

# INTERNATIONAL LEARNING FORUM

MONTREAL, CANADA, OCTOBER 24-29, 2010

Canada  
World  
Youth



Jeunesse  
Canada  
Monde



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### INTRODUCTION

Canada World Youth (CWY) hosted its first International Learning Forum, entitled **Youth Partnerships in Action**, as part of its Youth Leaders in Action (YLA) program from October 24 to 29, 2010. Held at the Hotel Gouverneur in Montreal, the International Learning Forum brought together between 60 and 70 international and Canadian partners, youth volunteers, alumni, and development sector specialists from 15 different countries (Benin, Bolivia, Canada, Ghana, Honduras, Indonesia, Kenya, Mali, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Peru, South Africa, Tanzania, Ukraine, and Vietnam). It provided participants with the opportunity to share experiences, identify best practices and lessons learned, explore common themes and emerging issues, network, and strengthen partnerships.

#### International Learning Forum Objectives

The **Youth Partnerships in Action** International Learning Forum had 4 main objectives:

- 1) To increase networking and knowledge sharing amongst Canada World Youth and its Overseas and Canadian partners.
- 2) To state best practices and challenges in the implementation of the Youth Leaders in Action program and mostly on the sectoral projects.
- 3) To increase Canada World Youth's visibility as a learning organization that trains youth in Canada and Overseas
- 4) With the participation of the Youth from Canada and overseas, to define and elaborate strategies aimed at increasing youth participation in the development of just, harmonious and sustainable societies.

#### What is the Youth Leaders in Action Program?

The YLA program is a unique CWY initiative funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). It comprises five different components: **Youth Exchanges; Inter-Institutional Capacity Building; Sector Projects; the Youth Leadership Initiative** (which involves providing seed grants to youth-led initiatives); and the **Learning Forum**. The YLA program focuses on three key sectors: Health, Environment and Gender and makes a contribution to the realisation of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.

In an e-questionnaire needs assessment, International Learning Forum participants identified specific learning needs as follows: navigating the Youth Leaders Initiative (YLI), inter-institutional capacity building (particularly funding administration), and gender mainstreaming. CWY then organized five sessions based on these needs and objectives.

## Youth Involvement

CWY considered active youth participation to be an essential element of the Forum. Young people were part of the consultation process before the event, they set the tone of the Forum by organizing the first two days, and they participated in numerous other ways throughout the week as well.

Melanie Hegg and Martin Gitau from the Kenya/Ontario team developed a program for the two “youth days” at the beginning of the Forum. The program included interactive sessions in which 40 young people explored issues linked to youth participation and community involvement; a welcome reception for 90 youth leaders; and activities to introduce and discuss the key messages determined by youth participants on the first day.

Youth representatives from other CWY teams, including the Ontario/Honduras, Quebec/Benin, British Columbia/Ukraine and Nova Scotia/Indonesia teams, were consulted about the specific topics to be examined during the two youth days. The organizing team also consulted the Youth Advisory Group of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO for ideas on pertinent youth engagement topics. All consulted parties also took part in the International Learning Forum.

## DAYS ONE AND TWO

### YOUTH IN ACTION: ACTIVATING THE YOUTH LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE

#### 2.1 Summary

The first session took place over two days (October 24 and 25) and was designed by youth for youth, to explore ways of increasing young people’s involvement in development issues touching their communities.

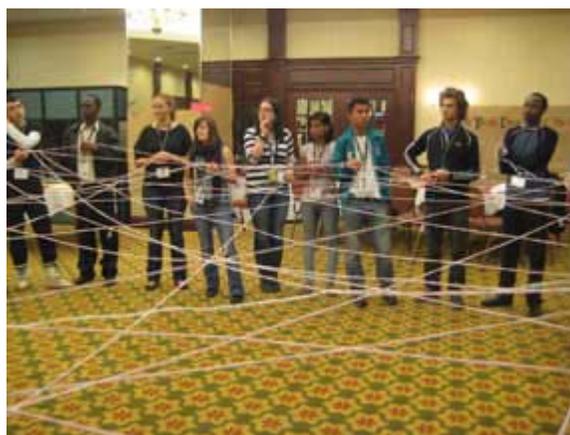
To identify and better understand the most relevant and important issues, youth participants brainstormed around the following questions:

- How and why do young people get involved in the life and development of their communities?
- How do young people create spaces for themselves in their communities?
- How do adults create space for youth in communities?
- What are the stimulators of and the barriers to youth involvement?
- From the youth perspective, what are the essentials for working with young people and encouraging their involvement in development?
- How could the link between the Youth Leaders in Action program and the Youth Leadership Initiative (YLI) be described?
- How do Youth Exchange teams relate with and build relationships in the community?
- What are the entry points or opportunities for youth participation in communities?
- How could the YLI be leveraged to take advantage of these entry points or opportunities?

The youth participants then decided on a main theme, **Youth Empowerment: How Do We Get There**, and developed four workshops to address this theme from various perspectives: Bridging the Gap, Resources, Youth and Organizations, and the Debrief.

While the first day focused on developing key messages through participatory workshops and activities, the second day consisted of presenting these messages to the CWY program managers, partner organizations, and staff who joined them. All participants then collectively discussed and compared youth engagement challenges and shared best practices. Participants agreed on many of the issues and worked together to further develop the specific solutions that had been identified by the youth participants on the first day.

All participants highlighted collaboration between youth and organizations or communities, as well as collaboration amongst organizations themselves (international partners, potential Canadian partners, and sector specialists). The results of the sessions held on the first two days show that young people are aware of the critical issues that concern them and that they have ideas and solutions to tackle these issues. Essentially, young people want to collaborate. But most importantly, they want to do so as partners. According to the youth participants who took part in the session, if an institution says it serves youth, it must put youth at the forefront. A point was made about the phrase “incorporating youth,” which seems to be used frequently by adults who want to accommodate young people without necessarily giving them any power. Youth participants stressed the importance of including young people as full stakeholders.



Youth also sent a strong message about empowerment, stressing that when they are empowered within an organization, everyone benefits—young people, the organization in question, and society as a whole. As one person put it, “When you empower a young person, you are empowering a society.” Empowerment, however, goes hand in hand with knowledge, and the importance of youth being better informed was therefore also discussed. It was pointed out that young people need to increase their involvement in communities and in youth networks, using alternative media such as the Internet and social networks to increase awareness on youth perspective in development. This coincides with the importance that young people place on relationships and networks as ways to break down barriers amongst individuals.

***‘If you want to go fast, go alone; but if you want to go far, go together.’***

At the same time, there are several challenges involved in increasing youth involvement and getting organizations to work in partnership with them. First, there is organizational bureaucracy. Many young people find that adult-run institutions guard their power closely, making it difficult for them to have their voices heard and their ideas considered. Another obstacle is

mistrust of youth in general, which often leads to a lack of funding for youth-led initiatives. Organizations are often hesitant to support youth initiatives because of a general belief that young people lack the necessary experience and skills to manage projects and resources on their own. Added to this are challenges linked to a lack of networks and support, lack of ideas, lack of education, and negative media coverage of youth.

Some adult participants in the sessions indicated that their trust in youth wanes when they see young people making poor choices (such as choices linked to substance abuse) or when they notice their lack of seriousness in the face of critical issues. They said that, under these circumstances, they find it difficult to give young people responsibilities. However, these same participants also expressed their will to involve and accommodate young people who show a sincere desire to be a part of their organizations. Some adults also spoke about young people's lack of initiative and suggested that young people may know what they want, but that they do not always necessarily persist in achieving their goals.

Despite the above-mentioned difficulties, young people in the session identified some of their assets, which include passion (youth are often idealistic in their beliefs and may lack the cynicism that sometimes comes with experience); a continuous capacity for networking (which can provide them with a supportive group from which to draw ideas, resources, and positive encouragement); and support from peers, teachers, mentors, parents, and friends.

The need for a two-way dialogue between organizations and youth was made very clear, especially by the youth participants. Organizations and young people have something to learn from one another, but there must be true dialogue for this to happen. Young people bring energy to organizations, and organizations provide the structure that is needed to bring ideas and programs to fruition.

Young people's energy, enthusiasm, and passion must be harnessed to address social problems related to health and the environment, and there are obvious advantages in collaborating to achieve this.

### **Proposals for a way forward:**

- Carry on reflection within organizations to find ways to increase youth leadership;
- Consult youth: Young people know how to address critical issues, but without consultation their solutions and voice will not be heard;
- Create more of a two-way dialogue between organizations and youth;
- Increase youth involvement in all stages of projects such as the Learning Forum (decision-making, planning, implementation, facilitation, and evaluation);
- Develop mentorship programs;
- Actively push for a safe space in which the voice of youth can be heard, or else the power dynamics at play will stifle it;
- Recognize that change comes from within; youth must use their power to create spaces to address issues; and
- Youth must pay attention to how the government provides funding to institutions and local groups.

## DAY THREE

## PROMOTING DIALOGUE: HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT SECTORS

## 3.1 Summary

On day three, international partners and Canadian sector specialist organizations discussed projects linked to health and the environment. Participants showcased their projects, discussing their goals and the approaches they used. (See annex 3 for the information displayed in the posters.) They also examined the role of youth in changing attitudes towards health and the environment and discussed the importance of identifying and engaging key stakeholders such as civil society, businesses, and government. Five Canadian organizations were also asked to participate in the activities: The Ontario Lung Association, The David Suzuki Foundation, The Stephen Lewis Foundation, The Sierra Youth Club, and The Canadian Environmental Network.



The following partners organised a photo and poster exhibition describing their respective projects:

- **Volunteer Centre**, South Africa
- The **Foundation for Sustainable Human Development (FUNDEHUS)**, Bolivia
- **ASONOG**, Honduras
- **FUNARTE (Foundation to Support Creativity in Children)**, Nicaragua
- **INPRHU (Institute of Human Promotion)**, Nicaragua
- **The Bolivarian Volunteer Brigade of Peru (BVBP)**, Peru
- **SYTO Ghana**
- **SYTO Benin**
- **Kijabe Environment Volunteers (KENVO)**, Kenya
- **Ministry of Agriculture**, Mali
- **AJUDE (Youth Association for Development of Volunteer Service)**, Mozambique
- **UVIKIUTA**, Tanzania
- The **National University of Ostroh Academy**, Ukraine
- **MENPORA (Indonesia's Ministry of Youth and Sports)**, Indonesia
- The **Youth International Cooperation Development Centre (CYDECO)**, Vietnam

After the Exhibition, partners discussed ideas to increase youth involvement in health and environment projects. They agreed that organizations should involve young people in project design, implementation, facilitation, and evaluation. Materials on and about youth should be produced by youth for youth. Youth should also be the ones

recruiting, as testimonials from young alumni are powerful and inspiring. Participants also discussed the importance of using such events as Learning Forums, regional and alumni networks, field visits, and social media to share best practices on youth involvement. Young people can change behaviours in health and the environment by:

- Gathering information, networking
- Communicating and teaching
- Inspiring others, being role models
- Learning about their communities
- Starting change from within
- Educating other youth
- Volunteering

Participants discussed the need for young people to plan more activities in their communities to effect change. They recognized that society is adult-centric and the need to create a space in which youth can have an equal say, so they are not just treated as an afterthought.



Participants also noted the importance of establishing volunteerism in the school curriculum. They encouraged the promotion of interesting, meaningful, valuable, and attractive volunteering programs, delivered by youth to youth and using various tools and resources linked to social media, sports, and culture.

### ***Proposals for a way forward:***

- Empower young people to engage in activities linked to health, education and the environment;
- Encourage mainstream youth volunteerism in the sectors of health and the environment (e.g. integrate volunteerism into the curriculum);
- Promote youth-to-youth education;
- Create a network in which youth can discuss issues related to health and the environment;
- Shift the current paradigm, which consists of adults taking sole control of the direction projects should take because they feel threatened, towards a paradigm where adults and youth work in partnership;
- Have youth plan their activities;
- Raise awareness among adults / hold workshops for adults by youth;
- Get adults to recognize that there is an adult-centric culture;
- Revisit the concept of youth (with youth and adults);
- Encourage creativity in income-generating activities, the promotion and awareness of youth initiatives, networking to create partnerships, and the search for alternative resources/labour (volunteers, community, etc.).

## DAY FOUR

### EMBRACING DIVERSITY AND GENDER MAINSTREAMING

#### 4.1 Objectives

In the needs assessment carried out prior to the International Learning Forum, participants expressed a desire to learn the skills and knowledge required to better advance gender equity in their projects. The organization *Gender at Work* designed an interactive session to strengthen development practices that engender real organizational, individual, and community change with equitable results for both men and women.

#### 4.2 Summary

The session on gender equity was a day-long one facilitated by Geneviève Sarasin and Rex Fyles of Gender at Work and Marie-Claude Mercier of CWY. In this session participants had an opportunity to discuss gender issues in their respective societies, draw parallels, and observe differences. Fifty-five people (33 anglophones, 12 hispanophones and 10 francophones) participated in this workshop. They were asked to think about the differences between men and women in their communities, discuss how women are marginalized, and address strategies to reduce barriers to gender equality.



The following points emerged from this discussion:

- There are many gender differences in International Learning Forum participants' respective societies. Differences mentioned were: men receive a higher income than women; women work primarily in the home and their ideas and skills are not as respected; men are more likely to get loans than women in some societies; women take charge of the house and men are responsible for finances; in some cases women do not have control over the number of births and the significance of bearing a son is still prevalent; and women are more likely to pay back their loans.
- Politics are becoming more progressive. Women's political participation is stronger; however, the implementation of policies that favour gender equality is still weak.
- In many countries, it is commonly believed that "if you educate a woman, you educate an entire society".
- Race plays a role in inequality. Large numbers of indigenous women have disappeared in recent years in Canada, but there is no follow-up because they are indigenous women.
- Although gender mainstreaming is constantly evolving, we are still struggling to achieve gender equality for women, even in Canada.
- Due to polygamy and other factors, men do not always bring home their entire income. Women need to generate an income.

- There seems to be a double standard between men and women in the work force. Men who work late are perceived as having obligations, while women who work late are seen as bad mothers.

***At the end of the day, the following conclusions were reached:***

- Intellectual change is easier than behavioural change, which is slow from one generation to the next;
- It is difficult to change a culture. Change cannot come about without taking into consideration gender relations and men and women's access to resources;
- Gender equity is linked to social and cultural values; and
- The four quadrants tool was very much appreciated by all participants, who found it easy to work with; the tool was considered to be a good point of entry in terms of asking the right questions and determining the kind of intervention that is right for one's own project.

## **DAY FIVE: HEAR OUR VOICE**

### **MOVING FORWARD/STRENGTHENING OUR NETWORKS**

#### **5.1 Summary**

Day five was devoted to networking, a priority identified by CWY partners, who presented successful cases of youth networks in West Africa and Indonesia. In the afternoon, some champions of youth were invited to a plenary session to explore what inspires a youth champion and how others can be encouraged to participate in moving the youth agenda forward globally. (See annex 2.) They discussed the necessary conditions for success and the promotion of networking/partnership standards.

#### **5.2 Networking and Partnership**

In four breakout groups, participants discussed the challenges of networking and working with partners. Sustained south-south exchanges were described as being difficult due to financial and political constraints. Sometimes difficulties also arise in networks and consortiums due to leadership, cooperation, and competition. Networks were however described as being important in terms of strengthening credibility.

#### **5.3 Panel Presentation, Market, and Evening Cocktail**

There were a total of 280 attendants at the panel presentation, the market, and the evening cocktail. For this event, CWY and its international partners prepared posters about their organizations and had them on display

for guests, along with posters about a project that had been presented earlier in the week. Partners also brought items from their respective countries that were put on display at this “market place” event. For the afternoon, representatives from Canadian organisations and the CWY board of directors had the chance to meet CWY’s international partners to discuss their projects and build links and cooperation.



The panel presentation took place in the late afternoon with four youth leaders from different Canadian communities: Pierreson Vaval, Mireille Lemieux-Legendre, Diego Andrés Robayo, and Lori Pittauttuq Tagoon. In this event, facilitated by Manuel Soto, youth leaders shared best practices and discussed the various challenges they face in their efforts to move the youth agenda forward in various communities around the world.



The evening ended with a reception that started with a welcoming speech from Dr. Sean Riley, the chairman of the Board of Directors and Iris Almeida-Côté, President and CEO of CWY, and ended with a performance from Kebeko, a Montreal-based urban music group. Three partners and alumni also shared their testimonies, including Darren Schemmer, Vice-President, CIDA Partnership with Canadians Branch, CWY alumni Snjezana Pruginic and Jean-François Dufresne, current CWY volunteer Janice Grey, and Mary Deros, a representative from the City of Montreal responsible for inter-cultural committees and youth.



## DAY SIX

### CHARTING THE COURSE

#### 6.1 Summary

The last day of the International Learning Forum was dedicated to strengthening networks and partnerships and looking at different options for fundraising at local, regional, and international levels. Although the issue of access to resources was raised often throughout the week, emphasis on this last day was put on naming actual resources so that participants could leave with something concrete to explore. The pictures taken during the entire event, notes, posters and presentations were made available to all participants on a USB key. International Learning Forum organizers and participants also received feedback from the youth representatives on the last day. The grand finale was when participants collaborated to produce the **four guiding principles** which speak to the specific themes discussed throughout the Forum.

#### The Four Guiding Principles

The following four principles evolved during the week-long CWY International Learning Forum and were finalized on the last day of the event:

1. Mutual and active collaboration, uniting youth, leads to sustainable social change for a just world in which equality between women and men is a reality.
2. A group of young people promoting mutual, friendly, accessible, and sustainable understanding allows just, equitable, and responsible social change to take place.
3. Youth motivation, with equitable, active, and friendly participation, leads to sustainable changes in health and the environment.
4. Collaboration, through reciprocal and friendly processes, can lead to sustainable social change, equality, and youth leadership.

#### 6.2 Accessing Resources

All participants at the International Learning Forum discussed resources in some form or another. Youth participants addressed the question from an accessibility point of view, whereas international partners talked about the availability of resources and how to tap into them.



When youth participants talked about barriers to resources they talked about lack of funds, lack of knowledge, lack of confidence/self-esteem, negative attitudes, lack of contacts, administrative barriers, discrimination, and geographical isolation. Some of the solutions to these barriers are education, access to technology, outreach (promotion of programs and opportunities available), teamwork and networking, partnership-building, community engagement and/or volunteering, and open and approachable leadership within organizations.

There is a need for young people to start their own projects and for organizations to be open to supporting and mentoring grass-roots youth initiatives. According to youth participants, young people can be a driving force in providing the motivation and determination needed to effect change, whereas organizations can provide the fundamental support needed to create an empowered youth population.

International partners, for their part, are aware that there are potential and alternative resources available. To harness these resources, however, they need to further develop their internal capacity to showcase their experience with CWY regarding certain program components, such as south-south exchanges. Partners have an interest in strengthening these exchanges because they provide possible avenues for alternative sources of funding.

More concretely, Edwing Garcia from ASONOG presented that organization's partnership project where Canada World Youth received financial support from The Clover Leaf Foundation for a water project called "Sources", as an example of additional funding. Latin American partners are in the process of developing a two-page concept paper on a regional network to share as a funding proposal.

### ***Proposals for a way forward:***

- Tap into possible sources of funding such as funds from the African Union, governmental sources, and regional organizations such as SADC in Southern Africa, ECOWAS in West Africa, the Open Society Institute of West Africa, and the Inter-American Development Bank;
- Develop a platform to provide information about and/or discuss initiatives currently in place and to share success stories;
- Get CWY more involved in promoting initiatives in exchange countries in order to increase the interest of potential Canadian funding partners in sectoral projects, and train exchange country supervisors (capacity-building) to better showcase these projects;
- Establish long-term internship opportunities within CWY or elsewhere (e.g. partners who have an expertise that can be tapped into).

The issue of collaboration between partners was raised when discussing steps for the future. It was mentioned that there is a need for physical and virtual spaces in which to talk about south-south programming. As a first step, international partners would like to collaborate directly amongst themselves in developing programming ideas that stem from the concept of the south-south programming.

### **Proposals for a way forward:**

- Develop the idea of a virtual space in which to discuss south-south programs;
- Create a physical space where some of the international partners can meet.

### **6.3 Youth Feedback**

The International Learning Forum organizers and participants sought feedback from the young people present. Although they appreciated the rich discussions and strengthened partnerships, many young people found it difficult to share their point of view. They said all discussions should have begun with the youth perspective, allowing the discussions to flow from there. When they did speak, their views were appreciated; however, they felt they had to work hard to create a space in which they could be heard. They encouraged the organizers to include youth right from the start in the next learning forum, right from the planning stage. As expressed by one participant, “The themes should be developed by youth.” They also noted that partners and organizations should build their sector projects together with youth. They suggested that youth be the ones to identify the issues to be addressed in their communities and that connections then be established with the organizations afterwards.

### EVALUATION RESULTS

On the final afternoon of the Learning Forum, participants were asked to fill out an evaluation form. A vast majority of respondents were generally satisfied with the International Learning Forum and with the results achieved. They said it was a very important and worthwhile initiative that revealed the value and potential of youth and the changes they can initiate. They highlighted the good linguistic balance that was achieved, the important discussions about new ideas that took place, and the links that were developed with other participants. They were impressed by the way in which the youth-adult gap was bridged, and with the overall organization of the week-long event.

Participants would have preferred to see more sessions facilitated by youth and more spaces created in which young people's voices could be heard. They recommended organizing more informal and interactive offsite visits and activities during the day to limit the time spent in the closed meeting room. They also recommended setting aside enough time early on in the Forum to allow for all partners to present their projects. Additional recommendations for future Learning Forums include a debriefing for youth, a planned opportunity to share, and the establishment of an international youth advisory committee.

#### Key Messages

- Ensure equal representation from all key players.
- Create a safe space for youth voices to be heard in all stages of the Forum (planning, organization, facilitation, evaluation).
- Provide space and planned sessions for youth-to-youth dialogue.
- Organize informal learning opportunities, such as group daytime/evening activities and excursions to avoid spending six days in an enclosed meeting room.
- Provide more time for partners to describe their sectoral projects focused on health, environment, and gender equity with the larger group.
- Establish an international youth advisory committee.

## CONCLUSION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Since 1971, CWY has carried out youth-focused programs with community and institutional partners in more than sixty countries in Africa, Latin America, Asia, the Caribbean, and Eastern Europe. Our mission is to increase the ability of people, especially youth, to participate actively in the development of just, harmonious, and sustainable societies. We envision a world of active, engaged global citizens who share responsibility for the well-being of all people and the planet.

CWY's first International Learning Forum created a space in which diverse voices were heard, ideas were explored, and collective learning took place. It was a unique opportunity for face-to-face interaction with our key stakeholders—Canadian and international partners, youth volunteers and alumni, and development specialists—who are at the very heart of our international development work. It helped us strengthen our networks and partnerships, implement innovative solutions to our Youth Leaders Initiatives challenges, and chart our course for the future.

The Learning Forum is an opportunity to share knowledge and to strengthen links between different YLA actors, primarily between exchange-country and Canadian partners. Participants were able to familiarize themselves with the various sectors, contexts, success stories, and challenges of the Youth Leaders in Action program. They shared experiences, expertise, and lessons learned that will further stimulate networking and strengthen partnerships. Daily “made-to-measure” sessions, which were developed based on priorities identified by participants in a needs assessment questionnaire, addressed topics of common interest within the YLA, such as gender mainstreaming, health and the environment, and administrative and fundraising issues.

We are grateful to all our partners for taking the time to share their expertise with us. We would particularly like to thank Angie Van Bijation, Gemma Peralta, Melanie Hegg, Martin Kimani Gitan, Diane Trahan and Marc Forget for successfully facilitating so many rich and diverse voices and experiences over the course of the Learning Forum. We would like to extend a sincere thank you to Geneviève Sarasin and Rex Fyles of Gender at Work for designing such a wonderfully thought-provoking and interactive session on embracing diversity and mainstreaming gender, to Mary Deros, member of the Executive Committee of the City of Montreal, and Darren Schemmer, Vice-President, Partnership Branch, CIDA. This kind of information sharing and capacity building is extremely important to our work. We would also like to thank the Canadian Commission for UNESCO for their partnership and financial support. The Canadian International Development Agency has been an incredible partner in making this Youth Leaders in Action possible and we acknowledge and thank their support.

Last but not least, a sincere thanks to all participants for taking the time to attend this week-long Forum, for sharing your expertise, and for further strengthening youth education, training, networking, and leadership that fosters community-based sustainable development.

Iris Almeida-Côté, President and CEO, Canada World Youth