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POLICY ISSUES IN THE ESCWA REGION

**NATIONAL YOUTH POLICIES WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF
THE WORLD PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR YOUTH (WPAY)**

Summary

This paper reviews questions raised regionally and internationally on the causes of the deterioration of youth conditions, despite development efforts by Governments. One of the reasons identified by an expert group meeting organized by ESCWA in Abu Dhabi in March 2009 on Reinforcing Social Equity: Integrating Youth into the Development Process is that most of the Arab countries were lagging behind in their response to the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY). Those countries suffered from the lack of commitment to the guiding principles of WPAY, that urges countries to give youth issues the importance they merit in the planning process. It has become essential in this context to conduct a critical review of youth development approaches, with the aim of arriving at pragmatic approaches consistent with demographic, economic and social changes, as well as with the opportunities offered and challenges raised by globalisation that have an impact on youth.

The current paper seeks to promote the importance of dealing with youth issues on the basis of the WPAY. This Programme of Action is a systematic framework that responds to the current conditions of youth and constitutes a qualitative leap in development methodologies, rendering it a practical approach amenable to measurement and monitoring. To reach this goal, the paper addresses a range of topics that shed light on the principles and basic premises of the WPAY; the priorities and characteristics that distinguish it from traditional approaches to development; its uses at national levels; and the requirements for its adoption as shown by an inquiry carried out by ESCWA. The paper also puts forward a set of recommendations for enhancing the response to the WPAY and consolidating its approach to ensure youth development.

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Introduction

1. This paper reviews the questions raised regionally and internationally on the causes of the deterioration of the general conditions of youth, despite development efforts by governments. The paper will address some of the reasons diagnosed by an expert group meeting organized by ESCWA in Abu Dhabi in March 2009 on Reinforcing Social Equity: Integrating Youth into the Development Process.

(a) The initiatives taken by the countries of the region in responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (WPAY) are rather weak and they lack commitment to the WPAY guidelines. These guidelines, which urge countries to accord youth the importance they merit in the process of planning and follow-up, were adopted by member countries under General Assembly resolution 50/81 of 14 December 1995 and successive annexes, the most important of which is resolution 62/126 of 5 February 2008, and the most recent of which is resolution 64/130 of 3 February 2010;

(b) Countries' initiatives in this area are limited and their results tend to be poor. Countries have sought through national projects to address some of the social, cultural and entertainment needs of youth. However, these projects have had limited effectiveness. Young people are an essential human resource that contributes to development and is influenced by it. Isolated projects that are dispersed geographically or sectorally are inconsistent with the dynamic requirements of the relationship of youth to development and incommensurate with the extent of international effects of change engendered by forces of globalisation. Moreover, these projects are inherently unsustainable, do not meet the growing needs of youth, and do not provide adequate opportunities for empowering them;

(c) Most of these initiatives lack a modern conceptual framework. Often, the needs of youth are addressed from a perspective that focuses on specific behavioural factors, mostly negative and rejectionist. Hence, young people are dealt with as a source of problems and tensions and a cause of violence, rather than as a human resource that has a role in economic development. As a result, youth are not accorded the importance they merit, which would facilitate benefiting from them as a productive, rather than a consuming group;

(d) Notwithstanding the diversity of the population and social compositions of countries of Western Asia and their approaches to development, their sectoral and general development policies have been largely based on a traditional approach that focuses on the overall population. This traditional approach to planning and management of development priorities has failed to deal with the demands and specificities of selected population categories and social groups, such as youth; thereby omitting to recognize the risks involved, and leading to exclusion of groups that may have more pressing development needs and roles.

2. In this context, it has become necessary to conduct a critical review of the methodologies adopted in addressing youth development, with the aim of arriving at pragmatic approaches consistent with demographic, economic and social changes, as well as with the opportunities offered and challenges raised by globalisation that have an impact on the societal role of youth.

3. Development in the Arab countries should not be viewed in isolation from the process of demographic transition, for there are cause and effect, dynamic and reciprocal relationships between development and demography. The outcomes of such relationships become apparent at the macro level through successive, rather than simultaneous, periods of time, i.e., after longer or shorter periods of time, depending on fertility rates. Since the impact of the demographic transition has begun to be felt in most countries of the region, the need for decision by policymakers has become urgent. Over the next few decades, the proportion of youth (15-24 years) is expected to reach an average of 34 per cent of the total working age population. In the Arab region, members of this group numbered about 38.82 million in 1985, rising to 65.68 million people in 2005. Their number is expected to rise to 79.452 million people by 2015 and to 85.964 million people by 2035, i.e., an increase of about 47 million.

4. The “youth bulge” has resulted in the emergence of youth as a new socio-demographic group. This term refers to the phenomenon of high numbers of young people in the age cohort 15-24 years. Emergence of this phenomenon often leads to the following:

(a) A high proportion of working age population (15-64 years) and lower dependency ratios, leading to economic and social returns defined as the “Demographic window of opportunity”.¹ The economic returns consist of an increase in and accumulation of public and private savings that can be converted into physical and human investment over a period of time when communities undergo demographic and structural changes, reshaping the population pyramid. However, such returns are not automatic. Rather, they have to be sought by policies considering young people (15-24 years) as a human resource, and aimed at investing in major priorities that meet their needs throughout their lives;

(b) The possibility of outbreak of civil conflicts and local, and sometimes regional unrest. The high percentage of young people, above twenty per cent of total population, is associated with an increase in violence among youth and emergence of political insurgencies and unrest, particularly in countries that suffer social systems lacking social equity and basic principles of democracy.

5. An analysis of the relationship between the consequences of population dynamics, including the changes in the age structure of population, and the basic social, economic and political issues of the region requires a consideration of three influential factors; namely, the human life cycle, development and globalisation.

6. The human life cycle consists of different stages of growth, each having its own distinguishing features. For example, childhood is characterized by physical and mental growth and the requisite psychological care, while adolescence is characterized by physiological developments that lead to dynamic behaviour dominated by a desire to reject and be different. Likewise, young adulthood is characterized by dynamic behaviour having rejectionist tendencies. In addition to the health requirements related to the physical development of young people, there are other societal requirements that have to be met, taking into account the behavioural factors characteristic of this life-cycle phase. Notwithstanding the difficulty of distinguishing the various overlapping physiological, mental, emotional and psychological phases of human development, it is acknowledged that such human characteristics are mostly constituted in the early stages of life: childhood, adolescence and youth.

7. Through policies and strategies designed to avert the social, economic and political exclusion of young people and the factors that perpetuate generational conflict, development processes have an essential role in addressing the “youth bulge” and consequent social and political crises. The adoption of appropriate policies and strategies would lead to an organization of the relationship between youth and society through strategic interventions that take into account both investment and human aspects, and provide mechanisms for bringing about the required social balance among age groups and generations.

8. The importance of globalisation is due to the fact that young people are now in a transitional phase that intersects with the current trend towards economic social, and cultural integration between the local national and the global. As a result, new work and life opportunities are emerging, along with challenges arising from the transition towards new tendencies that may not be compatible with those prevailing locally.

9. Hence, demographic changes and the youth bulge constitute a formidable challenge to Arab Governments. Economic, social and political consequences of failing to take the necessary measures may be very serious. The most important challenge is perhaps that of developing a socially acceptable approach that

¹ The “demographic window of opportunity” results when the working age population (15-64 years) grows at a rate that exceeds the rate of growth of the dependent population (under 15 and more than 64 years), which allows increasing personal and public savings. However, taking advantage of this opportunity is contingent upon adopting economic and social policies that will convert savings into developmental investment (including human resources development).

is politically effective and responsive to the needs of Arab youth. Since young people are the nucleus of the social order, this approach needs to be based on principles of social justice and equality. For the new approach to be realistic, it has become necessary to separate youth policy from the objectives of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), since these do not provide the tools for addressing specific social demographic groups, such as youth. Instead, another pragmatic approach that has often been overlooked, the human life-cycle approach, is needed. This latter approach recognizes that the needs of younger age groups differ from those of older age groups and the elderly. Each age group has distinct behaviours and requirements, leading to different economic and social consequences. Any damage suffered in one of the critical stages, especially childhood and young adulthood, is likely to result in serious harm impacting subsequent life-cycle phases.

10. The current paper seeks to promote the importance of dealing with youth issues on the basis of the WPAY. This is a systematic framework that responds to the current conditions of youth and constitutes a qualitative leap forward in development methodologies, rendering a practical approach amenable to measurement and monitoring. To reach this goal, the paper addresses a range of topics that shed light on the principles and basic premises of the WPAY; the priorities and characteristics that distinguish it from the traditional approaches to development; its uses at national levels; and the requirements for its adoption as shown by an inquiry carried out by ESCWA. The paper also puts forward a set of recommendations for enhancing the response to the WPAY and adopting its approach to ensure youth development.

I. WORLD PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR YOUTH

11. The United Nations has long ago determined that adherence to the principles and ideals as well as the interest in the capacities of young women and men are a vital necessity for achieving the goals and targets of society. This was recognized first in 1965 when member States ratified the United Nations Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples. Three decades later, in 1995, the United Nations adopted the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. In 2007, through the Report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations submitted to the General Assembly in its sixty-second session A/62/61/Add.1, the WPAY received strong support from the international community. A qualitative leap was thus achieved, making the Programme a practical youth agenda, through the identification of quantitative goals and standardized targets that can be monitored and evaluated over a time frame extending from five to ten years to come. The report and its annexes were approved by Resolution 64/130 of 3 February 2010.

12. The United Nations General Assembly has recommended that all Member States, United Nations bodies, specialized agencies, regional commissions, governmental and international organizations and non-governmental organizations, particularly youth organizations, encourage the development of policies aimed at young people, incorporate such policies into national development plans, and take the necessary measures to finance them; through the following resolutions:

- (a) Resolution 64/130 of 3 February 2010;
- (b) Resolution 62/126 of 5 February 2008;
- (c) Resolution 58/133 of 22 December 2003;
- (d) Resolution 57/165 of 18 December 2002;
- (e) Resolution 56/177 of 19 December 2001;
- (f) Resolution 54/120 of 17 December 1999;
- (g) Resolution 50/81 of 14 December 1995.

13. Member States at the United Nations agreed to work towards achieving the objectives of the United Nations Charter and its principles, including raising the standards of living of young people, their full employment, and creating an enabling environment for their progress and development.

14. The WPAY can be considered as a national action and international support document, aimed at enhancing the conditions and mechanisms for promoting youth welfare and standards of living. It also provides a framework for public policy, and practical guidelines for national action and international support for improving the conditions of young people.

15. The WPAY is an unprecedented initiative by the international community, in recognizing the value of youth as both human resources and as key agents for change and socio-economic development. The Programme of Action was developed on the basis of recent international instruments, including the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights, the Programme of Action adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development, the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development, the Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, and the recent United Nations Millennium Declaration.

16. Though they are an important contribution to the formulation and implementation of national policies, the above-mentioned instruments and programmes of action do not recognize that young people are a distinct category with specific needs and capabilities. Rather, they implicitly assume that young people would automatically benefit from development. However, although they provide guidelines for assessing progress towards the overall goals, within the framework of the priorities set by these documents, development methodologies have not developed specific indicators in the form of goals and time-bound targets that could assist in development or formulation of a national agenda for youth development, and hence provide better opportunities for assessing progress made at the national level. In this context, the goals and objectives presented within the framework of the third MDG constitute a starting point for determining the goals and targets for youth development. Yet, the issues addressed by the MDGs are related to the entire population, including youth, and do not focus specifically on issues that impinge directly on youth development. Since young people are a social group facing specific, often unique, demographic challenges, they needed to be separated from the context adopted by the MDGs and their indicators. Thus, the WPAY approach is distinguished from traditional approaches by recognising that a population consists of non-homogeneous groups with needs and roles that vary depending on the age phase in the human life cycle.

A. DEFINITION OF THE TERM “YOUTH”

17. The WPAY defines youth as a transitional phase from childhood to adulthood. Notwithstanding variations in conditions, issues and cultural heritage of youth around the world, the physical, psychological, mental and emotional changes associated with youth are common to all young people, without being restricted to a particular geographical area. Since young people are a demographic and social complex, under the guidelines of the WPAY, the United Nations adopted a procedural definition that covers persons aged between 15 and 24 years. The guidelines are important, because they focus on young people as a broad category comprising various subgroups, rather than considering them as a single demographic entity. They propose specific measures to meet the needs of particular subgroups, such as young people with special needs and rural and urban youth. This definition was adopted by many member countries, because it covers a specific population targeted in national plans.

18. In usage, the term “Youth” has become neutral, covering both young men and young women. The definition does not prejudice any other that may be adopted by United Nations member States on the basis of their own socio-cultural, economic, institutional and policy factors. However, adoption of the standard definition suggested by the United Nations is preferable, in order to facilitate inter-country comparisons, as well as within the same country over several periods.

B. PRINCIPLES OF THE WORLD PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR YOUTH

19. The following are the basic principles of the WPAY:

(a) Youth are a fundamental force for change that plays a role in development and is an essential partner in achieving sustainable development steadily and renewably. While the history of the developing societies testifies to the active participation of youth in liberation movements and struggle for national independence, the present time testifies to their energies and innovative capabilities in science and knowledge. They are a generation aspiring to prove themselves, venture and innovate in various areas of development, and they are also the group that is most heavily involved with information and communications technology, more open to the cultures of the world, and most desirous of achieving just democratic communities, as well as of intercultural dialogue and world peace;

(b) Investment in youth has positive returns: economic, in that it leads to breaking the cycle of poverty inherited through generations; social, in that it helps achieve social equity; and political, in that it facilitates opting for modernity and social modernisation for present and future generations. The United Nations was first to promote the positive role of youth in development, considering investment in young people to have benefits guaranteed for 4 to 5 decades to come, taking into account that they are essential for taking advantage of the demographic window of opportunity;

(c) The approach to youth should be built on rights and duties, with their various social, economic, political and civil-rights principles and concepts. Building on human rights requires first that all entities concerned with development and youth issues, from Government, to private sector, to civil-society organizations, to regional and international organizations should work jointly to consolidate these rights. Secondly, these rights should be adopted as criteria for evaluating national youth policies. Thirdly, youth should be core actors and partners in policies, programmes and projects that involve them. Fourthly, there should be no discrimination between any of the youth groups for whatever reason, whether religious, ethnic, cultural, social, or gender;

(d) The approach rests also on the premise that participation at all levels and in all forms is an inherent right of young people, by virtue of principles and conditions of citizenship. Such participation by young people should be made available in all groups, government institutions and civil society organizations; from the family, to educational institutions, through work institutions and civil-society organizations. Indeed, participation adds value to the youth themselves, as well as to the institution, the organization and the community.

C. PRIORITIES OF THE WORLD PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR YOUTH

20. In his report to the General Assembly of the United Nations in its sixty-second session, the Secretary-General of the United Nations proposed a coherent set of indicators, to measure and evaluate progress towards the specified goals and targets. The time-frame chosen to achieve the proposed goals and targets was from 2005 to 2015, respectively marking ten and twenty years since the adoption of the WPAY by member countries. The existence of standard indicators with specific goals and time-frames should help in formulating a national youth agenda and provide better means for assessing progress at the national level. In this context, the WPAY, in collaboration with member countries approved fifteen priorities that are directly related to issues considered by the countries and by young people themselves to be important at both the national and the international levels. These have been defined as belonging to three categories as follows:

The Fifteen Priorities of the World Programme of Action for Youth	
	<p><u>Youth in the Global Economy</u></p> <p>Education Employment Hunger and poverty Globalisation</p> <p><u>Youth in Civil Society</u></p> <p>Environment Leisure-time activities The full and effective participation of youth in the life of society and in decision-making Information and communications technology (ICT) Intergenerational issues</p> <p><u>Youth and their Well-being</u></p> <p>Health Juvenile Delinquency Drug Abuse Girls and young women Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) Armed Conflict</p>

21. The Programme of Action views, accurately and in-depth, the complex nature of the challenges faced by youth and provides proposals for action and procedural measures to be followed in an integrated way in each of the priority areas. It seeks to help Governments respond to the aspirations and needs of young people by working on these priorities to achieve a better future for all. The priorities are characterized by the following:

- (a) They have a complex nature, each having challenges that need to be addressed and opportunities that need to be seized;
- (b) They are interdependent by inseparable cause and effect relations, such that investment in one priority has a multiplier effect on the others;
- (c) Investment in these priorities in the early stages of human life provides maximum benefit, as intervention at an early age benefits present and subsequent generations;
- (d) They form in their entirety an integrated plan with standard goals and targets aimed at young people, working through strategies of empowerment and social inclusion on improving their conditions;
- (e) They allow better utilisation of resources by directing them towards major gaps and challenges, rather than distributing them randomly on non-priority issues.

II. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE WPAY, SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT POLICIES, AND THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

22. The following are some areas that distinguish the WPAY from sustainable development policies and the MDGs:

1. *Poverty eradication policies*

23. Often, experiences of the youth population are overlooked when such policies are made. Young people in urban and rural areas suffer from poverty. Yet, they are often beyond the scope of poverty eradication policies. This is generally due to lack of statistics on youth in general, and poor youth in particular, as well as to the rigid definition of poverty, which measures it by the level of household income or by total household expenditure assessed through household surveys. Often, young people are excluded from such surveys, due to lack of a definition that reflects the poverty of contemporary youth, which renders poverty eradication policy initiatives partial and limited in both scope and potential impact. These initiatives often overlook youth as a major group that suffers poverty or deprivation. Poverty is a multifaceted phenomenon that is not determined solely by income level, but also and to an important extent by access to services. Hence, it is a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including the inability to participate effectively in society; the inability to provide clothing, food and schooling to family members; a lack of access to means of production, such as land; a lack of access to gainful employment; and a lack of access to capital in the form of loans and financing.

24. The WPAY attaches the utmost importance to addressing youth poverty and recommends undertaking field surveys to provide detailed data on it so as to enable adoption of a more comprehensive approach to poverty. Indeed, targeting young people as a distinctive sector has become extremely important. Moreover, collecting quantitative and qualitative data and analysis on youth poverty has become an urgent need for developing policies and strategies that empower young people, reduce their exclusion, and enhance their sense of security. The Programme of Action stresses the importance of: rural development, consolidation of agricultural work values, promotion of attachment of youth to the land, and reducing disparities between urban and rural youth. It also stresses the importance of providing adequate housing for young people in cities, as well as adequate and safe food, and stresses the importance of making microfinance and microcredit available to them.

25. The WPAY provides a general framework for a national youth policy for which eradication of extreme youth poverty is a top priority. The Programme has also developed a set of quantitative targets that youth policies should seek to achieve between 2005 and 2015, as follows:

Objective 3-1: halve, between 2005 and 2015, the proportion of youth-headed households living in extreme poverty, while ensuring the female youth-headed households are not disproportionately impoverished.

Objective 3-2: halve, between 2005 and 2015, the proportions of young women and men without access to water, sanitation, electricity, health care and other basic services.

Objective 3-3: ensure that young women and men, through youth organizations, are involved in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of national development and/or poverty reduction strategies.

Objective 3-4: halve, between 2005 and 2015, the proportion of youth without adequate shelter or housing.

Objective 3-5: Between 2005 and 2015, increase by 50 per cent the proportion of young women and men with access to microfinance or other financial services.

Objective 4-1: halve, between 2005 and 2015, the proportions of young women and men suffering from hunger.

Objective 4-2: halve, between 2005 and 2015, the proportion of young women and men living without secure access to safe and nutritious food.

Objective 4-3: ensure equal access to timely food aid for young women and men in crisis situations.

Objective 4-4: by 2015, develop and implement policies aimed at the provision of information on nutrition and healthy lifestyles.

2. Education policies

26. By their very nature, education policies target youth. The current generation of young people is the most educated and trained. Indeed, education systems have witnessed significant expansion in terms of the numbers enrolled in the various educational levels and disciplines. However, the quantitative expansion has not been accompanied by qualitative advances that respond to the current needs of young people, particularly in the context of the historic changes through which societies are passing, such as open markets, and the proliferation of ICT tools of globalisation. Despite these developments, the education system has maintained its traditional role of reproducing society and sustaining prevailing social, economic and political systems. Thus the role of education in promoting change remained limited, and measures such as increased financial allocations; the enactment of laws and legislations, such as compulsory education, and promotion of education for all were to no avail. Education policies aimed at providing opportunities to all and making education a human right are still stalled. There are still some 130 million illiterate youth worldwide and school dropout rates for the current generation are higher than those for previous generations. Furthermore, the quality of education remains an obstacle to entering the job market locally and globally. Despite the fall of barriers between countries, education systems still maintain their local patterns and cannot meet the requirements of the global market by advancing the educational process, making it a source of intellectual innovation; enhancing student capacities for collective work; developing students' language skills, talents and intellect; and refining students' vocational skills and abilities.

27. The WPAY considers lifelong learning a necessity, the foundations of which should be established at a young age through formal and informal education. Moreover, the Programme emphasizes that education policies should be flexible and responsive to the varied and emergent needs of boys and girls. These policies should also take into account the geographic distribution (rural-urban) in order to provide opportunities for enrolment and prevent dropping out of school at an early age. The WPAY works on two aspects. The first is improving and adapting curricula to ensure knowledge and information transfer to students, while making the curricula themselves more responsive to current requirements, especially those arising from globalisation and the new knowledge and intellectual life skills imposed by it. The second aspect is to improve the relationship between education requirements and those of the new labour market, since globalisation requires new technical and intellectual skills. There is a package of measures that work towards harmonisation between the supply and the demand in the labour market, thereby making education rewarding and smoothing engagement in the labour market.

28. In relation to education policies, the following measures should be taken by countries of the region:

(a) Training a number of career advisors to provide information to students, explain in detail the nature of the vocational and skill needs of the labour market, wage levels and working conditions;

(b) Expanding job centres to disseminate information on jobs available in the labour market and their professional and educational requirements;

(c) Developing the largest number of qualitative databases that advertize the needs of the labour market (public and private) at all local, national and even regional levels, and making such databases accessible to graduates of general, vocational and university education;

(d) Strengthening partnership between the private sector and vocational schools, in order to provide manpower trained with the required skills and occupational competencies that meet the needs of the private sector, with this training financed by the private sector;

(e) Providing social protection systems to help disadvantaged young people who suffer unemployment and young workers in the informal sector, so as to ensure coverage of youth in the 15-24 years age group;

(f) Establishing training systems linked to specific sectors that need to employ a young workforce, such as building and construction, and communication and information technology;

(g) Reinforcing the scholarships system and making it merit based, in order to provide educational opportunities to all young people, particularly young women who have scientific ability, regardless of class, tribal affiliation or ethnic origin;

(h) Finding new outlets for financing education through partnerships between the private sector and government and educational institutions, in order to ensure that graduates of the educational system have the professional skills needed by the private and the public sectors;

(i) Increasing media awareness and promoting a culture that does not belittle vocational education, together with reviewing university admission systems towards reducing demand for humanities and guiding those who are willing towards fast vocational training courses and strengthening the role of manual work by increasing its rewards.

29. The WPAY provides a general framework for national youth policies giving priority to promoting access to quality education and ensuring that formal and informal youth education is supportive of life-long learning and skill development. The Programme developed a package of quantitative targets for youth policies to seek to achieve between 2005 and 2015. These are as follows:

Objective 5-1: achieve universal access to quality basic education and ensuring gender equality in education by 2015.

Objective 5-2: between 2005 and 2015, increase 50 per cent the proportion of students completing secondary education.

Objective 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.

Objective 5-4: ensure that opportunities for technical and vocational education and skills training are available to all youth by 2015.

Objective 5-5: by 2015, develop and implement national systems of quality assurance in education based on internationally agreed standards and tools.

Objective 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.

3. *Employment policies*

30. Studies show that youth unemployment is increasing at a rate higher than the rate of increase of unemployment among the population as a whole. Young people are the most vulnerable to unemployment, with their share amounting to about 48 per cent of the total, which means that approximately one out of every two unemployed in the world is aged between 15 and 24 years. Evidence also suggests that young people involuntarily join the informal sector to gain their livelihood. Work in this sector is usually casual and part-time, with workers deprived of the benefits of permanent employment. The sector also includes the self-employed who get minimal subsistence earnings. New male and female entrants to the labour market, who are usually young, are most at the risk of unemployment, and are often employed for low wages. The consequences of high unemployment among young people are increasing marginalisation and exclusion from public life, mounting frustration, and low self-esteem, which may in the long term lead to behaviours that could be a source of numerous social ills. Employment policies promoted within the context of sustainable development and the MDGs are focused on four strategies: (a) investment in youth education and training; (b) promotion of entrepreneurship among young people; (c) self-employment of young people; (d) providing equal employment opportunities for women and men. There is no doubt that supply-side measures are very important, but they do not solve the problem. The WPAY affirms the need to pay equal attention to both supply and demand. What is required is not only to provide sufficient numbers of jobs, but also quality jobs offering “decent work”. This requires directing investment towards sectors of the future, especially ICT. What distinguishes the WPAY from other methodologies is its emphasis on improving the quality of labour supply and creation of quality jobs.

31. In this context, the WPAY emphasizes the need to pay attention to both labour supply and labour demand, through the following measures:

(a) Instituting wage equality, expanding the minimum wage to include broader categories such as piece-workers, and ensuring the right to training and social protection;

(b) Improving institutional performance in monitoring labour-market needs and the number of job opportunities available to young people;

(c) Meeting the challenges arising from employment of youth in the informal sector by promoting the general principles of “decent” work approved by the International Labour Organization (ILO);

(d) Expanding demand for youth employment, through developing laws that encourage private companies to hire young people, implementing housing projects to meet growing demand, stimulating public spending on infrastructure, and promoting youth employment in the ICT sector;

(e) Increasing economic opportunities for young people, through youth service programmes that provide them with opportunities for training and acquiring skills and some of their material needs, developing programmes to encourage innovation, and financing small enterprises.

32. The required employment-policy efforts for the countries of the region should be, for example, through the following measures:

(a) Balancing labour-intensive investments with investments in advanced technology;

(b) Overcoming obstacles arising from the division of labour markets between public, private and informal sectors, through improving working conditions in these sectors and reducing wage differentials among them, and simultaneously enabling them to perform their economic and social roles;

(c) Improving the job-creation environment, through launching and sustaining institutional reforms, in both the public and private sectors (notwithstanding differences in the reform required in each sector).

Accountability, transparency and management in accordance with principles of good governance constitute powerful job creation and investment engines;

(d) Promoting job creation projects, particularly small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which have proved to be highly effective in creating better and more stable jobs for young people;

(e) Promoting regional economic collaboration and integration, on the basis of mutual and common interests, which has become an urgent, indispensable necessity in any attempt at reform and for rising to the challenges of globalisation.

33. The WPAY provides a general framework for national youth policies giving priority to increasing opportunities for decent, productive work for young women and men. The Programme developed a package of quantitative targets for youth policies to seek to achieve between 2005 and 2015. These are as follows:

Objective 6-1: halve, between 2005 and 2015, the proportion of youth who are neither in education nor in employment.

Objective 6-2: halve, between 2005 and 2015, the proportion of employed youth in vulnerable employment.

Objective 6-3: by 2015, reduce the gap between youth and adult unemployment rates.

III. SCOPE OF THE WORLD PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR YOUTH

34. The General Assembly took steps to encourage Member States to commit themselves to the implementation of the WPAY by urging national Governments to develop comprehensive, integrated national youth policies, within the framework established by WPAY, and to assess implementation regularly, as part of monitoring the implementation of the Programme.

A. DEVELOPMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE, INTEGRATED NATIONAL YOUTH POLICIES

35. A national youth policy is primarily an expression of the commitment of society to its citizens, and a declaration of a common national vision for the current generation of young people. It identifies the needs and priorities of youth, and provides a basis for equitable allocation of resources to meet their needs. The implementation of a national youth policy constitutes a realistic approach towards involving youth in decision-making processes, through their active participation in the development and implementation of policy. A national youth policy consists of texts issued by official government bodies, in collaboration with non-governmental youth organizations that specify the overall direction of the State in relation to youth, and are tantamount to a declaration of priorities and commitment to them. The policy also identifies a number of direct and indirect interventions and measures designed to achieve the quantitative and qualitative targets that have been determined at a national level. In the final analysis, a national youth policy would make it possible to empower young people and to involve them in economic, social and political life. Thus a national youth policy should:

(a) Clearly identify the position of youth and their role in society and the responsibility of society towards young people, on the basis of a youth vision, articulated by youth for the present and the future;

(b) Take into account the needs, problems and aspirations of youth on an integrated and balanced basis, supporting equal opportunities for young people of both sexes;

(c) Encourage the provision of services and establishment of appropriate structures to meet the needs and aspirations of youth, with participation from young people, to improve their conditions;

(d) Encourage young people to contribute actively to all economic and social activities, as well as to decision-making processes, to reinforce their impact on national development and international cooperation.

B. NATIONAL VISION OF THE ROLE OF YOUTH IN SOCIETY

36. A national vision focuses on key points, notably that youth is the goal of development and its instrument, and that young people are an essential factor of economic, social and political change and development. It establishes the direction of the country and the practical support it intends to provide to young men and women, reviews and analyses the conditions of youth, and forms an overall framework for the engagement of youth at the community and national levels. These concepts are typified by some of the following concrete examples:

(a) Empowering youth and engaging them in nation building and decision-making by efforts designed to enhance capacities and skills of young people and improve the opportunities available to them (e.g., the National Youth Strategy of Bahrain);

(b) Developing the spirit of citizenship among young people by promoting principles of social justice, instituting a concept of citizenship based on rights and duties, grounding young people in the love of their homeland and culture, and encouraging them to have full, constructive and effective participation in the development of the nation (e.g., the National Youth Policy of Jamaica);

(c) Raising young people who are aware of their capabilities and highly informed, and who enjoy good physical, mental, emotional and psychological health (e.g., The Medium Term Youth Development Plan of the Philippines);

(d) Enhancing a development perspective that considers youth as a social group with special needs, and seeks to incorporate their aspirations into all stages of development (e.g., the National Strategy for Youth of Iraq);

(e) Raising young people who are aware of their capabilities, highly informed and well equipped to deal with the vicissitudes and requirements of the era with awareness, confidence and competence, within a supportive and safe environment (e.g., the National Youth Strategy of Jordan).

C. BENEFITS ACCRUING FROM A NATIONAL POLICY FOR YOUTH

37. Benefits vary from one country to another. However, they generally include:

(a) Providing a national framework and a set of priorities for the development of youth policies and programmes;

(b) Consolidating a holistic perspective on the needs and aspirations of young people and providing an assessment of them;

(c) Encouraging citizenship and public service among youth in the service of national development and international cooperation;

(d) Setting national youth targets for government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector;

(e) Achieving balances, mitigating social exclusion and positively accommodating youth dynamism;

(f) Changing support provided to young people from the ad hoc and short-term to the planned and programmed;

(g) Changing the general orientation towards youth, moving from neglect to enhancement, from perceiving youth as a source of problems to envisaging them as a human resource, and from doubting the abilities of youth to trusting their capabilities;

(h) Supporting the enhancement of youth as agents of change in society, a valuable asset and an active partner;

(i) Encouraging investment in young people to ensure continued availability of resources, information and opportunities that enable young people to recognize their capabilities.

IV. OPERATIONAL STEPS TO RESPOND TO THE WORLD PROGRAMME OF ACTION

A. FORMULATION, IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION OF A NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY

38. Formulation, implementation and evaluation of a national youth policy requires the following steps:

(a) Broad participation of all parties concerned with youth in the design of a national youth policy based on a vision for young people developed by youth and all concerned parties, using basic definitions of the term “youth” and youth sub-groups;

(b) Defining a list of priorities covering different youth-related conditions as seen by youth themselves and in line with the fifteen priorities of the WPAY;

(c) Setting the goals and targets of the policy in light of defined priorities and according to an accurate calculation of expenses covering all youth sectors;

(d) Institutional restructuring and reforming institutional structures to facilitate communication and coordination between policymakers and national and local actors, and establishing mechanisms for encouraging community involvement and listening to the views of its representatives;

(e) Coordination of a national youth policy that covers all sectors and ensures partnership between youth NGOs, ministries and government departments dealing with youth issues, and key stakeholders;

(f) Encouraging the establishment of a national youth council, national youth service and/or youth volunteering service programmes, to implement a national youth policy at the local and provincial levels that includes actions, objectives and target groups, with specific interim time-frames and resource plans;

(g) Evaluating implementation of a national youth policy by performance indicators signifying a common commitment by Governments and youth NGOs, and reorienting the national youth policy as necessary;

(h) Sharing experiences on the progress achieved and obstacles faced by the national youth policy between ministries and departments responsible for youth in the countries of the region and around the world.

B. ADOPTION OF A NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY

39. The following measures should be taken to adopt a national youth policy:

(a) Negotiation of a draft national youth policy by all parties concerned (governmental and non-governmental organizations), leading to formal adoption by the national parliament as state, not just government policy;

(b) Resorting to other means to compel the Government to adopt a national youth policy (such as intervention by Head of State, consent of political parties, national consensus, or decision by ministries and endorsement by non-governmental youth organizations, etc.);

(c) The best way is for the national youth policy to be adopted legislatively as part of a long-term strategy set by the State and implemented by it in stages.

C. PROMOTION OF A NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY

40. The steps to promote a national youth policy are as follows:

(a) Launching a national campaign to disseminate and promote awareness and understanding of the newly adopted national youth policy;

(b) Widening the campaign for it to reach all youth sectors and organizations that provide services for young people, and the general public at large (national, provincial and local);

(c) The campaign could include activities such as:

(i) The President of the State (or the Minister responsible for youth) issuing a press release on the importance of a national youth policy;

(ii) Producing television, radio and video programmes and articles in newspapers;

(iii) Distributing simplified versions of the national youth policy to all schools.

D. INTEGRATION OF THE NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY INTO PUBLIC POLICY

41. Integration of the national youth policy into public policy requires that:

(a) The national youth policy be part of and coordinated with other government sectoral policies and integrated into the national development plan of the country;

(b) The needs and aspirations of young people be considered as an integral part of national planning and policymaking;

(c) The national youth policy be responsible for the youth sector independently and concurrently be at the heart of the comprehensive development plans of the country.

E. EVALUATION AND REORIENTATION OF THE NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY

42. The steps towards assessment of national youth policy and reorientation are:

(a) Developing performance indicators signifying a common commitment by Governments and youth NGOs, and reorienting national youth policy as needed;

(b) Monitoring progress and identifying obstacles facing national youth policies by the ministries and departments responsible for youth in the countries of the region and around the world;

(c) Holding regular meetings for the national youth authority to assess the implementation of the national youth policy in the short, medium and long terms;

(d) Developing electronic information systems holding basic data on the conditions of young people in order to monitor implementation of the WPAY at the national level;

(e) Timing and coordinating all of this with the assessment of the national development plan, and building on the lessons learned from evaluation of the national youth policy.

V. CHALLENGES FACING YOUNG PEOPLE IN ESCWA MEMBER COUNTRIES

43. Young people in the countries of the region face many challenges including:

(a) The social, economic and political exclusion of young people, resulting from the education gap. There are 13 million illiterate young people. Education is still traditional and the gap separating it from that in developed countries is very wide. There is a gap between the (vocational) education available to the poor and the (special and excellent) education available to the rich. The gender gap continues to exist, with a bigger proportion of females, especially in poor families, dropping out of schools. Female education still focuses on the traditional roles of women;

(b) The unemployment of young people who are the group that is most affected by the challenges posed by globalisation and the evolution of ICT in the labour market. The World Development Report 2007: Development and the Next Generation issued by the World Bank² points out that unemployment is a problem that concerns mainly youth, rather than the population as a whole, since young people constitute about half of the total unemployed population. Unemployment is more likely to increase among young people than among adults by 3.5 times. Globally, youth unemployment stands at about 14 per cent, while in the Middle East it is reported to be 25 per cent. Youth searching for their first job constitute 50 per cent of the unemployed, which is the highest regional percentage in the world. Periods of unemployment among university and vocational training graduates are relatively long (for example, up to 3 years in Morocco);

(c) The failure to align increased educational opportunities with more economic opportunities. Studies have shown that linkages between outputs of education and demand in the labour market are weak, causing high unemployment. One of the main consequences of globalisation is the speed of change in the quality and composition of skills required by labour markets. Education is rigid and does not respond quickly to the changing requirements of the labour market;

(d) Inadequate availability of ICT tools of globalisation. Data on use of personal computers indicate that there are 18 computers per thousand people in the Arab region, compared with a global average of 78.3. The Human Development Report 2002³ indicates that internet users in the Arab countries number 4.2 million, only 1.6 per cent of the population. This is due to several factors, including illiteracy, with the number of illiterates in the region estimated at about 60 million, and the low income levels of the greater part of the population;

(e) The economic, social and cultural gap between youth in the Arab world and youth in other regions;

(f) Lack of a strategic vision and absence of a philosophical framework for the development process in general and youth development in particular, which leads most Governments to continue dealing with youth through unsustainable sectoral programmes and projects, rather than formulate policies geared towards youth as a demographic social group.

² See: www.worldbank.org.

³ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, *Human Development Report 2002: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. Available at: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2002>.

VI. EXPERIENCE OF MEMBER COUNTRIES IN FORMULATING A NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY: ESCWA REGIONAL INQUIRY

44. Notwithstanding growing interest in youth at the level of political discourse, response to the WPAY in the Arab region in general and in the ESCWA member countries in particular is still weak, being restricted in most countries to the development of scattered sectoral programmes only partially designed to meet the needs of youth. ESCWA has conducted an inquiry aimed at identifying data on the constraints that impede the response of member countries to the WPAY and restrict their compliance with the commitments undertaken. The inquiry covered most of the countries of the region and dealt with a range of questions on the efficiency and methodology of planning, the efficiency and quality of interventions, the extent of the availability of institutions working in this field, and competence of workers in planning and policy development. A questionnaire was sent to a group of countries in order to assess their response to the WPAY. ESCWA has requested member countries to support its efforts in implementing the first phase of the proposed project: Strengthening National Capacities to Formulate National Youth Policies and Plans of Action: Responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth, which is a foundational phase that paves the way for later phases in the follow-up and monitoring of the implementation of the United Nations General Assembly resolutions on youth.

45. The questionnaire focused on the effectiveness of the enabling environment and the availability of the conditions for responding to the WPAY. It consists of four sections, each comprising a set of questions: (a) the general framework; (b) the institutional framework; (c) the structural framework; and (d) the situational framework. Below are some of the main reasons revealed by the inquiry for the weak response and the failure to formulate an integrated, effective national policy targeting young people are as follows:

(a) Lack of frameworks for and knowledge of the contemporary concepts and approaches that define the societal and developmental roles of young people and pave the way for youth policy formulation and practical implementation. In addition, development strategies have been formulated in response to sectoral or quality issues often addressed at the aggregate level, which results in excluding socio-demographic groups whose needs and roles may be more pressing at the development level (children, youth and the elderly);

(b) Strategies based on a generalized approach to resolution of qualitative issues and their uneven consequences, as well as the challenges posed by globalisation, have led to exclusion and marginalisation of several socio-demographic groups, especially youth. As a result, many young men and women suffer poverty, unemployment and exclusion from knowledge and culture, and are more vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV disease (AIDS) and drug abuse. Moreover, the spread of wars and local and regional conflicts contribute to worsening the impact of these challenges on young people;

(c) The environment under which these policies are formulated is characterized by the following:

- (i) Lack of statistical data and information on youth issues, disaggregated by age, gender and region (urban and rural);
- (ii) Lack of identification of the specific needs and priorities of the country as a whole and the different regions within the country (rural and urban);
- (iii) Scarcity of research that identifies and assesses the key factors contributing to the exclusion of young people;
- (iv) Scarcity of surveys and exploratory studies aimed at identifying the needs and demands of young women and men in member countries;
- (v) Lack of training programmes and national capacity-building of governmental and non-governmental organizations, leading to low level of competency of national cadres involved in formulating youth policies;

- (vi) Lack of youth institutions that coordinate sectoral efforts and ensure the efficient functioning of institutional mechanisms needed for youth development;
 - (vii) Weak political commitment to youth issues and the involvement of Governments in other less urgent priorities;
 - (viii) Inadequate legislation and political directions related to youth development;
 - (ix) Absence of guidelines for formulation of youth policies.
- (d) The inquiry found the following results:
- (i) Twelve States have separate programmes aimed at empowering young people and developing their capabilities; however, these are concentrated in urban areas and focus mostly on sports;
 - (ii) There is an absence of a contemporary national vision on the basis of which the role of youth in development can be defined. Only five countries have developed national youth strategies (Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Yemen), but these strategies have not been translated into action plans;
 - (iii) Out of the thirteen member countries that filled the questionnaire, only seven (Bahrain, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Yemen) defined youth as the 15-24 year old age cohort, while other countries gave definitions that range between 10 and 35 years;⁴
 - (iv) Most countries lack frameworks for and knowledge of the contemporary concepts and approaches that define the societal and developmental roles of young people and pave the way for youth policy formulation and practical implementation.
- (e) There is an absence of concrete efforts aimed at identifying the needs and priorities of young people at the national level and at the level of different regions within the country, lack of detailed statistical data on youth disaggregated by age, gender and regional distribution (rural vs. urban), and lack of research on youth;
- (f) There is an absence of efforts aimed at building national capacities and enabling decision makers to formulate a youth policy. National cadres suffer from the lack of capacity and financial resources are insufficient to implement activities and programmes for youth.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

46. In the light of all of the above, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- (a) Generalized approaches to development are no longer compatible with demographic changes and the new economic and social realities imposed by globalisation. It has become necessary to recognize the importance of the emergence of new age cohorts that have a role in economic, social, cultural, and technical changes and adapt the nature of policies and approaches accordingly;
- (b) The WPAY and its successive annexes are a methodological initiative that responds to demographic, economic and social changes. It is aimed at young people and provides an integrated action plan to guide countries in their efforts to formulate a national agenda for responding to the needs of young people and the requirements of development;

⁴ United Nations, ESCWA, *Analyses of the Questionnaire results on Responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth: Conclusions and Suggestions* (In Arabic), Workshop on reinforcing national capacities in responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth: national reports and systematic documentation of accomplishments, Beirut 17-18 December 2008

(c) Having a national agenda for youth development requires the formulation and use of standard indicators with specific targets and timeframes, and providing better opportunities to assess progress in implementing national youth policies;

(d) Youth in the Arab region are a dynamic group, a key component of human development, and an important element of change that affects and is affected by development. Hence, they should be targeted, be at the centre of development, and their needs and aspirations be considered an integral part of national planning and policy-making.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

47. The following are some recommendations that could enhance the response to the WPAY:

(a) Governments should abide by the resolutions of the General Assembly of the United Nations, fulfil their commitments to developing comprehensive and integrated youth policies within the framework established by the WPAY, and regularly assess implementation, as part of following this Programme up;

(b) Governments should adopt modern scientific methodologies in approaching the issues of youth as a distinct socio-demographic group facing its own challenges. Such methodologies should be separated from the context of the targets and indicators for the MDGs, to ensure that the national youth policy is applied to the youth sector independently while concurrently being at the heart of the overall national development plans;

(c) Governments should, within the limits of available resources and capabilities, participate in supporting and funding the regional project on strengthening national capacities for formulation of national youth policies: responding to the WPAY and studying the possibility of adapting and implementing it at a national level, in collaboration with United Nations organizations;

(d) The national youth policy should be linked to other government sectoral policies and be coordinated with and integrated into national development plans;

(e) National Governments should work, in collaboration with the United Nations system, to develop national youth policies, with the aim of achieving the proposed goals and targets, through contributing to the development of institutional capacities and helping develop appropriate mechanisms for achieving goals and objectives.

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