

Youth and Development

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Introduction

The Youth and Development report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) looks at what has worked, and what has not, across youth-focused programmes. The report is part of UNDP's *Reflections* series and draws on evidence from **40 UNDP evaluations and 5 external reports**. Rather than looking at youth development through one lens, it brings together learning around employment and livelihoods, youth participation, digital tools, peacebuilding, and psychosocial support.

The report brings out an important point: creating opportunities for young people is only one part of the process. What happens after a young person receives training, joins a platform, or gets a chance to participate also matters. The report identifies 6 lessons that can help make youth-focused programmes more useful and sustainable.

1. Skills to Sustained Work

One of the key findings is that skills training works better when it is connected to the labour market. UNDP found that youth employment and livelihood interventions were more effective when training responded to labour-market demand and was linked to practical routes into jobs.

This means that training cannot stop at the classroom or the training centre. Young people need to be able to see where their skills can take them and how they can use those skills to enter work.

2. Youth Platforms Beyond Visibility

Youth platforms can give young people a space to share ideas, innovations, and experiences. But the report finds that these platforms created more value when there was support to take those ideas forward.

Where the purpose of the platform was too broad, partner roles were unclear, or there was limited ownership at the country level, the results were weaker. This suggests that simply bringing young people into a room or creating a platform is not enough. There needs to be a clear next step after they have shared their ideas.

3. Digital Tools for Future Work

Digital tools are creating new ways for young people to learn, find work, and reach wider markets. The report found that these tools helped young people build skills and access opportunities, particularly when programmes also worked to reduce digital exclusion.

This is important because access to technology is not the same for everyone. Digital opportunities can only reach their full potential when young people who may otherwise be left out are also able to participate.

4. From Voice to Influence

The report also looks at youth participation in governance. It finds that participation becomes more meaningful when young people have defined roles and can see a clear connection between what they say and the decisions that are made.

In other words, giving young people a voice is only the beginning. They also need opportunities to contribute, take responsibility, and see their participation lead to something.

5. Recognised Peacebuilding Roles

Young people can also contribute to peacebuilding, but their participation becomes stronger when they have recognised roles within the process. The report finds that young people were better able to contribute when they were connected to local structures that communities already recognised and trusted.

This highlights the importance of working with existing community systems rather than creating completely separate structures for young people.

6. Psychosocial Support

The report also highlights the role of mental health and psychosocial support in youth programmes. Where young people faced distress, stigma, or protection concerns, programmes that included this kind of support helped make participation safer and more sustainable.

This is a reminder that young people may need more than skills or opportunities to participate fully. The support around them can also determine whether they are able to stay engaged.

Key Learnings and Suggestions:

The report brings out a simple point: **working with young people is not only about giving them a training programme or a platform. What happens after that matters just as much.**

For employment programmes, skills are more useful when they are connected to actual jobs and opportunities in the local market. Training programmes therefore need to understand what employers are looking for and help young people see a clear path from learning to earning.

The same applies to youth participation. Giving young people a space to share their ideas is a good start, but it becomes more meaningful when they have a clear role and can see their ideas being taken forward. Digital platforms can also open up new opportunities, but only when young people have the access and support needed to use them.

Another important learning is the role of **local support**. Whether it is employment, community participation, or peacebuilding, young people are more likely to engage when they are connected to people and structures they already know and trust. The report also reminds us that young people may need support beyond skills and opportunities, including guidance and psychosocial support.

Overall, the report suggests that youth programmes need to look beyond **participation numbers** and ask what young people are actually able to do with the opportunities they receive. **Skills should lead to work, participation should lead to influence, and opportunities should be supported by the right networks and systems.**

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