



Loud & Clear

Listening to and learning from what youth say about the world

international
youth
foundation®



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Introduction

Friend,

As governments, development organizations, and corporations set their sights on solving vexing challenges like poverty, gender inequality, and climate change, too often the world treats the burgeoning youth population as silent victims, or—worse still—part of the problem to be solved. What if those in positions of power shifted their approach to see young people as an integral part of the solution? What if youth voices were permitted to resonate through the world of global development? What if youth were not only heard, but really listened to—and heeded?

The world is home to more young people than ever before, and these young men and women possess ideas and a longing to contribute. To neglect youth agency and ignore or stifle youth voices is to isolate and disenfranchise youth. In contrast, engaging with them and equipping them to take a proactive role in their communities, cities, and countries can spur growth and progress. Indeed, any system, institution, or platform geared toward serving them benefits from hearing their first-hand experiences, unvarnished opinions, and fresh approaches.

Throughout IYF's 27 years, we've strived to prepare youth to be drivers of development, to create ecosystems of support in which they can thrive, and to position them at the center of the global development dialogue. Working for, and with, young people to empower them to be healthy, productive, engaged citizens has contributed to IYF's youth program design and evaluation, and at any time two young leaders serve on IYF's board of directors.

In this e-book, a collection of posts published on our blog, you will meet 2009 YouthActionNet® Fellow and former IYF board member Dina Buchbinder, and hear her thoughts on how organizations can take the youth perspective into account. You'll be introduced to IYF's team in Kazakhstan and learn the benefits that come from a youth-led team. You'll meet a dozen other extraordinary young women and men around the globe—from Baltimore to Mozambique, from the Dominican Republic to Morocco—who are not only benefitting from youth development programming, but leading the charge, directing the conversations, and creating the futures they desire and deserve.

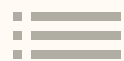
In the following pages, we celebrate young people's individual perspectives, drive, and talent. You will read stories about—and by—an amazing, diverse ensemble of young people whose voices matter, and whose voices have, in many cases, found an attentive ear. While the challenges facing our world are great, a generation of youth is poised to lead change and be actors in development. Join us in supporting them and believing in their power and potential. Join us in listening and learning. The time is right now.

Warm regards,

Ashok Regmi

Director, Social Innovation

INTERNATIONAL YOUTH FOUNDATION



UN Youth Assembly Previews Global Youth Wellbeing Index Findings

By Lara Henneman

AUGUST 17, 2017

Research concerning youth issues needs to be shared first and foremost with youth audiences for their input and use. In this spirit, IYF and Hilton previewed the 2017 Global Youth Wellbeing Index Executive Summary at the 2017 UN Youth Assembly on August 11 for more than 350 youth delegates from around the world. This audience of dynamic and conscientious 16- to 28-year-olds agreed with key Index findings, particularly those around gender equality and mental health, and raised some interesting questions of their own.

The 2017 Global Youth Wellbeing Index, commissioned by Hilton and produced by IYF, assesses young people's access—or often lack of access—to opportunities in seven domains. Covering five regions, the countries included in the Index are home to almost 70 percent of the world's youth. With an emphasis on listening to and amplifying young people's perspectives, the Index features data from our 2016 survey of thousands of young men and women in addition to



“Having strong life skills—being a problem solver and a team player—are critical in today’s economy.”

objective data indicators.

At the UN Youth Assembly, Daniella Foster, Hilton's Senior Director for Corporate Responsibility, introduced the report and underscored the crucial role young people will play in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals. IYF President and Chief Operating Officer (COO) Susan Reichle highlighted the top findings from the Index and

urged the audience to “use the data to make real change as part of their advocacy efforts in their home countries.” When she shared that Index data indicates that 89 percent of young survey respondents believe in gender equality, the delegates erupted in cheers.

After the panel, I had the opportunity to interview some of the delegates on their reactions to the Index findings. For Madeleine Kausel, a student at McGill University in Canada, one that hit home was the pressing need for young people to have access to better mental health care. “Mental health care is so important for students in university, and there’s very little support for it.” She added, “Students across Canada are starting to lobby their schools for better support. Mental health problems are pervasive across socioeconomic and educational levels.”

A rising junior, Madeleine is interested in corporate responsibility work and believes that the private sector has the power to do “an enormous amount of good by incorporating social investments into business strategy, not relegated to the side as traditional philanthropy.” After the event, she approached Foster, from Hilton, for career advice. “Having strong life skills—being a problem solver and a team player—are critical in today’s economy,” Foster told her. “The ability to adapt to change, effectively communicate, and work across functions and sectors is an asset for young people.”

“While it’s not without challenges,
public service careers can offer young
people the **opportunity to see the
world and to change it.**”

Rachel McCave, a delegate from the United States, identified with the Index economic opportunity finding that young people are optimistic about their financial futures. Seventy-four percent of youth surveyed across Index countries believe that they will be able to get the kind of job that they want, and 59 percent think that their standard of living will be higher than that of their parents.

The child of immigrants, Rachel shared with me that “immigrants assume that their children’s standard of living will be better than theirs. That’s part of the reason they move to new countries.” She also wondered about the impact of cultural change on mental health, adding, “If you feel like your cultural identity is under attack, then how does that impact youth wellbeing?”

Rachel is interested in a foreign service career and asked for advice from IYF’s President and COO, who

transitioned to IYF in 2017 after 25 years at USAID.

Reichle shared, “While it’s not without challenges, public service careers can offer young people the opportunity to see the world and to change it.”

To learn more about Index and its top 10 findings, read the 2017 Global Youth Wellbeing Index Executive Summary.

Lara Henneman is Manager, Corporate Programs, and one of the Index authors.

What Does Sustainability Mean to the World's Young People?

By Kim R. McCormick

SEPTEMBER 6, 2016

For International Youth Day, we asked a subset of the young people our initiatives reach around the world about that day's theme: the role of youth in fighting poverty and driving sustainability. The United Nations, whose decree makes August 12 a day where the world focuses on youth power and potential, defined sustainability in environmental terms, but the word holds different meanings for young people from Mexico to Mozambique.

The answers to the question "What does sustainability mean to you in your daily life?" reflect meaningful geographic and socioeconomic differences. They also confirm something we've long known: just how practical, thoughtful, and capable young students, employees, business owners, and innovators really are. The world must engage them as agents of change if we want to reach the Sustainable Development Goals.



“Sustainability means
improvement, innovation,
creativity.”

Environmental sustainability

Many of the young people our staff spoke to offered answers that align with the definition of sustainability in terms of conservation. “Sustainability is a way in which I can satisfy my needs without sacrificing resources,” says Conrado, a 19-year-old participant in EquipYouth Mexico.

In Latin America, this global employability initiative is a NEO-associated project.

Responses from Palestine highlighted rights and fairness. “Sustainability means equal rights: all people on earth have same rights, and equity in resources distribution, including water, home, air, and earth, says Daniel, 23, who participated in Youth Entrepreneurship Development, funded by USAID West Bank and Gaza. “As you have the right to access resources, you must have the duty to preserve it to continue for future generations.”

In Morocco, participants in Emploi Habilité cited specific examples of ways their environments were changing. “In my town ... the expansion of the city caused a lot of damage to the forest. Someday, the image I have of Kenitra, my city, will just be a distant memory, but the forest should belong to everyone—even the children who aren’t born yet,” says Yassir, 23, a graduate of our Passport to Success® life skills training. Fatima, 22, adds, “We must give nature time to regenerate.”

Entrepreneurial sustainability

Zimbabwe:Works (Z:W) is one of several IYF work readiness initiatives with an entrepreneurship component, and responses from participants indicate they have developed sharp minds for business. Dudzai, 29 and owner of a catering company, says for her, “Sustainability

means improvement, innovation, creativeness. If I’m not creative or innovative, my business will collapse.”

Rudo, a 31-year-old chemical engineer, also is thinking ahead—and thinking green. “In my line of business, sustainability means being able to pay employees on time and able to let the organization run even in my absence,” she says. Her company, which employs other youth, sells soap made from oils that would otherwise be wasted.

Z:W is supported by the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID), the US Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Embassy of

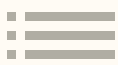
“As you have the **right** to access resources, you must have the **duty** to preserve it to continue for future generations.”

Sweden, in partnership with Zimbabwe’s Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprise and Cooperative Development.

Personal and family sustainability

In Kazakhstan, 16-year-old Assem spoke generally about sustainability, saying it means to “give a fishing rod, not a fish.” He is a participant in Zangar, a STEM and life skills-focused initiative carried out in partnership with Chevron.

Nearly 10,000 miles away, in Argentina, Anna, 22, sees a need for order and implications for how people and systems work together. This participant in the Walmart



Social Retail Training initiative, a NEO-associated project carried out in partnership with the Walmart Foundation, says, “The way to be sustainable is to divide tasks and share responsibility. Organize—not just at work, but also in a family and society.”

For others still, the word sustainability takes on a deeply person meaning. It becomes about dedicating time and resources for the well-being of their loved ones and themselves as individuals. “To me, sustainability means investing in your own education, so that in the future you have a permanent job that will ensure that you can support your family,” says Sabino, 18 and a participant in Escolhas, a partnership with Mozal in Mozambique.

“At first, sustainability for me meant caring for the environment, resources, and nature,” says Ayse Bor, 29, a social entrepreneur from Turkey and 2015 Laureate Global Fellow. “Later, I discovered about sustainability of the human being: slowing down, creating bonds, taking care of ourselves

and one another as well as the environment. Now I think being ‘sustainable’ is not enough, what I believe in is ‘love’—loving nature, loving people, loving myself, loving what I do. When there is love, all else will follow.”

Kim R. McCormick is IYF’s Editorial Manager.

My Hands-On Experience in a NEO Internship in the Dominican Republic

Vinioles Aquino Mieses

AUGUST 3, 2017

As happens too often in Latin America, youth in my home country, the Dominican Republic, have access only to poor quality technical and technological education. Our training institutions do not provide the necessary tools and methodologies to prepare us for an increasingly demanding job market. When we complete our studies, we are left without direction.

As a result, approximately 20 percent of Dominicans ages 15 to 24 are not in employment, education, or training (NEETs). The NEET phenomenon particularly affects young women like me: six of every 10 NEETs in the country are women.

The New Employment Opportunities (NEO) initiative is working to change this throughout Latin America and the Caribbean by bringing together key stakeholders from the private, public, and civil society sectors to close skills



“When we complete our studies, we are left without direction.”

gaps and offer the region’s youth market-driven training. I am 19 years old and one of 26,000 youth participants in the NEO Dominican Republic alliance.

Thanks to NEO’s quality standards tool and the creation of 23 job and internship placement offices (OILPs), the capacity of 26 regional service providers in the public and civil sectors has improved dramatically,

enabling these organizations to better provide life skills, job placement, effective teaching, and/or career guidance to youth like me.

The Instituto Politécnico de Hainamosa, where I studied, for example, learned how to implement career guidance and internship services that allowed me to secure a three-month internship as a technical electrician for CRINSA JR SRL, an electromechanical contracting company.

When I joined the company, I realized the significant role the OILPs play by connecting youth in polytechnic high schools with companies, and even more so in the case of young women pursuing non-traditional careers in the Dominican Republic. It became clear to me that without the NEO-facilitated OILPs, internships like mine would not have been available.

During my internship, I had the opportunity to perform tasks from the start through implementation in the field, allowing me to gain full understanding of the process. My tasks included testing the operation of the company's facilities and electrical systems and developing and interpreting electric plans and diagrams. I also learned how to conduct myself in a work environment and to strive to achieve my goals. I learned that responsibility,

efficiency, dedication, and loyalty are critical to success.

The internship process not only allowed me to earn my professional technical degree, but also provided me a unique experience that contributed to my academic education and personal growth. After the internship ended, the company hired me as an engineering and industrial security assistant.

I'm deeply grateful to the educational community for their support during my time as a student: by sharing their knowledge, patience, and respect, they have helped me

“The internship process not only allowed me to earn my professional technical degree, but also provided me a **unique experience** that contributed to my academic **education** and **personal growth.**”

build my future. Thanks to the support and trust of people like my colleagues at CRINSA JR, I have learned a lot.

And I learn more every day.

Vinioles Aquino Miseses participated in NEO in the Dominican Republic.

Meet the Young Team in Kazakhstan Advancing STEM Education

Matthew Hobson

NOVEMBER 9, 2017

Millennials—individuals born between 1980 and 2000—currently account for 34 percent of the global workforce and, according to a [Brookings](#) estimate, the number could soar to 75 percent by 2025. As baby boomers occupying the upper echelon of corporations retire, millennials will take on greater leadership roles and responsibilities.

When Assem Satmukhambetova, 30, was assembling a team for a new IYF initiative in [Kazakhstan](#), age wasn't necessarily a criterion she considered. "I was looking for people who shared the values and vision of the organization—people who are passionate and driven to work hard to make a difference," the Program Director says. As a recent article in [Forbes](#) noted, mission-oriented ambition is a hallmark of millennials in the workplace, with 84 percent placing the ability to make a lasting difference at the top of their professional goals. For mission-driven non-profits like IYF, this bodes well.

The six-person team in Kazakhstan works on IYF's [Chevron-funded Zangar initiative](#), which equips young



**“My favorite part ... is
talking to youth directly
during focus groups.”**

women and men in Kazakhstan's Atyrau region to find and retain employment by coupling life skills development with science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) training. When Zangar launched in 2015, the inclusion of [STEM programming](#) into the standard educational curriculum was in its infancy in Kazakhstan, but it's grown impressively in the last two years, due in

large part to the passion of the team—as seen from left to right in the photo:

Tolkyn Omarova, Program Manager, 31: “My favorite part of the work I do is talking to youth directly during focus groups, getting young people’s insights, and hearing how the program positively influences their lives.”

Maira Abakanova, Finance and Administration Manager, 46: “I am proud that, for two years, our team has been successfully implementing the Zangar program—now it’s known locally and country-wide.”

Assem Satmukhambetova, Program Director, 30: “We strive to be trusted by the people we serve.”

Meirgul Alpysbayeva, Program Manager, 31: “Since I work on the life skills component, I am proud of our trainers who deliver Passport to Success® (PTS) trainings to Atyrau’s youth and of the youth who achieve success with the help of our program.”

Nurzhan Amangossoy, Program Manager, 25: “I’m proud of the amazing programs we offer and seeing the youth use the skills they learn in real life.”

Ainur Orynova, Administration Assistant, 22: “The first time I heard about Zangar was on Instagram. Now, I am proud to be contributing to youth development in Kazakhstan.”

Perhaps the greatest boon of having a relatively young team is felt by Zangar’s beneficiaries—youth ranging in

age from 10 to 22. According to one young IT student, “I liked that we had a young coordinator, who was always available for us, either in person or by Skype. This helped with discussing ideas without hesitation.” Beneficiaries like this one often report finding it easy to connect and trust the young team, particularly the three program managers with whom they frequently engage directly. Satmukhambetova explains, “Our team tries to lead by example because we recognize that many youth look to us as role models.”

Their ages also mean many team members share a similar frame of reference with the youth they serve and, on a personal level, understand the specific challenges Kazakhstani youth face. The team’s willingness and ability to engage openly with the youth they serve is a characteristic shared by many millennials. According to a recent CNBC op-ed, millennials value mentorship, pour themselves into work they believe in, and recognize

life skills—like effective communication—as critically important.

Findings from the 2017 Global Youth Wellbeing Index make clear that young people want to take an active role in shaping the future of the workplace, and the world. At IYF, we ensure youth representation on committees, on our board, and at the helm of projects, programs, and initiatives. Today, with an average age of 30, the team in Kazakhstan illustrates what strong youth leadership looks like and the contributions a dedicated, talented, passionate staff—of any age—can make.

“I’m proud of the work we’re doing,” Satmukhambetova says. “They are my dream team.”

Matthew Hobson is IYF’s Web Writer.

“The first time I heard about Zangar was on Instagram. Now, I am **proud to be contributing** to youth development in Kazakhstan.”

Young People Voice Ways to Make a Better Future in Mozambique

Helena Chambuluka Cikanda

JUNE 8, 2017

The Via: Pathways to Work initiative had its official launch event in early May in Maputo, Mozambique. Many distinguished guests attended, but it was the energetic participation of young people that had the most impact. All day they raised their voices and made themselves heard. As the senior manager for operations and learning at the IYF Mozambique office, I had worried about the event going as planned, and the content of the event was equally important to me. In my almost 40 years, I had seen similar events that ended up being just opportunities for complaining, but that day something different was in store for me.

A partnership with the Mastercard Foundation and local entities GAPI, IFPELAC, and INEP, Via: Pathways to Work focuses on entrepreneurship opportunities and technical and vocational education training (TVET). The initiative addresses the reality of mixed livelihoods for



“... it was the strong
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youth in Mozambique and Tanzania: unable to find work in the formal sector, these young people work a combination of jobs to earn a living. To provide a broad basis of support, youth who take part in Via receive a mix of life skills training, entrepreneurship training, mentorship, access to financial support, technical training in a market-relevant trade, and job placement support.

At the event, rather than complaints, the constructive discussion identified areas of real opportunity. Everyone listened as one young man, youth panelist Sergio Libilo, emphasized the importance of “cultivating motivation in young people to enable them to create and undertake more formal and informal work.” Youth from Maputo City shared their job-seeking experiences, discussed the difficulties faced by young people in the job market, and suggested solutions. These included career guidance; support in knowing how to look for work; more focus on life skills, especially self-confidence; interview coaching; and more hands-on training.

“One problem is that universities are not able to place students in internships,” said youth panelist Gércia Sequeira. “They need to strengthen ties with the private sector.”

One young woman, Marlene de Sousa, shared how her job seeking efforts led her to create Attitude, a company that works to prepare Mozambican youth for the job market through coaching and counseling. “The solution starts with defining concrete personal objectives,” she said. “A young person must have a high knowledge of his or her own potential and maintain the right attitude to not only wait for the right opportunity to come but also to conquer those opportunities that will lead us to achieving our objectives of becoming successful professionals.”

“[Universities] need to **strengthen ties with the private sector.**”

It was captivating for me to see the young people present calling for the creation of youth advisory groups to help them voice their concerns about specific policies and regulations geared towards youth engagement, something already conceived of as part of Via but which has not yet been initiated. By the end of the event, several young people in attendance had already been inspired to put down their names to be part of such a group, which IYF staff will soon launch to ensure that their voices are heard.

While I enjoyed all aspects of the Via event, it was the strong youth voices in the room that most inspired me. I left motivated to continue working hard to achieve IYF’s

goals in Mozambique and Tanzania, and with renewed confidence that with the support of IYF and our partners, the young people of Mozambique are on the right path to succeed.

No matter which path they choose, they won’t have to walk alone.

Helena Chambuluka Cikanda is Senior Manager, Operations & Learning, in Mozambique.

Young People Tell Us How They Are Fighting Poverty & Driving Sustainability

IYF

AUGUST 12, 2016

Smart, passionate young people are hungry to continue creating meaningful and lasting change for their families, their communities, and the world. For International Youth Day, we set out to hear directly from young people around the globe and share their take on this year's theme, centered on two of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The thoughtful responses from a dozen youth who've participated in our initiatives underscore what IYF has known for 26 years: young people are the world's greatest resource. To reach the SDGs, the world must engage them as the agents of change they already are—entrepreneurs, peer educators, job creators, and community leaders—and support them in realizing their full potential.

This year, International Youth Day focuses on poverty eradication (Goal 1) and sustainable consumption and production (Goal 12). For our informal survey, we asked a



**“If all young people can
access work, we can help
irradiate poverty.”**

sampling of young people these questions:

- How can young people help end poverty?
- What does sustainability mean to you in your daily life?
- How are young people making their lives, their communities, and the world greener?

Responses from Latin America focused on skill-

building so that young people can secure employment and provide for themselves and their families. “If all young people can access work, we can help eradicate poverty,” says Rafael, 19. Living in Argentina, he is a participant in the Walmart Social Retail Training initiative, a NEO-associated project carried out in partnership with the Walmart Foundation.

Many other young people answered the first question by emphasizing the importance of creating opportunities through entrepreneurship. “We are creating productive initiatives in business, education, and training,” says Nat, a 20-year old participant in the TK Foundation-funded Orale initiative in Mexico.

Young entrepreneurs like Rudo, 31, in Zimbabwe take the thought one step further, because she is now in a position of being a job creator. “My current business grew from self-owned to a partnership,” says the Zimbabwe:Works (Z:W) participant. “As a chemist, I want to see myself establishing industries that can employ other young people. Currently I’m employing seven casual workers a day. If funds were available and the project running at full capacity, I could employ more than 30 casual people and five full-time employees.” Z:W is supported by the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID), the US Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Embassy of Sweden, in

“We need to help youth **know their internal ability**—giving them trust by showing them how to use their circumstances, environment, and obstacles **in a positive way.**”

partnership with Zimbabwe’s Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprise and Cooperative Development.

Self-employment also offers young people opportunities to effect positive change within their communities. In Jordan, 24-year-old social entrepreneur Mariam says, “I was from a household that made no income. I started very small, and now my project, Ibda’a, trains women from my community and disabled people, helping them generate income independently.” Mariam is a 2012 Fellow of BADIR, a YouthActionNet® national partner and an initiative of IYF, Starbucks, and M.H. Alshaya, Co.

Encouraging this kind of entrepreneurship requires

faith in young people’s inherent capabilities, says Nedjma in Algeria. This 25-year-old was a participant in the IDMAJ initiative, completed in cooperation with the US Embassy in Algiers and USAID. “We need to help youth know their internal ability—giving them trust by showing them how to use their circumstances, environment, and obstacles in a positive way,” Nedjma says. “For example, creating projects like cultivating the gambouzia fish that promotes health by eating mosquitos that can spread malaria.”

Across continents, in Kazakhstan, 15-year-old Daniyar is participating in Zangar, an initiative focusing on STEM and Passport to Success® life skills that is being carried out in partnership with Chevron. Daniyar says, “Things

like knowledge and skills are much more important than physical objects, like a school building. There must be many well-trained cohorts of trainers that will help other people find their best abilities.”

2012 Laureate Global Fellow Tolulope, 30, of Nigeria shared a similar thought. “Young people can help reduce and end poverty by first loving their neighbors as themselves, including the development of individual’s finding and fulfilling purpose,” she says. “Young people can do this via peer-to-peer educational support.”

“Poverty ends when we are well aware of our needs as a nation, when youth have real knowledge about the problems facing our country and the roots to the problems and a vision of what needs to be done,” says Ghassan, 29, a 2015 BADIR fellow in Jordan.

For our questions about sustainability and “thinking green,” many young people offered current examples. Several responses across regions emphasized a need to recycle. “It’s simple and doable by everyone. Instead of throwing things away, we are able to produce beautiful things,” says BADIR fellow Mariam.

Also mentioned as meaningful were organized community events for activities like trash collection and tree planting. “Clean up campaigns are very common with the youth and should be promoted,” says Tinasche, 25, a participant in Zimbabwe:Works. “Personally, every year

I participate in at least two.” Ramiro, 21 and a participant in EquipYouth Mexico, echoed the sentiment, saying that young people need to set an example by picking up litter. EquipYouth in Latin America is a NEO-associated employability initiative.

In Palestine, two participants in the Youth Entrepreneurship Development initiative, funded by USAID West Bank and Gaza, spoke to the importance of green building. Mona, a 24-year-old architect says, it “guides me to think all the time of saving resources and being creative in finding new ideas that can make a difference in my society.” Daniel, 23, elaborates on the idea with an example, saying, “Since we are suffering from water scarcity in Palestine, we encourage people to take into consideration while planning for new buildings the need to dig wells to gather and benefit from the rain in the winter.”

Young entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe also spoke to the ways their businesses support sustainable consumption and production. “At my [catering] business we do not encourage selling food in disposable containers,” says Dudzai, 29, a Zimbabwe:Works participant. “Rather, people are encouraged to sit down and have their meals on plates. In terms of waste disposal, we separate based on whether or not something can be composted, and we use a pit for composting.”

Rudo, the chemist and small business owner, says, “Instead of oil being released to rivers or other waste disposal mechanisms, we are putting it to good use by recycling it in the production of soap.”

Young people are incorporating environmental sustainability into their daily lives, their business plans, and their long-term way of seeing and interacting with the world. They’re also thinking creatively and practically about their role in ending poverty. If the world is to meet the ambitious Sustainable Development Goals, we must engage these youth as drivers of change.

How Two Youth Mentors in Mexico Found Their Callings

Andrea Padilla

FEBRUARY 9, 2016

Working at IYF has given me the privilege to travel to various cities in Mexico, with the aim of training local partners to implement our Órale youth employability model. With every new place I visit, I find a new and stimulating team of young professionals who will be trained as youth-to-youth facilitators, mentors, and counselors. And with every new team, the same faces come to my mind: the young people that started it all, back in 2011 in Ciudad Juarez.

When the initiative was known as Youth:Work Mexico (YWM), which was funded by USAID, I worked as Office Manager, and that's how I got to know our team of peer-to-peer leaders. Those youth were special. They were young people who took upon themselves the responsibility to transform their community. Besides being one of the country's most violent and crime-ridden cities, Ciudad Juarez offers limited opportunities for young people to reach their full potential.

"When I joined Youth:Work as a youth mentor, I felt



"I felt like I was part of something big, a big force."

like I was part of something big, a big force," says Daniel, now 24. He used to spend his free time volunteering at our office. He would fix printers or organize materials, and he used to help me with logistics for special events like graduation ceremonies, job fairs, or team meetings.

Since the project ended, we've kept in touch via Facebook, and we've also met through community

activities around the city. I remember one day at the office Daniel told me he wanted to buy a used bike, because he was thinking about not using his car anymore. He has gone on to help found La City Ride, which promotes cycling in the Ciudad Juarez/El Paso border area by organizing bike rides where participants learn about social issues.

“Before Youth:Work, most of us were young, restless people with isolated efforts to make a change in our city,” Daniel says, “Now I see that everyone has reached a professional development that amazes me.”

I also have kept in contact with Abigail, 26, a former YWM counselor. I remember her being the kind of team member who always had something to share with me about the young people she was working with. She took the experiences of her youth groups as her own; their challenges, their life stories were hers too.

After the initiative ended, she worked for our local partner Empréndete Juárez, who adopted the YWM model, and I had the opportunity to keep working her in my role as Program Officer. Abigail now works as Entrepreneurship Coordinator for the Community Foundation of the Northern Border. She continues to work with disadvantaged youth of Ciudad Juarez, supporting and empowering them to start and successfully manage their own businesses.

Through her job, she’s using the tools she learned as a

“[Youth:Work] was the best thing that has happened to my professional career. I found my career path. **I found my vocation.**”

YWM counselor, such as developing cooperative networks, facilitating, and especially how to interact with at-risk youth. Her plans include focusing her master’s degree thesis on social entrepreneurship, so that in the future she can have her own socially responsible business.

“Before Youth:Work, I didn’t have any experience working with youth nor in the social sector, but I was empathetic to the challenges of unemployed youth,” she

says. YWM, Abigail adds, was “the best thing that has happened to my professional career. I found my career path. I found my vocation.”

Andrea Padilla is an IYF Program Officer in Mexico.

3 Ways to Tap Young Leaders' Critical Insight into Global Goals

Lisa Jones

JUNE 30, 2016

“On a continent where leaders have been in power longer than most people have been alive, we need something new, something that works.” These are the words of [Siyanda Mohutsiwa](#), a youth activist from Botswana and stand-out speaker at the recent [World Bank Global Youth Forum](#).

Siyanda, known for her TED Talk, [How Young Africans Found a Voice on Twitter](#), highlighted the long-standing issue of youth as beneficiaries, not drivers, of development and decision-making around the globe. Fortunately, as the [youth bulge balloons to record numbers](#), stakeholders in development are recognizing that efforts for change are simply less effective when youth, those most inextricably linked to the existing issues, are left out of the process.

“We used to try to convince governments that they needed to include youth voices,” explained [Roby](#)



“...we need something
new, something
that works.”

[Senderowitsch](#), panel moderator and Manager of Leadership, Learning, and Innovation at the World Bank, “but now governments are coming to us, looking for ways to include youth.”

To tap young people’s creativity and insights in solving pressing global issues, the World Bank is launching the [Global Partnership for Youth in Development](#), a coalition

of global stakeholders who share a commitment to youth inclusion and leadership. Adding to the momentum is the UK Department for International Development (DFID), which recently announced plans to put youth at the heart of its work through a comprehensive Youth Agenda.

With this growing consensus, the question remains: how do we move beyond superficial efforts to 'listen' to youth and ensure that institutions with the resources to affect change seek out young people as credible advisors, collaborators, and organizers in solving the greatest challenges of our time?

I asked this question to several young leaders at the forum, each a member of YouthActionNet®'s global network of 1,350-plus social entrepreneurs under 30. They offered these suggestions to institutions looking to include youth in development:

- **Be clear in your request and consult the right young people.** "Organizations often try to lump all youth into one category," explained Daniel Uribe, founder of Costas Verdes in Costa Rica, "but the reality is, we are individuals with different expertise and experiences to offer." Daniel called for development decision makers to be more concrete and organized in approaching youth for input. He cited strategies such as quotas for youth on a board or advisory committee, because doing so ensures relevant youth

perspectives will be involved the moment high-level decisions are made.

- **Set targets and measure progress.** "A first step that every institution can take is to assess how you are including youth now—not as beneficiaries, but in program design and implementation," suggests Cherrie Atilano, founder of AGREA in the Philippines. "Once you better understand the gap that exists between where your organization is and where you need to be in terms of youth inclusion, you can then set targets and develop an intentional strategy in

"We used to try to convince governments that they needed to include youth voices, but now governments are coming to us, looking for ways to include youth."

consultation with knowledgeable young people."

- **Partner with youth-led organizations.** "Governments and global organizations are looking for solutions that are culturally-relevant and supported by local communities," acknowledged Waly Ndiaye, founder of Help the Street Children in Senegal. "Youth-led organizations combine the best of innovation, community trust, and local experience, but struggle with securing investments due to the stigma surrounding youth."

Young people are our greatest allies in driving

sustainable change. If we invest our hope in young people but not our resources, we miss out on the creative, agile, and locally rooted insights and strategies that are key to unlocking progress on issues ranging from climate change to racial discrimination and gender inequality.

“There will be no progress on the Sustainable Development Goals,” warned IYF President & CEO Bill Reese in his opening remarks at the forum, “if we do not tap the spirit, talent, and human resources of young people today.”

Development organizations need not squander precious time huddled together in board rooms searching for the secrets to youth-led development. Young people already have concrete ideas for increasing their involvement; we just have to ask. And then of course, act.

Lisa Jones is Program Manager, YouthActionNet®.

Dina Buchbinder Auron: How Your Board Can Benefit from Youth Voices

IYF

NOVEMBER 30, 2015

Dina Buchbinder Auron is Founder and President of Educación para Compartir (formerly Deport-es para Compartir), which works in multiple countries to “form better citizens from childhood through the power of play.” In 2009, she was selected as a YouthActionNet® Global Fellow, and in 2012 joined IYF’s Board of Directors as one of two youth members. As she nears the end of her term, Dina, now finishing a master’s degree at Harvard’s Kennedy School, reflects on her experience and what makes an effective board.

Why are youth views so critical to the governance of an organization like IYF?

It’s significant that IYF takes the voices of young people into account. If you’re committed to positive youth development, you need to hear from youth; their



“The global youth population is the largest it’s ever been; they **need to have a voice at the table.**”

perspectives need to inform your efforts at the highest level of decision-making.

What do you feel is one of your strongest legacies as a board member?

I’m extremely passionate about how IYF communicates what it does, and I’m proud to be a vocal advocate for IYF and its mission. There are success

stories everywhere; yet they're not as loud as the depressing news we so often hear in the media about youth challenges worldwide. IYF has a great story to tell. What better way to do so than through sharing the voices and perspectives of the young people we serve. IYF's contribution through the Global Youth Wellbeing Index is significant—and there's even more we can do to capture the needs of youth, their views, their hopes and dreams for their futures, and their contributions. The global youth population is the largest it's ever been; they need to have a voice at the table.

What did you learn through your board service?

My organization in Mexico is eight years-old. IYF just turned 25. The IYF board is more advanced and more developed than mine. I love my board and am very proud of them, but there are ways we could improve. My experience on the IYF board taught me what it means to manage an organization that's larger, more experienced, and operating all over the world. There's a lot that goes with that: having clear goals and strategies, managing human resources, delivering the best programs possible across diverse cultures, measuring your impact, and embracing every opportunity to learn and improve. And you need to be able to communicate your story.

“If you’re inviting youth, you need to truly **listen to their opinions,** to take them into account, to integrate them equally, and to **profit from their fresh perspectives.** This is what IYF does.”

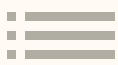
Given your experience on the IYF board—and with your own board—what advice do you have for young leaders in creating an effective governing body?

First, you need a clear plan for developing your board based on where your organization is headed. What are the areas of expertise you need to move forward? It's key to choose people who are aligned with your values and mission. You need to look for allies, professionals representing diverse sectors, and then work with them to

create a real team. IYF board members are impeccably committed and active in pursuing solutions. They're people who care profoundly about our mission and who will always be young in spirit.

What advice do you have for other organizations seeking to incorporate youth views at the board level?

If you're inviting youth, you need to truly listen to their opinions, to take them into account, to integrate them



equally, and to profit from their fresh perspectives. You need to receive them with an open mind and to value their contributions. This is what IYF does. It also helps to make sure they're prepared for their role. As part of my board orientation, I spent time talking to IYF's team and being exposed to different parts of the organization.

What are your hopes for IYF's future?

My hope is that IYF continues its life-changing work in creating possibilities for young people. Through programs like Passport to Success®, IYF helps youth see their self-worth and maximize their talents. IYF believes passionately in youth and in their potential; something I know from my experience as a YouthActionNet Fellow. Imagine, an international organization coming into your life and saying, 'we think you're great and your work is important.'

It's easy to let the problems of the world consume us. Organizations like IYF remind you that there's much light as well. I'm illuminated by that light. It allows me to move forward with strength, clarity, and conviction. I will always be an IYF ambassador, a proud and active emerita board member.



Message to Baltimore Youth: “Make Your Voices Heard”

Sheila Kinkade

MARCH 2, 2017

On a crisp winter morning, 10 youth from West Baltimore took their seats around a well-worn conference table at the Westside YO Center. Over the next two hours, they shared their stories while learning about grassroots movements and fellow youth who are speaking out and standing up.

This is what bottom-up change looks like in its most embryonic form.

Joining at IYF’s invitation, youth leaders Lashon Amado from Boston, Shawnice Jackson from East Baltimore, Daniel Martinez from Mexico, and Luke Rodgers from the United Kingdom kick-started the conversation. All younger than 30, these four are advisors to (Re)Connecting Youth, an initiative that aims to identify global lessons that can be applied to meet the needs of disconnected youth in the United States.

The Baltimore youth began by candidly reflecting on the challenges they face.

“There are so many abandoned homes, I don’t let my



“**The hood raised me.**
The hood made me.
I’m not ashamed.”

children go out and play,” said Novella Chase, 25, of her neighborhood’s windowless row houses with boarded up doors.

“In the summer there’s nothing to do but stand on the street corner,” echoed James Baytop, 19, who spoke to the need for more recreational opportunities for youth.

“It’s easier to get a gun in your hand than to fill out a job application,” added Mary Carter Johnson, a 27-year-old

mother of three, pointing to the allure of firearms in a city plagued by drug-related violence.

Each described communities' problems while expressing their desire to be part of the solution. Although these young people grew up many miles away from their international peers, their life experiences were surprisingly similar.

Daniel, 25, described his role in forming a citywide youth movement to combat the violence characterizing his hometown of Cuidad Juarez, considered the most dangerous place on earth from 2008 to 2012.

Luke, the 25-year-old founder of Foster Focus in the UK, shared his experience as someone who transitioned out of foster care, who now works to reform a system that too often stigmatizes the very youth it serves.

These young leaders related instantly to the challenges and aspirations of their hosts while sharing stories of resilience and positive youth-led change.

"The hood raised me. The hood made me. I'm not ashamed," said Lashon, 29, of his formative years growing up in Boston. Now just months away from earning a master's degree in sociology, he recounted dropping out of school, spending time in jail, and dodging gunfire. Lashon says the love he received from staff at a youth program set him on a path to improve the lives of others who grew up like he did. He is now leading the effort through Opportunity Youth United (OYU) to amplify youth voices in the United States.

"People will be inspired by you, just as I'm inspired by you. Don't wait for them to come to you. **Make your voices heard.**"

Lashon encouraged his Baltimore peers to be proactive in speaking out about the issues they care about. "If you want people to take you seriously, you need to learn about the system; you need to show up," he urged, offering examples from registering to vote to speaking up at town hall meetings.

"We need to hold politicians accountable," added Shawnice, who works as a Post-High School Individual Support Manager through Thread, a local nonprofit.

One theme that surfaced throughout meeting was individual responsibility in nurturing a positive vision for the future. "You need to reshape your own narrative and help shape other people's narratives," emphasized Lashon, building on input he received from his (Re)Connecting Youth colleagues the night before.

Heads nodded as he spoke. "People dwell too much on

the negative," said Kiona Craddock, who hosts a local call-in radio show. "The more we focus on problems, they keep being problems."

To channel the positive energy in the room, Lashon encouraged the Westside youth to join OYU's efforts to create a network of youth-led Community Action Teams in cities across the country, with Baltimore soon to join. The teams mobilize youth to take action, particularly when it comes to informing local and national policies impacting opportunity youth.

As the session came to a close, Luke scanned the room, making eye contact with the other 13 young people present. His closing words were: "People will be inspired by you, just as I'm inspired by you. Don't wait for them to come to you. Make your voices heard."

A Young Woman in Morocco Finds Her Voice & Goals

IYF
JULY 28, 2014

To get to school every morning, 17-year-old Khadija has to walk an hour down a rocky road under the blazing sun to Morocco’s southern coastal city of El Jadida—some 20 kilometers from her small village. Her determination to make that daily trip, however, is a recent development. Khadija admits she had considered dropping out of school on numerous occasions. “I live farther than the other girls from the school, and there was no one to walk with me on my route. I felt isolated, and didn’t want to talk to any of my classmates,” she confides. When her teacher suggested she join the Life Skills Club at her school, she accepted, even though she had little faith it would make a difference. “I didn’t really have a goal in life. When you live here, you lose hope. Also, I never thought my parents would let me go into town to finish my studies,” she explains. “You know how it is here; young girls have to stay at home to help with household chores.”

Joining the Club, however, changed Khadija’s



“At home, I often imitate the teacher. I teach my mother, who is illiterate, how to manage her time and her budget.”

feelings of isolation and despair, and gave her the confidence she needed to move forward in her life. From her first visit there, Khadija felt she belonged. The Club, which uses the International Youth Foundation’s Passport to Success® curriculum, helps equip young people with important life and employability skills, including effective communication, problem solving,



teamwork, and responsibility. “I quickly got rid of the obstacles that were holding me back,” she says. “I was so happy that finally someone was interested in young girls like me in the countryside. I fit right into the group and grew real friendships thanks to the Club—which allowed me to feel less alone.”

Khadija was also excited to share what she’d learned with her family. “At home, I often imitate the teacher. I teach my mother, who is illiterate, how to manage her time and her budget,” she says. “And even my brothers and sisters have changed. Today when we eat together, we’ve learned to listen to one another. Before it was chaotic; everyone talked at the same time and no one listened to each other.”

Khadija’s father, a local farmer, looks with new admiration at his daughter. “She’s growing,” he says. “She asserts herself. Before, I was scared to let her go by herself into town. Now I feel she is capable of doing it.” His daughter agrees she has changed. “I feel like I’m really 17 years old. I’ve matured,” Khadija says. “Before, when I saw all the girls from the town I didn’t like them. Today, having talked about it with others at the Club meetings, I don’t judge them anymore. I feel I can face them, and command

their respect.” Khadija plans to be a doctor one day—an ambitious goal that reflects a new level of confidence and purpose in her life.

Next school year, she is looking forward to making that long walk into town every morning. This time, to attend high school.

“She’s growing. She asserts herself.
Before, I was scared to let her go by
herself into town. Now I feel
she is capable of doing it.”

Crystal's Song: A Message of Hope for Youth At-Risk

Sheila Kinkade

DECEMBER 15, 2015

Music transports us. It touches our hearts. It can even unite us. But can a song help heal a painful past?

For Crystal Goh, the answer is an unequivocal 'yes.'

A gifted singer and songwriter, Crystal knows from personal experience the healing power of music when imbued with a message of hope. In 2011, the 29-year-old lost her voice to a neurological condition called spasmodic dysphonia. The experience left her feeling alienated from family and friends in her native Singapore. Months later, a friend encouraged Crystal to sing at an event, and her voice began, slowly, to return. "Pain taught me empathy," says Crystal, who now helps disadvantaged youth to transform difficult life experiences into opportunities to reflect and give back.

I was fortunate to hear Crystal perform one of her songs, "There'll Be Spring," twice during her visit to Washington, DC, as an IYF 2015 Laureate Global Fellow. Both times, her impassioned delivery



**“Youth who’ve come to
believe they’ll never
achieve anything begin to
see their strengths.”**

culminated in a standing ovation. Captured in the song is a powerful message of hope:

Cast off the ache of pain
the reproach and the shame
Let your past be your past

The same message drives Crystal's work today through Diamonds On The Street (DOTS), the organization she founded in 2013 to help youth at-risk reframe their life narratives.

DOTS is rooted in the Logotherapy approach of Holocaust survivor and psychiatrist Victor Frankl. Frankl hypothesized that individuals are primarily motivated to find meaning in life and that one has the ability to choose one's attitude even in the face of unavoidable suffering.

Staffed by volunteer social workers and counselors, DOTS works with youth, ages 13 to 21, who have grown up in challenging circumstances that put them at greater risk for developing anti-social or self-destructive behaviors.

Each young person participates in small group exercises delivered over six to 12 three-hour sessions. Creating safe spaces where young people feel valued and supported is critical, Crystal says. Participants begin by identifying and sharing their unique story. Subsequent sessions help them reframe challenging life narratives by pinpointing the lessons embedded in their experiences.

"Youth who've come to believe they'll never achieve anything begin to see their strengths," says Crystal, adding that helping young people move beyond a painful past often involves nurturing empathy toward those they hold responsible.

Group members then translate their experiences into songs, which they perform before an audience that includes their family members and/or caregivers. The net result? Healing occurs on both sides, as the youth and audience members see new possibilities emerge.

Through their experience, DOTS participants also develop valuable life skills such as self-reflection, improved communication, and the confidence to pursue goals. In 2013, for example, one program graduate shared her dream of launching a restaurant. Not long afterward she won a chef competition, and she is now enhancing her culinary skills while networking with potential investors.

The program's approach reflects a growing body of research and practice in the use of storytelling to facilitate emotional healing. "When we deny the story, it defines us," writes researcher and author Brené Brown, PhD, who emphasizes the vital role of creativity in facilitating deep learning and self-awareness.

In the future, Crystal seeks to apply elements of the

“Creating safe spaces where young people feel **valued** and **supported** is critical.”

DOTS approach within school systems to help more young people discover the value of their stories and journey towards new possibilities.

To learn more about Crystal's work, visit www.diamondsonthestreet.com.



Visit the IYF blog to read even more
stories of how young people
are positive forces for change and
growth in their communities.