

Consolidated Response Online Discussion Forum on Vulnerable Youth 16 March – 4 April 2010

Introduction

The fourth discussion forum hosted by APYouthNet during 16 March to 4 April focused on vulnerable youth. At the request of community members for improved opportunities to share knowledge, this forum dealt with three topics under the overarching theme of vulnerable youth, each in its own discussion stream:

- Engaging young migrants
- Youth in emergencies
- Young people with disabilities

Young people are a great source of energy and ideas but in some circumstances the opportunity to harness those advantages can be obstructed. Each of these streams highlighted different situations in which young people can face challenges, which range from inequality, discrimination, abuse, exploitation, exclusion and violence. In the face of these obstacles, young people can struggle to reach their full potential

A consistent theme in all streams was that young people should never be viewed as a homogenous group. Young people are *individuals* characterized among other things, by age group, gender, location, resources, education and life experiences. There is no ‘one-size-fits’ all solution, but the lessons learned and practical experiences shared during this forum will hopefully provide better guidance to experts and practitioners on what works and what doesn’t.



An innovation was also piloted during this forum. In the ‘young people with disabilities stream’, cross-postings were exchanged between APYouthNet and the Solution Exchange (SE) India Work and Employment Community, a UN-sponsored initiative. Questions from the forum were shared with SE and their responses were shared with the APYouthNet community, and vice versa. The series of exchanges that took place helped to enrich the discussion with practical experiences directly from the field. This collaborative effort will be explored for future discussions.

With special thanks to the moderators, a synthesis of each discussion stream is provided below. The discussion posts can be viewed at: <http://ap-youthnet.ilobkk.or.th/discussion-lists/vulnerable-youth>

Discussion stream: Engaging young migrants

Moderator: Max Tunon

Background

In Asia, more than 3 million workers leave their homes every year to work in another country, joining some 25 million who are already abroad. In addition, hundreds of millions more migrants move for work within their own countries. Most experts predict that migration in the region will continue to rise. The structure of the economies and demographic evolution is driving the need for low-skilled workers in labour-intensive jobs, and this demand is met with a steady supply of migrants attracted by the wage differential. Moreover, ASEAN has set a target for the free movement of skilled workers within the ten countries by 2015.

Many migrant workers, particularly low-skilled workers, are vulnerable to rights abuses and exploitation. Because of their limited skills and experience, young migrants are especially at risk. In Thailand for example, migrant youth are prevalent in ‘3D’ jobs (dirty, difficult and dangerous) in the manufacturing

and domestic work sectors, with boys aged 15-17 working on fishing boats the most likely to be in a worst form of child labour.¹

To better manage migration in the region, it is essential that the voices of young migrants are heard at each stage of the migration cycle. Their input would improve the design of pre-departure training materials, the development of accessible support services at destination, and the formulation of migration policy that takes into account the real situation of migrants, etc.

Various partners in the region are looking to engage youth by working more closely with migrant communities, NGOs, women's and youth groups, etc. For example, in late 2010, the ILO, Save the Children UK, World Vision and UNIAP will support the Third Mekong Youth Forum on Migration and Human Trafficking. The purpose of the APYouthNet e-discussion was to collect good practices and lessons learned in fostering the effective participation of young migrants, given their specific vulnerabilities and the challenges in reaching them.

Discussion points

1. *Migrant youth vulnerability*

A number of comments spoke to the vulnerability of young migrants. June Kane suggested that rather than identifying migrants as one homogenous group, it is important to examine vulnerability in a matrix that includes the migrant's gender, age, country/region of origin, family circumstances, educational level, (dis)ability etc. Paul Gordon from the British Safety Council put forward a number of other conditions that directly influence the working conditions and vulnerability of a migrant, including their legal status, job security, language, training and experience. Understanding the challenges faced by migrants and designing appropriate responses requires an understanding of these vulnerabilities and the relations between these factors.

The importance of challenging assumptions and understanding the different country or regional contexts was highlighted. For example, Shyama Salgado posted that in most Sri Lankan communities, girls stay in school longer than boys - who are sent out to become 'breadwinners' at an earlier age. June suggested that much of the research in South Asia reveals that both girls and boys are exploited in domestic work, roughly equally. However, by the time boys are in their early teens, most have moved into other areas of child labour. Exploitation in that sector is therefore a function of age as much as it is of gender.

2. *Challenges in migrant youth participation*

Youth participation is a challenging process, and migrant youth participation even more so. It was proposed that we still do not really know how to effectively engage young people so that *they* feel satisfied with their involvement and *we* (e.g. practitioners, experts, academics) feel satisfied with the outcomes. Several posters identified some of the difficulties in (a) the process of youth participation; and (b) moving youth participation beyond tokenism.

Goy Phumtim suggested that cultural barriers may prevent young people from expressing themselves or questioning authority. Some could question whether migrants are even entitled to participate; if they have access to civic and political rights outside their own country. Moreover, some subject matters may be too complicated or full of technical jargon for young people to fully comprehend. When engaging migrants or bringing people from different countries together, the language barrier is a major impediment to a free-flowing exchange of ideas and interpreters may struggle to provide a 'pure translation'. Indeed, many of the young people contacted to participate in this forum were probably intimidated by the language.

In many cases, children and young people participate only at special, one-off events. In many cases, a lot of time and money is invested in preparing for these events, and the skills developed by children and adults are not capitalized on or followed-up on. In many cases, participation is restricted to a relatively elite group of children, often educated and with existing contacts with NGOs - largely because of the aforementioned challenges.

¹ *Underpaid, Overworked and Overlooked: The Realities of Young Migrant Workers in Thailand*, Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University. Part of an ILO Series on Human Trafficking and Labour Migration in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (2006).

3. Examples of (migrant) youth participation in policy formulation

Although some NGO partners have regular participatory activities at local levels, youth forums have been the main channel through which the ILO and a number of other organizations have engaged young people on the issues of migration and human trafficking. The forums provide a platform for youth to feed into national policy dialogue and empower advocates. The Mekong Youth Forum 2007 led to a pledge by the governments of the six countries to actively seek the involvement of affected groups in the formulation of future migration and anti-trafficking policy. In January 2010, senior officials from those countries specifically requested further support in meeting this commitment, which will come in the form of national and regional youth forums throughout 2010.

Henrik Vistisen shared the Sri Lankan Youth Parliament's (SLYP) list of recommendations that informed the National Action Plan on Youth Employment. These were drawn from youth consultations in urban, rural and conflict-affected areas. One of the recommendations is to prevent qualified youth from migrating by providing them with incentives to stay in the country. The SLYP also implemented and facilitated qualitative focus group discussions with youth as part of the National Youth Survey. This process ensures that employment promotion policy is meeting the needs and concerns of young people.

4. Creative approaches to communication

Creative approaches to communication can help to overcome some of the major challenges in child and youth participation. Many young people may be too shy or not have the language skills to express their ideas. A painting, a photograph, a video, a performance, music, etc. builds on the skills young people have, and can be a more powerful communication tool.



Allan Dow noticed during the 2007 Mekong Youth Forum in 2007 that the young people were very interested in 'youth reporting' - a sort of citizen journalism. Giving a young person a video camera in the months or weeks leading up to an event - and then allowing some editing time - could provide first-hand perspective and far greater insight into the local circumstances, difficulties faced, and the opportunities for more effective responses.

The Network for Migrant Children (Thai-Cord) uses creative media to protect migrant children and youth from Lao PDR from the worst forms of child labour, including trafficking. They organize exchanges on the Lao-Thai border, in which Thai youth with experience in media production help to train Laotian youth to produce short films, commercials and music videos under the theme of 'Prevention of Laotian Youth Migration and the Love of the Homeland'.

5. Examples of youth-run organizations

June Kane shared her experience of visiting the Cambodian Children's Centre in Phnom Penh. She was impressed with what they were achieving with a youth-run board of directors, youth-run management and young volunteers. Their achievements came not only from their unique understanding of the issues and avenues for action, but also their outreach to other young people, including hard-to-reach groups.

The ILO is exploring how migrant associations can be used to foster migrant youth participation. Migrant associations are not registered institutions, but can still be a useful means of reaching migrants with information and assistance, and representing their rights and interests in the workplace, in society and in policy dialogue. There are different models for forming such associations: by country of origin, sector, geographical area, gender or age.

The challenge June identified in establishing youth-run groups was securing access to funding and government support. She suggested that a 'mentoring' mechanism be set up by organizations that do have access to donor funding, but also - crucially - respect the importance of the young people themselves being 'in charge'.

Concluding Analysis

The key recommendation from the moderator's perspective is the need to focus less on large national or regional events and more on local activities. The large events are expensive, pose immense logistical challenges, benefit a limited number of youth ambassadors, and result in broad policy recommendations. Local activities can be held more regularly, allow for relationships and rapport to develop, build on skills learned, and can focus on local responses that will impact their lives directly. This is particularly true for

young migrants or potential migrants who do not have the opportunity to travel to participate in national or regional forums.

The discussion provided a number of good examples of youth and migrant participation. These will certainly be used to inform the forthcoming national and youth forums in the Mekong countries, as well as more local efforts to engage youth on an ongoing basis.

Several posts made reference to far more in-depth guidelines and reports on youth participation, including:

- UNICEF: Child and Youth Participation Resource Guide http://www.unicef.org/adolescence/cypguide/index_intro.html
- Save the Children: Seen and Heard: Participation of children and young people in Southeast, East Asia and Pacific... <http://sca.savethechildren.se/upload/scs/SEAP/publication/publication%20pdf/child%20participation/seenandheard.pdf>
- ILO-IPEC: Combating child trafficking for labour exploitation: A resource kit for policy makers and practitioners <http://www.ilo.org/ipecinfo/product/viewProduct.do?productId=9130>

Discussion stream: Youth in emergencies

Moderator: Anne-Marie Davies

Background

Young people in countries affected by emergencies represent a force for renewal, re-birth and change. At the same time, youth also represent a highly vulnerable group before, during and after emergencies, facing particular risks and vulnerabilities and requiring special services, support and protection. Young people's needs and disadvantages vary depending on age, gender, ethnic group and language, socio-economic class and caste, disability, HIV etc. Young women and men have different interests and priorities, and experience different opportunities and challenges; for instance, a 15 year-old adolescent has different capacities, perspectives and life experiences to a 24 year-old young adult. Further, understandings and expectations of youth and young people and concepts of adulthood vary across communities and cultures across Asia.

Young women and men's vulnerability in emergency stems in part from the impact of conflict or disaster on this formative stage of life representing young people's development and transition from childhood through to adulthood. Both conflict and disruption generated by conflict, crisis and disaster deprive many young people of secure family environment and community networks, leaving them with a lack of physical care, personal support and guidance and positive role models to refer to. Schools close down, education and training opportunities can be unavailable for long periods. Decent job options are likely to be very scarce, and when few jobs are available, young people tend to be the least likely to find work.

In such circumstances, many young people lose their trust in others, hope for the future, sense of belonging, and pride, self-respect and respect for others, with severe/significant consequences to the individual and to the community and wider society. They become alienated and disenfranchised. Depression, anxiety and frustration can expose them to risky and anti-social behaviour, criminality and violence, and to the risk of recruitment into armed groups and gangs out of despair or sense of revenge. Reconstruction processes rarely involve young women and men and there are limited capacities, opportunities and 'platforms' for youth participation and citizenship in emergencies, generating further insecurity and instability.

This discussion forum seeks inputs and guidance from members to gather ideas about what can and should be done to empower youth during the different phases of emergency management, such as response, rehabilitation and reconstruction, and prevention. The goal was to develop coherent strategies, solutions and good practice for policy-makers and other decision-makers in the Asia Pacific region, and beyond. In this discussion we understand 'emergency' according to UNICEF's definition: 'A situation which threatens the lives and well being of large numbers of a population and in which extraordinary action is required to ensure their survival, care and protection. Emergencies may be created by natural or technological disasters, epidemics, or conflicts'.

Discussion points

1. Youth, emergencies and exclusion

'Youth exclusion [in Yemen] is multi-faceted: no single axis of exclusion can fully explain the processes by which youth are excluded. Progress in assisting youth through one pathway will not ensure that youth are not excluded in other pathways. Exclusion is also interdependent: exclusion manifested during early stages of the transition can reinforce exclusion at later stages. For example, youth who receive inadequate schooling have trouble finding paid work, which can thereby limit their ability to purchase housing, get married and become independent adults'

(Youth Exclusion in Yemen; 2009)

The importance of looking towards the fringes of society and targeting the most vulnerable and marginalized young people in emergency programming is demonstrated in the correlation between youth exclusion and social insecurity and instability. David Braun pointed out that the exclusion and disenfranchisement of youth and the 'trust gap' (mistrust of young people) is often a 'pre-existing' condition worsened by impact of emergency, and indeed could further be a driving force for the onset or exacerbation of emergency (i.e. violence, conflict) and an immediate/underlying cause of social instability and insecurity, for example in Timor Leste. A useful approach could be to consider youth exclusion, disenfranchisement and the 'trust gap' throughout the Disaster Risk Management (DRM) cycle i.e response, reconstruction, rehabilitation, mitigation, preparedness/readiness phases of emergency.

Seema Agarwal-Harding and Jon Kapp highlighted that many programs are focused on studying the beneficiaries and often neglect to fully examine the large numbers of youth who are excluded and do not benefit from related programmes. For instance, marginalized youth are often clustered in the informal sector of the economy with little possibility of entering the private sector without critical outside intervention. Saifullah Chaudhry shared that the ILO is empowering and providing technical assistance to its constituents (Governments, trade unions and employers) to respond effectively in cases of emergency to prevent youth from being further marginalized.

The effect of missed stages in their school-to-work transition can also push young people into a vicious cycle of poverty and exclusion, with critical impacts on their ability to secure decent work in the years ahead and in realizing their full potential. In addition, due to a lack of adult protection and inability to protect themselves, youth become particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, with young women particularly at risk of gender-based violence, unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted disease. Age-appropriate health care services are likely to be entirely unavailable.

This emphasizes the need to consider pathways' to youth exclusion before, during and after emergencies in contexts where either youth exclusion (directly/indirectly) contributed to emergency; or emergency exacerbated existing or created new forms of youth exclusion. Mukesh Gupta pointed out that sometimes relief packages for the 'former combatants' weigh more while the victim groups become further marginalized - creating a recipe for more friction and destabilizing the peace. Using a life cycle approach to explore processes of exclusion at different stages of development, from young adolescence to young adulthood can help to identify the pathways through which many youth are excluded from educational attainment and livelihood.

2. Youth, emergencies and employment

Programming for youth employment (and indeed education, health, participation, protection) in 'non-emergency' situations is often inadequate and limited capacity of any systems, structures or services faces immense challenges and constraints before, during and after emergency. In many ways, we would look for key elements of rights-based approaches to youth employment, in both non-emergency and emergency programming. Gianni Rosas pointed out that core programming components, labour market interventions with social services, training and career counseling combined with psychosocial support all represent key strategic interventions in both non-emergency and emergency contexts, albeit distinct in interpretation and implementation.

However, the onset of emergency clearly presents context-specific risks, constraints and challenges for youth that need to be considered in any emergency programming with integrated strategic response to reach young people most vulnerable to risk and exclusion. For example, often the emergency response requires a range of skills and skilled workers to support reconstruction and rehabilitation phases but there is often a 'disconnect' between education for livelihood opportunities, and the demands of the 'emergency' market place for specific skills. Also, the psychosocial impact of emergency on young people throws up both acute and chronic issues for consideration in youth employment in emergency programming.

Mukesh Gupta shared his experiences and involvement with the ILO/FAO project, 'Jobs for Peace'. He noted that sometimes the trigger for conflict is the lack of suitable livelihood opportunities in the rural areas in most countries. To address this, the 'Jobs for Peace' project creates an enabling environment for youth through skills development, enterprise, access to finance and many other activities.

3. Gender, youth and emergencies

The critical issue of gender and challenges of gender inequality are often not addressed in emergency programming with limited consideration of traditional gender roles and expectations in both understanding and responding to the priorities, interests and experiences of both young women and men. Seema highlighted that adolescent girls and young women are often overlooked in emergency response and recovery programming, particularly in conflict-contexts where most attention is given to the rehabilitation and re-integration of young men, as former combatants, 'perpetrators' of violence, and an ongoing risk factor to security and stability. Without having addressing the power imbalances that impact negatively on relationships between men and women, and on social progress and justice, adolescent girls and women already experiencing multiple-discriminatory factors will be further marginalized by emergency situations.

4. Youth participation in emergencies and 'windows of opportunity'

In the formulation and implementation of post conflict recovery initiatives for youth it is fundamental to gain insights into the triggers and underlying causes of conflict. Understanding and analyzing youth exclusion in emergency contexts is the foundation for relevant, effective and inclusive programming that addresses the specific priorities, vulnerabilities and risks faced by specific groups of young people. Youth participation in recovery processes is essential to ensure young people's perspectives, interests and priorities are represented and responded to.



Emergency situations can also provide 'windows of opportunity' in reaching out to previously excluded groups of youth by opening up structures and systems for reform and development, mobilizing large-scale awareness of and funding for marginalized youth issues and generating changes in societal attitudes and behaviors that shift gender norms and roles, sometimes forever.

5. ICT, youth and emergencies

Seema underlined that the power of technology to connect and 'network' youth is a useful force in and engaging youth in learning, information, and productive activities and has an important role to play in the mobilization and constituency building of youth in expressing their voice and advocating for change. Examples of ICT-based networking between youth include the Plan-ed (<http://www.plan-ed.org/>) School Linking project which connects children and creates bonds between schools in the UK and Kenya, Sierra Leone, Malawi and China, supported by a range of resources to foster collaborative learning and dialogues about global issues, including issues and impact of climate change (<http://www.planschoolslink.org/home>).

Concluding analysis

Countries in emergency cannot afford such a waste of positive energy. Young people can make a crucial contribution to the reconstruction and recovery of emergency-affected countries. They can be at the forefront of social movements and promote change, a more equitable society and a lasting peace. It is therefore adults' responsibility to support young people in directing their energy positively, involving them in catch-up education programmes, restoring their hope for a better future and developing their capacity to contribute to society as parents, caregivers and community leaders.

A number of critical areas for discussion and development were raised in relation to targeting excluded youth including:

- Policy gap and impact analysis
- Consultation and engagement of youth
- Disaggregated data collection and analysis
- Monitoring and evaluation of progress and change

Focus should not be given to just one particular area but all, in order to have a more holistic approach.

The approach to which we address youth in emergencies should not be homogenous but catered to each situation.

Below is a list of resources that can provide more in-depth information regarding young people and emergencies:

- Series of country- case-studies by International Alert (2009) on youth employment and conflict: <http://www.international-alert.org/publications/index.php>
- Like Stepping Stones in the River: Youth Perspectives in the Crisis in Timor Leste (2007): <http://www.plan.org.au/mediacentre/mediareleases/3061/3064>
- Youth Exclusion in Yemen: Tackling the Twin Deficits of Human Development & Natural Resources (2009):http://www.ineesite.org/uploads/documents/store/Assaad_Barsoum_Cupito_and_Egel_Youth_Exclusion_in_Yemen_2009.pdf
- UNGEI: Making education work: the gender dimension of the school to work transition (2009) <http://ap-youthnet.ilobkk.or.th/resources/research/making-education-work-the-gender-dimension-of-the-school-to-work-transition-2009>

Moderator: Maureen Gilbert

Background

Access to quality education, vocational training and employment are denied to millions of young people with disabilities worldwide, including here in the Asia Pacific region. Some people justify this by saying that young people with disabilities have lower productivity than others. Others say that young people with disabilities don't want to work. Another group of people believes that young people with disabilities should be shielded from the harsh ways of the world, and so should be kept out of regular workplaces for their own protection. Lots of people say that it is too expensive to employ young workers with disabilities. None of these statements is true, but still many young people with disabilities are denied the right to choose what they want to work at and where, or are denied the right to work at all. And young entrepreneurs with disabilities are less likely than their non-disabled peers to be able to access credit or start-up funds

According to the UN, people with disabilities make up 10% of the world's total population, but 20% of those living in poverty, and it's easy to see why. The UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which came into force in 2008, recognizes 'the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others'. This stream aimed to gather ideas about what can and should be done to make this a reality in the region, by asking two linked questions:

- To what extent are young people with disabilities included in the debate about decent work? Answers to this explored barriers and attitudes.
- What changes to policy and practice are required so that young people with disabilities can access decent work? This sparked debate about education, the public, commercial and not-for-profit sectors, and more.

Discussion

1. The need for awareness raising that works

Disabled young people from the Redemptorist Foundation in Thailand pointed out that while the Thai Government has done a lot to improve their status in recent years, 'still the attitude of society has not changed much'. This was echoed all over the region. Helping employers and others to realise that it is the environment, not the impairment, that disables; challenging the stigma of impairment; dealing with the prejudice that leads to the rejection of disabled job seekers even if they are more qualified than the competition; supporting families so that they do not hide their children away - all of these situations, and many more raised by contributors, point to the need to activate creative awareness raising programmes that really work. Contributors said that these should be targeted at employers and also aimed at society in general. Asoka Walpitagama, a parent of deaf children in Sri Lanka, asked for more support and guidance, as well as a more accepting society. 'Protecting' young people with disabilities often works to exclude people and deny them their rights.



A stream of the discussion forum focused on how to raise awareness of autism. Do National Days of Action leave lasting legacies? The debate did not reach a conclusion on this point, but clearly these traditional methods of creating awareness are insufficient on their own.

2. Implementing legislation

Bhawna Tripathi highlighted the need for community participation, as 'attitudes towards (people with disabilities) lie at the two extremes of either absolute neglect or over-protection and excessive sympathy...formulation of more and more laws isn't going to fetch us anything until and unless some concrete efforts are made to sensitize communities and society at large.' Saurabh Singh added pithily

that in his country of India, ‘though all the policies are formulated perfectly, their execution lacks spirit’. In some cases, there is a lack of protection of rights or justice through the judicial system. How can urgency be injected into the process of disability inclusion?

3. The business case

Emanuela Pozzan was one of several contributors who stressed the urgent need for case studies, success stories and effective business case arguments to use with employers and others. Helping employers to see disabled young people as productive employees is a priority. Samir Ghosh said that employers fear failure because they don’t know much about disability, and also they think that disabled people can’t meet targets: ‘in most cases disability isn’t the centre of the problem, presumptions and negative attitudes are’. Elsewhere in India, Aparna Dass, who works with Cheshire Homes’ Livelihood Resource Centre in Bangalore, detailed how the Centre has built up successful partnerships with hotel groups and others, which has helped employers to see ‘the disabled person as a trained manpower, who can add value at the workplace’ rather than ‘considering the disabled people cheap labour’ as many Indian employers do. Only when employers are more disability-aware will they see that it is in their best interest to provide reasonable accommodations.

4. Market-oriented vocational training

Prashant Verma, a visually impaired assistive technology expert, wrote from experience: ‘On the one hand (young disabled job-seekers) have to confront the lack of sensitivity and awareness in the employers, and on the other hand they are faced with the lack of institutions and training facilities which would help them develop the skills required in the job market’. This view was echoed by many contributors, including Aparna Dass, who wrote, ‘The Vocational Resource Centres and special employment exchanges are a big infrastructure created by the government, which are completely inefficient’ because, according to Samir Ghosh, they are mainly in urban areas, cater for few trainees, are hard to access and, most importantly, are not market-oriented.

The lack of market orientation in vocational training open to young people with disabilities is a big issue throughout the region. Emanuela Pozzan asked, ‘Why it is generally accepted that people with disabilities engage in handicraft work but people have little or no idea of how much more people with disabilities can do?’ Khairil Yusof pointed out that, ‘existing training programmes, such as creating handicrafts, are labour intensive and provide limited income at best. Also, most [computer] training is for disabled people as users (accessibility) and not towards employment opportunities’.

Patrick Daru, based in Indonesia, pointed out that vocational training is teacher or trainer oriented, and does not take the learning needs of the participants into account. While there is some good practice available, ‘skills training in Indonesia goes very much along the lines of the ‘protection model’ that aims at giving ‘some’ skills to youth with disabilities, for whatever they can do, but not geared towards employment.’ Erdenebileg Tudev mentioned that in Mongolia, teaching English to young people with disabilities has given them ‘modern development footholds’ and led to self-employment, but such examples appear to be rare.

In situations of chronic under-employment, such as in Indonesia and in rural India, finding solutions is essential. Meena Shenoy stressed that young people with disabilities need access to good career counselling, too.

5. Inclusive education and training:

Part of the solution lies in ensuring access to mainstream education and vocational training for young people with disabilities. To achieve that also requires major attitudinal change, from training institutions, parents and society alike. One contributor pointed out that inclusion in the region often relies on external funding. When the project ends, the inclusion stops. But many contributors, from all over the region, said that the standard of education offered to young people with disabilities in specialised settings was lower than that offered to the population in general.

Just pushing young people with disabilities into mainstream settings will achieve nothing. Inclusion needs to be well-planned and, as Patrick Daru wrote, it has to take the effects of impairment into full account. Poor education, stigma, over-protection and other pressures take their toll on young disabled people’s confidence, said several Indian contributors. Empowering young people with disabilities and building their confidence and capacity are essential pre-conditions for accessing decent work. It was also proposed to increase accessibility to resources and the use of assistive technologies.

6. Data and statistics:

Contributors noted how there is no coherence in how disability data and statistics are gathered, and how this makes it easy for Governments and others to ‘hide behind the lack of data’ and do little or nothing. A contributor described a recent workshop in Viet Nam in which three key stakeholders presented ‘papers with completely different data/sources on disability and at the end everybody was hiding behind the fact that without data little can be done...’ It’s how the numbers translate into urgency that matters: ‘Take the case of HIV/AIDS - 33 million people living with HIV/AIDS in Asia versus 238 million people with disabilities. Yet HIV has much more attention than disability at political and funding level.’ This brought the discussion back to awareness raising and to the fact that a great deal can be achieved on a commonsense basis, while the statistics are gathered and collated.

Concluding analysis

The enthusiasm, concern and intensity of contributors showed that the issue of how to ensure that young people with disabilities can access decent work is a hot topic with APYN members and Solution Exchange India members alike. Ultimately, all the threads led back to the question of awareness raising, and the urgent need to:

- Assess which methods work best in which circumstances in the region - targeted approaches, in particular, need to be introduced and assessed; and
- Assemble and disseminate throughout the region best practice in targeted awareness raising, disability equality training and various approaches to the business case (for vocational trainers, employers etc) relating to access to decent work for young people with disabilities.

Contributors could see ways forward, once these building blocks are in place. Until now, Governments appear to have been the main target of awareness raising. It is critical that people with disabilities should be aware of their rights through greater advocacy. This discussion forum showed that attention must be given to other stakeholders, too, if real inclusion is to result.

A remarkable aspect of the discussion forum was how pleased so many contributors were that the topic had been raised. This suggests that there might be interest in further discussions on this subject at some point in the future. Similarly, there seems to be scope for thinking about some way of bringing concerned persons together for a creative event to share experiences and best practice, and to look for some helpful directions for the future.

Below is a list of resources and websites that can provide more in-depth information regarding young people with disabilities:

- UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: <http://ap-youthnet.ilobkk.or.th/discussion-lists/vulnerable-youth/disabled-youth/557711912/503718416/UN-CRPD-English.pdf>
- Website, “Delivering Return on Disability”: http://www.returnondisability.com/content/what_we_do.html
- The price of exclusion: the economic consequences of excluding people with disabilities from the world of work: http://www.ilo.org/skills/what/pubs/lang--en/docName--WCMS_119305/index.htm
- Solution Exchange is a UN-sponsored initiative: <http://www.solutionexchange-un.net.in/se.html>

Discussion Statistics

Total number of subscribed members: 55 plus the Work and Employment Community, Solution Exchange India which consists of 3,000+members.

- ILO: 19
- Non-ILO: 36
- Male: 35
- Female: 20

Total number of contributions (from all three streams):

- Week #1: 31
- Week #2: 32
- Week #3: 28

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Moderators: Maureen Gilbert, Anne-Marie Davies and Max Tunon

Forum Participants:

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