



Peacebuilding & Development Institute

Youth & Conflict Conference May 15th-16th, 2006

Policy Principles and a Youth-Based Framework for Policy

The participants at the American University's Peacebuilding & Development Institute Youth and Conflict Conference, held May 15-16, 2006 in Washington, DC, suggest the following policy principles and youth-based framework for policy action. These principles are intended to inform, guide, and structure the development of systematic and systemic approaches to protecting children from conflict and violence around the world. The principles promote the inclusion of youth in and at all levels of decision-making and program implementation and seek to strengthen and support existing policies and international laws that protect young people. These policies will be effective only if youth are given access to information and are informed of their rights. When implementing these policies, the varying cultural contexts – at the local, national, and regional levels – should be taken into consideration and the policies should be applied nationally and harmonized regionally, and internationally. The following policies and principles emphasize sustainability and the reality of the situation on the ground, as well as encompass the entire life cycle of a conflict, especially the rebuilding process. These principles are intended to enhance the dialogue on issues relating to youth and conflict and move it from rhetoric to practice.

- **Better coordinate NGO programming and government action:**

Include youth in decision-making processes regarding programming needs and implementation, particularly with regards to identifying gaps in programs, needs, or resources; allocating resources; identifying program applications, allowing for flexibility to utilize local contexts. Ensure transparent processes and program operation.

- **Create a more fluid definition of children and youth in areas affected by conflict:**

The definitions of children and youth should extend beyond current definitions and arbitrary age determinations. They should be flexible enough to include those individuals affected by conflict as youth who reached adulthood during the lifecycle of the conflict. The categorization of youth should avoid exclusive targeting of particular groups and concentrate on more inclusive support for different subgroups of youth.

- **Increase the level of accountability to the population, group or community intended to benefit from assistance:**

Include members from different youth, ethnic, and tribal subgroups into the dialogue to create effective programmatic efforts. Demand full participation of the community and develop community oversight boards that work in conjunction with outside actors and the youth themselves.

- **Strengthen existing best practices and mechanisms that protect youth:**

Facilitate the inclusion of youth using existing standards, norms, and processes.

- **Improve program evaluation:**

Undertake program evaluation that is youth centered, reflects functional programming, and is participatory in nature. Ensure that program evaluation is accountable to the population being served and is linked with existing community and government structures, as well as takes regional dimensions into consideration.

- **Educate funders:**

Inform funders and donors of youth based approaches to conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Include community dialogue that includes youth perspectives when meeting with funders and assessing need. Develop innovative ways to include youth by creating youth forums for program implementation and evaluation. Demand youth-based action research.

- **Hold offenders accountable:**

Implement targeted sanctions, including travel bans and freezing of assets, against violators of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international laws and standards that protect children. Provide a youth based framework for justice and develop punitive measures for those that commit not only crimes against humanity, but crimes against children, through the International Criminal Court or other national, regional, or international justice mechanisms.

- **Expand the political dialogue and strengthen political participation:**

Develop culturally sensitive civic education curricula and integrate them with existing formal school structures and informal NGO youth trainings, with particular emphasis on youth/peer training. Initiate forums and training workshops for inter-generational dialogue. Create national problem-solving groups that include key actors in the conflict and conflict resolution with a particular emphasis on youth. Conduct initial stakeholder assessments and identify the key leaders and brokers in the peacebuilding process. Allow opportunities for constructive engagement and provide conflict resolution training for participants.

May 16, 2006