

Effective Youth Participation - "Young People and Agenda 2030"

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We have often heard that young people are not the future but the present. Yet what is the current situation of young people as leaders at the present time? Why is this important and how can we empower them?

Let us begin answering these questions with some figures. According to the Office of the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, 42% of the world's population is under 25 years old, and 85% of the world's young people live in developing countries.

These are two interesting statistics that enable us to identify not only characteristics of young people as a world group, but shared challenges. Almost half the world is under 25 years of age and of this population group, 85% are geographically located in countries considered to be developing nations.

Let us focus on Latin America and the Caribbean, where approximately 18% of the population is under 30 years old. To go into greater detail, according to official figures, approximately 21.63% of the population of member countries of the Andean Community of Nations is within the age range of the population considered young by their respective legislations: Peru with a youth population of 26.5%, Colombia with a youth population of 12.73%, Bolivia with a youth population of 23.61%, Chile with a youth population of 24.3% and Ecuador with a youth population of 20%.

These figures clearly reflect the importance of young people to the population, both at global and national level, and the planning required by governments, not only to meet the specific demands and requirements of this group of the population but also to involve them directly in the process of designing these interventions.

But let us return for a moment to the international arena, and examine the mechanisms for youth participation. The United Nations, recognising the demographic importance of young people and their capacity for generating social development, has undertaken various initiatives from the international community to empower young people in their role of achieving Sustainable Development. The first United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development, held in 1992 – "The Earth Summit", recognised that achieving sustainable development would require the active participation of all actors in society.

The Agenda 21 document formalized this participation via nine sectors recognised by the United Nations as valid channels of communication and for channelling requests, whose participation will be facilitated in United Nations activities related to sustainable development. These are known as "Major Groups" and have been referred to in various resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly as "Major Groups and other Stakeholders". The Major Group for Children and Youth is one of these nine Major Groups officially recognised by the United Nations and it receives

its mandate through the General Assembly of the United Nations, bilateral agreements and/or terms of reference with specific entities.

At the level of global agendas, the Global Forum on Youth Policies in Baku – Azerbaijan, the World Conference on Youth in Colombo – Sri Lanka and more recently, the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth and the Youth Forum in Portugal – Lisbon, reflect this commitment of the international community to establishing a common agenda for youth development.

The Peruvian government is not indifferent to this commitment. During 2018, I had the opportunity to serve as National Director of Promotion, Organisation and Management at the National Secretariat for Youth, a leading body in youth policy in the Peruvian government.

From this Secretariat we designed, along with the National Centre for Strategic Planning – CEPLAN, a process for the participation and double accountability for youth within the framework of constructing the 2050 vision of the country. This was the first time young people had the opportunity to play a formal role in formulating this process.

The process made it possible to establish 26 decentralised forums in each region of the country and in the Lima Metropolitan area, where young people had the opportunity, along with local government, to identify a common agenda of prioritised demands from young people, framed within the Sustainable Development Goals. They also chose delegates to a national plenary meeting. At the national plenary, they undertook a democratic exercise to re-establish national priorities for youth, identifying as priorities Gender Equality, Sustainability and Integrity. These were formalised in Ministerial Resolution 523-2018-MINEDU, which formally turned them into policy and created the Working Group responsible for drawing up the action lines and goals to achieve integrated development and exercise the citizenship of the Young person by 2021.

But in addition we managed to establish a double accountability mechanism as, once priorities have been identified, the Peruvian State will go back to the regions and to the Lima Metropolitan area via the decentralised forums, where it will report on the progress of these priorities. Youth organisations will similarly report on their actions concerning the fulfilment of requests they themselves have prioritised.

We have been able to observe the demographic importance of youth and the trend from global to local level of dealing with this group not just as a beneficiary group but also as a group with decision-making ability.

The experience of Peru proves that it is possible to create a national agenda for youth by starting from young people themselves.