, implementation and monitoring. This should extend to the design of national level development targets, plans and accountability mechanisms that derive from the new framework. For example, children and young people should be **empowered to participate in the creation and monitoring of national action plans on key issues that affect them, such as education and health**.

Children and young people must be given the proper tools and information, including **education**, on issues that affect them. Children and young people must also be supported to understand how to access materials and mechanisms to help them claim their human rights and hold duty bearers to account for delivery of the post-2015 development framework. Support should be given to increase children and young people's **access to information**, improve communications with civil society and to sensitize young citizens about their rights. The media should be used as a tool to inform and to educate. Governance education should be available in schools.

Child and youth-friendly information and materials should be developed with young people themselves, through traditional and technology-based platforms. Information and materials must be accessible to all children and youth, including those with disabilities, those from ethnic and linguistic minority groups, and those living in hard-to-reach areas. Face-to-face and peer-led workshops or focus group discussions should also be considered as some of the most effective ways of working with, and consulting, children and young people. Implement reforms targeting the **media to ensure transparency**.

Implement formal **youth empowerment training**, establish volunteering programmes and review national youth policies regularly.

Structures and mechanisms should be created that enable children and young people to engage in meaningful and continuous dialogue -for example, through the creation of **youth advisory groups**.

Facilitate collective action by child and youth-led organizations and groups to claim their rights. Support the organizational development of child and youth-led organizations and groups to enable them to be more effective, inclusive and democratic. Enable them to access, analyze and use information on their rights by strengthening their leadership, networking and influencing skills.

Support public officials, to **strengthen public accountability mechanisms**, specifically mechanisms for service delivery monitoring and young citizen feedback into policy, planning and budgeting.

- *Recognizing that many structural gender inequalities affecting women and girls are embedded in discriminatory social norms, practices and stereotypes, what transformative strategies or approaches (in addition to legislation, and including at the household decision-making level) could effectively overcome the deeply-rooted discrimination that prevents women and girls from both enjoying the full spectrum of their human rights, and from living a life free of poverty?*

The impact on community level sociocultural context on women's and adolescent empowerment cannot be overstated. It is therefore of great importance to work with attitudes and intolerant behaviour in the community as well as at national level to address gender inequalities and discriminatory social norms.

Invest in girls' access to quality education¹, including the transition to, and completion of, secondary education. Girls who benefit from a quality secondary education are more likely to marry later and have fewer, healthier children and will have a better chance of remaining alive, staying healthy themselves and are better equipped to make autonomous decisions about their lives. There is a need to focus not only on quality of education but also on *removing the barriers* (in and outside of the school environment), that hinder girls' access to education, including child labor, child marriage, and gender based violence in and around schools.

Enable girls and women to take a control of and have the final say in decisions about their bodies, their sexuality and healthcare. This would include investing in programs aiming at giving young people, including married and unmarried girls and boys, and very young adolescents (10-14), equal and universal access to available, acceptable, age-appropriate and quality SRHR services (which should be linked with programs to end gender based violence) and access to modern contraception regardless of age, sex or relationship status. It would also include programs that meeting the rising level of demand for comprehensive sexuality education for all.

Engage families, communities and men and boys to challenge gender inequality.

Changing attitudes, social norms and behaviors which perpetuate gender inequality also requires working with, and mobilizing parents, families and communities, including men and boys, in order to foster environments where girls and women are able to make autonomous decisions about their lives. Working with boys and men is essential to successfully and sustainably promote gender equality. It is imperative for both governments and civil society to engage boys and men, including traditional, religious and community leaders, to challenge harmful, discriminatory and unequal gender norms and promote attitudinal change throughout their communities. It is important when engaging boys and men to positively reinforce the universal benefits of gender equality for all people, regardless of sex or gender identity. The confines of patriarchy limit the lives and choices of boys, men, girls and women alike, entrenching norms and practices as 'suitable' for men that are both harmful and unhealthy.

¹ A quality education is critical in helping children develop the skills, knowledge, confidence and abilities to make their own decisions, enjoy healthy and positive relationships, and make informed and positive choices about their health and well-being, and their lives. Ensuring that girls receive a quality education that is grounded in, and promotes non-discrimination, gender equality and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, is also central to advancing gender equality.

- *Both within and outside of the political arena, where are the important or emerging sites for women and girls to actively participate in local, national, regional and international advocacy and action; and within these sites, what are the priority areas where new and concerted policy measures and interventions can achieve gender equality through the post-2015 development agenda?*

Facilitate collective action by child and youth-led organizations and groups to claim their rights. Support the organizational development of child and youth-led organizations and groups to enable them to be more effective, inclusive and democratic. Enable them to access, analyze and use information on their rights by strengthening their leadership, networking and influencing skills. The right of the youth to organize themselves and promote the enabling environment and for them to be seen and heard in traditional and emerging arena must be respected.

*Swedish Steering Group for Beyond 2015, co-ordinated by CONCORD Sweden.
The following organizations support this statement:*

Diakonia
Forum Syd
LSU -The National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations
LO-TCO Secretariat of International Trade Union Development Co-operation
MyRight
Plan Sweden
PMU - Swedish Pentecostal churches
RFSU - the Swedish Association for Sexuality Education
United Nations Association of Sweden
Church of Sweden
Swedish Mission Council
WaterAid Sweden
WWF Sweden