

Young people are often denied their rights because they are no longer seen as children in need of special care and support, nor are they yet recognised as adults. They are seldom mentioned in policy frameworks in relation to rights such as education, health care, labour, participation and protection from conflicts and sexual exploitation. Sida recognises young people as agents for change and considers young people's political participation as a high profile issue.

### Why dialogue on young people's political participation?

- **To fulfil legal responsibilities and uphold young people's rights.** The right to participate is relevant to exercising all other rights – within the family, school and larger community, both locally and nationally.
- **To enhance democratic processes.** Representative democracy is strengthened when young people become active in their communities. Young people's right to participate is closely linked to freedom of expression and the right to information.
- **To improve decision-making.** Participation leads to more accurate, relevant decisions, which are better informed and more likely to be implemented and owned by those concerned.
- **To comply with the Swedish Policy for Global Development:** *“The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child puts the focus on children's rights, interests and needs. It commits all states to take appropriate measures to implement the convention. Children and young people are important both as stakeholder groups and as actors. Their initiative and will to contribute to development should be regarded as an asset.”*
- **To advance the Swedish government's policy on human rights and democracy:** *“Young people's participation and possibilities to*

### Definition of Young People's Political Participation

The Swedish government defines young people as girls and boys, women and men, between the ages of 13 and 25. Their political participation can take many forms, including all the ways young people engage in civic life, practice active citizenship or give input into processes that determine policy and practice. This may involve, for example, serving on a school or city council, voting in an election, or participating in a poverty reduction strategy process, the planning process for a road construction project or in the budget process of a local government.

*influence in a tangible way should be given higher priority.”*

- **To let young people inform development interventions.** Young people are experts on their own challenges and circumstances, and on ways to reach others their age.
- **To improve services.** Consulting with children and young people enables services to be improved and adapted to meet changing needs.
- **To build skills amongst young people.** Participation enhances their abilities to debate, communicate, negotiate, prioritise, consult and make decisions.

### Policy framework for young people's right to participate in political processes

- *The UN Declaration of Human Rights* states that human rights are for everyone. The *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* clarifies that the right to political participa-

tion includes the right to join a political party and the right to vote (Article 25).

- According to *Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)*, children have the right to participate in decision-making that affects their lives. It recognises the potential for children to enrich decision-making processes, to share perspectives and to participate as citizens and agents of change.
- The Swedish Government defines young people as being between 13 and 25 years of age, and the UN as those between 15 and 24. Depending on their age, young people's rights can also be found in the *CRC*, the *African Youth Charter* (which covers people between 15 and 35), the *Ibero American Convention on the Rights of Youth* (which includes people of 15 to 24 years), as well as in many other international and regional human rights treaties and national legislation.

### To promote young people's participation, State Parties shall:

- a) Guarantee youth participation in parliament and other decision making bodies.
- b) Facilitate platforms for youth participation in decision-making at all levels of governance.
- c) Ensure equal access to young men and women to participate.
- d) Give priority to marginalised youth.
- e) Make young people aware of their rights and of opportunities to participate.
- f) Institute measures to professionalise youth work and provide training.
- g) Help build the institutional capacity of youth organisations.
- h) Create policy and programmes for youth voluntary work.
- i) Provide access to information and services that empower youth.
- j) Include youth representatives as part of delegations.

Modified from Article 11, African Youth Charter

- The *African Youth Charter* states that “every young person shall have the right to participate in all spheres of society.” It lists the measures that State Parties should take to promote such participation (see the box in the margin). The *Draft East African Youth Charter for Human Rights and Good Governance* emphasises the importance of involving youth in all decision making processes. The *Ibero American Convention on Young People's Rights* includes the right to political participation.
- In 2009, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted *General Comment no 12* on “The right of the child to be heard”. It clarifies the meaning of participation and offers guidance to states on how to implement this right into legislation, policy and practice in different settings and situations.

### What to dialogue about?

- **About the recommendations of human rights committees.** Human rights committees – such as the CRC committee – and individual experts monitor the implementation of the human rights, including those of young people. They disseminate information and formulate recommendations for countries, which can be used in dialogue.
- **About issues raised by young people themselves.** Valuable perspectives can be found by consulting with young people themselves and their organisations. Such information can be gathered, for example, via focus groups, questionnaires, peer-led research, websites, music or drama.
- **About young people's participation in policy development.** Depending on the context, dialogue could focus on young people's participation in drafting poverty reduction strategies, national development plans, national plans of action, labour market policies, or laws relevant to children and young people.
- **About young people's participation at the local level.** Young people's participation should not be limited to national or high profile processes. They should participate from the bottom up: in community level advisory bodies, local level decision-making and oversight structures, and so forth.
- **About recommendations made by development cooperation partners.** This could include recommendations made at different levels, for example by national NGOs, universities, government agencies, Plan International, Save the Children and UNICEF.
- **About ways for young people to inform development initiatives.** Young people have expertise about the development challenges they face, and on how to communicate with others their age.
- **About legislation governing young people's participation.** Dialogue could focus on the merits or demerits of national or sub-national legislation governing young people's participation and access to information. It could also identify gaps and/or interrogate new legislative proposals.
- **About opening up, claiming or creating spaces for young people to engage in the public sphere.** It may be necessary to build key relationships and make public processes more transparent and accessible for young people.
- **About including young people who are often marginalised and not heard.** These may include young people with disabilities, the most poor, those in correctional facilities or without parents, young Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersexual persons (LGBTI), or those who speak minority languages.
- **About improving the quality of young peoples' political participation.** See the ladder of participation in the illustration.

“States have not given sufficient attention to the specific concerns of adolescents as rights holders and to promoting their health and development.”

Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2003



## Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation

- Rung 8: Young people & adults share decision-making
- Rung 7: Young people lead & initiate action
- Rung 6: Adult-initiated, shared decisions with young people
- Rung 5: Young people consulted and informed
- Rung 4: Young people assigned and informed
- Rung 3: Young people tokenized\*
- Rung 2: Young people are decoration\*
- Rung 1: Young people are manipulated\*

\* **Note:** Hart explains that the first three rungs are non-participation

“Young people are not a homogeneous group and we are both a target group and an actor in development cooperation.”

Seher Yilmaz, President of the National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations (LSU)

Adapted from Roger Hart (1992), Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence.

## Dialogue with whom?

- **To know the answer to the above question a context specific stakeholder analysis is needed.** Consider who already has knowledge to contribute, who may develop the capacity to help advance the rights of young people to participation, and also who may resist what you want to achieve. The next two bullet points give some examples.
- **At national and local level,** key stakeholders for dialogue on young people's political participation may include government ministries and agencies, schools, colleges and universities, political parties, local councillors and authorities, youth clubs, trade unions, researchers, parliamentarians, and civil society groups.
- **At the regional and global level,** key stakeholders may be other donors or regional and multilateral actors – such as the African Union, Inter Parliamentary Union and UN World Programme of Action for Youth.
- **Consult with Sida partners on child rights.** Sida has existing close relationships with for example Plan Sweden/International, Save the Children, UNICEF and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. They could play a key role in Sida dialogues in different countries.
- **Dialogue with young people** and their organisations to find out how they already participate in public life and to identify possible spaces for new or enhanced participation.
- **Support dialogue through media.** The media may have a key role to play in enhancing young people's political participation through spreading information and spurring debate. Media also has the power of changing attitudes needed to open up spaces for participation. In addition, youth are often avid consumers, and potential producers, of media resources.

## How to conduct a dialogue on the rights of young people

To find out more about how to dialogue on the rights of young people to participate, see the Sida brief *Conducting a Dialogue on the Rights of Children and Young People (part 1)*.

## Genuine participation versus tokenism

Participation is not authentic when children and young people have no clarity or influence over the consequences of their opinions. Inauthentic 'participation' often merely disguises what is actually manipulation. The key to genuine participation is practicing respect for young people's views. It is essential to safeguard those who disclose sensitive information. Participants should also know whether and how their concerns and recommendations will be followed up on.

“The capacity of each society to progress is based, among other elements, on its capacity to incorporate the contribution and responsibility of youth in the building and designing of its future. In addition to their intellectual contribution and ability to mobilise support, young people bring unique perspectives that need to be taken into account. Youth organisations can be important forums for helping young people to develop the skills necessary for effective youth participation in society.”

Priority area 10 – The full and effective participation of youth in the life of society and in decision-making, of the World Programme for Action for Youth (WPAY)



## UN General Assembly resolution on youth

The UN General Assembly encourages Member States to ensure the full and effective participation of youth and in the life of society and in decision-making processes by:

- a) Creating effective channels of cooperation and information exchange among young people, their national Governments and other decision makers;
- b) Promoting youth-led organisations and the important role they play in supporting young people's civic engagement, capacity-building and providing non-formal education;
- c) Supporting, including through State and local governments, the establishment and functioning of independent national youth councils or equivalent bodies;
- d) Strengthening the participation and inclusion of young persons with disabilities in decision-making processes on an equal basis with others;
- e) Providing young people who are disconnected or socially and economically excluded with opportunities to participate.

*Modified from UN General Assembly Resolution 64/130, 2010*

## REFERENCES

The following are some references used in this brief:

- Convention on the Rights of the Child: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/index.htm>
- African Youth Charter: [http://www.africa-union.org/root/au/Documents/Treaties/Text/African\\_Youth\\_Charter.pdf](http://www.africa-union.org/root/au/Documents/Treaties/Text/African_Youth_Charter.pdf)
- Draft East African Youth Charter for Human Rights and Good Governance: [http://www.africayouthtrust.org/resources/docs/eayhrd/charter/Final\\_Draft-East\\_African\\_Youth\\_Charter\\_for\\_Human\\_Rights\\_and\\_Good\\_Governance.pdf](http://www.africayouthtrust.org/resources/docs/eayhrd/charter/Final_Draft-East_African_Youth_Charter_for_Human_Rights_and_Good_Governance.pdf)
- Ibero American Convention on Young People's Rights: <http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=16822>
- Inter-Parliamentary Union: <http://www.ipu.org>
- Policies and programmes involving youth, resolution adopted by the General Assembly in 2010: <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N09/469/63/PDF/N0946963.pdf?OpenElement>
- UN General Assembly Resolution 64/130, 2010: <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N09/469/63/PDF/N0946963.pdf?OpenElement>
- World Programme of Action for Youth: <http://www.un.org/events/youth98/backinfo/ywpa2000.htm>

Find more information, references and web links relevant to dialogue on children and young people at [www.sida.se/childrensrighths](http://www.sida.se/childrensrighths).

SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AGENCY

Address: SE-105 25 Stockholm, Sweden.  
 Visiting address: Valhallavägen 199.  
 Phone: +46 (0)8-698 50 00. Fax: +46 (0)8-20 88 64.  
[www.sida.se](http://www.sida.se) [sida@sida.se](mailto:sida@sida.se)

