



YOUTH, PROSPERITY, AND SECURITY INITIATIVE

ASSESSING YOUTH WELLBEING Toward a Global Youth Wellbeing Index

In partnership with the International Youth Foundation (IYF), the Youth, Prosperity, and Security Initiative at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) is examining the opportunities and challenges facing young people around the world and expanding the conversation about youth and global development, economic growth, national security, and social progress. A signature project of the CSIS-IYF Youth Prosperity and Security Initiative is the Global Youth Wellbeing Index. This index exemplifies a cross-cutting and multi-stakeholder approach to strategically address youth wellbeing and global security. IYF and Hilton Worldwide announced a commitment to support the development of such an Index at the 2012 Clinton Global Initiative. Additional partners are providing unique, privately collected, proprietary data including The Futures Company, YouthPolicy.org, and Youth Business International/Global Entrepreneurship Monitor.

In January 2013, we began designing the framework for a Global Youth Wellbeing Index with the goal of filling a significant gap among the numerous comparative measures of national poverty, development, and wellbeing. The Index will comprise representative indicators in a number of domains including citizenship, education, economic opportunity, health, safety and security, and information and communications technology. To inform the index architecture, we held a series of domain-specific discussions with small groups of thought leaders, sector experts, and stakeholders to consult on the virtues of specific indicators and data sets for each of the six proposed domains. Over 50 individuals from 35 different organizations participated across the sessions. The following are some of the key discussion points and conclusions that will be reflected in the forthcoming final Index framework and inaugural report for select countries, expected to be released January 2014.

WHY AN INDEX?

While there are a number of socioeconomic assessments and national rankings that are important in triggering dialogue and policy reform, none are looking specifically at young people. Yet, with half the world's population being under the age of 25 and young people comprising nearly 40 percent of the population in some countries, it is increasingly evident that national growth, global development, and security are dependent upon addressing youth needs and harnessing their potential. The Index, or summary of measures, seeks to help key

stakeholders make sense of separate, often conflicting data on learning, livelihoods, community or political engagement, health, and other aspects of youth wellbeing. Ultimately, the Index can provide public- and private-sector policymakers and decisionmakers a simpler way to understand the big picture, drive action and investments, and measure progress over time.

WHO ARE YOUTH?

Youth is a stage of life that is neither finite, nor necessarily linear, and is as much a social construct as a term of science to discuss, evaluate, and assess a heterogeneous population group that shares characteristics of transition. These transitions include significant physiological, psychological, social, and economic changes when young people come to be recognized—and recognize themselves—as adults. Youth has come to include adolescents, teens, and young adults and is most often used synonymously with young people (though some do distinguish youth from young people by age).

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For statistical purposes, youth are most often, but not exclusively, defined as those aged 15 to 24 in the global context. On the national level however, youth policy and programs are often designed to reach younger adolescents or young adults. International legal norms and varying thresholds for youth transitions across sectors further complicate this. For example, different markers include the onset of puberty around age 10 (a health-based threshold) and the granting of voting rights, nearly universally at age 18 (a citizenship-based threshold).

Our approach to youth development and associated indicators reflecting the different stages of youth is informed by the rich body of research, scientific, and policy literature including findings summarized in seminal works. These include the Search Institute's Development Assets Profile; *Growing up Global* from the National Academy of Sciences; the 2007 World Development Report from the World Bank, *Development and the Next Generation*; and the 2012 USAID *Youth In Development Policy*. We also drew upon the Millennium Development Goals (MDG)-associated indicators, targets, and the seven youth-specific indicators for monitoring progress, and the report of the UN Experts Group on Indicators for the World Programme of Action on Youth.¹

WHAT IS WELLBEING?

Wellbeing is most commonly used to describe overall quality of life. In nontechnical terms, it has been defined as "the state of being happy, healthy, or prosperous." Development literature has traditionally taken a more technical approach in its definition of wellbeing, associating it with welfare, utility functions, and multidimensional measures of societal growth and progress. Our approach to youth wellbeing draws on the findings of noted economists and social scientists who have explored measurements of poverty, development, social progress, and quality of life.

Over the past two decades, there has been an evolution in the concept of "wellbeing" in the international development discussion. While wellbeing assessment was largely

based on countries' gross domestic product (GDP) through the 1980s, by 1990 international development agencies and programs, such as the UN Development Program (UNDP), had begun to recognize the need for a holistic, more qualitative assessment of international development. Acknowledging this need, the UNDP released the Human Development Report and launched its associated Human Development Index (HDI) in 1990 to provide a composite of global populations' health, education, and income. As a tool "created to emphasize that people and their capabilities should be the ultimate criteria for assessing the development of a country, not economic growth alone,"² the HDI has provided a framework for development indices over the past two decades.

Our approach to youth wellbeing is also infused with findings from the 2009 "Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress," which argues that "quality of life includes the full range of factors that make life worth living, including those that are not traded in markets and not captured by monetary measures."³ We have drawn upon the commission's main recommendations by considering subjective measures of wellbeing and indicators across multiple domains of life.

Similarly, we have incorporated insights from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and its "Your Better Life" Index, which is based on 11 topics the OECD has identified as essential in determining quality of life. These topics range from health and education to local environment, personal security, and overall satisfaction with life, as well as more traditional measures such as income. We have also drawn upon the body of work that has measured "happiness" in Bhutan and elsewhere.

¹ "Quantitative Indicators for the World Programme of Action for Youth: Report of the Expert Group," United Nations, 2012, accessed September 1, 2013, <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/doc12/RD-EGM-YouthIndicators.pdf>.

² "Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs): 2012 Human Development Index (HDI)." UN Development Programme, 2012, accessed September 1, 2013, http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_2013_FAQ_HDI_EN.pdf.

³ Joseph E. Stiglitz, Amartya Sen, and Jean-Paul Fitoussi, "Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress," 2009, 58, accessed September 1, 2013, http://www.stiglitz-sen-fitoussi.fr/documents/rapport_anglais.pdf.

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Incorporating these theoretical perspectives, the Global Youth Wellbeing Index encompasses a set of indicators that address the overall national environment, the status or specific level of youth participation, and youths' outlook and satisfaction across the various domains of their lives and transitions: health, economic opportunity, education, citizenship, safety and security, and information and communications technology (ICT).



WHAT IS POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT?

Positive youth development (PYD) refers to intentional efforts of other youth, adults, communities, government agencies, and schools to provide opportunities for youth to enhance their interests, skills, and abilities into their adulthoods. PYD is a comprehensive framework outlining the support young people need in order to be successful and emphasizing the importance of focusing on youths' strengths instead of their risk factors to ensure all youth become contributing adults. Policymakers often focus on the negative behaviors or risk factors that youth face and emphasize reducing statistics such as teen pregnancy or dropout rates. PYD, on the other hand focuses on building the positive attributes young people for success. It also emphasizes the supports and services necessary to help youth transition through various stages of their development. States and policymakers are beginning to

use this framework to develop policies and programs that will ensure that all youth are ready to learn, work, and live a healthy, engaged, and prosperous life.

KEY POINTS FROM DOMAIN WORKSHOPS

Integrate Positive Youth Development

A PYD-oriented assessment of youth wellbeing should include three principal elements: (1) use of positive, asset-based indicators when appropriate and feasible; (2) youth participation in the process; (3) accounting for youth perceptions and outlook. The Index includes PYD indicators such as receiving a loan, youth literacy rates, as well as subjective measures of youth outlook across all domains. The subjective indicators provide critical insight into how youth feel they are doing in each area of their lives. As recent uprisings across the globe have shown, young people's negative outlook or perceptions of opportunity gaps can drive movements regardless of what data says is the "reality" of their situation.

Account for Enabling Environments, Youth Status, and Outlook

In order to better encompass a holistic account of youth wellbeing, the index utilizes three types of indicators in each domain: national environment, the state of youth specifically, and youth perceptions. The national and enabling environmental measures reflect factors that are not necessarily youth specific, but significantly impact young people's quality of life and opportunities, such as infrastructure or levels of conflict. Youth-specific indicators are those that directly measure the status of youth in a given area, such as youth literacy rates. Youth perception indicators are subjective indicators that reflect youths' outlook, such as whether youth are satisfied with their government.

Limited Age Disaggregated Data

Much of the data is being drawn from large publicly available and verified data sets managed by the World Bank, World Health Organization (WHO), UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, among others. The domain workshops and data mapping have revealed major age disaggregated data gaps across all six

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domains. These gaps reaffirm the crucial role the Index plays as a tool to highlight areas for age disaggregated data collection. Due to these gaps, certain indicators cannot be included (youth voting for example). Another significant data gap is the limited data for subjective indicators. Though surveys among young people are increasing, they still have small sample sizes, lack global scope, and are likely to have a narrow line of inquiry (for example, consumer behavior or political opinion). Recognizing how youth perceive their present environment and future possibilities is a crucial component of the wellbeing of youth. As mentioned, what the data shows can often contradict how youth feel.

Account for Diversity and Equity

Youth are not monolithic; they are a diverse group who share differences and commonalities that often reflect the societies and communities in which they live. Their individual quality of life is likely shaped by factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, marital status, religion, disability, ethnicity and language group, or sexual orientation. We know for example that young men and women experience differences in equity as evidenced by differing rates of education enrollment, access to financial institutions, and health care. Levels of wellbeing also differ, often significantly, between rural and urban areas. Access to jobs, health care, education, and technology, as well as the level of security a young person feels, is impacted by the environment in which they live. Ideally, the Index could account for these inequities, but such disaggregated data does not exist at scale, nor do estimates of sector inequality. In education for example, efforts have been made⁴ to develop a globally comparative nationwide gini coefficient, but such efforts have not been more recently repeated or replicated in other sectors.

⁴ Vinod Thomas, Yan Wang and Xibo Fan, "Measuring Education Inequality: Gini Coefficients of Education," World Bank. 2000.

Limitations of Global Data Coverage

In addition to lacking youth-specific data, global data coverage is also a significant limitation. Data on youth is collected on disparate indicators within sectors, by different institutions, at different times, in differing sets of countries; making credible comparisons challenging. Policy and reforms are increasingly driven by data and evidence—and attention to the needs of young people is all too easily marginalized by their complexity. This provisional framework for the Index will test the model and attain results for a set of 30 countries. These countries account for nearly 70 percent of the world's youth population and are diverse in both geography and income level.

NEXT STEPS

The Index hopes to inspire increased levels of policy dialogue and influence reform, inform the post-2015 MDG agenda, and encourage strategic investment in youth. Following the release of the beta Index for approximately 30 countries, the next steps could also include major new data collection and youth surveys to expand the coverage of the Index, as well as design of and data collection for the Index to assess wellbeing of specific groups of youth as more "big" data becomes available—for example young women and girls or urban youth. As a tool, the Index framework could be used to undertake deeper-dive domain, country, and regional case studies in additional countries.

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