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REPORT OF THE UNESCO GENERAL CONFERENCE YOUTH FORUM (2009)

6th UNESCO Youth Forum
1-3 October 2009, Paris, France

Introduction

We the 128 youth delegates of the 6th UNESCO Youth Forum, representing 89 Member States, have gathered at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, France from 1-3 October 2009 to share our experiences, exchange our views on youth issues and to develop recommendations for action. Our discussions focused on one main theme, "Investing out of the crisis: towards a partnership between UNESCO and youth organizations" and a cross-cutting theme "Youth participation: UNESCO Youth Forum, a long-term approach." On this 10th anniversary of the UNESCO Youth Forum, we are proud to represent different countries, cultures and points of view and to bring them together in order to find better opportunities for youth.

Investing out of the crisis: towards a partnership between UNESCO and youth organizations

The world is facing an unprecedented set of global crises leading to extreme poverty and widening inequalities. While we must acknowledge that young people are an important asset to development, we are also deeply affected by the current global crisis in all aspects of our development.

We affirm that education at all levels is a public responsibility and public good. We strongly believe that education is the most important tool for youth to overcome this crisis and it is also fundamental for development. Although significant improvements have been made in recent years in access to education globally, the relevance and quality of education lags behind. Education remains insufficiently linked to employment and overly focused on "credentialism". At a time where our future depends on the expansion of the green economy, fewer and fewer young people are pursuing scientific careers. Even before the crisis, unemployment rates were highest among youth, a situation which is now worsening, particularly for young women. A greater focus must also be

given to those groups that are most affected by the crisis including migrants, minorities and indigenous peoples.

In order to face these challenges, we have the following proposals:

1. In order to reach the Education for All (EFA) objectives, public responsibility and investment is an absolute necessity in all countries. In addition, we strongly demand that donor countries follow up commitments of development aid to education at a level which will ensure the achievement of EFA objectives by 2015;
2. To improve the link between education and the changing labour market, education must be accompanied by a process of early participation in the labour market. One mechanism for achieving this is two-way intergenerational partnerships, such as mentorships and internships, which enable youths to gain access to the market and to acquire relevant skills at an early stage. In parallel, technical and vocational education and training needs to become a formalized part of the education system and become a viable alternative to university studies;
3. We call upon UNESCO National Commissions to coordinate cooperation and dialogue between youth organizations, civil society groups and the private sector to promote and enhance youth and social entrepreneurship and business creation programmes, which will help to alleviate unemployment among youth (by 2011);
4. We call on Member States to raise awareness on the importance of the green economy amongst youth and to work with the research community to foster youth scientific research.

Youth participation: UNESCO – Youth Forum, A long-term approach

We are committed to “invest out of the crisis” using our energy, creativity and sense of responsibility to take action and secure a better future. We are confident that our opinions and ideas can make a difference, but they must be heard. This is the sixth time that youth delegates have participated in the UNESCO Youth Forum, but we need further spaces to participate, to follow-up and to put our recommendations into action. We must have more resources and support for our initiatives, as well as opportunities to strengthen our capacities and skills to implement them. More mechanisms are also needed for youth involvement in UNESCO National Commissions and the General Conference.

We believe that intercultural dialogue is essential for us to achieve these common goals. In addition to face-to-face communication, we can leverage online social networks (OSNs) to expand our reach, keeping in mind that these networks are not universally accessible and can be short-lived.

We, the participants of the 6th UNESCO Youth Forum, want to change this situation:

1. We strongly call on every Member State to include youth delegates within their official delegation to the UNESCO General Conference by 2011, based on a common set of criteria;
2. We call on all UNESCO National Commissions to create permanent youth desks;
3. We urge National Commissions to invest in the preparation, follow-up and monitoring of previous recommendations, and encourage youth regional meetings for this purpose;
4. We urge Member States to ensure greater international representation of delegates at the Youth Forum and to secure funding for least developed countries that may not be able to send youth delegates to the Forum;

5. We encourage Member States to cooperate closely with youth organizations and their partners, to establish or to develop existing representative and inclusive youth councils at national level to enhance communication between us and our governments;
6. We welcome the initiatives of National Commissions which disseminate good practices regarding our involvement in their work;
7. Online tools, such as online platforms and databases, must be maintained and further developed for multidisciplinary knowledge-building and management of youth issues, and to increase youth participation;
8. Member States should invest in non-formal education in order to reach all youth, particularly those who are not in school, and also hold fora and events related to cultural diversity, in order to multiply the opportunities for young people to participate in their communities;
9. We ask UNESCO and its Member States to cooperate with NGOs and media institutions to promote positive messages (particularly through OSNs where youths are very active) on issues such as non-violence, to disseminate good practices amongst youth, and to ensure that the Bonn Declaration on Education for Sustainable Development is implemented;
10. We request the establishment of an evaluation mechanism of the concrete actions and support of the National Commissions in implementing the recommendations of the Forum;
11. We request the feedback of the UNESCO General Conference in the Final Report.

Conclusion

We are committed to building a strong partnership with UNESCO towards sustainable development and the implementation of a progressive agenda. While some may lack hope in the future, we are agents of positive change and through this Forum we aim to take hope back home with us to make a difference in our countries and communities.