A Development Framework That Reflects Our Realities

Sara Vida Coumans & Sarah Kennell (Youth Coalition)

As the International Year of Youth (IYY) comes to a close, we youth advocates have to recognize that this year has given us many opportunities to lobby at the United Nations. Nonetheless, the outcome document of the High Level Meeting on Youth once again illustrates that there are limited opportunities in decision-making processes for young people to participate in a meaningful way. As a result we are confronted with an outcome document that does not reflect our realities. Young people’s sexual and reproductive rights are an essential part of these realities, and yet the linkages made to these rights are almost invisible.

The IYY has laid the ground for the years to come as we move towards a new development framework that will follow up on the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action (ICPD PoA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Nevertheless, it is important that decision-makers recognize that meaningful youth participation is essential to the new development framework; they must also understand that in order to ensure meaningful youth participation, structural and procedural changes are necessary to adapt to the needs of young people. For example, during the development of the HLM on Youth outcome document, there were limited opportunities for young people to participate, but this participation would only have been meaningful and effective if young people were also supported by ongoing capacity building. We, young people, need decision-makers to be committed to meaningful youth participation.

We all thought that we understood the notion of meaningful youth participation; yet the reality is that decision-makers have had difficulty turning notions into actions. This has to change in the years ahead, this has to be improved as we move forward in order to ensure that young people can participate meaningfully in the planning and creation of the new development framework.

Do you want to read more about what meaningful participation actually is? Please read, Meaningful Youth Participation: What it actually means for you, your work and your organization, available to download on the website of the Youth Coalition.

If you think meaningful youth participation is important, please visit the COMMIT campaign to sign the petition on: http://is.gd/commit2youth

www.facebook.com/YouthCoalition
http://twitter.com/youth_coalition
Why has SRHR not been a priority during the IYY?

Yoli Sánchez Neyoy & Pablo Torres Aguilera (Dance4Life)

The end of the International Year of Youth (IYY) is near so it’s time for all of us to recap what happened during the year and how are we going to follow up on it. We need to ensure that youth issues are not left behind and that topics that were not really in the spotlight are now considered as a priority. This is where the topic of SRHR comes to the table.

Youth from other movements have experienced a very active year as well - climate change has been in the spotlight for the quite some time, and development and migration are also big issues, but can we say the same about Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights? Can we really say that the IYY left us with great achievements on SRHR? We all know that SRHR is not comprised of just one issue to target, we know that if we talk about SRHR and youth then we are talking about human rights, education, health, development, equality, gender, economy and the many other issues involved. If SRHR includes all of these different important issues, and it is crucial to achieve the MDGs and the other commitments made by governments, then why wasn’t it a priority throughout the IYY?

Youth organizations working on SRHR, HIV and other related fields worked hard during the IYY ensure that relevant topics were reflected in the declarations at the different World Youth Conferences that were held during the year. However most of the time it was difficult to advocate for youth SRHR.

Now that the end of the IYY is coming, the question remains: are we doing enough? Will the declaration on Youth from the United Nations reflect the real needs of young people in terms of SRHR at the community level? Working in Dance4life we see it every day: countries where youth are not allowed to talk or to ask anything about sexuality, young people not having access to condoms because some governments still think it is inappropriate, young people living with HIV being discriminated against at their schools or jobs because of ignorance; these stories are happening every day. For this reason, it is important that the IYY has a tangible impact on the lives of youth. Otherwise, it will remain a year of good intentions that does not improve people’s lives.

We know that providing young people with access to SRHR is not something that can be achieved in one year. It’s a good first step to have an IYY, but it’s also important to make sure that youth and SRHR issues are a daily topic in government agendas. In dance4life we strongly believe that this can be achieved by young people, working at the community level, creating an impact at the global level. The key to capitalizing young people’s efforts towards meaningful youth participation. It is crucial for governments to create or transform mechanisms for youth participation. Laws and national programs need to respond to the reality of youth in their community and country context, while taking into account the diverse populations that we are part of. This is a call for supporting young people’s leadership in the movement, but also for putting meaningful community youth involvement at the forefront of our agendas toward policy makers.
Participación Juvenil en Las Organizaciones

Diane M. Rodríguez Z (Activista transexual, Silueta X, Guayaquil, Ecuador)

El trabajo de las y los jóvenes se vive en carne propia en las organizaciones comunitarias y sin fortalezas como las nuestras. No a través de una computadora, de estadísticas ni de imágenes o videos que nosotros mismos elaboramos. Sin menospreciar el trabajo de las grandes organizaciones y entidades públicas que supuestamente trabajan por la juventud, hay que mencionar que lamentablemente nuestro trabajo de campo no es reconocido como debería de ser.

Somos las agrupaciones juveniles, quienes desde nuestras pobrezas y especificidades, las que concebimos las inequidades y la falta de atención hacia la juventud. Hay programas, planes y acciones desarrollados por algún experto en Juventud aunque en realidad los expertos seamos nosotros mismos. Ante este tipo de procesos la desmotivación de muchos activistas juveniles inicia.

Los gobiernos, aunque tienen lineamientos para contribuir al desarrollo organizacional de las agrupaciones comunitarias juveniles, no cumplen con esos procesos a la hora de ejecutarlos. Los grandes organismos que reciben los fondos para ONGs juveniles se fortalecen consecutivamente, sin embargo esos fondos no son distribuidos acorde a las necesidades de las organizaciones comunitarias juveniles, que continúan en las mismas circunstancias.

Para concluir, los grandes gobiernos dicen avizorar a la juventud como una de las herramientas de soporte futuristas y dicen hacer grandes esfuerzos para que las y los jóvenes nos empodermos de este proceso pero en realidad se nos limitan los espacios. Ese discurso se convierte en un instrumento para hacer pensar que se hace algo, cuando en realidad se hace poco de lo que se cree. Trabajen con nosotros y nosotras, caminen con nuestras dificultades y entréguenos las herramientas para crecer hacia esa utopía, sin más limitaciones que los demás.

The International Year of Youth in Latin America

Ricardo Baruch (Youth Coalition)

With the IYY almost over it is a good time to look back and see what happened in the last couple of years, particularly looking at two important events that took place in the region: The World Youth Conference and the regional Pre-Conference. It is important to mention that Latin America was one of the key regions that pushed for the establishment of the International Year of Youth at the UN General Assembly in 2009 and many countries in the region developed activities during the IYY.

The Government of Mexico organized the first big event of the International Year of Youth: the World Youth Conference. The WYC took place in Guanajuato, Mexico in 2010. During this conference a Declaration was created by the governments and another Declaration was created by NGOs. The NGOs Declaration was a great document where young people around the world recognized the importance of the promotion of the Sexual and Reproductive Rights including comprehensive sexuality education, access to condoms, the right to safe and legal abortion and the rights of young people with diverse sexual orientations. Part of the preparation process for the WYC was a regional Pre-Conference was organized in Latin America which took place in May 2010 in Salvador, Brazil. The Bahía Declaration was drafted and is particularly important for organizations working on issues related to sexual and reproductive health and rights because, just as the NGO Declaration of Guanajuato, it recognizes the need of pushing a human rights-based agenda on development issues. The recognition of the principle of non-discrimination is another key point that is also shared by the Bahía Declaration.

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It is also important to acknowledge the work of many regional organizations such as the Espacio Iberoamericano de Juventudes, the Red-LAC, GYCA-LAC, IPPF-WHR among others. Our year is almost over but young people will remain an important part of the development agenda. We need to make sure we hold our governments accountable so they can keep the promises made during the IYY, particularly in Latin America.

The Need For Comprehensive Sexuality Education Promotion

Margo Bakker & Aukje Houben (CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality)

Although most world leaders agree on the provision of education for young people, they do not agree on all forms. Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is still not accepted as a crucial part of the school curricula in most countries. In contrast to broad ‘sex education’, CSE does not only address the biological aspects of sex but also the different types of contraceptive methods, sexual preference, relationships, and builds skills on how to talk about and negotiate sex, how to stay out of negative sexual situations, relations, etc. It has been proven that CSE is very effective, in comparison with other forms of sex education, like abstinence-only programs. CSE leads to young people protecting themselves against pregnancy and STIs.

Given its many benefits, why isn’t CSE a priority? Why do some world leaders oppose CSE?

In 2000, 189 nations agreed on trying to reach the eight Millennium Development Goals. These MDGs are a priority of many world leaders. Looking at the different goals, it is our view that CSE contributes to many of them. Take MDG 5 for instance; improve maternal health, with two sub goals: reduce maternal mortality and achieve universal access to reproductive health. CSE contributes to safer sex, which results in less childhood pregnancies, less unwanted pregnancies and less unsafe abortions. This, in turn will result in less maternal mortality. Similarly, CSE can contribute directly to MDG 6 (combat HIV/Aids, malaria and other diseases) and MDG 3 (promote gender equality and empower women). All the 189 nations agreed on these MDGs to be achieved by 2015. This deadline is very close. For youth-led organizations promoting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) of young people, it is important to keep CSE on the agenda of likeminded nations and policymakers and convince others of the benefits of CSE. We should use the MDGs, and of course the ICPD Program of Action as international policy frameworks to point out what governments have promised and committed to.

In order to be able to put CSE on the agenda it is crucial that like-minded (youth) organizations work together closely. Together we are strong! However, not only cooperation between youth-led organizations is important. Transparency of the government and all organizations is also crucial to reach our set goals. Youth and adults have to work together. This requires adults to understand how youth can be meaningfully involved, during the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of SRHR policies and programs. On the other hand, this also requires youth to focus, deliver, and prepare well. Youth are the present and future agents of change to improve the current SRHR situation worldwide. We know what youth want because we are youth! Let’s work together to achieve our shared goals.
The Government Gets Groovy

Milinda Rajapaksha (South Asia Regional Youth Network)

What comes to your mind when someone talks about the National Youth Council in your country? Bureaucratic old government officials, lengthy procedures, criticism and resistance towards any type of innovation, obliviousness about youth participation and long queues for a simple one-minute meeting with senior officials? Oh and did you just say NGO participation? Oh no, you wouldn’t even want to go there.

Would you believe if someone told you that a National Youth Council has a Facebook page? That senior officers use tablets to check their mails? That the National Youth Council has their own funky slogan and brand name? A place where every employee, from the chairman to clerical staff members, wear the same groovy T-shirt on Casual Fridays? A place where all youth-serving NGOs are able to host their events? Well, guess what? It is neither a dream nor a joke. This is the real story we made possible in Sri Lanka.

The National Youth Service Council of Sri Lanka (NYSC) was established in 1979; made possible through a Parliament Act that appointed a Director General for Youth Affairs in the country. NYSC is governed by a board of directors appointed by the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Skills Development and one member is always elected by the young people of the country. NYSC has appointed a particular staff member, entitled the Youth Service Officer, to the Village level Administrative division of each district. This staff member works closely with other local administrative officers in the provincial public administrative system to push forward youth agenda. The smallest but most powerful entity of the NYSC is the village-based youth clubs in each district. These clubs are located in almost every part of the island including the recently reconciled North and East.

For the first time in three decades, the NYSC got its first youngest Chairman in 2010. This young man began visiting every single NYSC office in the country to ensure that it was youth-friendly in every sense of the word - both physically and emotionally! All in all, he completely rebranded NYSC as ‘Sri Lanka Youth’. This was particularly directed towards sensitizing and motivating Tamil and Muslim young people to access a fearless doorway after the atrocities of a 30 year old war. The hip website and Facebook group greatly appealed to the new generation and made NYSC a cool place to hang out at and work for. NYSC promoted equality at each and every dimension, from sports to governance, thus providing a meaningful space for young people from all the parts of the country including North and East.

This week NYSC has achieved yet another milestone in the face of youth participation in Sri Lanka: a seat is being provided for a youth representative of a “civil society working for youth” at the National Delegation for UN High Level Meeting on Youth. This is an opportunity of equal status; for participation, preparation and negotiation; for delivery of inputs to follow-up plans and a space to put forward the agenda of civil organizations. NYSC has already planned to accept and implement the Outcome document of the UN-HLM on Youth, in close conjunction and partnership with civil organizations and the private sector. All in all, the plan is to make “Sri Lanka Youth” a one stop shop for all diverse needs young people have. This will directly affect the drafting of the National Youth Policy that is currently underway and the finalization of the Young People’s Health Policy which is nearing completion.

Visit www.srilankayouth.lk how the government can ensure meaningful youth participation at each and every level in the country including governance. NYSC has clearly shown the possibility for a real youth-adult partnership.
What Young People Want To Say To Their Governments

International Planned Parenthood Federation & Y-Peer

Young people from 39 countries around the world (see list below) shared their thoughts on “What are the three main issues that your government needs to address about sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people in during the upcoming HLM on youth?”. Here’s a picture of what they said:

List of countries:

Afghanistan, Algeria, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Central Africa Republic, Chile, Colombia, Congo, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Gabon, Ghana, Georgia, Guinee-Conakry, Haiti, India, Iran, Honduras, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Mali, Mexico, Mongolia, Nepal, Niger, Pakistan, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Syria, Togo, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Zambia
La Declaracion Ministerial Prevenir con Educación y las personas jóvenes en América Latina y el Caribe
Camilo Saldarriaga

En el 2008 las y los Ministros de Salud y Educación de toda América Latina y el Caribe asumieron en la Ciudad de México un compromiso histórico firmando la “Declaración Ministerial Prevenir con Educación”. En este documento los gobiernos reconocen que “La sexualidad es una dimensión constituyente del ser humano que se expresa durante toda la vida”, y asumen varios compromisos como: Reducir para el 2015 “en 75% la brecha en el número de escuelas que actualmente no han institucionalizado la educación integral en sexualidad” y reducir “en 50% la brecha en adolescentes y jóvenes que actualmente carecen de cobertura de servicios de salud para atender apropiadamente sus necesidades de salud sexual y reproductiva”.

Sin embargo a tres años de la firma los avances que se han realizado son pocos y las personas jóvenes de toda la región, tememos que los compromisos no trasciendan el papel. La urgencia de atender las necesidades de las personas jóvenes en materia de salud sexual y reproductiva es innegable: en nuestra región los embarazos adolescentes crecen de manera alarmante, un elevado porcentaje de las personas que adquieren el VIH son jóvenes y la violencia de género se perfila como un enorme problema.

Los compromisos establecidos en la declaración son sumamente concretos, y esto es lo que la hace tan valiosa, además de ser un reconocimiento explícito de temas fundamentales para el bienestar de las personas jóvenes, establece metas concretas.

Por esto personas jóvenes de toda América Latina y el Caribe hacemos un llamado en el marco de esta Reunión de Alto Nivel para que nuestros gobiernos tomen ese liderazgo que la firma de un documento como este les otorga en el campo de los derechos sexuales y reproductivos de las personas jóvenes. De manera que durante esta reunión reconozcan de manera abierta nuestras necesidades en la materia y retomen esos compromisos que han asumido para atenderlas.

En el marco del cierre del año internacional de la juventud exigimos que como personas jóvenes se nos escuche y que nuestras solicitudes en el campo de los derechos sexuales y reproductivos sean escuchadas, pues de las decisiones tomadas en este espacio depende la calidad de vida y el futuro de millones de personas jóvenes en toda la región.

The articles in this newsletter represent the views of the authors and not of the Youth Coalition.