

# Young People and Consultative Processes for Poverty Reduction Strategies: Justification, Challenges and Opportunities

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*Poverty is inseparably linked to lack of access to or loss of control over resources, including land, skills, knowledge, capital and social connections. Without those resources, people have limited access to institutions, markets, employment and public services. Young people are particularly affected by this situation. Therefore, specific measures are needed to address the juvenilization and feminization of poverty.*

Paragraph 40, World Programme of Action for Youth (United Nations, 1995)

## **Background**

There is wide-ranging consensus that poverty needs to be understood in a multidimensional manner that goes beyond the use of income measures (i.e. \$1 or \$2 a day) (Gordon, 2003; Hulmes, 2003; World Bank, 2004). When exploring views on poverty with young people, they often do not associate poverty with any specific level of income, but rather with the ability to access opportunities, networks and services and to exercise control over the decisions that govern their lives. Living in poverty as a young person can equate to an inability to get an education, find decent employment, or secure adequate shelter. It can also mean being more vulnerable to preventable diseases, crime and violence, inadequate access to justice and the courts, as well as exclusion from political processes and the life of the community. For young people, poverty is deeply about equality, specifically in relation to opportunities and decision-making, or the lack thereof.<sup>2</sup>

If poverty for young people is in part about accessing opportunities and decision-making processes, then solutions must focus on the empowerment of young people themselves, especially those suffering the greatest discrimination and social exclusion. Consultation, dialogue, and eventual partnership with young people and their organizations becomes essential to grappling more effectively with well-established patterns of inequality that sentence young people, their families, and their communities to reoccurring cycles of poverty. Logically, the terms of most poverty reduction strategies (PRSs) require that civil society, which includes young people, be involved in their formulation.

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<sup>1</sup> This briefing note aims to present a conceptual framework for the involvement of young people in processes related to Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSs). It explores current experiences, challenges and potential strategies for advancing such work. The views expressed do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations. All comments can be sent to [larsenj@un.org](mailto:larsenj@un.org).

<sup>2</sup> The observations presented here are based on consultations with young people for the ten-year review of the World Programme of Action for Youth and from participatory exercises undertaken for the project *Tackling Poverty Together: The Role of Young People in Poverty Reduction*. More information on both is available at: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/workshops.htm>

However, consultative processes must be sustained and well-equipped if they are to achieve genuine cooperation with youth organizations and mutually work to disclose the needs, perspectives, and capabilities of young people as architects of their own future. Consultations that lead to enduring solutions to poverty will depend on the use of inclusive practices, some of which may be unique to working with youth.

Box 1: Frequently used terms defined in the context of PRSs

### **YOUTH**

For the purpose of collecting comparable statistical data, the United Nations defines *youth* as those between 15 and 24 years of age. However, it is also recognized that youth is a period of transition from childhood to maturity, which varies greatly between, and even within, societies. This critical life stage may begin as early as the age of ten (for children heading households, for example) and may continue beyond the age of 24. In this sense, youth continues until the process of transition to independent and self-sustaining adulthood is achieved. It is also recognized that young people do not form a homogeneous entity and that for the purposes of creating effective policies and programmes, it is increasingly useful to take stock of the diversity within youth, as well as to further delineate sub-categories such as the age of 15 to 19 years and 20 to 24 years. The terms *youth* and *young people* are used interchangeably in this paper.

### **CONSULTATION**

*Consultation* is defined as an act that promotes the exchange of information and discussion of experiences and opinions between two or more stakeholders, generally to promote reflection and beneficial change on a specified topic. Formally, it can include involvement in panel discussions, working groups, informal discussion circles, participatory assessment methods, surveys or other tools that promote thoughtful deliberation. In this paper, consultation is interpreted as the first step in a process that leads to a greater level of engagement (see Box 2 - Levels of youth engagement relative to PRSP processes).

### **POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGIES (PRSs)**

*Poverty reduction strategies* emerged largely in the last ten years as national policy frameworks for addressing poverty. They act as road maps by setting priorities for poverty-focused domestic policies and programmes. Many countries have PRSs in place, most in the form of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). PRSPs describe the macroeconomic, structural, and social policies and programmes that a country will pursue over several years to promote broad-based growth and reduce poverty, as well as to secure financing from associated sources. They are prepared by governments in low-income countries through a participatory process involving domestic stakeholders and with the coordinated support of international financial institutions, bilateral donors, and the United Nations. PRSPs are results-oriented, containing targets and indicators. Most are set within a three- to five-year rolling time frame and reported on annually. PRSPs are processes as much as they are documents and there are several steps to formulating, implementing, and monitoring the strategy. As of the end of 2006, over 60 countries had prepared either full or interim PRSPs (World Bank, 2006).

## **Justification for consultative processes with young people on PRSPs**

There are several considerations that underscore the importance of undertaking effective consultative processes with young people in the context of poverty reduction strategies.

*1 - Effective consultative processes with young people safeguard their rights and reduce their vulnerability.*

Poverty is increasingly seen as both a cause and a product of human rights violations and no longer an issue that can be addressed solely through strategies that focus on economic growth and development. A human rights approach to poverty stresses that policies and institutions directed towards poverty reduction should apply the norms and values set out in international human rights law.<sup>3</sup> This context provides poverty reduction strategies the opportunity to empower the poor, rather than simply direct development efforts at them (Robinson, 2003). Though empowerment is a long road, it is guided by the principles of participation, non-discrimination, and equality in all processes.

Such an approach also makes poverty reduction an obligation, rather than an act of welfare or charity, and compels policymakers to seek out and collaborate with vulnerable social groups in order to identify and implement appropriate strategies to escape their destitution (United Nations, 2006). PRSP processes have considerable impact on children and young people, who form a significant proportion of the population and a large number of those living below the poverty line in a majority of developing countries (United Nations, 2005).

Often the condition of living in poverty affects the ability of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged youth to defend their rights and responsibilities. Young people living in poverty are, owing to their situation, disempowered and excluded from society, and their capacity to secure their own rights may be extremely limited. Involving young people in the PRSP process then also becomes a way to build the capacity of young people to understand and participate in their economic and social rights. This may be particularly critical for youth living in chronically poor households, young women living in societies that disregard their basic human rights, youth infected with or affected by HIV/AIDS, internally displaced young people, and young people living with a disability, among others. Without engaging young people, it is unlikely that their needs, including those of the most vulnerable within the age cohort, will be located within the demographic and poverty profiles that are critical to the prioritisation of issues within PRSPs.

*2 - Effective consultative processes with young people often expose unique aspects of poverty that may have important policy and programme implications.*

Young people's participation in the development of PRSPs fulfils and protects important human rights, but it can also improve decision-making and serve as a practical tool to achieving better policies and programmes. This is particularly well-documented in the area of adolescent sexual and reproductive health programming, where youth participation has shown to have significant positive effects on programme outcomes, including increased community support for health-related projects and a commitment to sustaining the activities (African Youth Alliance, 2005).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For a more complete discussion of the human rights approach to poverty eradication see the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Human Rights and Poverty Reduction: A Conceptual Framework* (Geneva, 2004) and *Draft Guidelines: A Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategies* (Geneva, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> See also the World Health Organization, *Preventing HIV/AIDS in Young People: The first systematic review of what works to prevent HIV infection among young people in developing countries: A Summary of the WHO Technical Report Series No 938* (Geneva, 2006) and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), *Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic 2006* (Geneva, 2006).

It has also been noted that young people provide a unique perspective on the impacts of poverty on the family and household, for example, regarding decisions about education and the allocation of scarce resources such as money or food. Youth often “voice truths that adults no longer notice, or which socialized adults are wary of expressing, such as the link between poverty and family violence or substance abuse” (Save the Children, 2004, p.30). Young people are also commonly best at explaining why they do not attend school and what measures would encourage and support them to do so.

If young people can work with adults to articulate and present their experience of poverty, its manifestations in their everyday lives, how it affects their families, their schooling, their health, their aspirations, and how they could be supported to affect change, such information could be invaluable to poverty reduction processes. However, caution is raised against *data-mining*, the term used to describe using young people exclusively as information providers. Effective consultative processes with young people must be viewed as a first step in a continuum of increased participation, which ideally results in constructive adult-youth partnerships and a more full engagement. Otherwise, young people become relegated to providers of technical information and denied a wider say on the overriding issues of the PRSP (Brock, 2004).

*3 - Effective consultative processes with young people help to integrate the social dimensions of poverty and can assist in a more equal distribution of power.*

A familiar, albeit endangered, view in development debates is that economic growth is the first priority for reducing poverty, after which should follow social considerations. Advocates of this argument purport that “a rising tide floats all boats” and that wealth will “trickle down” to the poor. This view generally prescribes modest funding for social policies, used mostly to diminish the unintended consequences of economic change through limited interventions in basic education and health. However, there is growing consensus that sustainable poverty reduction is a dual function of economic growth and income redistribution.<sup>5</sup> Redistribution has faster impacts on reducing poverty than growth, but economic expansion is needed to sustain the process over time (Ortiz, 2006). While social policies are often equated with services in education, health, employment, and social security, they are also about redistribution, protection and social justice, aiming to place people at the centre of policy-making.

Designing good social policies requires understanding the needs of a country’s population from different perspectives and a common problem with existing strategies is generalizing about “the poor” (Ortiz, 2006). Youth are a group with substantial numbers below the poverty line owing to different causes of vulnerability and risk. Based on their own distinct experiences, young people can inject important social considerations into the poverty dialogue. If given the opportunity to be well informed and prepared, they can also work alongside adults to ensure coherence between the results of policy diagnostics and the establishment of priorities, programmes and budgets.

Without particular attention, it cannot be denied that the power dynamics behind PRSPs are stacked against youth participation. Between the mix of high-ranking government officials, international financial institutions, large donors, highly qualified advisers, and more organized segments of civil society, young people are at the bottom of the chain of influence. Yet young

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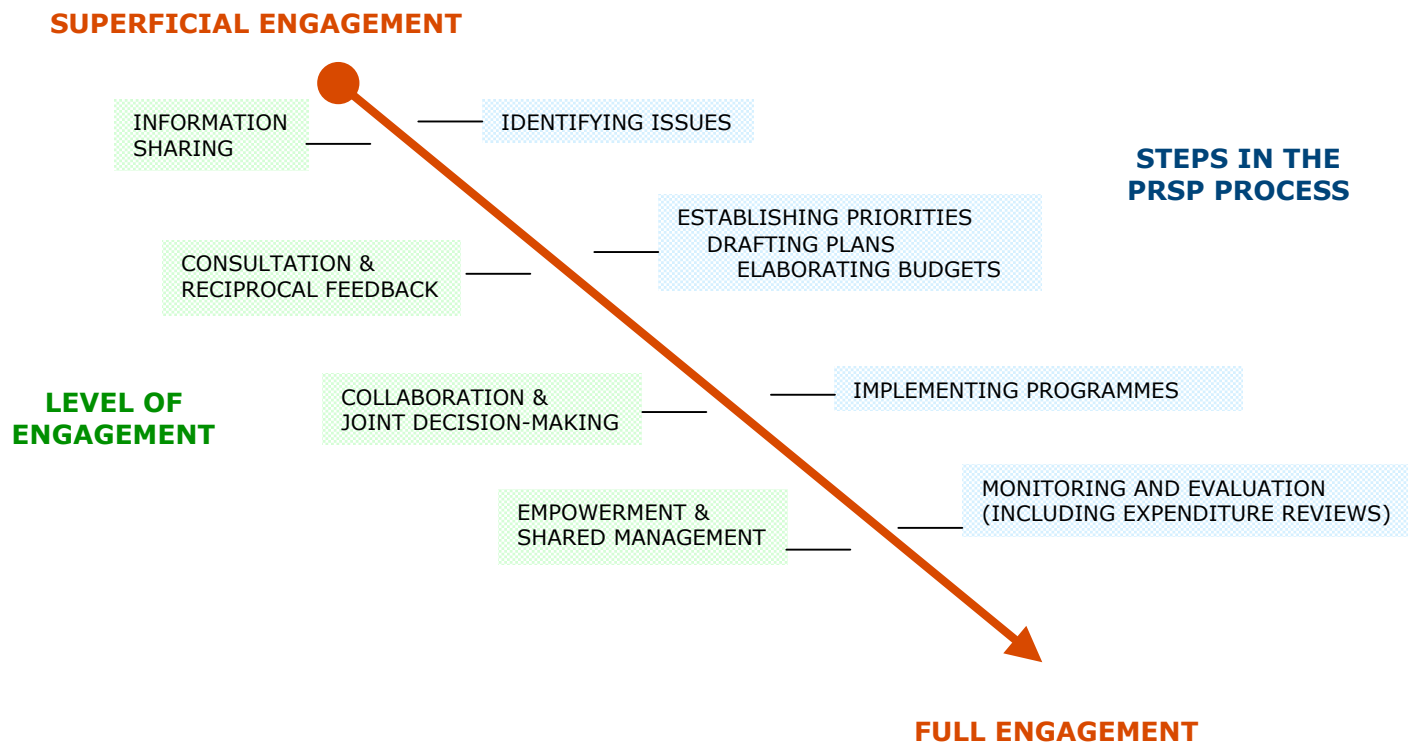
<sup>5</sup> For example, see UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs *The Inequality Predicament* (New York, 2005) or Perry et al. *Poverty Reduction and Growth: Virtuous and Vicious Cycles* (Washington, DC, 2006).

people can work to bring a measure of accountability and transparency to poverty reduction policies, assisting in a more equitable distribution of power. When policy-making is co-opted by powerful institutions and elites, policies become biased and unaccountable to the majority of citizens, laying the groundwork for inequity, exclusion, and dispossession.

*4 - Effective consultative processes with young people can foster inclusive engagement that supports all aspects of the PRSP process.*

Consultative processes with young people, while useful in soliciting information and identifying important issues, should be seen as part of a continuum leading to a more complete engagement in support of the overall PRSP process. Consultation is not an end product or final outcome in and of itself. Rather, it is a means to achieving other results with young people, such as obtaining accurate needs identification, building relationships, buy-in and trust, identifying mutual goals and priorities, exchanging information, and generating new strategies based on partnership. Accordingly, as the steps to a PRSP progress, so do opportunities to deepen the engagement of young people (see Box 2: Levels of youth engagement relation to PRSP processes).

Box 2: Levels of youth engagement relative to PRSP processes



Young people have a role to play in poverty reduction strategies beyond the identification of issues through the sharing of experience. They can assist in poverty diagnostics and help to prioritize the results. If there is transparency about the prioritisation of diagnostic results, then young people can strengthen the social contract between a national government and its citizens by promoting public awareness and understanding, particularly among their peers. They can make linkages to existing but often inactivated national youth policies to ensure coherence between various sectors (e.g. transport, health, rural development, labour, housing, education, culture, etc.). They can help to ensure that the results are translated into action plans, targets and deadlines. They can be effective in lobbying to ensure that priorities are backed by adequate budgetary allocations and translated into public investment pipelines. They can be skilful and resourceful implementation partners to work alongside designated ministries. All stages of the PRSP processes are amenable to being participatory for young people, provided that provisions are made to address and meet their special needs (see Box 4: Challenges to involving youth in PRSPs, related strategies and examples of specific tools).

*5 - Effective consultative processes with young people identify youth-specific elements of poverty that conventional data collection and needs assessments often fail to recognize.*

One reason that young people are frequently overlooked in PRSPs is because conventional poverty assessments fail to recognize youth poverty as dynamic, meaning that it varies throughout young people's transitions to adulthood. Because young people have fewer safeguards against hardship, they can slip in and out of poverty quite easily. For example, lacking access to credit or an extensive social network, a temporary loss of income can plunge a young person into poverty for an uncertain period of time. Few researchers have looked into the characteristics of poor young people, particularly their shifting movements in and out of poverty.<sup>6</sup> There is also generally a lack of available age-disaggregated poverty data.

Most poverty assessments, including those used in the formulation of PRSPs, rely on household surveys to identify the poor. These surveys usually focus on easily enumerated households comprising a dwelling and a family. Usually a household is identified as poor or non-poor based on the cumulative income of household members and regardless of possible unequal distribution of income within the household. Poor young people are also likely to be underrepresented in such a context if they have left the parental home. For example, the rapid increase in urban migration makes it likely that young people are among those who have left their primary family dwelling and now live in illegal settlements or overcrowded buildings (UN-HABITAT, 2004). This is one example of a subgroup of youth likely to go uncounted in poverty assessments.

Single-observation survey data cannot be used to track people's movements in and out of poverty over time, making it difficult to identify fluctuating vulnerabilities. The lack of both longitudinal data, tracking what happens to young people over time, as well as cross-sectional data, offering a more complex account of different subgroups of young people, makes consultations with young people particularly valuable as a way to integrate their needs into national PRSPs.

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<sup>6</sup> An exception here would be the International Labour Organization's latest *Global Employment Trends for Youth* (Geneva, 2006), in which a chapter is devoted to trends in youth poverty and the plight of the young "working poor", or young people who are unable to escape from poverty because of the type of work they do and their inability to find more decent and productive work.

## Current experiences of consultative processes with youth for PRSPs

Despite the fact that PRSPs have already been in operation for eight to ten years, serious efforts at incorporating young people into their formulation are still quite nascent and for the most part undocumented. In cases where information is available, it does not usually tease out the critical lessons learned about the needs of young people in relation to effective consultative processes around PRSPs. While far from complete, here are some examples:

- In **Bosnia-Herzegovina**, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Youth National Parliament held in Sarajevo in 2003 discussed the Developmental Strategy for BiH-PRSP and the need to include more youth concerns. More than 30 youth leaders from around the country participated, as well as representatives of governmental and non-governmental sectors. Following this, the Youth Information Agency (OIA), a non-governmental institute in the field of youth policy, assisted in the development of a Youth Coordination Board of PRSP.<sup>7</sup>
- In **Cameroon**, a project entitled “Young People in the PRSP” united young leaders from 30 different organizations across the country with the aim to increase youth participation in the national PRSP process. The group organized trainings for other youth to understand PRSP procedures, particularly as it related to debt cancellation, to ensure that young people could benefit from the resources made available from the cancellation.<sup>8</sup>
- In **Guyana**, an organization called Youth in Development facilitated the gathering of young people from 27 different organizations in Georgetown to formulate a Youth Agenda for the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). The meeting resulted in a report that was presented to the National Government’s PRSP Secretariat. The participating organizations considered it essential for young people to be part of this PRSP process and aimed to prioritize youth concerns related to reducing poverty. The main concerns in the report include education, health, job creation, and good governance.<sup>9</sup>
- In **Honduras**, Save the Children and its local partner organisations facilitated five consultations with children and young people that shaped advocacy around Honduras’s PRSP. In the largest of the consultations, involving 3,000 children and young people from across the country, viewpoints were sought on child labour. The results raised the issue of protection from exploitative child labour, an issue authorities had not addressed in the interim PRSP. A commitment was secured to use funds released by fulfilment of the PRSP towards education initiatives for young workers. The youth consultations also sounded important warning bells about the long-term impacts of poverty, such as damage to psychological health because of an unceasing bleak outlook for the future (Save the Children, 2004).
- In **Kenya**, young people made several gains during the formulation of the Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment in 2002-03. Young people were vocal in all of the Participatory Poverty Assessments that took place in ten districts. This led to a Youth Thematic Group and to youth representation in the Poverty Eradication Commission. In

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<sup>7</sup> More information on this example is available at: [http://www.oiabih.info/en/lobira/bh\\_omladinski\\_parlament/](http://www.oiabih.info/en/lobira/bh_omladinski_parlament/)

<sup>8</sup> More information on this example is available by contacting Mr. Pascal Bekono at [pbekono@yahoo.com](mailto:pbekono@yahoo.com)

<sup>9</sup> More information on this example is available at: <http://www.yid.org.gy/youthagendaprsp.html>

planning processes for achievements of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), young people were invited to be a part of the National Civil Society Organisation Steering Team that undertook country reports and needs assessments. Since these initiatives, young people have seen the creation of a National Youth Policy and the establishment of a new Ministry of Youth. While these are recognizable gains, young Kenyans request greater support in order to enact these policies and plans, both in terms of financial resources and capacity-building (e.g. budget literacy and monitoring public expenditure).<sup>10</sup>

- **Nigeria's** equivalent to a PRSP, the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), is soon to elapse. Under the leadership of a youth-led organization called Development Partnership International (DPI), a study has been undertaken called "Meeting Our Every Need: Young People's Reflections on the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy". The study was prepared through key-informant interviews, youth focus group discussions, and other information collection efforts carried out by young people across Nigeria. It aims to reflect on how young people have fared within the context of NEED I and to ensure that their needs are more effectively integrated into NEEDS II.<sup>11</sup>
- In **Tanzania**, the Tanzania Youth Coalition (TYC), a loose network of approximately 78 organizational members, is one of the few organizations that target young people in local communities in their campaigns concerning MKUKUTA (the Swahili term for the country's PRSP). TYC has begun a pilot project with the support of UNICEF to let people know about the opportunities stipulated in the MKUKUTA and how to access resources, for example from the TASAF (Tanzania Social Action Fund) and local government authorities. The project is targeted towards organizations and local communities at the district level and will initially take place in one zone comprising of fifteen districts. Prior to the pilot project, TYC carried out consultations with 1900 young people on what they wanted to be in the MKUKUTA. This work was assisted by the Vice-President's Office. Because TYC had been involved in several pre-MKUKUTA activities, they have now been invited to sit in the Communication Technical Working Group, part of the monitoring set-up for MKUKUTA under the Ministry of Planning, Economy and Empowerment. The group works to ensure that every Tanzanian knows what MKUKUTA entails, using tools such as the popular Mapambano Magazine and organizing Poverty Policy Week. The Working Group will also produce the Peoples' Views Report for the year 2006/2007 and publish the annual report on the implementation of MKUKUTA together with the Research and Analysis Working Group. TYC is ensuring that young people are a part of this work.<sup>12</sup>
- In **Vietnam**, Save the Children organised three large-scale consultations in Ho Chi Minh City involving over 400 children and young people in national poverty planning. The consultations spanned the full PRSP cycle: from pre-PRSP development planning, to getting feedback on the interim and draft PRSP, to a review of progress in implementation. Children and youth highlighted issues such as family separation and violence, as well as the plight of urban unregistered migrants who are not able to access healthcare and education. Their

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<sup>10</sup> More information is available at: [www.unescap.org/pdd/calendar/PovDecade/EGM%20papers/Tombo.pptt](http://www.unescap.org/pdd/calendar/PovDecade/EGM%20papers/Tombo.pptt).

<sup>11</sup> The report *Meeting Our Every Need: Young People's Reflections on the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy* is available through DPI at: <http://www.developmentpartnership.org/dpi/contact.html>.

<sup>12</sup> More information on this example from Tanzania is available at: <http://www.ms.dk/sw47828.asp>

information helped change procedures to allow unregistered migrants access services more quickly. This was a major step forward in a city where large numbers of people are ‘hidden’ unregistered migrants. The consultations also resulted in two local government initiatives to involve children and young people in official processes (Save the Children, 2004).

- **Zambia** adopted its first PRSP in the year 2002 for a two-year period ending in 2004. The Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection spearheaded a network called the Civil Society for Poverty Reduction (CSPR) to facilitate contributions to the PRSP process. Of the 24 organizations involved in the network, three were youth organizations, namely Operation Young Vote, Youth Advocacy and Lobby Network, and the National Youth Constitutional Assembly (NYCA). Similarly to gender issues, youth issues were considered to be crosscutting by the network and youth contributed to the areas of Governance, Education and Health. Through the CSPR, youth were also active in the monitoring of the PRSP implementation and Operation Young Vote and the National Youth Constitutional Assembly trained young people in participatory methodologies to conduct Poverty Assessment surveys. After the expiration of the 2004 PRSP, young people engaged in the formulation of Zambia’s six-year National Development Plan. This time, over 25 youth organizations participated in the process. Unlike the first PRSP, the National Development Plan includes a chapter on Children and Youth. Youth organizations also drafted shadow chapters on Education, Health, and Employment, which were submitted to the Government for consideration in their official chapters. Insufficient resources, difficulty in coordinating the multitude of Zambian youth organizations, and lack of information about policy processes are cited as some of the challenges encountered by those involved in these processes.<sup>13</sup>

These examples differ significantly. In some cases, the process was youth-led and centred on raising awareness, collecting information and preparing reports that could be used as advocacy tools (Cameroon, Guyana, and Nigeria). In others, young people were supported by adults who assisted in creating spaces for young voices to be heard (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Honduras, Vietnam). In some instances, youth participation in PRSP consultations led progressively to greater involvement in on-going processes, as well as to more formal, institutional responses (Kenya, Tanzania, and Zambia). There are surely more examples of youth involvement in the over sixty PRSPs around the world beyond those listed here.<sup>14</sup>

Yet the documentation available on the experiences listed above reveals some important challenges and considerations about consulting and working with young people on poverty reduction strategies. To supplement these examples, two other sources of information are used in this analysis: experiences gained from a multi-country project on young people and PRSPs (see Box 3: Tackling Poverty Together: The Role of Young People in Poverty Reduction) and feedback received via an electronic consultation with young people on their participation in PRSPs.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> More information is available at: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/TPT10.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> A more complete and wide-ranging compilation of young people’s experiences with PRSP processes would be valuable in advancing inclusive development processes. Additional examples are welcomed at: [larsenj@un.org](mailto:larsenj@un.org).

<sup>15</sup> The e-consultation, which was organized by UNFPA using the Internet platform of TakingITGlobal, took place over a period of three weeks in November 2006. The dialogue focused on three areas: 1) current levels of youth participation in PRSPs; 2) thematic issues in PRSPs of relevance to youth and identified gaps, and 3) how young people want these issues to be resolved. A summary of the e-consultation is available at: <http://groups.takingitglobal.org/YouthandPRSPs>

### **Box 3: Tackling Poverty Together (TPT): The Role of Young People in Poverty Reduction**

The guiding aim of the *Tackling Poverty Together* project is to work directly with young people to identify and strengthen their role in poverty reduction strategies. The project, managed jointly by the United Nations and the National Council of Swedish Youth Organizations (LSU), fosters cooperation with and between youth organizations from Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Sweden, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. Secondary objectives of the TPT project include to further an understanding of youth poverty by soliciting the views of young people; to review some of the current PRSP in Africa and their efforts to include youth; to assist youth organizations in developing the skills necessary to strengthen their role in PRSP processes; and to explore models of cooperation between the youth organizations, Governments and the United Nations.

To date, the project has consisted of two workshops interspersed by regular email and telecommunication. The first workshop, held in Ndola, Zambia in October 2005, explored the concept of youth poverty and examined current poverty reduction efforts. Participants created action plans containing concrete steps towards the inclusion of youth in the poverty reduction efforts of their countries. These action plans were reviewed at the second workshop held in Kampala, Uganda in March 2006, when participants discussed problems encountered, lessons learned, and future directions for their work.

Evaluations indicate that the project has generated some initial success. Through the creation of youth-led action plans, participants feel the project has operated as a constructive adult-youth partnership. Some of the factors of success have been identified as: the establishment of an advisory group, the selection of a diverse group of youth organizations, the provision of capacity building for youth organizations, on-going feedback and support, and shared decision-making.

However, the TPT project is at a crossroads. In order to continue, the youth organizations involved in the project have stressed the need to expand the support base for the project, particularly at the national level, to include stakeholders from UN country teams, World Bank country offices, relevant Government Ministries, and other youth organizations. They have also requested on-going mentorship and support for various aspects of their longer-term action plans (e.g. to incorporate gender perspectives in their work). The degree to which the TPT project will achieve sustainable success depends on its ability to attract more partners at the country-level.

Extensive documentation on the TPT project, including interim reports, the country-level youth action plans, compiled evaluations, and other documents are available on the project's website at <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/TPT.htm>.

### **Challenges and considerations for consultative processes with youth on PRSPs**

In the majority of contexts, civil society participation in PRSP processes is still quite new. For young people and their organizations, the struggle to be successfully involved in these processes is even greater. Several factors have been identified as “enabling elements” that determine the ability of civil society organizations to promote the interests of the poor. These include elements such as the freedom to associate, the ability to mobilize resources, the capacity to regulate and take responsibility for their own accountability, representation and legitimacy, as well as the ability to gather information and convey it articulately to decision-makers (Thindwa et al., 2003).

Despite the benefits of youth participation, youth organizations tend to be an underdeveloped segment of civil society and are disadvantaged in possessing the enabling factors for civic engagement in PRSP processes. Youth organizations are often under-resourced and depend heavily on the volunteer time to coordinate and manage their day-to-day operations. They often cannot divert the funds designated to project-specific endeavours to on-going efforts of participation. There is also the difficulty of representation and coordination, as organizing peer consultations and meetings require resources. In some countries, the plethora of small and fragmented youth organizations makes it difficult for young people to coordinate their endeavours and bewilders decision-makers when trying to choose suitable interlocutors. It must also be recognized and accounted for that many young people attend school, help out with family-based enterprises, do domestic chores, or must generate subsistence income, leaving little time to participate in other processes.

Altogether this means that adults must work alongside young people in creating the enabling environment for effective engagement. First and foremost, this will require the allocation of sufficient resources, both in terms of financial input and time, to working with and strengthening youth organizations. Capacity building will be crucial, both to develop specific skills (e.g. research methodology, project management, financial monitoring, etc.), and to coordinate peer outreach and the strengthening of youth organizations as legitimate institutional actors. Likewise, it may be necessary to work with youth organizations to identify those young people who may need some form of compensation to participate, particularly in order to sure that all young people have the opportunity to be involved and not just those well positioned because of income, education or family background. It may also be necessary to raise awareness within broader civil society of the importance of young people's contributions.

The need to allocate sufficient time and resources to working with young people on PRSP processes cannot be underestimated. Insufficient funding and hasty processes can become part of a vicious cycle that compromises the outcomes of youth involvement, thereby undermining the justification for working with youth on poverty reduction processes in the future.

Related to the need to allocate sufficient resources for working with youth is the fact that PRSP processes are both technical and bureaucratic, making them disparate and incongruent with most youth processes and activities. Access to information and the ability to demystify public policy reports, budgets, and related documents becomes essential to meaningful engagement. This reaffirms the need to allot sufficient time to consultative processes, as youth organizations may need a period to discuss matters among themselves, seek clarification, and reformulate their views. Processes must be transparent as much as possible and there must be provisions in place to ensure regular two-way communication, knowledge sharing, and reciprocal feedback. Adults working with young people on PRSP processes also need to find the balance between communicating issues clearly in terms that young people can understand, while not being condescending, over-simplifying issues, or imposing external viewpoints. Information needs to be exchanged between adults and young people in both directions to maintain an understanding of work that has been done, the reaction of the various constituencies and authorities, and the next steps for future involvement.

Because PRSP processes can be complex and elaborate, there is a risk that young people's contribution, when set against more experienced actors fluent in economic and planning issues, will be devalued and not taken seriously. There may be a need to create acceptance of the

concept of working with young people on PRSPs in order to counter adult resistance to involving young people in the main aspects of development. Adults can be actively or passively resistant to youth participation. This can be due to cultural dissonance, as many of the principles and practices of youth participation clash with assumptions regarding the role of young people. In many cultures, young people are not typically viewed as equal to adults. Young people may be expected to be deferential, obedient and keep their views to themselves. Adults may also resist youth participation because they do not want to share their decision-making authority and the power that it entails. In these instances, adults are willing to have young people participate but not if it brings changes to the current modus operandi.

It is essential to address the power dynamics involved in youth participation in order to ensure that their involvement does have the capacity to change things. To build acceptance around the concept of youth participation, it is useful for it to be endorsed at the higher levels of an institution. Having participation of young people authorized at higher political and managerial levels can provide the necessary support and justification for those working to make it achievable on the ground. There should also be a focus on equipping adults to work effectively with young people. Commonly it is young people who are under pressure to adapt to adult-led working styles and practices. However adults involved in the process must be supported and trained in building respectful partnerships with young people through interaction and dialogue.

Having a framework that clarifies the roles and expectations of all stakeholders is very helpful for effective youth participation. Often times youth participation disappoints both the adults and young people involved in the process because they were not sharing a similar set of expectations. As with any partnership, it is important to learn about each other party's interests, obligations, and abilities and to jointly outline roles and responsibilities.

Further to these considerations, it should be recognized that young people do not form a homogeneous entity and that for the purposes of creating effective policies and programmes, it is increasingly useful to account for the diversity within the cohort of youth. Usually youth organizations are attuned to marginalized groups of young people, but they lack the experience, expertise or resources to effectively outreach to disadvantaged youth and to incorporate their needs into regular activities and programming. Nevertheless, young people are generally more effective than adults in outreaching to marginalized youth and much is to be gained from collaboration in this area to ensure that even the most vulnerable youth have an opportunity to voice their experiences. Another strategy is to tap into existing expertise and to bring more partners to the table, such as those already working to respond to the needs of groups such as girls and young women, ethnic minorities, disabled youth, migrant or displaced youth, young people living on the streets or in remote, rural areas. There have also been positive experiences using a full range of participatory methods such as community mapping exercises, wealth ranking, circles of influence, role-playing exercises, and the creative arts. When supplemented with conventional methods such as focus group discussions, one-on-one interviews and group discussions, a full range of issues related to youth poverty begins to reveal itself.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> For example, in order to involve urban youth in Tanzania's Participatory Poverty Assessment Process and to engage young people in thinking about the complex, underlying causes of drug abuse, domestic violence, and the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS, researchers turned to music. Youth spent a week in their communities observing, asking tough questions, discussing and developing their own conclusions. After teaming up with a well-known hip-hop artist, the youth transformed their message into powerful rhythmic lyrics that expressed to policy-makers their views on the PRSP. For more information, see: [http://www.esrftz.org/ppa/Hali\\_Duni.htm](http://www.esrftz.org/ppa/Hali_Duni.htm)

Finally, it is necessary to recognize that young people’s engagement in PRSPs is not an end in itself. Ideally, it should be seen as a wider initiative to empower them to shape their communities as participating and questioning citizens. As youth organizations become engaged in PRSP consultations, it is quite likely that their commitment to achieving the objectives of the PRSP will grow. For this reason, young people need to be integrated into all aspects of a PRSP – from planning to research and needs identification, from implementation to monitoring and evaluation. There is no single effective practice or structure that ensures effective youth engagement in the PRSP process. Rather a shift in thinking needs to occur that incorporates young people as partners all the time and in as many ways as possible. Most participatory initiatives have centred on large-scale consultations to gather views and experiences. This is a step forward, but the venture needs to evolve in order to truly benefit from the contribution of young people to poverty reduction.

## Summary

Consultative processes that achieve genuine cooperation with youth organizations and work to disclose their needs, perspectives and capabilities to be a part of solutions to poverty must be sustained and well resourced. This paper provides the justification for undertaking effective consultative processes with youth in the context of poverty reduction processes. This includes the protection and promotion of young people’s basic human rights; the exposure of unique youth perspectives that have important implications for the reduction of poverty; the integration of the social dimensions of poverty and a more equitable distribution of power; and support for all aspects of the PRSP process, including improved data collection and needs assessments.

A review of existing experiences, though far from complete, reveals some important challenges and considerations about consulting and working with young people on poverty reduction strategies. These challenges are summarized in Box 4: Challenges to involving youth in PRSPs, related strategies and examples of specific tools. Overcoming such challenges will require considerable commitment and resources; however, there is good reason to work towards the full engagement of young people in PRSPs. As noted by a young person following a workshop on PRSPs, “In learning more about my country’s PRSP, I am amazed at how useful youth organizations could be in improving and completing these documents and in realizing their full implementation”.

Box 4: Summary of challenges to involving youth in PRSPs, related strategies and examples of specific tools		
Challenge or consideration	Related strategy or provision	Examples of specific tools
Youth organizations tend to be an underdeveloped segment of civil society and sometimes lack enabling factors for civic engagement in PRSP processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ allocate sufficient resources (financial, time, staff) to the process of engaging youth organizations. Participatory processes and relationship-building require sufficient time and attention.</li> <li>▪ provide support to coordinate peer outreach and to strengthen youth organizations as legitimate actors</li> <li>▪ provide capacity building and on-going mentorship</li> <li>▪ create awareness within civil society of the importance of young people’s contribution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ mapping exercises of existing youth organizations, leading to a co-managed contact database and outreach strategy</li> <li>▪ co-convening meetings and forums e.g. meeting space, travel subsidies</li> <li>▪ food or financial compensation for youth who could otherwise not attend</li> <li>▪ skills training in e.g. project management, research methodology or budget issues</li> <li>▪ co-sponsored promotional messages about the role of young people in development processes ( via radio or newspapers).</li> </ul>

Challenge or consideration	Related strategy or provision	Examples of specific tools
<p>PRSP processes are both technical and bureaucratic, making them disparate from youth activities and requiring the adequate provision of information.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ ensure timely provision and access to information and relevant documents</li> <li>▪ strategize with youth on the best ways to communicate with their hard-to-reach peers (e.g. illiterate youth, youth living in remote rural areas)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ co-production of accessible, youth-friendly version of key documents</li> <li>▪ Internet terminals in schools, libraries or other public spaces reserved for young people to access information</li> <li>▪ training materials on effective information retrieval via the Internet</li> <li>▪ a tip sheet with key dates, terms and other relevant PRSP information</li> <li>▪ youth-to-youth popular media campaigns, newsletters, and websites</li> <li>▪ on-line messaging boards and chat groups with invited guests who are knowledgeable to answer questions</li> <li>▪ provide regular information sessions that include a brief overview of key documents, their relevance and how they can be obtained (key web links, offices, ministries)</li> </ul>
<p>There may be a need to create acceptance of the concept of working with young people on PRSPs in order to counter adult resistance to involving young people in the main aspects of development.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ secure high-level and institutional endorsement if possible</li> <li>▪ plan for a period of accommodation and learning and have strategies in place (training, awareness campaigns) to confront cultural dissonance</li> <li>▪ provide support for adults on the concepts and practices used in youth engagement</li> <li>▪ initiate dialogues with youth organizations to develop a joint framework of understanding around roles, responsibilities, and the expectations of all parties</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ compilation of international and national commitments related to the importance of involving youth in decision-making for circulation and endorsement</li> <li>▪ equip adults (e.g. resources, required reading packages, trainings, on-line tools) to work in meaningful partnerships with young people</li> <li>▪ put in place specific measures (e.g. review dates on the calendar, progress reports) that will allow each partner to provide feedback</li> </ul>
<p>Young people do not form a homogeneous entity and for the purposes of creating effective policies, it is increasingly useful to account for diversity within the youth cohort</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ collaborate with youth organizations in order to support the incorporation of marginalized youth in their current programmes and activities</li> <li>▪ tap into existing expertise and bring new partners to the table that work with vulnerable groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ participatory methods in outreach and poverty assessments, making special efforts to include “younger youth” below the age of 19.</li> <li>▪ peer-to-peer gender awareness training for youth organizations</li> </ul>
<p>Young people need to be integrated into all aspects of a PRSP – from planning to research and needs identification, from implementation to monitoring and evaluation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ brainstorm on all areas and processes of a PRSP and the potential for youth involvement in each</li> <li>▪ examine all issues covered in a PRSP through a youth lens in order to spread youth involvement beyond traditional “youth areas” such as education and health</li> <li>▪ support bottom-up, youth-led initiatives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ focal points for youth in key ministries, departments, offices so that youth organizations have a regular point of contact with whom to develop an on-going relationship</li> </ul>

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