Background paper no. 2

United Nations Mandates on Youth Employment

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Youth unemployment is one of the major issues confronting countries in every region of the world. It is estimated that 60 million young people would like to find a job but they are not able to do so. Furthermore, it is projected that within the next 20 years over one hundred million jobs would have to be created to meet the employment needs of young people. Within this context, during the 1990s, several major global initiatives have been organized by the United Nations to address the issue of youth unemployment. These initiatives include the World Summit for Social Development and the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action; the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond; the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth and the Lisbon Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes; World Youth Forum of the United Nations System and the Braga Youth Action Plan. The challenge is to begin to give life to the outcomes of these initiatives.

The initiatives have resulted in concrete proposals and innovative and imaginative approaches to resolving the problem of youth unemployment. The following are highlights of these initiatives.

The World Summit for Social Development

In 1995, the United Nations convened the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD), in which over 100 Heads of State participated. The WSSD addressed productive employment as one of the issues confronting the international community. The WSSD addressed unemployment as it affects all people and groups within countries. Youth unemployment was a major concern of the Heads of State who attended the WSSD.

The Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action of the WSSD stated that the problems of structural, long-term unemployment and underemployment of youth should be fully addressed in any strategy to create employment. It recognizes the urgent need for young people to have access to knowledge and skills, especially within the context of globalization and the rapid technological development.

The Copenhagen Programme of Action (pp.90-91) indicates that policies should seek to guarantee all youth constructive options for their future by:

(a) Providing equal access to education at the primary and Secondary levels, with literacy as a priority and with special attention to girls;

(b) Encouraging the struggle against illiteracy and promoting
literacy training in national languages in developing countries, in particular in Africa;

(c) Encouraging various actors to join forces in designing and carrying out comprehensive and coordinated programmes that stimulate the resourcefulness of youth, preparing them for durable employment or self-employment, and providing them with guidance, vocational and managerial training, social skills, work experience and education in social values;

(d) Ensuring the participation of youth, commensurate with their age and responsibility, in planning and decision-making with regard to their future.

The World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond

The World Programme of Action for Youth recognizes that youth unemployment is a global issue affecting every country in the world. It indicates that youth employment is affected by several issues and challenges such as: global recession, lack of access to financial resources, illiteracy, insufficient training, and advances in technology and communications. Furthermore, it stated that unemployment have a negative impact on youth leading to low self esteem, marginalization, impoverishment, the lack of skills and the wasting of an enormous human resource. Moreover, the Programme of Action highlighted the need to involve young people and their organizations in employment policy processes.

The programme of action made several proposals:

Proposals for action

1. **Opportunities for self-employment**
   Governments and organizations should create or promote grant schemes to provide seed money to encourage and support enterprise and employment programmes for young people. Businesses and enterprises could be encouraged to provide counterpart financial and technical support for such schemes. Cooperative schemes involving young people in production and marketing of goods and services could be considered. The formation of youth development banks could be considered. The Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives is encouraged to develop models for cooperatives run by youth in developed and developing countries. Such models could include guidelines for management training and training in entrepreneurial techniques and marketing.

2. **Employment opportunities for specific groups of young people**
   Within funds designated to promote youth employment, Governments should, as appropriate, designate resources for programmes supporting the efforts of young women,
young people with disabilities, youth returning from military service, migrant youth, refugee youth, displaced persons, street children and indigenous youth. Youth organizations and young people themselves should be directly involved in the planning and implementation of these programmes.

3. **Voluntary community services involving youth**
Where they do not already exist, Governments should consider the establishment of voluntary service programmes for youth. Such programmes could provide alternatives to military service, or might constitute a required element in educational curricula, depending on national policies and priorities. Youth camps, community service projects, environmental protection and inter-generational cooperation programmes should be included among the opportunities offered. Youth organizations should be directly involved in designing, planning, implementing and evaluating such voluntary service programmes. In addition, international cooperation programmes organized between youth organizations in developed and developing countries should be included to promote intercultural understanding and development training.

4. **Needs created by technological changes**
Governments, in particular those of developed countries, should encourage the creation of employment opportunities for young people in fields that are rapidly evolving as a result of technological innovation. A subset of the employment data compiled by Governments should track the employment of youth into those fields marked by newly emerging technologies. Measures should be taken to provide ongoing training for youth in this area.

Special attention should be paid to developing and disseminating approaches that promote flexibility in training systems and collaboration between training institutions and employers, especially for young people in high-technology industries.

**The Lisbon Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes**
The Lisbon Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes was adopted on 12 August 1998 in Lisbon, Portugal by the first session of the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth held in 1998. It called for the effective preparation of young people for the labor market. In addition, it emphasized the great importance of creating an enabling economic, social, and political environment that is necessary for resolving youth unemployment and underemployment.

To improve the situation of youth unemployment and underemployment, the Lisbon Declaration calls for the following actions:

- Affirming the ultimate societal goal of full employment so as to ensure that equal opportunities are available to young women and young men for income-earning work;
Promoting equal employment opportunities for young people as well as equal protection against discrimination, including in wage payments, in accordance with national employment legislation, regardless of ethnic or national origin, race, gender, disability, political belief, creed or religion, or social, cultural or economic background;

Promoting equal employment opportunities for young women, inter alia, by adopting and implementing laws against sex-based discrimination in the labour market as well as legislation to guarantee the rights of young women and young men to equal pay for equal work or work of equal value;

Improving complementary partnerships among public authorities, the private sector and educational institutions, along with civil society initiatives, for the promotion of youth employment;

Promoting research on youth unemployment, taking into account market trends and demands, in order to design and implement youth employment policies and programmes, with due regard to gender-specific circumstances;

Investing in the entrepreneurial capacity of young women and young men and providing them with the necessary skills and resources to establish their own enterprises and businesses;

Taking effective measures to secure the prohibition and immediate elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including support to the ongoing negotiations towards the finalization by the International Labour Organization of a future instrument addressing this issue, and measures to protect young women and young men against other forms of exploitation, including through sex tourism, prostitution, trafficking in human beings and bondage and any kind of labour, paid or unpaid, which negatively affects their mental, physical, social and moral development, with due regard to the particular situation of young women;

Promoting employment-oriented education and training to ensure the constant adjustment of education to the changing social and economic environment, including market needs;

Promoting the development of mechanisms for career counseling for youth through educational and training institutions as well as the community;

Promoting a greater national and international commitment to the protection of youth migrant workers, with attention to their enjoyment of human rights, their social needs and their prevention from exploitation;

Promoting youth entrepreneurship in rural areas with a view to assisting youth to embark on self-managing and self-financing activities;
The Braga Youth Action Plan

The Braga Youth Action Plan was adopted on 7 August 1998 in Braga, Portugal by the leaders of youth organizations who participated in the third session of the World Youth Forum of the United Nations System. The Forum is mandated by the General Assembly to review the World Programme of Action for Youth. The Forum called for united action among all sectors to address youth employment. Furthermore, it stressed the need for relevant information and knowledge of the employment situation confronting young people.

The Braga Youth Action Plan recommends the following:

- It should be recognized that the problem of youth unemployment is serious and complex and requires action at both the macro and microeconomic levels by governments, the social partners, NGOs, and the United Nations system.

- There is a need to promote, improve, and extend the design and implementation of policies and programmes to promote employment among young people. We recommend that the United Nations system, in close collaboration with youth NGOs, undertake a comparative evaluation of the situation of youth employment programmes in different countries from different regions. This evaluation should emphasize programmes for disadvantaged youth, such as, but not exclusively, women, youth with disabilities, the long-term unemployed, indigenous peoples and migrants. The evaluation should look at issues such as the sustainability of jobs created once programmes are completed, the quality of jobs created and the contribution of the project to social development.

- It should be recognized that there is a lack of institutional capacity of NGOs in the employment area and communication between NGOs and the United Nations system. NGOs often face difficulties in raising funds to finance projects and lack knowledge about existing projects and programmes to promote youth employment. To overcome this, we propose a new system of information exchange between youth NGOs and the United Nations system and a framework of collaboration to provide technical and financial support to NGOs. The first step is for all NGOs to gain access to relevant communication facilities (with the assistance of the United Nations system). The second step would be to create a website and mail-out directory with and for NGOs as another means of communication. The Webster should contain, among other things, information regarding the NGOs and international organizations themselves, printed material in electronic format produced by the United Nations system, project updates and experiences and ideas on how to obtain financial and technical support for activities related to youth employment.
There is a need to empower, mobilize and inform young people about fundamental rights at work. In order to promote social development these rights must be respected by all. Youth NGOs should participate in the ILO’s efforts to publicize its conventions, recommendations and resolutions, especially the "Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work" adopted by the International Labour Conference in June 1998. We further recommend that an information dissemination campaign be undertaken by NGOs with the financial support of the United Nations system to educate young people about their rights under ILO instruments. The campaign should take the form of conferences, information materials and training, and will emphasize grassroots participation.