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# YOUTH AND INEQUALITY

Time to support youth as agents of their own future

Young women and men today must grapple with serious social, political and environmental problems inherited from their elders. Yet they are systematically excluded from policy decisions, even though young people make up one quarter of humanity. By marshalling the energy, creativity and talents of youth to address the multiple inequalities they face, we will all reap a 'demographic dividend' and build a fairer world.

# SUMMARY

Inequalities between generations have grown at an alarming rate over the past few decades, paralleling the rise in the gap between rich and poor. The policies that enabled an outrageously large portion of the world's wealth to accrue to the very top of the income spectrum have delivered a difficult present and uncertain future to a huge majority of today's youth.

At the same time, young people possess the energy, creativity and passion to take on the intractable problems they have inherited from their elders. Less imprisoned by ideological and institutional strictures, they have demonstrated the ability to think outside the box and develop innovative solutions.

The youth population of the world is the largest it has ever been: 1.8 billion people between the ages of 10 and 24, the majority of whom live in urban areas of developing countries. Given their numbers, youth could offer many of the world's poorest countries a 'demographic dividend': when today's young people attain working age, they will far outnumber the dependent population. With the right investments and policies aimed at youth, across sub-Saharan Africa that dividend could be as much as one-third of the region's current GDP, for as many as 30 years.

Despite their strength in numbers and their creative potential, youth are largely excluded from formal political processes and continue to be subject to age-based systems of authority. Even though they will bear the brunt of the world's unsolved dilemmas, like the effects of climate change, they are marginalized politically and culturally. This sad fact is evident in adult-centric public policies and in social norms and values that usually fail to take into account of young people's views, interests or voices.

Youth are demanding political representation and a say in government policy. Langgin, for example, a 20-year-old from a farming community in the Philippines island of Mindanao, is one. She spends her energy bringing together young people in her region to talk about the effects of climate change and raise their concerns to local government. She was motivated to take up activism when unexpected extremes in weather caused her family's harvest to fail and she had to abandon her plan to become a veterinarian.

Not surprisingly, youth are at the forefront of many of the world's emerging political movements. They have delivered piercing critiques of the extent to which wealth and privilege have rewritten the rules of the system, shifted ever more economic risk to youth and barred youth from a fair say in the policies that affect their lives.

Recent years have seen a considerable uptick in interest in youth issues among political leaders and civil society groups. In the last five years there has been an explosion of meetings, summits, forums, and other events aimed at advancing innovative solutions to problems that affect

*'I hope every girl finds the courage to beat the odds and shine through all the hardships and obstacles that society imposes on girls and all people belonging to marginalized communities.'*

Zainab Asif Dar, 22 years old, student, Pakistan

youth and building connections among youth from different regions of the world. Similarly, there has been a 50 percent increase in the number of countries that have national youth policies.

If today's youth are to become the motor of tomorrow's economic takeoff, policy makers must make concerted efforts to enhance youth participation in policy making. They should engage with young people as active citizens, architects of their own future. They should provide youth with quality education, access to health services and the training and support they need to obtain decent and sustainable employment.

And policy makers should look beyond employment and education to address other fundamental inequalities young people face. Youth is not a homogenous group, and certain young people are more affected by inequality than others.

Millions of youth around the world face discrimination based on their gender, sexual orientation, race, caste, religion, ethnicity, physical abilities or the place where they live. The intersectional nature of these forms of systemic discrimination experienced by young people deserves special attention.

Young people will be instrumental in finding solutions to the challenge of inequality. Today's youth form the generation that has the best chance to end poverty, stop climate change and ensure the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) become a reality. Support and solidarity from their elders can help them gain the power, knowledge, and skills to achieve these goals.

Parents, educators, policy makers and other leaders should ally with young people in tackling norms and behaviors that prevent us all from realizing our fundamental rights and building a more tolerant, peaceful and just society.

Since 2014 Oxfam has called for urgent action to tackle extreme inequality, which threatens to undermine the last quarter-century's progress in reducing poverty. Inequality, in its various forms, poses a fundamental challenge to youth well-being today around the world. We hope this paper will contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenge, and to more effective action to address it.

*'As a young Dene woman, I have seen and experienced oppression first-hand...I understand that it will be up to my generation and younger generations to actively see the UN's Sustainable Development Goals through to fruition. It is a big responsibility.... I will try to do my part in my own home communities.*

Angela Code, 27-year-old Sayisi Dene First Nations woman, northern Manitoba, Canada

# 1 INTRODUCTION

*'The leaders of this country, they say we are children and that youth are the leaders of tomorrow, but tomorrow is never now. It is time that we youth turn tomorrow into today.'*<sup>1</sup>

In recent decades, as the gap between rich and poor has increased rapidly around the world, the inequalities between generations have also grown at an alarming rate. The policies that enabled an outrageous portion of the world's wealth to accrue to the very top of the income spectrum have delivered the world's youth a difficult present and uncertain future.

The youth population of the world is the largest it has ever been: 1.8 billion people between the ages of 10 and 24,<sup>1</sup> the majority of whom live in urban areas of developing countries.<sup>2</sup> Africa is the world's most youthful continent, with 60 percent of its population under age 24 and 19.5 percent between 15 and 24.<sup>3</sup> Asia has the most young people: 754 million, a number that has nearly tripled since 1950.<sup>4</sup>

Many of the world's poorest countries could benefit from a 'demographic dividend' when their young people attain working age, since they will outnumber the dependent population. A recent United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) report estimates that with the right investments and policies aimed at youth, the dividend across sub-Saharan Africa could be as much as '\$500bn a year, equal to about one-third of the region's current GDP, for as many as 30 years.'<sup>5</sup>

The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, has pointed out that the current generation of world youth live in a time of unprecedented opportunity, declaring that they 'are the first generation that can put an end to poverty and we are the last generation that can put an end to climate change.'<sup>6</sup>

In a world that has witnessed a string of political uprisings led by youth in recent years, governments, international organizations, civil society and the private sector must better understand the ways in which inequality affects the lives of young people. We must better understand efforts to increase youth social and political participation, increase their access to employment and capital, and reduce the marginalization of vulnerable groups. We must also ally with youth to change social norms and behaviors that keep young people, especially young women, from reaching their full potential.

This paper builds on Oxfam's work on ending extreme economic inequality and illustrates how youth in low, middle-income and high-income countries, are grappling with the dramatic rise in economic inequality rippling across the globe.

*'As a youth leader, I'm inspired to call for other young people to act on climate change as we know for a fact that we will be the ones directly affected by climate change as it worsens in the future.'*

Langgin, 20 years old, Filipino youth leader

1 Excerpt from speech of a Kenyan youth group leader, Kiserian, Kenya. March 2, 2014.

The paper begins with an analysis of the specific and disproportionate impact of inequality on youth (section 2). It then offers an overview of initiatives taken by governments and multilateral organizations to address youth inequality (section 3), followed by an examination of exciting initiatives undertaken by youth activist and youth organizations (section 4). The final section offers conclusions and recommendations for policy makers, youth organizations and development groups (section 5).

## Who are youth?

There is no universally agreed definition of youth. It is a social and cultural construction bound by a range of indicators including age, marital status, financial dependency, responsibility and emotional dependence on primary caregivers. These indicators vary considerably across cultures and contexts.

Young women face specific challenges and are generally more marginalized than young men across all indicators of youth development, and are often seen as losing youth status once they marry or have children, regardless of their age.<sup>7</sup>

The age-brackets used to define youth have expanded in recent years due to economic decline, rising levels of formal education and increasing barriers for young people to set up their own families. Kenya defines youth as anyone between the ages of 18 and 35,<sup>8</sup> while in South Africa the bracket extends from 14 to 35, and Honduras defines youth as those between the ages of 12 and 30.<sup>9</sup>

Oxfam uses the United Nations definition for 'youth' as people between the ages of 15 and 24, while acknowledging that the category is more fluid than a fixed age group would suggest.

### ***Oxfam's approach to working with youth***

Oxfam envisions a transformation of current unequal power structures, including those that inhibit the advancement of women's rights, into equitable social and political relations where young people's rights and needs are understood and respected, and young people lead and participate in decision making that affects their lives and their communities.

Oxfam's work with youth is centred on the belief that if young people are enabled to freely and effectively use their energy, skills and creativity to assert their rights and influence structures and behaviors, then this generation can create lasting change in their communities, regions and around the world.

A core feature of this approach is a shift in thinking and strategy from doing programmes 'for' young people, to working 'with' young people and also supporting them to 'lead' on efforts to overcome poverty and injustice. This means working in partnership with young people to amplify their voices to power holders; creating enabling spaces for youth participation and increasing the political will among public and private sector decision makers to work in partnership with young people.<sup>10</sup>



## 2 HOW INEQUALITY AFFECTS YOUTH

*'The world has changed and will change but ultimately what is required [by youth] is the same: access to decent work and the possibility of developing a life project.'*<sup>2</sup>

With the largest global youth population ever, millions of today's youth are being failed by the world. They are bearing the burden of multiple inequalities—social, economic and political. They lack access to basic rights and far too many do not have a genuine chance to reach their potential in life.

These multiple inequalities fall most heavily on young women, ethnic minorities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and questioning (LGBTIQ) and marginalized youth, who in many places around the world face prejudice and discrimination. Often, youth suffer multiple or intersectional discrimination when their identities overlap, creating strong barriers to meaningful participation in society.

In some countries girls are more likely to die in childbirth than they are to finish school, and an estimated one in three girls is married before the age of eighteen, some as young as eight. More than 500 million young people live on less than \$2 a day, and nearly 126 million of them cannot read a full sentence.<sup>11</sup>

This challenging situation can be largely attributed to the explosive growth of extreme economic inequality the world has seen in the last 30 years. The concentration of much of the world's wealth and resources in the hands of the few (in 2016 the world's richest 62 individuals owned as much wealth as the poorest half of the world population<sup>12</sup>) has heightened inequality between the young and old, with disproportionate effects on young people.<sup>13</sup>

In many countries, the elderly too are hit hard by the yawning gap between rich and poor. From the United States to Italy to Spain, a growing number of people over 65 are staying in the labor market, thanks largely to government cutbacks that limit pensions and raise the retirement age, which also reduces opportunities for young people.<sup>14</sup>

2 Guy Ryder, Director General of the ILO. Quoted in: UN News Centre. 'Youth employment an 'absolute priority' in South America – UN labor chief  
<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=53875>

## What is inequality?

Measures of inequality often focus on economic inequality (by income, wage or wealth), and are calculated using indexes such as the GINI coefficient.<sup>15</sup> However, inequality can be based on access to adequate living conditions, schooling, social networks, access to political forums or a decent working environment.<sup>16</sup>

Chronic social and economic inequality can range from unequal terms of international trade, to abusive working conditions, to entrenched political capture of policy influence. Girls and women in general face greater forms of inequality than their social peers and gender bias strongly reinforces all forms of inequality.

Many studies have shown that extreme economic inequality is bad for economic growth<sup>17</sup> and compounds pre-existing inequalities between women and men and between those living in rural versus urban areas. One broad comparative study found that “the poorest rural women are almost six times more likely than the richest urban men to never attend school”.<sup>18</sup>

Market fundamentalism and political capture by elites are at the heart of extreme economic inequality and limit the life chances of millions of youth around the world in numerous ways. First, economic inequality limits social mobility, or the prospects that over the course of a lifetime a young person will be able to work his or her way into a better economic situation. Economist Miles Corak has published extensively on the relationship between economic inequality and social mobility, showing that in countries with greater inequality of incomes ... a greater fraction of economic advantage and disadvantage is passed on between parents and their children.<sup>19</sup> Gender inequality also influences social mobility. A study by The Brookings Institution shows that young women in the United States are less likely than young men to escape the poverty of their parents.<sup>20</sup> Young people today do not have the same opportunities as the young people of yesterday, unless they come from very privileged backgrounds.

Economic inequality also affects access to education, health and other services for young people. Poverty interacts with economic inequality to create ‘traps of disadvantage’ that push the poorest and most marginalized people to the bottom and keep them there. Free public health and education services are strong weapons in the fight against economic inequality. Free universal primary education is vital for empowering girls and young women to have more control over their lives; it helps prevent child marriage, encourages fewer children and leads to a stronger economic position in society.<sup>21</sup>

Access to the Internet is also a service that must be extended to more of the world’s youth, as this technology allows education to move beyond the classroom and is an invaluable platform for social and political communication. Digital activism—from networked social movements to hacktivism—is one of the fastest growing forms of youth civic engagement, but it is restricted to those who have access to the required funds and technology, who are predominantly young men.<sup>22</sup>

In many countries, both developed and developing, such public services are becoming increasingly subject to fees that put them out of reach of the majority of youth, particularly for young women. Tuition fees are increasing and in some countries fees for primary education are being introduced.<sup>23</sup> In Kenya, tuition for secondary school is rising far faster than inflation and private secondary schools charge up to \$23,600 (US) per year.<sup>24</sup> When talented young people cannot afford to pursue secondary or tertiary education, their talents are not nurtured and the societies they live in suffer from a reduction in innovation and the loss of their potential contributions.

For youth who manage to enter higher education, the challenge is not only cost, but also quality. Benin in West Africa is a striking example. The country's only public university until 2001, the University of Abomey-Calavi has long had problems with huge class sizes and inadequate specialized training for science and technology students. With the creation of other public universities starting in 2001, including the University of Parakou and the Agriculture University of Kétou,<sup>25</sup> more space has been created for students and overcrowding has eased. However, private universities, sometimes unaccredited and largely specializing in science and technology studies, still represent a large part of the higher education market in Benin, with one estimate being that in 2009 private universities and colleges represented 20 percent of all higher education enrolments.<sup>26</sup> While the government continues to expand the public university network and to crack down on unaccredited private institutions, students who can afford to are still choosing private institutions in large numbers.

High tuition fees are also an issue for youth in rich countries. In the United States, tuition fee hikes—as high as 14 percent in a single year—have been accompanied by a decline in the quality of education, with widespread cuts to programming and reduction in faculty even as the student body grows.<sup>27</sup> In 2011 a massive youth movement known as Le Printemps Érablé that swept Québec successfully blocked increases to tuition rates. Sixty-five percent of the province's full-time undergraduate student population is in debt (for an average of \$13,967 apiece, while one in four owes more than \$20,000).<sup>28</sup>

**Private provision of services skews their benefits towards the richest, leaving the poorest and most vulnerable youth at a huge disadvantage as they try to manage their transition into adulthood.**

As made clear in the 2016 UN 'World Youth Report on Youth Civic Engagement,' socioeconomic inequality leads to higher incidences of violence and instability, and strongly increases the likelihood of youth joining radical or extremist groups.<sup>29</sup> The stereotype of youth as the exclusive perpetrators of violent crime is certainly overblown. But poor, unemployed youth are disproportionately involved in crime, and are often manipulated, hired, or coerced by adults to engage in violent crime or be co-opted as child soldiers. In conflict zones youth are often drawn to violent groups, viewing them as the only guarantors of safety and the basic necessities of life.



In Kenya during the post-election violence of 2007, reports emerged of elite politicians hiring young unemployed men of their ethnic group to serve as fighters in inter-ethnic group hostilities.<sup>30</sup> These youth carried out the vast majority of the killings that took place in this horrific episode in Kenyan history. Another example raised in the UN World Youth Report, is that of Ajmal Kasab, the lone surviving terrorist from the 2008 Mumbai attacks in India. It is possible he was forced to join the operation in return for a payment to his impoverished family.<sup>31</sup>

Young unemployed men are also the most likely to join gangs and to suffer violence at the hands of the police. In the United States, a *Guardian* investigation found that young black men aged 15–34 were 'nine times more likely than the population at large to be killed by police officers in 2015.'<sup>32</sup> Latin America, one of the most unequal regions in the world, is at the same time one of the most unsafe, outside of war zones. One World Bank case study examining Mexico's drug wars underscores the relation between income inequality and criminal activities and involvement in gangs.<sup>33</sup>

More generally, high rates of youth unemployment lead to an increased tendency to believe democracy is bad for the economy, that democracies are indecisive and inefficient, and that a 'rogue leader' can rule better.<sup>34</sup> High rates of youth unemployment have been linked to social unrest, and many argue that youth unemployment combined with the youth 'bulge' in the region played a key role in the Arab Spring and subsequent unrest in the Middle East.<sup>35</sup> It is important to note however, that unemployment is not the only factor that leads to youth involvement in protest and violence. A recent study by MercyCorp concludes that a larger sense of frustration at government, often due to poor governance and other underlying factors, is more often the trigger.<sup>36</sup>

Extreme economic inequality is at the forefront of Oxfam's concern due to the fact that other forms of inequality, including gender inequality, are made worse by the growing gap between a country's wealthiest and poorest individuals.<sup>37</sup> Youth who already face multiple forms of discrimination get pushed further down the ladder. However, there are other important forms of inequality to consider.

In terms of political inequality, young people lack forums and opportunities for political participation and influence. They are often underrepresented in influential government positions or in hierarchical systems that favor elders, and they lack forums for voicing their concerns and demanding government action. Where youth are able to participate in politics and policy-making processes, it is often the most privileged youth who can effectively make their voices heard and who ultimately benefit most from initiatives targeted at youth.

Often within their own families and communities, young people have no influence over decision making. Young people must grapple with norms and behaviors that diminish the weight of their voices and reinforce inequality. From disproportionately large shares in unpaid family work to a denial of their right to sexual reproductive health, widely held perceptions can result in severe socioeconomic challenges for youth.

*'Globally, over 73 million youth are unemployed, and young people are three times more likely to be jobless than experienced workers and professionals. And despite some progress, girls and young women continue to face gender-based discrimination in all walks of life.'*

Empower Women NGO  
Newsletter, August 2015

Young women are specifically affected by societal norms around gender, which can prevent them from participating in political activity, limit their access to education, impose high levels of unpaid domestic work and truncate their efforts to claim and use their rights. Women still earn far less than men for comparable work, and women lack control over income and wealth. Systemic discrimination against women and girls is both a cause and result of the inequalities that drive poverty, and can be exacerbated by class, ethnicity and age.

Society as a whole is worse off where there are high rates of youth unemployment, reluctance to listen to youth voices and a severe lack of opportunities for youth due to bias against their race, gender or ethnicity. Youth will face the consequences of the serious problems their elders have been unable to solve. The current generation of youth, particularly the poorest youth, will likely spend their whole lives struggling with the impact of the failure of the world's governments to curb carbon emissions. In local communities around the world, the search for solutions—both practical and political—to living with climate change is increasingly falling to a new generation of young people.

In addition, the ages of 18 to 25 are when young adults form their beliefs on how politics, society and the economy work, and their experiences during these years have lifelong impacts. Studies have shown that being unemployed during these formative years makes one more likely to believe that success comes from luck rather than hard work or talent, and less likely to have confidence in public institutions.<sup>38</sup>

Economic inequality indirectly and directly affects youth chances for productive and stable employment, a reality that has been exhaustively studied. In times of recession young people are first to lose their jobs, and the consequences for their career development are long-lasting.

## YOUTH SUFFER MOST FROM ECONOMIC CRISES

*'We shouldn't lose sight of the fact that recovery is not universal and that almost 43 percent of the global youth labor force is still either unemployed or working yet living in poverty. It's still not easy to be young and starting out in today's labor market.'*<sup>39</sup>

Although the effects of the 2008 global recession have varied widely, youth are consistently the most affected. What's more, youth have been hit harder than in previous recessions. A study of 17 middle-income countries found that youth experienced the largest rise in unemployment rates, which was even higher for young women, youth members of another marginalized group, and those living in rural areas. In 15 of the 17 countries included in the study, wage rates also decreased for youth.<sup>40</sup>

In Latin America, despite relatively low overall unemployment rates over the past decade, youth represent over 40 percent of all unemployed people, despite comprising only 18 percent of the population.<sup>41</sup>

An International Monetary Fund (IMF) study of developed countries found

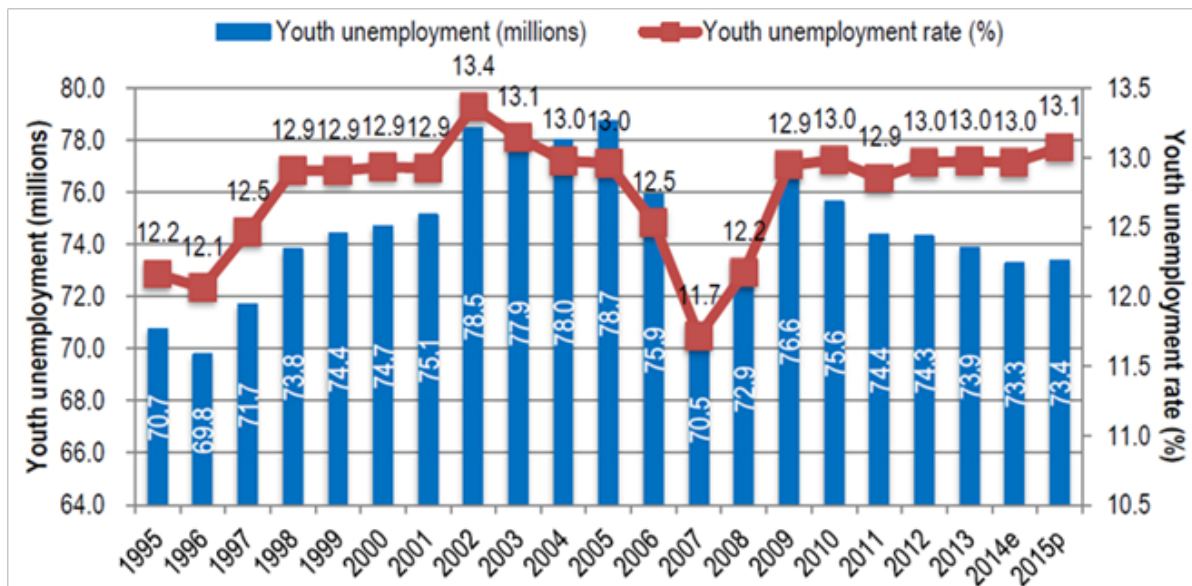
that since 2008 youth unemployment has increased by 6.5 percent, compared with only 4 percent in previous recessions.<sup>42</sup> Within the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), youth for the first time have replaced the elderly as being at the greatest risk of poverty.<sup>43</sup> In many European countries long-term youth unemployment now constitutes more than one-third of total youth unemployment.<sup>44</sup>

The outlook for youth is particularly bleak in South Asia, where youth unemployment is four times higher than that for adults and is not projected to improve soon due to additional millions of young people entering the job market in the next five years.<sup>45</sup>

The situation of many employed young people remains precarious. According to a 2015 report from the International Labour Organization (ILO) the jobs of two in three young workers in most low-income countries are either in vulnerable self-employment or unpaid family labor.<sup>46</sup> Young people are coerced to accept risky and dangerous forms of employment in the informal sector, where they cannot exercise their rights. Globally, youth who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) made up 16.2 percent of the overall population of those aged between 15 and 24 in 2013.<sup>47</sup> Among NEET youth, young women and those with low education levels are overrepresented.<sup>48</sup> ILO survey findings in 25 countries show that in general young women have a harder time obtaining a decent job than young men, and the 2008 economic crisis led to higher ratios of vulnerable employment for women.<sup>49</sup>

Norms and beliefs in society can play a strong role in young people's contribution to unpaid care work and unpaid family labor. In many places youth learn very early that women are exclusively responsible for the care of children, for cooking and cleaning, and that it would be shameful for a man to carry out any domestic work. Persistence of fixed gender roles in the household mean that women spend much more time on unpaid family labor than men.<sup>50</sup> As such, unpaid family work creates barriers for young people, especially young women, seeking to attend school or find paid work.<sup>51</sup>

**Figure 1: Global youth unemployment 1995–2015**



e = estimate; p = projection  
Source: ILO

Economic downturns have long-lasting effects on economies and societies, and without the right policy interventions these effects will not disappear when economies pick up. Youth who lost their jobs during Indonesia's 1997 financial crisis were less likely to have jobs many years later, and a higher proportion of those who did have jobs were employed informally. Similar results were found for those who joined the labor force during recessions from 1982 to 1999 in both middle- and high-income countries. By the time the job market picks up again and individuals' preferred jobs become available, their credentials are less recent and less relevant than those of more recent graduates. These youth often earn less than their peers even 10 to 20 years after the recession, and are in less prestigious occupations.<sup>52</sup>

### Case study 1: The generation gap is widening in Canada

Canadian youth are currently facing high rates of underemployment, while access to higher education is getting farther out of reach, particularly for First Nations and immigrant youth.

The cost of undergraduate tuition has more than tripled since 1995.<sup>53</sup> Such fees now take a much larger percentage of the income of visible minorities than of others: fees cost approximately 11 percent of the average annual incomes of white males, but 15 percent of male visible minorities and 21 percent of female visible minorities.<sup>54</sup>

According to the Canadian Federation of Students, 'today's students are the most indebted generation in Canadian history. The average student graduates with over \$28,000 of debt.'<sup>55</sup> The province of Québec has both the lowest tuition fees and lowest levels of student debt in the country. However, in Québec students with children are another group at risk. Nearly nine out of ten students with children must go into debt to complete higher education, compared with six out of ten childless students, and their average debt load is \$20,100, compared with \$13,445 for students without children.<sup>56</sup> After a four-year degree, the average university student is nearly \$30,000 in debt.<sup>57</sup>

The interest charges on student loans disproportionately affect the poor, since they often pay 40 percent more for their education than those who can pay out of pocket. These figures, based on government loans with favourable terms, do not begin depict the plight of students who must also turn to private sector loans.

Youth unemployment spiked during the recession and remains double the overall unemployment rate. About one-third of young Canadians work in part-time jobs, many of which are low paying and temporary.<sup>58</sup>

Furthermore, 27.7 percent of Canadians aged 15–24 were underemployed in 2014.<sup>59</sup> Since the financial crisis, more university graduates, and women in particular, have been employed in jobs that require high-school-level skills or less.

Young Canadians have also been earning less. Today's 25–34-year-old working full time makes \$4,200 less per year than youth did three decades ago, adjusted for inflation. The earnings gap between age cohorts has also grown: in 1980, Canadians aged 25–34 earned 47 percent less than 50–54-year-olds; now they earn 64 percent less.<sup>60</sup>

The well-being and life chances of youth are seriously affected by extreme economic inequality. To the degree youth are denied access to policy and decision making, quality education and quality employment, extreme inequality will persist into the future. Helping youth overcome the various dimension of inequality they face, and especially the impact of extreme economic inequality, is an urgent priority for governments, international organizations, and civil society. In the next section, we provide an overview of the current policy landscape for youth well-being, employment and empowerment.



### 3 GLOBAL YOUTH POLICIES AND INITIATIVES

Recent years have seen a considerable uptick in interest among world leaders and civil society groups alike in advancing innovative solutions to youth issues. The sudden preponderance of youth policies is evidence of this trend: there was a 50 percent increase in the number of countries with a national youth policy from 2013 to 2014, and in 2016 two-thirds of the world (131 countries) had them.<sup>61</sup> Fourteen of the fifteen states of Oceania had such policies, while in Africa they are now in place in 32 of 54 states.<sup>62</sup> While Canada has no national youth policy or strategy, the federal government is currently initiating many new youth-related policies (see Case study 2 below), and some provinces, such as Québec, have comprehensive youth policies.

In many countries that do not currently have a national youth policy, Oxfam is committed to working with youth to influence governments to ensure their well-being and empowerment. For a list of countries without a national youth policy where Oxfam is active, as well as all countries with a national youth policy, see Annex 1.

The existence of a national youth policy, while representative of a general increase in government interest in youth issues, does not necessarily translate into improved opportunities or participation for youth. Similarly, while national-level youth representation is an important step, elite capture of official youth organizations often limits their ability to reach the most vulnerable youth. Youth initiatives and policies must be developed through genuine consultation with diverse groups of young people, and must be judged by their impact on those sub-groups that most need to benefit from them. In particular, initiatives and policies should recognize and proactively address the gender inequalities faced by young women.

Much current policy and most initiatives focus on the issues of youth employment and education. Important as these are, additional effort must be made in the equally important areas of civic and political participation, gender justice, fostering leadership or amplifying the voices of youth. Given the difficulty of assessing the impact of youth policies, this chapter offers a number of case studies that highlight positive outcomes of initiatives aimed at youth.

One overarching trend among national youth policies is robust support for, and encouragement of entrepreneurship. In countries where a large proportion of the youth population falls outside the formal job market, it makes sense to invest in young people's potential to start their own businesses or employ themselves. However we must recognize that youth, especially young women from poorer families, face considerable obstacles to creating and maintaining successful businesses, even with

government funding. A recent *Quartz* article argues that successful entrepreneurs come from families with money, and that this ability to fall back on family financial resources is what allows them to take economic risks.<sup>63</sup>

### **Measuring youth well-being**

The analytical tools used to measure and compare youth well-being globally have improved dramatically of late. Focus has begun to shift away from using economic and employment indicators alone and towards developing holistic, youth-specific measures. At the same time, knowledge sharing and impact assessment have been prioritized.

For measuring employment, international organizations are increasingly using the number of youth not employed or in education or training (NEET) rather than employment statistics. This indicator sheds light on school dropouts and those who have given up on the labor market. It has been adopted as an indicator of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

The ILO and the OECD have suggested that a youth ‘scoreboard’ be established to track progress in youth access to employment and education in G20 countries, which would enable more timely and accurate reporting on the effectiveness of policies relating to youth employment.

The World Bank has developed a Youth Employment Inventory that gives comparative information on more than 400 youth employment programs in 90 countries.<sup>64</sup> The database makes an important contribution by identifying successful policy interventions that could be replicated in other contexts.

The most widely used holistic measure of youth well-being is the Youth Development Index (YDI), launched in 2013 by the Commonwealth Youth Program. The YDI represents the first global effort to bring together global data on youth welfare, and currently measures youth development in 170 countries, including 51 of the 54 Commonwealth countries; the YDI uses data from five key areas—education, health and well-being, employment, civic participation and political participation.<sup>65</sup>

# YOUTH POLICY FRAMEWORKS AND GUIDING DOCUMENTS

Multilateral, regional organizations and governing bodies have enacted numerous broad frameworks and policy guides relating to youth well-being, which have undoubtedly helped bring youth issues to the forefront of government priorities. These broad aspirational frameworks, such as the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, show that youth are being recognized as an important focus in the future of global development. One of the major strengths of international rights-affirming documents and declarations is that they can provide a structure within which youth can assert their rights.

*'Inequalities in social, economic and political conditions, including racism and xenophobia... lead to increasing hunger, deterioration in living conditions and poverty among youth and to their marginalization as refugees, displaced persons and migrants.'*

World Programme of Action on Youth

Table 1: Timeline of important rights instruments, declarations and policies regarding youth well-being	
Year	Title
1965	UN Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples
1992	Vision 21 – from United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro
1995	World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY)
2006	African Union Youth Charter
2006	Arab Declaration on Youth Empowerment
2006	Pacific Youth Charter
2008	Ibero–American Youth Charter
2008–2012	Global Partnership for Youth Employment (GPYE)
2012–present	Solutions for Youth Employment (S4YE)
2013	EU Youth Guarantee
2015	2030 Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 8 <sup>66</sup>

That said, the impacts on youth are indirect and inconsistent, as even adopted policies often suffer from an implementation gap. For example, the impact of the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) has been limited, with the UN Youth Envoy noting in 2014 that of 115 countries represented at the First Global Forum on Youth Policies, only 23 had made significant progress in implementing WPAY.<sup>67</sup>

The African Union's Youth Charter has sparked a dramatic increase in the number of national youth policies. Currently, 32 countries in Africa have a National Youth Policy in place, up from 23 in 2014.<sup>68</sup> Of the ten African nations that have passed new constitutions since 2006, nine specifically mention the rights of children and youth.<sup>69</sup>

The Organization of American States (OAS) has a Youth Agenda, which acts as a guide for increasing youth participation in politics and increasing access to skills, training and employment. The OAS' Youth Agenda focuses on three pillars: increasing dialogue with youth and youth participation in OAS policy formation, capacity building for youth, and supporting youth leaders within member states.<sup>70</sup> This agenda represents a good starting point for including youth and drawing attention to the issues they face. However, nearly a decade after its adoption, it has yet to be translated into major policy positions.

Other multilateral and civil society initiatives are worth mentioning. The Global Partnership for Youth Employment (GPYE) is a joint project of the World Bank, the Youth Employment Network and the Understanding Children's Work Project. It has supported detailed research into local youth employment challenges, and has sparked greater understanding of youth employment issues across many municipal and national governments in the Middle East.<sup>71</sup> In Palestine, for example, more than 9,000 youth have been trained in business skills and the partnership has elicited commitments from municipal governments to address youth employment.<sup>72</sup>

Solutions for Youth Employment (S4YE), founded in 2012, is a coalition of civil society organizations, foundations, private companies and youth groups that encourages entrepreneurship in Europe, Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America. Its comprehensive baseline report shows that programs that encourage entrepreneurship have the highest returns in terms of youth employment outcomes and earnings, and that financing for entrepreneurship must be combined with skills training.<sup>73</sup>

The European Union's Youth Guarantee program requires EU member states to provide specialized services to enhance young people's employability. Such services include public employment, apprenticeships, vocational education and training opportunities. Thanks to the program's efforts to coordinate and personalize services, by 2011 Finnish youth enjoyed an 83.5 percent employment rate within three months of being registered as unemployed. The EU also has a highly successful structured dialogue process whereby the EU Youth Forum is able to participate in policy discussions with the European Commission on matters relating to education, the environment, youth political participation and youth employment.<sup>74</sup>

While such training and financing schemes have shown promise, their effectiveness could be greatly enhanced by encouraging youth participation in government and society, and by addressing the inequalities that affect them, especially gender inequality.

*'The focus on youth employment in [SDG] Goal 8 provides a new opportunity to mobilize broad global partnerships to support action on a more significant scale. Increased investment is needed to alleviate the scars of the [2008] crisis on the present generation as well as to ensure more inclusive labor markets and societies.'*

Azita Berar Awad, Director ILO's Employment Policy Department.

## Case study 2: Youth policy in Canada and Québec

Canada does not have a national youth policy, a national youth organization/association, or a federal authority responsible for youth. When the Liberal Party formed the government in November 2015, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau appointed himself Canada's first federal Minister for Youth.

Most Canadian provinces have youth policies. The disadvantage of leaving youth services and policy to provincial and municipal bodies is that services to youth may not be comparable across the country.

Québec manages youth policy at the highest level of the provincial government, and has had comprehensive youth policy in place since 2001. Associated Action Plans for 2006–2009 and 2009–2014 resulted in substantial benefits to youth in terms of accessing education, starting businesses and promoting diversity.<sup>75</sup> An updated 2015 Québec Youth Policy will form the basis for the next Québec Youth Action Plan, a five-year scheme with a pledged investment of over \$200m, set to be unveiled in fall 2016.<sup>76</sup> It will address five key areas for government intervention: promoting healthy lifestyles in a safe and secure environment; developing an educational environment that encourages perseverance; encouraging pride in Québec citizenship and culture; preparing young people for work, while creating an economy ready to welcome them; and supporting youth entrepreneurship and business success. The plan resulted from a long process of consultation with youth and other stakeholders.

The federal government has made significant policy proposals that will help young Canadians in areas of employment, access to education, and representation in federal politics. Major areas include increasing the number of summer jobs supported by Canada's Youth Employment Strategy, making post-secondary education more affordable for low- and middle-income families, and significantly increasing education support for First Nations youth. In July 2016 the government launched a process to select the Prime Minister's Youth Council, which will be made up of young people from diverse backgrounds and constituencies. A Canadian Youth Service is also to be established, which will give young Canadians the opportunity to gain work experience while serving Canadian communities.

It is crucial that these initiatives include representation from marginalized sub-sets of Canadian youth as well as young women.

*'Young people aren't just the leaders of tomorrow, they're the leaders of today. Their voices matter... the things they do now can have a tremendous impact to change the world, right now.'*

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada

## YOUTH INCLUSION, PARTICIPATION, AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Numerous initiatives are moving beyond a focus on education and employment alone to a broader base for youth policy. This shift is captured well by the World Bank's proposals for a multidimensional policy for youth inclusion.

Outlined in a 2014 report on the situation of young people in Tunisia after the 2012 revolution, the World Bank sets out three core pillars for multidimensional policy for youth inclusion: access to employment, participation and active citizenship, and youth-friendly services at the



local level. Such a holistic approach could help promote greater equity for youth and facilitate their meaningful participation in economic life.

**Figure 2: Multidimensional Policy for Youth Inclusion**



Source: World Bank

The International Youth Foundation (IYF) has put such a holistic policy framework into action. A founding partner of the S4YE coalition, IYF has partnered with over 470 organizations to strengthen youth policy at local and national levels.<sup>77</sup> The Foundation's life skills curriculum, 'Passport to Success', has reached youth in more than 40 countries, while their 'Build Your Business' digital tool is used by more than 300 organizations in 20 countries to help young people found successful small and micro enterprises.<sup>78</sup>

The IYF's programming around social innovation is worthy of attention and replication. Its 'Youth Action Net' supports the goals of social innovation by providing youth who found social ventures with leadership training, resources, and capital. Since 2000 the program has supported more than a thousand social entrepreneurs from 90 countries.<sup>79</sup> This vital form of investing in youth well-being capitalizes on the fact that young people are already actively working to solve the problems of their communities. For example, the program helped Deepa Gupta from India to expand her initiative, Jhatkaa.org, which uses text messages, email and social networks to encourage youth to hold politicians accountable for their promises, and has already mobilized more than 100,000 people to take action on social issues.<sup>80</sup>

### Case study 3: Youth gain education and campaign on rights in Mali

**Educational Centres for Development (CEDs)** have created opportunities for youth in Mali to access informal education that leads to employment. Supported by the NGO Plan International, the first CEDs, launched in 1994, aimed to provide education for young people aged 9 to 15 who had no access to school or who had quit without completing primary school. The CED program offers a basic education cycle of four years with two years of pre-professional training. Graduates acquire basic literacy, numeracy and vocational skills, but no diploma. The program proved so effective at preparing students for employment, CEDs were incorporated into the public education system 2000.

**My Rights My Voice (MRMV)** was created to empower young people to claim their right to quality health and education services. Oxfam started MRMV in 2011 and has now implemented the program in eight countries, including Mali and Niger.

In Mali MRMV promoted e-learning tools to improve educational quality and address some of the major socio-cultural constraints that keep students, and particularly girls, from accessing and completing school. Most importantly, the program helped young women learn about sexual and reproductive health, so as to avoid early pregnancy and marriage.

During the 2012 presidential and parliamentary elections, MRMV campaigned on health and education as essential to youth development. The campaign used various creative approaches, such as commercials, radio panel discussions and floats at markets, crossroads and playgrounds. More than 1,700 youth activists raised public awareness and encouraged their peers to register to vote.

*'The State shall take measures, including affirmative action programmes, to ensure that the youth—a) access relevant education and training; b) have opportunities to associate, be represented and participate in political, social, economic and other spheres of life; c) access employment; and d) are protected from harmful cultural practices and exploitation.'*

2010 Constitution of Kenya

### Case study 4: Youth employment in the Occupied Palestinian Territory

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, about four in every ten youths in the OPT was unemployed during the second quarter of 2015, even though nearly half of those unemployed had completed at least 13 years of schooling. The unemployment rate among youth graduates was 52 percent.

Since 2009 the Youth Employment Support Program (YES) offers youth technical training, vocational training, on-the-job training and entrepreneurship support. YES is run by Taawon, a longstanding Palestinian non-government organization. Through the YES portal, job seekers can access paid internship and apprenticeship opportunities that significantly enhance their employability. They can even secure a first six-month employment opportunity.

In addition to financial and technical support, participants receive extensive workplace success training focused on communication skills, teamwork and professional skills development, problem solving, and community and environmental awareness.

*'So here I stand... one girl among many. I speak—not for myself, but for all girls and boys. I raise up my voice—not so that I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard. Those who have fought for their rights: Their right to live in peace. Their right to be treated with dignity. Their right to equality of opportunity. Their right to be educated.'*

Malala Yousafzais, 19, Pakistan, girls education activist and 2014 Nobel Peace Prize recipient

The program has successfully provided new graduates with access to the labor market and increased their employment prospects. It has also worked towards equal employment for youth from different geographical locations, thus decreasing internal migration and increasing employment opportunities in marginalized and rural areas.

YES has also supported young entrepreneurs with financial resources, incubation services and entrepreneurship training. The program led to the employment of over 800 young men and women, and in its first phase helped them generate an aggregate annual income of \$30m (US).

## YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS, SUMMITS, FORUMS AND ONLINE CONSULTATION

One hundred thirty-one countries have a national youth umbrella organization or association 'recognized as the national representative structure for youth by governments, media and/or regional or international forums'.<sup>81</sup> Regionally, Europe has the highest rate of organizations or associations (95.5 percent). Oceania is also a leader (14 out of 15 countries), as it was in national youth policies. Half of Latin America's 41 countries have one, as do just under half of Asian countries, nearly 40 percent of sub-Saharan African ones, and one-third of those in the Middle East and North Africa. Neither Canada nor the United States has a national youth organization or association.

While the presence of a national youth organization confirms that some youth are able to organize and be recognized by the state, it does not give much indication of how representative they are. Official youth organizations can be useful, but governments should not restrict youth participation in political debates to that vehicle alone.

The numerous regional youth organizations are diverse. In the European Youth Forum participating organizations range from national youth organizations, to student labor unions, to regional and local youth-led NGOs.<sup>82</sup> The Asian Youth Council, on the other hand, is only open to national-level youth organizations recognized by their governments.<sup>83</sup> Other regional youth forum initiatives, such as the Organization of African Youth, were started by individual youth and have a hard time exerting influence.

In the last five years there has been an explosion of meetings, summits, forums, and other events aimed at bringing together youth and policy leaders, youth from different regions of the world and youth organizations to share experiences and build connections. Some recent examples include the World Bank's annual Youth Summit, started in 2013,<sup>84</sup> the July 2013 Youth Takeover of the UN,<sup>85</sup> the Young Americas Summit (held alongside the last four Summits of the Americas),<sup>86</sup> and the Youth Summit in the UK to consult on the implementation of the SDGs.<sup>87</sup> It is often difficult to gauge how diverse or representative youth participation is in these high profile events, and some of them are certainly only accessible to select youth representatives.

Other multilateral initiatives are open to a wide range of youth organizations. In 2010, the League of Arab States co-organized the Euro-Arab Youth Conference in Ragusa, Italy, together with the Council of Europe, the Italian Youth Forum, and the European Youth Forum, which resulted in policy recommendations for greater socio-economic and political inclusion of young migrants.<sup>88</sup> In 2012 the Euro-Arab Youth leadership meetings were formalized with the foundation of the Mediterranean University on Youth and Development. There now exists a global network of Universities on Youth and Development facilitated by the North–South Centre of the Council of Europe. These gatherings draw broad participation from individual youth and a wide variety of youth organizations, and educate young people on how to gain the broadest impact from their movements.<sup>89</sup> In 2015 the first CELAC-EU Youth Days conference sought to provide an arena for youth from Latin America, the Caribbean and Europe to share ideas about youth employment and bring youth demands to policy makers.<sup>90</sup>

Increasingly, youth engagement in international meetings and knowledge-sharing events is mediated online. The shift towards including any youth with Internet access is very encouraging. While many would still be excluded due to lack of access to a telephone or the Internet, many more can make their voices heard with the aid of ICT technology.

The youth wing of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network uses the Internet to increase global youth engagement in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. According to Coordinator Siamak Sam Loni, with half of the world's population under the age of 30, 'It seems very clear that [youth] are one of the primary stakeholders.'<sup>91</sup> Youth possess the idealism, enthusiasm, and creativity that are desperately needed to realize the vision of the SDGs. One of the network's latest projects is a mobile app to track youth initiatives related to the SDGs, called the Youth Action Mapper.<sup>92</sup> It will allow all local initiatives to be visible on a global scale.

The first UN Youth Envoy, 29-year-old Ahmad Alhendawi of Jordan, appointed in February 2013, launched 'Writing Youth –Google+ Hangout,' an online forum for discussion of youth-related issues. In May of that year a panel of international youth experts participated in a live conversation, guided in part by Tweets and Facebook posts from youth around the world.<sup>93</sup> The proliferation of social media tools and Internet access should lead to a wider variety of young voices and experiences being shared with policy leaders.

### Case study 5: Bolivia and Peru: Indigenous youth participate through art

Indigenous youth in Latin America are a very vulnerable group. Victims of historical discrimination, they tend to live in poverty in rural areas, and they frequently suffer violence inside the family and out. Young indigenous women are particularly vulnerable, since they face triple discrimination based on their age, gender and ethnic origin.

In 2010–2013, Oxfam partnered with Bolivian (2010–2013) and Peruvian (2012–2013) indigenous communities, Wapikoni Mobile and two local partners (CEFREC in Bolivia and CHIRAPAQ in Peru) to strengthen youth participation and leadership through digital communication.

The approach used was originally developed with Canadian First Nations youth and focused on the production of films, capitalizing on transformative potential of art and communication to combat discrimination. The films produced tell moving individual stories. In one, a young girl reads a letter to her alcoholic father who has left the family. In another, a woman tells her life story and shows her arduous daily routine.

The project improved youth's knowledge of their rights, enhanced their leadership abilities and increased their social and technical skills. The films were shown at international festivals (25 shorts were nominated and six won awards). Broadcasts reached an audience of 500,000 people, helping to spread awareness of development issues.

### Case study 6: Kenya: County governments address youth unemployment

In 2013 approximately 80 percent of Kenya's 2.3 million unemployed people were youth between the ages of 15 and 34.<sup>94</sup> Fortunately, the country's 2010 constitution took the issue seriously and prescribed an affirmative action program, which includes the 2012 Access to Government Procurement Opportunities (AGPO) initiative to enable youth, women and people with disabilities to access 30 percent of Government Tenders.<sup>95</sup> The national recommendations on youth have largely been taken up by new county-level governments created by the constitution.

Kajiado County is located in south-central Kenya along the border with Tanzania and is inhabited largely by Maa-speaking pastoralists. Citing its sparse and nomadic population, Kenyan governments both pre- and post independence made few investments in infrastructure or government services. Today, Maasai pastoralists are recognized in the new constitution as a marginalized group, making youth in these areas eligible for affirmative action based on both their age and their ethnic identity.

The Kajiado County government set itself the goal of empowering more than 75 percent of the county's youth to be self-reliant through training, education, employment and credit.<sup>96</sup> Significant investments in education were announced as was the creation of a Youth Enterprise Fund to finance 500 youth businesses between 2013 and 2017. Spending was also announced for recreation and to support athletic and artistic talents, however, a 2015 World Bank study found that these are not the main priorities for Kenyan youth.<sup>97</sup> While these plans are impressive, implementation has been slow.

*'The constitution has changed things because now there are many more leaders. It is a good change because there are many job opportunities as bodyguards and drivers. Also youth are supervising trucks that come to pick up sand now that some roads are getting fixed.'*

Mercy, 29, Kajiado County, Kenya



The county's bursary program for secondary and university education has reached a large number of needy students, and is contributing to reducing inequality in access to education. And the mere existence of county-level government has provided direct employment for hundreds of young people. However, those being hired are overwhelmingly highly educated, male, and living in less remote parts of the county.<sup>98</sup>

Despite its shortcomings, this progressive policy has emboldened youth to stand up for their rights. Recently, a group of young people sued the government for failing to respect the constitutional mandate to hire a certain proportion of women and ethnic minorities.<sup>99</sup>

We are living through an exciting time in youth policy, as interest grows and governments and regional and international organizations seek innovative policy solutions to the issues youth face. Country-specific projects and programs are encouraging youth political participation, employment and empowerment.

At the same time, there remains too great a preoccupation with youth education and employment alone. If governments want to make progress on addressing the underlying reasons for youth unemployment and educational failure, they must implement policies that recognize and address the underlying causes of the unequal position of young people in society. They should reduce inequality generally, invest in sustainable development for the future and ensure youth, in all their diversity, are participating in policy decision making.

## 4 YOUTH LEADING THE WAY

From Spain's *Indignados* to Greece's pro-Syriza protesters, from the social media-savvy leaders of the Arab Spring protests to the crowds behind Occupy Wall Street, youth are at the forefront of many of the world's notable political movements.

Young people, especially students, have long been key actors of social movements demanding progressive change. The difference today is that youth face unique challenges and opportunities, and represent over a quarter of the global population, the largest youth population ever seen. They live in a world with extreme levels of wealth and inequality, and where the presence of climate change is an imminent threat to young livelihoods, futures, and the survival of the planet. The two factors of a large youth population and extreme inequality mean that today's youth have unprecedented motivation to challenge the status quo and unparalleled potential for effecting social and political change, through their strength in numbers and a highly interconnected world.

Young people are delivering piercing critiques of the extent to which wealth and privilege have succeeded in rewriting the rules of the system, while shifting ever more economic risk to youth and barring youth from a fair say in the policies that affect their lives.

Youth are also finding their own solutions to challenges of joblessness and hopelessness, even in countries with very high unemployment. One young man in rural Kenya, Alex Nairowua, turned his love of hiking and knowledge of the mountains in his home area into a source of income by starting a website advertising guided hikes to tourists. Through innovation, creativity and perseverance, young people are finding solutions to their problems and a sense of community.

*'Today's young people are ready and willing (but not necessarily able) to put their ingenuity and resources to work for themselves and their communities.'*

S4YE Baseline Report

In India, for example, the media platform Youth Ki Awaaz ('Mouthpiece for Youth') publishes stories of individual young people's struggles online and through social media. The group also offers fellowships to young people with innovative ideas on how to solve social problems. Two recent recipients worked on bringing solar energy to remote communities in their home areas.<sup>100</sup> Also in India, the youth collective Commutiny brings together over 40 youth-led and youth-serving small organizations to share knowledge and resources and encourage youth leadership and engagement with politics and social issues.<sup>101</sup>

In East Africa, the multi-media platform Shujaaz, founded in 2010, reaches a huge proportion of Kenya and Tanzania's young people with messages of empowerment and advice on entrepreneurship. In Kenya, Shujaaz is a graphic novel comic series, and also produces radio, text-messaging, social media, and online video content; in Tanzania it is a standalone graphic novel. Shujaaz tells the story of a youth living in a Nairobi slum who rigs his own pirate radio station to reach out to other youth. One of the

first issues depicts the practice of dyeing baby chickens pink in order to reduce losses to hawks and other predators. Given that each issue is estimated to reach 10 million youth across all platforms, the project has the potential to transform thousands of young lives. Shujaaz won an Emmy award in 2012 for innovative educational programming.<sup>102</sup>

In Guatemala, youth are risking their lives to protect the environment. Organized Youth in Defense of Life (JODVID), founded in 2015 in the town of Jalapa, seeks to address the negative impacts of mining in their region. In the face of violent repression, the members of JODVID, together with other local committees, succeeded in winning a ruling from the Guatemalan Constitutional Court to require a Canadian mining company to comply with community demands.<sup>103</sup>

The following case studies highlight some recent youth-led political protest movements from across the world.

*‘The fundamental role of this movement is to come to grips with its true strength, which is not only its capacity for exerting pressure, but its capacity to make proposals and undertake political action.’*

Camila Vallejo, 28, Chilean student protest leader

### Case study 7: Chile’s Penguin Revolution

One of the largest youth movements in recent years was the effort by Chile’s students to force an overhaul of the higher education system. Chile has the second highest gross national income (GNI) in South America, but also one of the world’s highest rates of economic inequality.<sup>104</sup>

In 2006, secondary school students began to rebel against an education system that allowed only 40 percent of Chilean students to receive a free secondary education in public schools (the rest attended private and charter schools).<sup>105</sup>

In what came to be known as the Penguin Revolution, due to the colours of the students’ uniforms, students organized strikes and marches seeking repeal of the law that minimized the national government’s responsibility for ensuring access to education. They also demanded the elimination of fees for the university admissions test and for student transit passes.

The movement quickly spread across the country, and on May 30, 2006 between 600,000 and one million students went on strike at over 250 schools. The government responded with reform proposals that met many, but not all, of the students’ demands. After uneasy negotiations, movement leaders joined the Presidential Council and called off the strikes.

In 2011, the protests began anew, this time at Chile’s universities, which at the time were proportionally among the world’s most expensive, with tuition costing \$3,400 a year in a country where the average annual salary was about \$8,500.<sup>106</sup>

The students demanded free tuition at public universities, meaningful student participation in university governance, equitable admissions with less emphasis on standardized tests, and government action to punish profiteering by public universities.

Students used creative forms of protest, such as kiss-ins and flash-mobs, in combination with occupations and strikes to press their agenda. Marches of hundreds of thousands of students were common in the summer of 2011

In January 2016 President Michelle Bachelet announced a program to allow 165,000 students to attend 30 universities for free.<sup>107</sup> This major victory for all of Chile’s students was a hopeful sign of greater equity in Chile’s education system.

### **Case study 8: Fed up in Senegal and Burkina Faso**

In Senegal a youth movement spearheaded by hip-hop musicians was extremely influential in mobilizing voters during the 2012 elections. The civil society group 'Y'en a marre' ('Fed Up') was formed in 2011 in the wake of growing youth frustration with the government of Abdoulaye Wade.

First elected in 2000 on a free-market platform, Wade amended the constitution to weaken the opposition and lengthen his term as president. Despite large protests, the courts allowed him to run against a badly split opposition in 2007 and, to the shock and dismay of young activists, he won.

In 2011, as new elections approached, a number of well-known hip-hop artists founded the 'Y'en a marre' movement. They recorded a hit song, 'Faux, pas Forcer,' that depicted young people gathering to participate in the election and respectfully demonstrating for change. The movement raised public awareness and mobilized against potential fraud using slogans, such as 'ma carte mon arme' ('my voter card, my weapon') and 'Juni juni votes' ('Thousands and thousands of votes').

When the government began mass arrests of protesters and stories emerged that the founding hip-hop artists faced surveillance, threats and harassment, the movement grew even stronger. The comparatively youthful opposition candidate Mackey Sall (Wade was 85) campaigned on a promise to restore the old term limit, and he won.

The 'Fed Up' model has been influential across West Africa. In 2014 Burkina Faso President Blaise Compaore (who had been in power since 1987) also tried to change the country's constitution to enable him to run for yet another term. There, a group called Balai Citoyen ('The Citizen's Broom'), in which hip-hop artists also featured prominently, organized peaceful protests that forced Compaore to resign in 2015.

### **Case study 9: Bolivian youth write laws**

Taking advantage of Bolivia's constitutional reform of 2009, which allows the different levels of government (municipalities and departments) to develop their own legislation related to social and economic development, youth organizations in the municipalities of El Alto and Sucre, and in the department of Tarija, decided to come up with local laws that fit their own views and addressed their specific issues.

With the support of CEADL, an Oxfam ally, the young women and men held a series of encounters to encourage reflection, brainstorming and consensus. Participants developed proposals for municipal and departmental by-laws addressing the main problems youth face: employment, access to economic opportunities, participation in decision-making and access to education.

Youth then lobbied legislative authorities to win adoption of their proposals. They utilized a wide variety of communication and dialogue tools to publicize their draft proposals to youth in general and to particular officials, as well as to cultivate public support.

The result was the approval of the Municipal Law for Youth in the city of Sucre and the draft bills now being consulted with youth to be negotiated later with local authorities in the municipality of El Alto and the department of Tarija. The process itself generated important linkages among youth organizations and encouraged other legislative initiatives focused on youth across the country.

The case studies in this section illustrate how youth are engaging with government to demand that their concerns be heard and acted upon. In all of them the central goal is to make youth concerns impossible to ignore. Evident in their demands for change are the inequalities young women and men face. In the Chilean case youth are demanding fair access to education. In Senegal and Burkina Faso youth are protesting their disproportionate unemployment and the fact that leaders are unaccountable. The latter connects with the concern of youth that their society has concentrated wealth in the hands of a few and that there is no easy path ahead for young people.

Whether through direct political protest or smaller initiatives, youth are mobilizing and demanding change because they know they have the most to lose if concrete actions to counter inequality are not taken. Governments, institutions, civil society and the private sector must work together with young people, recognize them as leaders and change-makers and respect their right to shape their own futures.

With their creativity, energy and passion, young people will be instrumental in finding solutions to the challenge of inequality. Today's youth form the generation that stands the best chance to end poverty, stop climate change and ensure the SDGs become a reality. With support and solidarity from their elders, they will acquire the power, knowledge, skills to demand these promises are kept.



# 5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## It is time to support youth as agents of their own future

The voices of the young have become too important to ignore. If societies hope to enjoy a stable and prosperous future and reap the rewards of the demographic dividend, these voices must be listened to and acted upon, starting now. A variety of promising policy interventions point the way to a better path forward.

By changing the policies that have drastically widened the gap between rich and poor, we can hope to narrow the divide of power and wealth between youth and older generations and between various groups of young people themselves. Initiatives that reduce inequality generally also help the world's youth. **Indeed, if we are to even up the gap between today's youth and previous generations, we must re-evaluate failed policies and instead place the interests of the public before the interests of the powerful.**

The inequalities that affect young people all over the world are not only economic; they are social and political. The pressing problems that today's generation of youth has unjustly inherited, like climate change, will only be solved when young people's energy, creativity and talent are brought to bear.

Youth are already playing, and must continue to play, a central role in creating a future in which they can succeed and lead meaningful lives. In order to hold governments to account, youth can leverage their strength in numbers, reaching out to local politicians and asking what they are doing to address youth well-being. Furthermore, youth must continue to organize into responsible and accountable organizations and seek to develop joint agendas with government bodies to tackle inequality.

However, youth cannot bring about widespread change without the support of adults, governments and organizations acting as allies. We must work with young people to promote the empowerment of youth, especially young women and young members of marginalized groups, because young people's active citizenship is essential for our collective future.

To that end, Oxfam, in consultation with young women and men, offers the following recommendations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **For national governments and multilateral organizations:**

**Include young people in the design, implementation and monitoring of policies and in decision making, especially for issues that affect their lives.**

**Support policies and programs aimed at youth that engage with young peoples' energy and desire to change the world.** Development interventions aimed at youth should reach beyond keeping young people in school or employed, or providing make-work projects. Especially in contexts where frustrated youth are joining extremist organizations, development initiatives must partner with young people to work on changing the political realities that underlie their frustrations.

**All programs must acknowledge systemic discrimination** that reinforces the inequalities faced by young people, especially young women, those with disabilities and LGBTIQ youth. Programs should work alongside youth to develop and implement policies to address the causes of inequality.

**Do not treat youth as a group isolated from the rest of society.** Despite inter-generational conflict and inequality, young people are supported by and in turn support multi-generational families, communities and networks. Any effort to solve problems faced by youth must keep in mind the important connections young people have with those younger and older than themselves.

**Increase access to quality education** for both girls and boys, with particular attention to girls' completion of secondary education and access to non-formal educational opportunities.

**Oppose privatization of public services.** Free healthcare and education are human rights and they mitigate the worst impacts of economic inequality for youth.

**Continue to prioritize better data collection, analysis and sharing initiatives.** The excellent progress made on understanding the multi-faceted reality of youth employment must be extended to other issues affecting young people. We need to better understand how young women and young men are affected by the various dimensions of systemic inequality and what actions can best respond.

**Work towards reducing the rampant economic inequality faced by youth,** taking into account the links between the various dimensions of inequality faced by young people.

- **Adopt aggressive policies on youth employment,** and include young people and the private sector in their design.
- **Create and stimulate decent employment and livelihood opportunities** for young people and provide access to credit to

encourage entrepreneurship. Ensure equal access and opportunities for young women and for young people living with disabilities.

- **Promote the social responsibility of large companies and multinationals.** Encourage them to offer internships to new graduates and guarantee that a percentage of those internships result in paid opportunities; support initiatives to raise minimum wages and limit executive pay.

**Consider the gendered impacts of policy before implementation, and actively prioritize the needs of young women.** Promote women's rights and young women's leadership in addressing gender inequality.

- **Create the right conditions for young women to become active citizens, exercise leadership and access equal employment** by providing supports such as childcare, food and transport, literacy training, flexible schedules, and other accommodations. Recognize the value of women's unpaid labor in homes or family businesses.
- **Protect the human rights of girls**, especially from all forms of child abuse, violence, exploitation and trafficking, and work towards the elimination of harmful practices.
- **Ensure equal access to non-biased sexual and reproductive health information and services.**

**Advocate for and, where possible, implement actions to combat climate change**, acknowledging that climate change is one of the biggest challenges facing this generation of young people.

- **Prioritize funding to help youth living in poverty adapt** to the impacts of climate change, and support youth and women's groups concerned with climate change.
- **Enable technology transfers** that build capacities in poor countries to develop appropriate technologies, renewable energy solutions and sustainable transportation, with a focus on empowering youth.
- **Recognize, support and promote the role of youth in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.** Governments should establish structured mechanisms for participation and co-decision making, especially in areas that have a clear impact on young people, and provide adequate funding so that youth can fulfil their roles and contribute to a more equal, just and peaceful world for all.

### **For civil society organizations working with youth:**

- **Work with youth as partners** and keep them involved from start to finish. CSOs must take the time to meaningfully engage with youth and bring them into the heart of program conceptualization, research, monitoring and evaluation.
- **Look beyond official youth groups for youth-led grassroots projects to support.** Make greater efforts to identify young people already working to solve problems in their communities, connecting them to potential donors and facilitating the creation of networks among youth organizations.

- **Work with youth, educators and decision makers to shift norms and behaviors regarding gender role stereotypes and to encourage all to value the equal rights of girls in society.**
- **Facilitate safe environments for young people to engage with other civil society actors and government institutions,** in which they can develop their capacities, skills and confidence.
- **Support the development of an enabling environment for young people to participate meaningfully** by engaging constructively with adults who hold decision-making power.
- **Actively work to ensure that programs and activities are not maintaining or replicating pre-existing inequalities that affect youth.**

# ANNEX 1

## Countries that have a National Youth Policy

*\*= Countries where Oxfam is active ^= Countries with a draft youth policy or where it is unclear whether current youth policy qualifies as a national policy*

Note: Youthpolicy.org only considers a country as having a National Youth Policy if it is holistic in the issues it covers and applied by the National Government across all parts of the country. There are many countries with some policy instruments aimed at youth where it is unclear as to whether they can be considered truly National Youth Policies or not. For the purposes of this table, we have included countries in unclear situations in the list of countries that **do** have a National Youth Policy.

*Afghanistan	Dominica	Madagascar	*Sierra Leone
*Albania	*Ecuador	*Malawi	Slovakia
Andorra	^*Egypt	Malaysia	Slovenia
Angola	*El Salvador	Maldives	*Solomon Islands
Antigua and Barbuda	Estonia	Malta	*South Africa
*Armenia	*Ethiopia	^*Mauritania	South Korea
*Australia	*Fiji	Mauritius	^*South Sudan
Austria	Finland	*Mexico	^Spain
*Azerbaijan	*France	^Micronesia	*Sri Lanka
^Bahamas	Gabon	Moldova	Suriname
^Bahrain	Gambia	Mongolia	Swaziland
*Bangladesh	*Georgia	^Montenegro	Sweden
Barbados	*Germany	*Morocco	Switzerland
Belarus	*Ghana	*Mozambique	^Syria
*Belgium	^Grenada	Namibia	Taiwan
Belize	*Guatemala	Nauru	*Tajikistan
*Benin	^Guineau-Conakry	*Nepal	*Tanzania
Bhutan	^Guyana	*Netherlands	*Thailand
Botswana	^*Haiti	*New Zealand	*Timor-Leste (East Timor)
^Bolivia	*Honduras	*Nicaragua	*Tokelau
*Brazil	Hungary	*Niger	*Tonga
Brunei	*India	*Nigeria	Trinidad and Tobago
Bulgaria	^Iraq	*Niue	Turkey
*Burkina Faso	*Ireland	Norway	Turkmenistan
*Burundi	^Ivory Coast	Palau	^*Tuvalu
*Cambodia	Jamaica	Panama	*Uganda
Cameroon	*Japan	*Papua New Guinea	Ukraine

Cape Verde	^*Jordan	^*Paraguay	*United Kingdom
^*Central African Republic	Kazakhstan	*Peru	^*United States
Chile	*Kenya	^*Philippines	Uruguay
*China	*Kiribati	^Poland	Uzbekistan
*Colombia	Kosovo	Romania	*Vanuatu
*Cook Islands	^Kuwait	*Russia	Venezuela
Costa Rica	Kyrgyzstan	*Rwanda	*Vietnam
Croatia	Latvia	Saint Kitts and Nevis	*Yemen
^*Cuba	*Lebanon	^Saint Lucia	*Zambia
Czech Republic	^Lesotho	^Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	*Zimbabwe
^*Democratic People's Republic of Korea	*Liberia	*Samoa	
*Democratic Republic of Congo	Liechtenstein	San Marino	
Denmark	Lithuania	Togo	
^Djibouti	Luxembourg	*Senegal	
*Dominican Republic	Macedonia	Serbia	
<b>Countries where Oxfam is active with no national youth policy</b>			
Algeria	Laos	Sudan	
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Mali	Tunisia	
Canada	Myanmar (Burma)	Tuvalu	
Chad	Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel	Western Sahara	
Indonesia	Pakistan		
Italy	Somalia		

Source: <http://www.youthpolicy.org/> Overview of National Youth Policies, with some corrections and verifications from Oxfam Country Offices. <https://www.oxfam.org/en/worldwide>



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