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# Publication Launch: Youth, Voice and Development Phase One Report

Written by **Alyson Brody** (University of Leeds and British Council)



CTS Phase 2 South Africa. 2018: Photo Credit: Fenia Kotsopoulou

Youth, Voice and Development is a Leeds University-based programme that asks: ‘What works for putting young people at the heart of research that contributes to positive change?’ Phase One, in 2020, was a collaboration between Changing the Story and the British Council which aimed to map connections and synergies between the youth-focused work of both and to enable mutual learning. Phase two will continue the work as a strand of PRAXIS, looking across the Global Challenge Research Fund (GCRF) portfolio.

A report and policy brief based on the findings of phase one is being launched 15 February, 2021. The report starts with the premise that young people matter – they are a rapidly growing demographic, representing over a fifth of the world’s population but their rights and perspectives are too often ignored in decision-making and planning for economies and societies they will inherit. The report starts with a snapshot of the current situation for young people in Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) countries, drawing on data from the United Nations, World Bank and the British Council Next Generation research series, which engaged young people in identifying critical issues in a range of ODA countries. It highlights four critical areas of concern:

**A crisis in Education:** In all the countries researched by Next Generation respondents indicated that education is far from fit for purpose, with poor resources, curricula that do not prepare them for employment and ill-equipped teachers.

**A crisis in employment:** Many of the young people surveyed were facing protracted unemployment, with young women often worst affected. Emerging data from the World Bank and other organisations indicate that the COVID-19 crisis is deepening this employment crisis for young people.

**A crisis in political engagement:** In the majority of countries surveyed for Next Generation, young people reported a deep distrust of authorities and a sense of political disillusionment. Many reported not feeling represented or listened to by governments.

**Exposure to gender-based violence and discrimination:** The Next Generation research echoes concerns raised by the UN and other development actors that there is a serious growing problem of gender-based violence (GBV) for girls and young women in many ODA countries. Some female respondents also talked about sexual harassment and abuse in schools. However, the majority of GBV goes unreported due partly to feelings of shame and stigma and fear of not being taken seriously.

The emerging picture points to a global crisis for youth. There is a high risk this will translate into longer-term systemic impact that include economic stress, mental health issues and engagement in risky and/or violent behaviours. It is clear there is an urgent need to address these issues in ways that involve young people directly in shaping their lives, choices and futures.

## The value of PAR methodologies for working with young people

The youth-focused work of CTS and the British Council is demonstrating the enormous importance and value of working with young people through creative participatory action research (PAR) methodologies. Many of the projects included in the report support very practical engagement with young people, with immediate outcomes, while also helping to create enabling environments for deeper levels of social change. They do this in different ways:

Through **embodied approaches** where young people are active participants in co-producing knowledge through creative processes such as performance, art and poetry. For example:

**Mobile Arts for Peace (MAP)** works with young people through music, dance and drama in communities affected by conflict and other traumatic situations and where public services are non-existent or limited. A key focus of these creative projects is addressing the mental health of young people through activities such as writing and performing plays that enable them to express and confront painful experiences and to articulate often difficult ideas about issues such as conflict, marginalisation or GBV.

Through ‘ground up’ approaches that harness young people’s agency in shaping education, political processes and employment opportunities.

‘**Tribal Education Methodology: Sustainable Education Through Heritage and Performance**’ works with schools in Kerala India to develop more inclusive, participatory ways of teaching. A key aim is to make the school curriculum more relevant for children from marginalised tribes in the area by using drama as a way to promote their culture and language. The end goal is to reduce the high dropout rate among students from these marginal groups.



CTS Tribal Education Methodology. Storytelling Walls. Photo Credit: Sreenath Nair

The British Council Active Citizens social leadership training Programme works with young people at the community level in over 70 countries. It supports young people to take action on issues they care about and builds their trust and confidence through participatory approaches that include art and story-telling.

The CTS project ‘Building Inclusive and Sustainable Civil Society: A Social Entrepreneurship Wellbeing Toolkit Created by and For Young People’ held participatory events with young social entrepreneurs in Malaysia where they could share their experiences and co-develop strategies for success and well-being. Learning and examples from these activities form the basis of a wellbeing toolkit that will be adapted and shared with young social entrepreneurs in other countries.

It has never been more important to understand what young people want and need. The report argues for the positive power of creative, participatory approaches that embrace young people as agents with valuable insights, knowledge and capacity. These approaches are enabling them to generate alternative stories that resonate with their specific situations and help them envisage meaningful futures for themselves and their communities.

The Youth, Voice and Development report is available [here](#).

The Youth, Voice and Development Policy Note is available [here](#).

For more information about Phase 1 and Phase 2, please contact [changingthestory@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:changingthestory@leeds.ac.uk)

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