

Summary Report: Youth E-Consultations on Building Citizen Centred Policies & Services and Climate Change

Context & Background

Young people constitute an important and significant part of the global population – over half are under the age of 25 – yet this is not reflected in their level of involvement and inclusion in decision-making processes and public debates. Many governments are focusing their efforts on addressing the special needs and opportunities of youth, all the while tackling global issues such as climate change that young people view as pressing and urgent. In a time with ever-increasing technological process and greater access to information, the traditional impression of apathetic youth is being shattered. The question that needs to be asked is: how can we ensure that young people are engaged in public policy and addressing global issues?

Between May and June 2008, TakingITGlobal conducted two separate e-consultations on behalf of the Organization for Economic Cooperation & Development (OECD). Each e-consultation ran for 3 weeks and presented a number of thematic questions for young people to consider. Are youth able to participate in shaping public policies and services? What do they think of their governments' response to climate change? Over 350 participants from over 75 countries participated in the e-consultations and their voices and opinions were enlightening, eye-opening and honest.

This report summarizes the findings from each e-consultation; the full report can be downloaded from both the OECD and TakingITGlobal websites. The results will also be presented at the OECD's International Workshop on Building Citizen Centred Policies and Services in Ljubljana, Slovenia (June 26 & 27, 2008).

OECD: http://www.oecd.org/document/53/0,3343,en_2649_33735_40812149_1_1_1_1,00.html

TakingITGlobal: <http://www.takingitglobal.org/resources/toolkits/view.html?ToolkitID=1633>

Themes

Building Citizen Centred Policies & Services

- Voices & Choices: Designing Public Policy with Youth
- Creating & Using Public Services: Experience and role of young people
- YouGov: how do youth want to use technology to interact with government?

Climate Change

- Adaptation: how have young people and governments responded?
- Mitigation: the role youth can play
- International Cooperation: Youth perspectives on the global effort

Results

When it comes to public policies, especially those that were directed at youth, the participants tended to agree that they were not consulted or involved in the development; this ultimately leads to an environment where young people are not treated as individuals who can constructively contribute to civil society. This is particularly obvious when examining climate change, where government actions and policies to date have been more *reactive* than *proactive*, that is, addressing *symptoms* and not *root causes*. In both e-consultations, young people share a common belief that at the very least, their voices should be heard.

What governments can do immediately is to include young people in all steps of the process. Consult with them and listen to their opinions, and at the same time, ensure that young people are actually engaged as civil servants to not only implement suggestions, but to act as intermediaries for their peers. Additionally, there needs to be increased trust in the ability of young people to carry out community projects that address the impact of climate change on localities. Finally, education is an important step that will increase the capacity of young people and empower them to affect immediate and future change.

Where governments seemed to be failing in the eyes of the participants is in their ability to serve the interests of young people. A lack of resources and priorities was mentioned by several participants, particularly financial support. Where young people have the creativity, energy and ambition to make a positive impact (whether in addressing specific issues like climate change, or enabling greater youth engagement), they often face obstacles that prevent their full development. Further, governments are not effectively using the channels to disseminate knowledge; messages don't reach young people, or are poorly communicated. In turn, young people do not have the opportunity to speak directly on issues that affect them.

That some governments have tried to incorporate the latest Web 2.0 technologies is a positive step that was recognized by the participants. Yet many made it known that social networking sites like Facebook and YouTube are simply tools for communication, and that **effective dialogue** is a required to engage the youth demographic. Whether climate change or social services, young people want to be involved in a transparent process where all players are held accountable.

Conclusion

Globally, youth hold a tremendous amount of energy, passion and creativity, all of which are needed to envision and implement positive solutions to large issues like climate change, or national public policies. Participants in both consultations demonstrated a strong and genuine interest in being able to influence the shaping of public policies and services.

Governments must realize that young people are equal citizens, and it is imperative that they are involved at all steps of the public policy process. When it comes to the larger international challenge of climate change, their collective voice is a powerful catalyst. Successful governments will be the ones that embrace the means and channels for communication and dialogue, include youth in the development of policies, and actively implement solutions that benefit all their citizens.

About TakingITGlobal

TakingITGlobal (www.takingitglobal.org) is an international organization - led by youth and empowered by technology. TakingITGlobal connects youth around the world to find inspiration, information and get involved in improving their local and global communities. Headquartered in Toronto, Canada, with a growing worldwide presence, the organization's flagship program 'TakingITGlobal.org, serves as the most popular online community for young people interested in connecting across cultures and making a difference, with hundreds of thousands of visitors each month.

TakingITGlobal works with global partners – from UN agencies, to major companies, and especially youth organizations – to build the capacity of youth for development, artistic and media expression, make education more engaging, and involve young people in global decision-making.