

**DRAFT CONCEPT NOTE**

**Policy Development for Sustainable Youth Livelihoods**

Currently there are about one billion people between the ages of 15 and 24 years, the WHO definition of youth, or about 17 % of the total. At the same time, by virtue of their numbers, the limited economic opportunities and high levels of unskilled youth, poverty is gradually becoming a youth phenomenon. This in turn is creating a downward spiral of inter-generational poverty. Demographic, cultural, social and economic factors associated with those living in poverty often combine to present young men and women with significant challenges in establishing a sustainable livelihood. The exact circumstances facing youth around the world obviously varies widely. However, there are many common constraints, opportunities and assets shared by youth.

As a group young men and women are often marginalised in society, which results in limited access to resources including kinship networks, education, land & technology; and little or no interaction with formal institutions. These challenges are not unique to youth. However, evidence indicates that youth are affected in a disproportionate manner. Young women are particularly affected. Their cultural and social position, and lack of skills, knowledge and institutional support often makes them vulnerable to prostitution, early wedlock and child-bearing, HIV/AIDS and abuse during civil conflicts which further limits their choices later in life. But global productivity and security will hinge on developing their full potential and engaging them not only as beneficiaries, but also as participants and problem-solvers.

Traditional youth development programmes have tended to focus on youth as a separate development 'niche'. This approach overlooks the fact that youth livelihood systems are inherently interconnected to the surrounding social, financial and ecological environment especially as members of households in a given community. Examples of this are programmes that provide vocational training to youths who then face the prospect of looking for work in weak economic environments where there are little or no formal job opportunities. Past programmes that have concentrated on employment generation for youth have essentially failed to recognize the complex and diverse nature of youth livelihood systems. Conceptually, employment can be viewed as just the activities within a livelihood system, the others being assets and entitlements.

The reality is that youth livelihood systems comprise a complex and diverse set of economic, social and physical strategies. These strategies are realized through the activities, assets and entitlements by which individuals make a living. Sustainable livelihoods are derived from youth's capacities to exercise choice, and to access opportunities and resources, and use them for their livelihoods in ways that do not foreclose options for others to make their living, either now, or in the future. Given the complex nature of youth livelihoods it is clear that policy interventions that focus

narrowly on providing jobs for youth will rarely be sustainable as they fail to take into account the holistic nature of youth livelihood systems. It should also be noted that failures such as these are often present in programmes targeting adults. The concept of the sustainable livelihood approach presented here is equally applicable to both youth and adults. In adopting a more holistic approach it will be important to look at the overlap between these groups in programme work.

Today's policy response requires some fundamental shifts in the way policy makers view the challenge of providing jobs for young people. A sustainable livelihoods approach provides a methodology for policy makers that recognizes, and takes advantage of, the complex nature of youth livelihood systems. The SL approach incorporates a set of four core principles that can be used to make policy more responsive to young people's own interpretations of and priorities for their livelihoods. These core principles guide policy makers to focus on:

- youth assets and strengths;
- entitlements
- macro- micro linkages;
- the holistic nature of livelihood systems; and
- the sustainability of policy outcomes ( here sustainability implies ecological integrity, social equity, economic efficiency and the ability to withstand outside shocks and stresses.

Each of these principles and their policy implications are discussed below.

#### *Youth assets and strengths*

The SL approach starts with an analysis of youth strengths, as opposed to needs. This recognizes the inherent potential of youth, which is based upon their access to assets and their coping and adaptive strategies developed to deal with outside shocks and stresses. (It also recognizes that a focus on strengths is more empowering for youth than one on weakness). Assets, in this particular context, are defined as not only natural (i.e., land, water, common-property resources, flora, fauna), but also social (i.e., community, family, social networks), human (i.e., knowledge, creation by skills), and physical (i.e., roads, markets, clinics, schools, bridges). A focus on these assets will broaden policy making so that instead of looking at youth in an enclave it is now conceptually easier to see that youth livelihoods are inherently connected to and crucially depend on their households and the surrounding environment. In this case policy should aim to improve youth access to assets and to build on and support existing youth coping and adaptive strategies. It should also be recognised that in many cases young men have better access to resources than young women. This will require that policy makers identify the obstacles that youth face in accessing assets and the development of appropriate policy to overcome these.

An effective policy intervention would be to focus on the development of youth enterprise and entrepreneurial capabilities. The latter are particularly important for the majority of young people who are operating outside formal economic and learning institutions. Enterprise capabilities are attitudes and behaviours that allow a person to adapt to changing circumstances by taking control and initiative. Examples include self-

determination and initiative, focussed decision-making, creativity, foresight and strategic thinking, resilience, conflict resolution, marketing and management. These capabilities applied to business formation and expansion are called “entrepreneurism” whereas enterprise skills may be applied to a wide variety of other life circumstances, including coping with and adapting to conditions of poverty and making decisions regarding health and well-being.

### *Entitlements*

Entitlements refer to human rights, which include economic, social, cultural and political rights, all of which are interdependent and recognised by the international community. The sustainable livelihood approach first tries to identify the constraints that prevent youth realising these entitlements and secondly attempts to overcome these constraints through empowering youth and eliminating discrimination. The primary focus is on the linkages between government, civil society and youth with the aim being to increase the accountability of public institutions.

### *Macro micro linkages*

The SL approach recognises the importance of macro level institutions and policy on youth livelihoods at the micro level. Policy should aim to bridge the gap between the macro and micro levels. It is equally important that policy formulation at the macro level be based upon the micro realities faced by youth. Although local youth issues relevant to policy making will be cross sectoral and complex, policy tends to be simplified and set within sectoral government ministries or multi lateral departments. This conflict needs to be dealt with to ensure effective participatory policy making.

Policymakers require a policy product. Participatory research provides an opportunity to deliver specific policy recommendations and a learning experience for policymakers. In order to successfully create the policy product that authentically echoes the voices of the youth and increase the probability of implementation, the following can be considered:

- Governments can establish formal or semi-formal mechanisms to assist participatory policy. For example, through the setting up of youth policy implementation units. These units are typically attached to ministries. Their job is to work in a collaborative way across ministries to promote participation in youth decision-making within the government, and then to reach outside that arena to get input from other sources.
- Challenge intermediary structures and bring officials and local people together in the field. Merging their discourse can be more successful than providing second hand reports to officials.
- Encourage the flow of information and knowledge between key stakeholders at all levels.
- The gap between policymaking and policy implementation should be followed up on. Policy changes do not always lead to changes in outcome. Policy can exist as an intention or as a symbol, but may never be put into practice. Therefore, policy change advocates should follow up with the progress of the proposal as it moves around within the different levels of government and departments until the desired change is issued.

- Participatory policy making is a Process, not an Event. Participation makes it necessary to be responsive to a range of interests that may or may not have been fully understood at the outset. As a practical matter, this suggests the desirability of phased programs, rolling designs, and flexibility.

### *Holistic*

To make policy more effective, policy makers need to be aware of the cross-sectoral and multi disciplinary nature of youth livelihoods. In this way the SL approach provides a way to understand what shapes people livelihoods and how the various influencing factors can be adjusted so that, taken together, they produce a more beneficial livelihood outcome. One of the major challenges in policy development is reconciling the fact that sectoral government line ministries will have to develop and implement cross-sectoral and multi- disciplinary policy.

### *Sustainability*

In order for policy to be sustainable it is necessary to recognise that sustainability has many dimensions. The sustainability of livelihoods is a function of how men and women utilize asset portfolios on both a short and long-term basis. Sustainability should be defined in a broad manner and implies:

- The ability to cope with and recover from shocks and stresses;
- Economic efficiency, or the use of minimal inputs to generate a given amount of outputs;
- Ecological integrity, ensuring that livelihood activities do not irreversibly degrade natural resources within a given ecosystem; and
- Social equity- the promotion of livelihood opportunities for one group should not foreclose options for other groups, either now or in the future.

Such a broad definition of sustainability provides policy makers with a broad range of policy options. However with diversity come policy trade offs. Common trade offs include tension between local livelihood needs and wider concerns about environmental sustainability, maximizing returns to livelihood systems in the short run while guarding against shocks and stresses in the longer run, and developing youth livelihood systems without compromising livelihood opportunities to others in the community.

### **Case Study: Participatory research into urban violence and poverty in Jamaica using an assets approach**

The research was initiated by the World Bank in two phases to deal with the growing problem of urban violence and its impact on youth. In the first, the researchers used PRA methods to seek out the perceptions of poor urban people about the causes and effects of violence in their communities. In the second phase, contact was made with representatives of other organisations active in the community, such as the police, businesses, non-governmental organisations and the Church. The researchers could then compare the views of poor people with these other key organisations.

It is interesting to note that the PRA identified income sources, which comprised formal employment through an employee (hotel work, factory work) *and* a whole range

of other informal livelihood activities (straw vending, ganja selling, barbering, prostitution, operating sound systems).

Analysis of the causal relationship between violence, poverty and social institutions was undertaken in terms of the relationship between the different assets of the poor and how each asset related to violence and how violence in turn eroded or consolidated it. This in turn has a significant impact on livelihood systems. Two assets in particular were addressed: 1) labour as an individual asset; and 2) social capital as a community asset.

#### *Labour as an asset*

The violent reputation of the neighborhood was seen as the reason behind the closure and/or moving out of local business. This reputation also reduced access to infrastructure (physical assets) i.e. schools and health centers were being closed down, electricity supply was erratic, and buses and taxis refused to operate in the area. This lack of infrastructure, particularly electricity, was seen as the reason behind a downward spiral of violence amongst young men. This in turn impacted on young women in the form of increased domestic violence.

#### *Social capital*

Social institutions play a crucial role in livelihood systems. The PRA showed the extensive nature of social institutions, ranging from informal bodies, such as families and households, through local associations to formal organisations concerned with political, educational and religious matters. The assessment identified the range of institutions considered important by the community, as well as providing ideas as to their inter-relatedness, relative importance, and whether they were negative or positive.

Using this asset assessment the local community came up with a list of recommendations for building social capital. Young people identified training and training centers together with education and schools as the most important social institutions for their livelihoods.

(Holland & Moser Can Policy focused research be participatory: research on poverty and violence in Jamiaca using PRA methods. In: *Whose Voice? Participatory research and policy change* Ed. Holland & Blackburn Intermediate Technology Publications 1998)