



A PROMISING FUTURE?

Time is running out
for this generation

By Christy Macy

NOT A WEEK GOES BY without seeing negative or disturbing images of young people in the news. Young gang members running drugs in Mexico... 12-year-old soldiers shouldering guns in Somalia... The sons and daughters of Arab and African immigrants going on a violent rampage in the suburbs of Paris...

Teenage pirates holding international ships hostage off the coast of Africa... A 16-year-old Palestinian throwing rocks at passing cars shot dead near Ramallah...

A 23-year-old Nigerian with possible ties to terrorist groups trying to blow up a plane headed for Detroit. ¶ These events reflect the harsh realities of young people's broken lives—when hopes for a better future are crushed, voices are not heard, and opportunities to break out of a downward cycle simply don't exist. Yet this is only one side of this younger generation's story. ¶ Consider the young people in Port-au-Prince who mobilized their community to help ensure children traumatized by Haiti's earthquake had a safe place to eat and sleep... The young drug dealers and gang members in Medellín, Colombia who exchanged their guns for a job and a paycheck... Former youth combatants in Mozambique who lead conflict-resolution programs across the country... The 27-year-old entrepreneur in the West Bank who created a mobile phone-based job-matching service to connect thousands of Palestinian job seekers to future employers... And the 23 million 18- to 29-year-olds in the United States who cast their ballots in 2008—the most young voters ever—who made the difference in putting America's first African American president in the White House.



THERE IS A CHOICE

What do these opposing images of youth—the positive and the negative—tell us? That they are clearly protagonists who are shaping the world around us. However, the direction their paths take to adulthood very much depends upon the opportunities they have and the decisions they make along the way. What conditions determine a young person's route to the future?

We already know that when young people have the skills and opportunities to get a job and support their families and are able to exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens that they have a personal stake in creating a better future and the motivation to reach

“Normally when we need to know about something we go to the experts, but we tend to forget that when we want to know about youth and what they feel and what they want, we should talk to them.”

— Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary General

their goals. Yet when such success is elusive, young people become idle, restless, and frustrated. Out of work, out of school, and out of hope, they are left on the margins of society yet painfully aware, through global technology, of the world passing them by. Gravitating toward unhealthy and often dangerous activities, they remain unequipped to improve their own prospects or contribute to society.

WHY THE URGENCY TO ACT?

While real progress has been made in a host of critical youth development areas—from primary school enrollment to gender equity to health outcomes—significant and often escalating needs among today's youth remain unmet. Recent studies underscore the vital imperative to place young people at the center of the development agenda. A 2009 report by the British Council, for example, describes a deep and growing level of frustration among Pakistani youth and growing disillusionment with democracy.¹ Nine out of ten youth surveyed have lost confidence in their government. Thirty six million jobs would need to be created in the coming decade to slow the country's soaring youth unemployment. Pakistan, the report concludes, is facing a “demographic disaster” if the needs of its dramatically growing youth population remain unaddressed. Similarly, a recent Council on Foreign Relations brief² warns that societies with high birthrates (and a disproportionate number of young men

between 15 and 30 years of age) are prone to conflict—the result of a “large reservoir of potential recruits to radical organizations.”

Even efforts to build more peaceful societies are being sabotaged by the growing number of alienated jobless youth. A March 2010 Security Council³ meeting dealing with Sierra Leone warns that “the magnitude and political significance of youth unemployment poses a latent risk of instability” even as the nation struggles to consolidate peace and stimulate development. “Many of that country's young people were idle, concentrated in urban areas, and frustrated by social marginalization,” noted John McNee, Chair of the Sierra Leone Peacebuilding Commission.

These alarm bells are further amplified when one looks at global demographic trends. The “youth bulge” of 1.3 billion young people ages 12 to 24 continues to expand, placing extraordinary pressure on many countries' already weakened services and infrastructure. By 2050, the world population will reach 9 billion, with 90% of that growth taking place in developing countries. Young people's lives will become even more challenging over the next two decades as the number of people living in urban areas in developing countries is expected to triple.⁴ Even now, in countries like Venezuela, Uruguay, and Argentina, more than ninety percent of the population lives in urban areas. Many governments admit they are unprepared and overwhelmed when considering how to handle such rapid urbanization. A dramatic example of just one of the world's sprawling mega-cities is Lagos, Nigeria. In 1950, it was home to 300,000 citizens. By 2015, Lagos' population will have ballooned to 23 million.⁵

As a result of these conditions, youth unemployment—a powerful indicator of a young person's limited prospects—continues to surge. More than 100 million youth today are unable to find work, and the International Labor Organization (ILO) calculated that as a result of the recent global recession, the number of jobless youth increased by 8.5 million from 2008 to 2009—the largest year-to-year increase in youth unemployment in at least a decade.⁶ Over the past ten years, young people in East Asia have experienced the greatest decline in employment—down nearly ten percent compared with a global average of 3.4%.⁷ A 2010 ILO report reveals a particularly pessimistic view of the global job situation, noting recent data “represent an unprecedented increase in the number of unemployed.”

¹ Pakistan: The Next Generation, *British Council*, November 2009; ² Council on Foreign Relations Analysis Brief, “The Battle of the ‘Youth Bulge’,” April 27, 2007; ³ Youth Unemployment Poses ‘Latent Threat’ to Sierra Leone's Stability, *Security Council Meeting (SC9890)*, March 22, 2010; ⁴ Eco2 Cities: Ecological Cities in Economic Cities, *World Bank Press Release*, 2010; ⁵ The MegaCity, by George Packer, *New Yorker*, November 13, 2006; ⁶ Global Employment Trends, *International Labour Office (ILO)*, 26 January 2010; ⁷ Job Losses in Asia and Pacific Slow, *ILO Press Release*, 26 January 2010



LEFT: (from left to right) Suspected pirates arrested in the Gulf of Aden, off Somalia's coast; Accused drug dealer Lorena Hernandez, 21, sits behind bars in Tijuana, Mexico; French riot police officers arrest youths in a Paris suburb, following a week-long violent rampage across ten of that nation's cities.



RIGHT: US First Lady Michelle Obama meets with youth leaders in Mexico, including Maritza Morales, second from left in front row, 2007 YouthActionNet® Fellow.

SOLUTIONS DO EXIST

In the World Bank's 2007 *World Development Report*, then President Paul Wolfowitz sent a strong message to the global community. Noting the connection between expanded opportunities for youth and the fight to end poverty, he said: "The time has never been better to invest in young people living in developing countries."⁸

Solutions do exist to address these multiple challenges. The button can be reset. And there are significant assets on the side of progress—including today's young people. Even those who are struggling mightily to survive are members of the healthiest and most educated youth cohort ever. They have the chance to advance themselves and their societies as no other generation in history. But they can't do it alone.

The extraordinary "bonus" of this historic generation can be realized in the coming years through revitalized economies, vibrant communities, and greater peace and stability. But such a future can only be built upon the sustained attention, resources, and coordinated action of every sector of society and the full participation of young people themselves. Conversely, we can stand on the sidelines or maintain the status quo—and turn that "bonus" into a global liability.

Our challenge today goes beyond the work to expand opportunities and provide choices for today's young people. We must also help change public perception about the role and image of youth in the world. They are protagonists who have the power and promise to improve their lives and the world around them—serving as problem solvers, not merely problems to be solved.

BY THE NUMBERS ...

**100
MILLION**

young people unable to find work today

**8.5
MILLION**

increase in jobless youth from 2008 to 2009

**9
BILLION**

population of the world by 2050

**70
PERCENT**

projected percentage of the world's population living in urban areas in 2050

US First Lady Michelle Obama, who met with youth leaders during her trip to Mexico in April 2010, offered them this inspired message: "You have the unprecedented ability to organize and to mobilize and to challenge old assumptions, to bridge old divides, and to find new solutions to our toughest problems," she said. "If we are going to make our world safer and healthier and more prosperous and more free, we are going to need the passion and the daring and the creativity of every one of you."⁹

"We envision a future Haiti where the power of the young in influencing positive change is recognized and valued... It's time to reset the button."

— John Miller Beauvoir, 26, Port-au-Prince, Haiti

Yet even youth equipped with multiple talents and limitless energy need our collective support. At the launch of IYF's *Youth:Work Jordan* program in Amman, youth from some of the country's most impoverished communities, most of whom are out of school and unemployed, expressed their commitment to being positive forces for change in their communities. They spoke in unison to the assembled crowd of government dignitaries, business executives and NGO leaders about their vision for the future: "We can build, we can plant, we can be creative, we can invent, but one hand alone cannot clap. That's why we need your support."

It's up to all of us to answer their call. **Y**

⁸ 2007 World Development Report, Development and the Next Generation, *The World Bank*, 2006, p. xi; ⁹ Remarks by the First Lady at Youth Forum, Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico City, White House Press Release, April 14, 2010.

MOVING TOWARD SOLUTIONS:

10 STRATEGIES FOR HOPE

We highlight here proven approaches that can help close the learning gap, prepare youth for the workforce, and empower young people in their communities. Significant new investments to scale up such activities will help “tilt” young lives in a positive direction.

1. LISTEN TO YOUTH

Giving youth a seat at the table must go beyond token gestures to ensuring they play a significant role in decision making around issues and strategies that impact their lives.

Examples abound of young leaders seeking a voice in policy debates. Joseph Kimani Njuguna, a *YouthActionNet*® Fellow from Kenya, founded the Africa Youth Trust to ensure Kenya’s laws and policies are responsive to the needs and aspirations of its youth. Its “Action Guide” is galvanizing young people countrywide to help shape national policies and ensure accountability.

In Nepal, 26-year-old Sumnima Shrestha is elevating youth decision making powers around Nepal’s environmental agenda—distributing a working paper on the issue to members of Parliament drafting Nepal’s new constitution.

2. SUPPORT MARKET-DRIVEN APPROACHES TO JOB TRAINING

Conducting targeted labor market assessments and employer-based surveys ensures job training programs match local business needs while strengthening—and creating—much needed alliances with the private sector.



3. PREPARE YOUTH WITH A RANGE OF SKILLS

Employers are seeking youth who can work in teams, who can resolve problems and who can communicate effectively—as a complement to technical job skills training.

In response, IYF teamed up with the GE Foundation in 2005 to create *Passport to Success*, which equips youth with a wide range of employability skills that include teamwork, conflict resolution, life planning, health, and workplace skills. Initially conducted in two countries, *Passport to Success* has now reached 47,000 young people in ten countries, with its curriculum translated into twelve languages.



4. INVEST IN “WHAT WORKS”

We have the necessary knowledge and experience to address a range of social challenges. Rather than constantly reinventing the wheel, place greater emphasis on identifying and sharing the lessons learned and then invest in those proven programs.

Toward that end, with support from the World Bank, IYF has co-sponsored regional “learning” conferences in Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America to promote a deeper understanding of which strategies are most effectively addressing youth employment needs worldwide.

5. GO FOR SCALE

The urgent needs of youth today demand we take successful models to real scale, thereby multiplying the number of young people served. Issues of scale and sustainability must be considered from the outset, so pilot programs are designed with expectations of eventual system-wide expansion.

For example, the lessons learned from IYF’s *entra21* youth employability and ITC job placement program in Latin America and the Caribbean have led to a dramatically expanded Phase II with critical support from the Multilateral Investment Fund (MIF). Projected impact: 50,000 more jobless youth to gain training and jobs across the region.

In addition, successful elements of *entra21*—including entrepreneurship training, internships, and job placement assistance—have now been integrated into IYF’s other employability programs in the Middle East, Africa and the Caribbean and will continue to shape our efforts in the field.





"Technology is forcing teachers to change because they are no longer the sole source of information."

—Aakash Sethi, Director
Quest, India

6. PROMOTE IT SOLUTIONS TO LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD

While technology by itself is not a silver bullet for improving development outcomes, it is indispensable in reaching the world's most underserved youth with learning, work, and citizenship opportunities.

7. SUPPORT YOUNG SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS

The world needs innovative solutions to deeply entrenched problems, and young people are uniquely equipped to play this role. Place more emphasis on identifying and investing in the most promising youth-led ideas. Connecting young innovators with each other in a network results in an explosion of creative problem solving.

8. BUILD MULTI-SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

Evidence shows that when you leverage the resources and expertise of the public, private, and nonprofit sectors in a well coordinated development alliance, the sum total of such activities far exceeds the contributions of any individual player. $1+1=3!$

In support of this strategy, IYF's *Education & Employment Alliance (EEA)*, launched in 2005 to implement youth employability programs in Egypt, India, Indonesia, Morocco, Pakistan, and the Philippines, placed a clear emphasis on alliance building to maximize impact. As a result, EEA created project-based partnerships with nearly 320 organizations, leveraging US\$9.3 million in additional resources and program support. USAID has championed the approach through its Global Development Alliance which has cultivated more than 900 public-private alliances with over 1,700 individual partners—contributing billions of dollars in combined resources and expertise since 2001.

9. HARNESS THE POWER OF THE SOCIAL MEDIA REVOLUTION

Young people are leading the way in putting today's social media tools to work in increasingly sophisticated ways to raise public awareness on critical issues and unify disparate efforts to achieve greater impact on the ground.

For example, Khalida Brohi, a 20-year-old women's rights activist living in remote northwest Pakistan has garnered popular and international support for her campaign against "honor" killing through her Facebook page.

Also utilizing the power of social media, US Secretary of State Colin Powell, Bill Gates and Queen Rania of Jordan are joining a new global health campaign by sending out "tweets" encouraging the public to buy bed nets as a way to fight the spread of malaria in Africa.

10. DON'T GIVE UP

We have the tools to overcome even the most daunting barriers standing in the way of progress among today's youth.

Our greatest assets in this struggle are young people themselves, while our greatest barrier is lack of mainstream social and political will.



"We can build, we can plant, we can be creative, we can invent, but one hand alone cannot clap. That's why we need your support."

— Jordanian youth at the launch of the *Youth:Work Jordan* program in Amman

