



THE GLOBAL YOUTH BULGE

A Perspective from Canada World Youth

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“Never before have there been so many young people.” A fourth of humanity is now young (from 10 to 24 years old). The average age of the world is 25 years old. In addition, a large majority of young people live in the developing world, according to the United Nations Population Fund.

This presentation will describe some of the major aspects related to this “youth bulge” (USAID, 2012), and discuss some of the international context, Canadian Official Development Assistance (ODA) performance over the past ten years (CCIC, 2016), and finally, present the Canada World Youth policy and programming response to this situation.

Canada World Youth offers international transformative learning experiences focused on building knowledge, leadership and skills through participation in sustainable community-driven projects. The pioneer of the international youth exchange, it was founded in 1971 and since then, more than 38,000 youth from Canada and across the globe have participated in CWY programs, in 69 countries. In addition, programs have taken place in over 500 Canadian communities.

WHAT IS THE YOUTH BULGE?

On October 31st, 2011, the world population reached seven billion. Half of this population is under the age of 30, and 1.7 billion are aged 10–24, making this the largest generation in human history (USAID 2012).

In Sub-Saharan and North Africa, approximately 40 percent of the population is under 15 years old, and almost 70 percent is not 30 yet, opening the door for a large transition (USAID 2012). The processes of globalization, technological progress, and the rise of social networking offer new opportunities for youth to connect and become more active participants in development, while at the same time making their lives more complex and challenging. It can be seen both as a threat, and an opportunity (USAID 2012).

Improvement in education, healthcare, and job training could use youth as a “demographic dividend” in order to accelerate economic growth and trump poverty. The results show that investments in early education and literacy contributes to a foundation to continue progress. However, the developed countries, not only in Europe, are now facing the reality of declining fertility rate leading to larger shares of the population working in the economy. The challenge is the following: according to the International Labor Organization (ILO), 75 million young people worldwide are unemployed, and we would need the creation of more than a billion jobs to welcome the new workers and reduce the unemployment rate (USAID 2012). Furthermore, the number of youth that are *Not Employed or in Education or Training* (NEETs) is increasing. Developing countries show a NEET rate of 12.4% for men and 28.1% for women (USAID 2012).

With this lack of job opportunities, young people enter a labor market in which informal or part time jobs are the most rapidly growing form of employment. The jobs available are short-term with no real security or benefits. Not to say that in a lot of countries of the developing world, agriculture remains the economical center, concentrating 70% of the labor force. That contrast reminds us that although new



information and communication technologies are a key tool to engaging youth, we need to remember that studies show that 77% of those over age 25 in the developing world and 70% of youth under 25 years old do not have access to the Internet.

While education, healthcare and jobs show improvement on a global level, there is a further requirement to emphasize groups that are difficult to reach, like migrant and refugee youth, Indigenous youth around the world and in Canada, street children, rural youth, married girls and young people with disabilities. And, for all youth populations, it is important to note that while employers value technical skills they also place a high value on socio-emotional skills such as adaptability and teamwork that young people learn through youth-centered models such as experiential, asset-based, non-formal learning opportunities.

Beyond labor, security concerns accompany this “youth bulge”. Indeed, in the era of terrorism and radicalization, there are worries that this cohort made up of many unemployed or idle young men, in particular, may be attracted to cause social unrest, violent extremism and other forms of conflicts. The fact that 86% of countries with civil conflict have populations with a majority under the age of 30 is not reassuring (USAID 2012). With rapid urbanization, poor natural resource management, economic stagnation, unemployment, limited social investment, and few opportunities for political participation, all these ingredients can form an explosive cocktail. Not to forget that violence against young women continues to be alarming, all around the globe. Good news is that the gender gaps have been closing, with the ratio of girls/boys in elementary school is 97:100, up from 91:100 in 1999, and 96:100 in secondary school, up from 88:100 in 1999 (USAID, 2012).

CANADIAN OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE PERFORMANCE

What is the context in which organizations like CWY operate? Canadian multilateral support from GAC (Global Affairs Canada) remains strong, civil society support is medium (it has increased since 2012-13), and bilateral is weak. Multilateral Branch and Geographic Branch now provide more support to CSOs (civil society organizations) than Partnership. Canadian CSOs receive the majority of funding relative to foreign – 80% on average – and while the number of Canadian CSOs being supported is showing a rapid decrease, the amount of funding per organization is increasing (CCIC, 2016).

If you exclude humanitarian funding to Canadian CSOs, the period from 2012-13 continues to show a gradual decline for Canadian CSOs, with core funding continuing to decline.

What are the other trends? We cannot ignore the focus on the African Continent, with GAC support for CSOs working in Africa continues to increase. The key elements are now humanitarian help, health, education and food security, with an emphasis on women and girls from a feminist lens (CCIC, 2016).

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE IN THAT CONTEXT TO TRANSFORM THE THREAT INTO AN OPPORTUNITY?

There is no question that we should be supporting livelihood programs that target youth at risk of being recruited by extremist movements, political factions, and/or criminal groups and ensure that youth are included in any kind of peacebuilding efforts (CWY, 2016).

Regarding the environmental crisis, resilience to climate change is about more than technological solutions – it requires social transformation in the broadest sense. Investments in mitigation and adaptation will not trickle down to women and young women if they do not address deep-rooted



gender inequality. Initiatives should prioritize women and young women's access to control over land and other productive resources, access to technical training, strengthening rural women's organizations and networks, and the supporting of enhanced participation by women in early warning systems for environmental hazards.

Concerning technology, we must remember that even here in Canada, the Internet is not an accessible resource, especially for Indigenous youth and remote communities. Affordability of access is also a barrier. Around the world, we need to promote connectivity, as well as e-literacy and life skills development to ensure positive online engagement.

Lastly, knowing that youth between 15-24 are a tier less likely to have a bank account, we must create and support programs that address both the demand and the supply side of job creation, and are promoting entrepreneurship and engagement. (USAID, 2012)

CANADA WORLD YOUTH RESPONSE

In January 2014, CWY reviewed its programming in the face of this new reality. By partnering with *Youth Challenge International*, we created *EQWIP HUBs: Powering Sustainable Youth Livelihoods*. EQWIP HUBs are dynamic innovation spaces spanning 17 urban centers across Bolivia, Ghana, Indonesia, Peru, Senegal, and Tanzania. Buzzing with collaborative energy, each EQWIP HUB provides a unique platform for young minds – especially women – to build market-relevant skills, gain access to mentorship, networks, technology and capital to prepare them for meaningful employment, or to launch a new wave of entrepreneurship. Qualified and passionate young Canadians work in specialized teams to support each EQWIP HUB, fueling cross-cultural innovation, gender responsive programming and peer-to-peer mentorship.

EQWIP HUBs directly addresses the challenges related to livelihoods, job creation, entrepreneurship, technology and gender-equality. We believe that with amplified confidence, youth can sustain a livelihood and benefit their communities.

CWY has responded to the call for action to engage Indigenous youth who are the fastest growing youth population in Canada. As a part of this “bulge”, with 48% of the Indigenous population under the age of 25, and facing political, social and cultural challenges, Indigenous youth have interest and pertinence to participate on the global scale. Between 2009 and 2015, 595 Indigenous youth participated in leadership projects in Canada and around the world, representing 25% of all youth on CWY programs. While all CWY programs are open to Indigenous youth, CWY is committed to programming specifically designed for these youths. The pillars of the program include overseas exchanges and internships, youth forums, and the United Nations seminars.

Finally, the third element of our programming response is the Global Alliance of CWY Alumni Associations. We are currently building a structure that will allow CWY to create bilateral partnerships around the world with like-minded organizations, which in many cases will be run by CWY alumni. With the launch of these entities overseas, we will establish a Global Alliance of CWY Alumni whose objectives will be powered through our reciprocal exchange model.



With this conviction in reciprocity, we want to continue creating bridges between youth of the world. The challenges of this generation will not be limited to the borders of their countries. The only hope is a global solution.

Sources:

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