

## Session: How to Integrate Youth in Development Policy Making?

The DE/GE perspective on youth and their engagement in development issues

Good afternoon everyone,

Thank you for inviting me to speak on this theme which is very close to the work that I do in Ireland and at European level. My name is Elaine Mahon, and while I am the chair of the newly-established Youth and Children Working Group of the DARE forum, I am also the Development Education (DE) project officer of the National Youth Council of Ireland which is a member of EYF. I'm very glad to have the chance to be here before you, and to give you some context of the work I am involved in in both roles - at European and national level - and to give a DE perspective on how youth can lead on and be involved in actions within international development.

What do we mean when we talk about development/global education? There are almost as many definitions, as there are actors engaging in it. CONCORD and the DARE forum share a vision of *'a world in which poverty and inequality have been ended; in which decisions are based on social justice, gender equality and upon our responsibility to future generations'*. Within the DARE forum of CONCORD we see DE as fundamental to this process. In seeking to ensure social justice at local and global level, as well as promoting fair partnerships internationally, we aim to not only achieve the MDGs, but achieve them in a manner in which reflection on development practices is promoted and people's rights and dignity are respected and protected.

In the youth and children working group of DARE, we have two main overall aims:

1. To promote DE and the development agenda in youth organisations
2. To ensure that young people are involved as actors and leaders in international development through DE structures, and development NGOs.

We see the context of youth work and non-formal education as having a vital role to play in facilitating young people to become global citizens who act against poverty and inequality. Good practice in youth work is about

- personal development and confidence-building for young people to speak out;
- activities which are led by young people; and
- facilitating the participation of minority or hard-to-reach young people.

It is hoped that as young people participate and act on DE issues within youth work, that they will bring the knowledge and skills they develop to other fora - that they will remember games and discussions about climate change, for example, at their youth club, be involved in action with their peers, and take that knowledge to other fora as they become adults. Young people are leaders rather than 'recipients' of DE, involved in critical discussion on global justice and development, and with that finding ways to reach the MDGs within the context of

fairness and equality for all. To achieve the MDGs, we not only need political commitment to the MDGs, but a whole set of human rights instruments in order to improve people's lives around the world.

In Europe, young people are involved in DE through youth organisations, sports clubs, migrant-led groups, schools and in development organisations. Young people can be involved through giving speeches, doing drama, writing songs, designing posters, signs and murals, and taking public street action. There are a number of actions taken around international days and weeks of significance which are a great platform for young people to raise awareness and take action at local, national and international level. Such days provide the opportunity of media coverage, and grabbing the imagination and attention of the public which leads to pressure on governments on specific issues, including the 8 MDGs. These occasions include Universal Children's Day, World Aids Day, Global Education Week (Council of Europe - I am the coordinator in Ireland for GEW); and Global Action Week on Education for All.

I have a few examples to show you in terms of actions linked to the MDGs that have been taken in Ireland and Finland.

1. A project called 'Paving the Way' which was done by a youth organisation called ECO-UNESCO. The action involved having members of the public paint tiles around the issue of climate change. The young leaders then presented the tiles to Ireland's Minister for the Environment and on to the UN Climate Talks with the aim of influencing commitment to MDG.7 to ensure environmental sustainability

2. The 'Send a Friend to School Action' led by youth organisations in coordination with the Irish Coalition of the Global Campaign for Education . Young people did cardboard cut-outs and wrote messages about the importance of education (MDG 2) and gender parity (MDG 3) within education. Some of these cut-outs were sent to New York to coincide with a UN special session on children.
3. A school in Galway, Ireland took action to tackle discrimination and stigma directed at people with HIV/AIDS. This action was significant as it shows how one action can lead to long-term involvement as the students went on to promote their campaign at the 'Young Social Innovators Competition' in Ireland. Tackling stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS is crucial in promoting treatment of the disease, and in prevention (MDG 6).
4. Examples from Romania (on slides)

While I believe that the attainment of the MDGs, and support for aid and development is an important aspect of DE, as illustrated by the examples above, I also believe that the DE agenda is broader in encouraging critical reflection of global structures, and promoting equality and justice at local and global level. For instance, youth groups are very active around 21 March International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Fairtrade Fortnight and in Ireland, a topic which is becoming more and more important "images and messages in development". Plan Finland and their Children's Board devised a project on writing rap and hip-hop with lyrics based around the MDGs. They found that promoting awareness and action on global

justice and the MDGs, that it was best to start with what young people are interested in, and what affects their lives at local level - in this case, children's rights. These themes may not be "directly" linked to the MDG agenda, but should be seen as having an important role to play in the process of how we act to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger (MDG 1) and promote partnership for development (MDG 8). There can at times be a rift between organisations working for relief and development and DE practitioners. While it would be useful to be able to link DE and awareness-raising directly to global international development and the MDGs, DE goes further in seeking to encourage and facilitate the ability of critical reflection and analysis of global structures among young people. Taking action to promote equality and justice at local and global level is a fundamental part of this learning and reflection process, and has been demonstrated by young DE actors for many years in Europe and elsewhere.

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